

# The Rise of Kandong Girls: A Qualitative Examination on the Lives of Prostitutes

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## **Abstract**

*This paper deals with the problem of prostitution in Barangay Abatan, Buguias, Benguet. The main objective of this study is to gain insights about how the Kandong Girls live their lives through the understanding of the factors that pushed them to engage in prostitution. Also, it aims to understand the impact of sex profession to their personal lives. This study made use of qualitative research method through the case study design. The participants of this research were three sex workers in Abatan, Buguias, Benguet that were selected through purposive sampling. The major instrument for data collection was the interview guide. Using axial coding, the data were related together in order to reveal codes, categories and subcategories ground within the participants' voices. The findings revealed that the factors that pushed the participants to become Kandong Girls are their willingness to sustain their family's needs, the idea of having a good income and easy money, being fascinated by their friends, survival, and to escape from physical violence experienced inside their home. Moreover, being engaged in sex profession has led them to have a deceitful lifestyle, having a stained image, and being vulnerable to sex related diseases.*

**Keywords:** *Kandong Girls, Prostitution, Impact of Prostitution, Motivating Factors*

## **Introduction**

Around the world today, there is a human rights crisis of sexual abuse, voluntarily or involuntarily, of millions of women, children, and thousands of men in prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. Prostitution is one of the branches of the sex industry. Taylor and Jamieson (1999) stated that sex industries work on the basis of the same principles of supply and demand as other industries.

Fundamentally, prostitution is the business or practice of providing sexual services to another person in return for payment. Prostitution is commonly defined as a custom of having sexual relations in exchange for economic gain (Wood, 2001). The person who receives payment for sexual services is called a prostitute or sex worker.

Also, prostitution is a social problem that exists throughout man's recorded history. It has often been describing as the world's oldest profession (Samir, 1965). Sex work has always been a stigmatized activity that has recorded its presence over centuries the world over. The profession though has undergone changes in the way it is practiced over time (Robinson, 2007). This profession is an industry in which a person provides sexual services to other in exchange for money, is hence known as sex worker (Goodlin, 2009).

Statistically, prostitution has a widespread increase around the world. According to United Nations (UN) in 2009, there are 40-42 million prostitutes in the world of which 75% are 13-23 years old. The traditional image of prostitution has greatly evolved. Nowadays, prostitution is displayed everywhere in our society. The locations of has sprung up in massage parlors, at bars, in brothel, dating services, and in the internet (Goldman, 2013). There is substantial indication that female prostitution is an extensively growing profession and prostitutes are spread all over the world. Globally, around 1.8 million people have indulged in prostitution (ILO, 2000).

There were certain and many reasons and factors involved motivating women to adopt prostitution profession. According to UNESCO (2012), the factors to which a woman enters the field of prostitution may be based on their willingness like voluntarily or by force. Voluntarily initiation include those who are willing to work as prostitute due to economic crisis and family pressure. Debilitating economic circumstances are often the biggest reason for involvement in prostitution, as it helps to acquire a certain commodity in conditions of poverty (Jackson et al., 2009).

On the other hand, involuntary initiation is specific to women who are forced to enter the sex industry, likely because of kidnapping and trafficking (UNESCO, 2012). The process comprises of recruitment, harbor, movement, and compelling methods to cement the victim in prostitution through coercion, violence or threat. According to Willis and Levy (2011), innocent women are often pushed into prostitution by trafficking and pimps.

Further, most studies tend to lay emphasis on economic necessity or financial hardship as the primary reason for women's entry into sex work. Scholars explain women's economic necessity as resulting from factors such as chronic poverty, divorce, widowhood or separation, family debt, lack of education, early marriage, limited economic opportunities or lack of family support (Devine et al., 2010).

However, Clinard (1968) argues that prostitution is a deviant behavior - a manifestation of a state of anomie in which society fails to provide certain opportunities for individuals to achieve the goals set by the

institutions of the society. He argues further that prostitutions have a separate subculture with norms and values that are directly opposed to that of the larger society to the extent that they often run afoul of the laws of the society. In line with these views, Thomas (1980) posited that women enter prostitution because of pathological problems at their backgrounds- a broken home, parental death or neglect, separation of parents, maladjustment or emotional disturbance that are conducive to prostitution and other deviant behaviors.

Further, Samir (1965) argues that ecological factors such as urbanization and migration may easily engender the necessary conditions often associated with prostitution. He argues that it must be explained and interpreted within the context of the decline in kinship, conflict between institutions, secularism, disorganization, mobility and anomie which determine the main features of any society undergoing change.

Moreover, sex work had a severe impact on women's health and social life. These sex workers are often in situation that deprives them of the right to ask for their health and comfort (Ramaiah, 2006). Also, they are greatly exposed to sexually transmitted infections (Bokhari et al., 2007). Pregnancy, drug addiction, and conflicts are some other complications of prostitution (Qayyum, 2013).

Several factors force a woman into prostitution. Being born in to poverty and misery makes them desperate to find a source for easy money. Also, a lack of education and skills that limits their potential and prevents them from acquiring other employment opportunities. A significant number of them have also been found to be victims of abduction, rape, incest, maltreatment and other forms of abuse and violence. Women, after working in the "entertainment" industry suffer from STD, AIDS, sexual and physical battering, alcoholism and drug abuse, unwanted pregnancies, and a host of other socially unacceptable and often life threatening situations (Women's Feature Services, 2000).

Prostitution has been around in Abatan for years now. It's also spreading to neighboring towns. Sex worker in this locality are known to be as saklot girls or kandong girls (See, 2015). Many women who work in bars in the area are often referred to as kandong girls or saksaklot girls in the local vernacular. The rise of night spots in the region can be attributed to the fact that the place is the center for commerce in the province. It's a place of convergence for vegetable traders, miners, businessmen, and those working in the trucking industry. Through the years, joints offering liquor and entertainment sprouted in the region (The Cordilleran Sun, March 17, 2015).

Therefore, the above stated situations inspired the researcher to conduct the study which aimed to uncover the motivations of these Kandong Girls in entering the world of prostitution and how their sex profession affects their lives. The study focused on the factors that pushed the participants to become Kandong Girls and the effects of their sex work in their personal lives. The result of this study will benefit the barangay officials of Barangay Abatan, Buguias, Benguet, the community, the researcher, the Kandong Girls who are considered to be victims and the future researchers.

### **Materials and Methods**

**Research Design.** This research utilized the Qualitative Approach that focuses on how people interpret and construct their experiences and their worlds, and the meaning that attributes to their experience (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Specifically, case study design was employed that allows the researchers to explore a real-life situation through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple source of information such as observation, interview, documentation and reports (Reswell, 2013).

**Population and Locale of the Study.** This study was conducted at Brgy. Abatan, Buguias, Benguet and it involved three (3) sex workers as participants of the study. To arrive with the number of participants, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is a technique whereby respondents are chosen based on the discretion or judgement of the researchers. The criteria in the selection of the participants include: a) they are at least 18 years of age; b) currently residing at Brgy. Abatan, Buguias, Benguet; and c) must have at least two (2) years of experience as a sex worker.

**Data Gathering Tools.** The main data gathering instrument used in this study is interview aided by an interview guide. The informal interview was assisted by a voice recorder and notes that were prepared by the researcher. The researcher formulated interview guide questions based on the needed information that are related to the topic and specific problems of this study. The interview guide was subdivided into two themes of questions. First part dealt on the motivations of the informants in becoming sex worker while the second part dealt on the effects of their sex work to their lives.

**Data Gathering Procedure.** After the identification of the participants and before the data gathering, an informed consent form containing the conditions of the interview was presented and clearly explained to the participants. Upon explanation, the researcher asked the participant if they fully understood the undertakings of the informed consent and they were requested to affix their signature as proof of their consent. Likewise, the researcher sought permission if it will be possible to use audio recording devices during the conduct of informal interview. The interview was conducted at the time the participants were available because they were interviewed individually and privately.

**Treatment of Data.** The data obtained from the interview were organized and divided into sections. Through joint and thorough analysis of the researchers, the researcher could reflect on what the participants' want

to express during the interview without bias. The researcher interpreted right away the data collected and made sure that there wasn't any bias and empathy with the participants' life events. Using axial coding, the data were related together in order to reveal codes, categories and subcategories ground within participants' voices within one's collected data. In other words, it is one way to construct linkages between data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the codes and coding technique utilises the case oriented approach strategy referred to as 'partial ordered displays' to analyse the case study data. This strategy allows for the quick identification of the segments relating to the research questions and any potential themes.

The process involves creating codes to be used for the analysis of the case study data and then coding the data. Codes are tags or labels that assign units of meaning to the data and for the quick identification of the segments relating to the research questions and any potential themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994:56).

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Factors that Pushed the Participants to become Kandong Girls**

#### **Family Sustenance**

All of the participants confessed that they were predisposed to engage in sex profession in order to provide for their family's needs. They are the income earners in the family contributing more towards their family's sustenance. The young ladies whose parents are incapable of taking care of them and their siblings, tend to go into prostitution so as to make ends meet and take care of their families.

In an interview with Participant A, she said that "My family is in Mindanao. I am sending money to my mother because she is living alone for I already don't have a father. My mother is weak and old". In support to this, Jackson et al. (2009) argued that economic circumstances are often the biggest reason for women involvement in prostitution, as it helps to acquire a certain commodity in conditions of poverty. Similarly, Devine (2010) posited that economic necessity or financial hardship is the primary reason for women's entry into sex work.

In the same interview with Participant B, she stated that "My father is a farmer. We are eight siblings in our family and my mother is just a plain house wife". She also added that "I immediately send my money to my parents so that I will not spend it and I also wanted to help my siblings in their school needs. Also, "Time came that my husband died. He was stabbed to death, so I am alone now. My child is already studying and I am burdened with his needs, I have limited income to provide the needs of my child", as mentioned by Participant C.

According to Merton's Strain Theory, deviant behaviors such as drug abuse, prostitution, and physical abuse are a result of the strain an individual goes through while trying to please the society. He explains that crime is not caused by a single person but it is the function of society structures and the desire to achieve societal goals (Bernard, 1984). Further, Keel (2008) observes that there are so many inequalities forcing some people to involve themselves in criminal behaviors in order to fit in the society. They are just means of achieving certain goals to an individual which does mean that they are just means.

Behaviors such as commercial sex is only common among individuals who come from the low class families and who are not satisfied with their position. It is hard to find an individual from the high-class family being involved in a deviant behavior like prostitution (Agnew, 1992).

#### **Good Income and Easiness of the Job**

Both Participant A and Participant C mentioned that they engaged themselves in sex profession because of the idea that it is in this profession that you can earn big money in an easy way. Matching this, Participant A said that "In here, we are confident that we can earn easy money. She also added that "We are being paid daily". She even confessed that it is difficult to find a good job especially that there is increase of prices of goods, then you work hard but being paid low. Consistent to this, Shrage (1989) explains that women become prostitutes after failing in finding a profitable job since their weak personality and lack of authority makes the competition with others very difficult and hardly possible. Besides, these women with no self-confidence brainwash themselves believing that prostitution is the most suitable job for their status and ruling out the possibility of finding a decent job someday.

Therefore, permanent unemployment and need for financial support makes young girls infatuated about money and ready to enter prostitution in order to get it. The social environment has been strongly identified as a crucial factor contributing to the expansion of prostitution.

In the study conducted by Asvik in 2004, it was revealed that the big income and easiness of the job attract girls to engage in prostitution. Further, the good income allows these girls to support their family and relatives. The Women's Feature Services cited several factors that forces a woman into prostitution which include being born in to poverty and limited employment opportunities make them desperate to find a source of easy money (Women's Feature Services, 2000).

Furthermore, in the interview with Participant C, she stated that "Money is easy in this kind of job, right? It is true. I want to be frank to you because you asked me, so I just answered you. Money is easy here, in other words easy money, right?". This is supported by Participant A who said that "We have customers that give tips aside from the payment for our service. Then, our salary is given every day that's why we can buy our needs and I was able to regularly send money to my mother".

According to Lamont (2010), prostitution is, in some way, the product of limited opportunities for women to earn money, and their lack of economic independence in industrial societies. Prostitution could be attractive to the group of women who are economically dependent on men, or to government as a means of revenue generation. Most women can earn a higher income from prostitution than through legitimate jobs (Vago, 1994).

Therefore, the participants have perceived sex work as an easy way to earn a living. The overriding reason for women engaging in prostitution is the money they can make from the trade. Some of them go into it because there are no jobs for them to take care of their selves.

#### **Fascination of Friends**

All of the participants have declared that they were swayed by other people specifically their friends to indulge into sex work because of the good income that these people had experienced to gain.

Agreeing this, Participant A said that “Our friends have invited us to engage in this job saying that money is fast and easy”. In the context of prostitution, the behavior is usually learned as individuals share their ideas about sexuality. Besides, most people usually join the sex industry after learning about the material benefits that are associated with prostitution. Research studies in sex industry reveal that the success of the practitioners depends on the level of their expertise or skills (Clinard & Meier, 2008, p. 67). Such skills are usually acquired as prostitutes interact and share ideas on prostitution.

Consistent to this, Participant B, when asked if someone influenced her, she answered, “There is, it was my cousin who invited me to because according to her, the work is good and the income is high. That was the reason why I got into this job”. Similar response was sought from Participant C who said that her friend invited her in this job.

In relation to this, Davis (1971) proposes an exposure model to explain what influence women for entering prostitution. According to this model, women enter prostitution because of interpersonal contacts and inducement from others involved in prostitution. Likewise, some studies have found that influence from peers is often a risk factor for entry into prostitution (Bao et al., 2000).

Further, the study conducted by Raphael and Shapiro (2002) revealed that majority of their sample were encouraged to enter prostitution by another individual. Moreover, peer influence can sway individual’s decision making to be consistent with a social norm (Zwane, 2000).

To support this, the Differential Association Theory asserts that an individual may learn about prostitution through witnessing the nonverbal responses of these others towards the activity, such as rolling the eyes or staring and through discussions with people who engage in that activity (Sutherland & Cressey, 1960: 123).

Consequently, it can be inferred that the participants were pressurized into the sex work because their friends are into it and they do not let them know the dangers involved in it, only the glamorous part of it.

#### **Survival**

One participant expressed that she completely engaged herself into prostitution because she was left with no choice in order for her to survive. Participant C stated that “My mother married another man. All of us, their children were trained to stand on our own, and we are responsible for our own lives”. In support, Crowley’s research reveals that 85% of young prostitutes testify the absence of their father and their mother throughout their childhood (Flowers, 1998). As a result, they have been victims of a substantial lack of care and affection; one which they hope to compensate for through prostitution.

Participant C also narrated that she ran away from their house in order to look for a job that could sustain her needs. She shared, “When I ran away from our house, I have no choice but to join my friends and work in the club in order to survive; for me to have a temporary shelter and have something to eat”. Now that she is a single mother, she can’t get away from such job because she is she has to work for herself and her child.

It can be inferred from the narratives of the participant that prostitution is a survival behavior rather than sexual behavior or a lifestyle choice. If they will not work, they will suffer. This is consistent with the ideas of Farley (1994) who assures that for women, prostitution is not about sex but about survival. Indeed, homelessness is a common situation encountered by girls who become prostitutes afterwards. In other words, they are found bartering sex for money and especially for housing.

Survival sex is not a financial transaction. It is, quite simply, exchanging one’s body for basic subsistence needs, including food, clothing and shelter. In a similar view, according to an article published in the New York Times in 2009, nearly one-third of homeless youth end up participating in survival sex during their time on the streets. While survival sex also entails exchanging their bodies for drugs and alcohol, youths are most frequently looking for shelter and food.

Once homeless, young people are at significant risk of commercial exploitation and sex trafficking for reasons ranging from a lack of resources for basic needs, such as food and shelter, to the need for social connection when separated from the family unit and other social supports (Rotherham-Borus et al., 1992).

#### **Escape from Physical Violence at Home**

Participant B who is just 19 years of age, has shared during the interview that she ran away from home because of the cruelty of his brother and it pushed her to engage in such profession. She told that “My brother

keeps on hurting me physically that's why I'm here because I wanted to escape his cruelty. Since young, he always hurt me even for no reason. My parents don't care if my brother is hurting me".

It can be understood that physical violence is a prominent factor in the engagement of women to sex work. From violence experienced at home to running away just to escape the violence, these women are now exposed to an environment which promotes sexual trafficking.

According to the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) reports, 80 percent of female runaways were physically or sexually abused at home before fleeing to the streets. Simply put, the strongest determining factor in teens becoming runaways is physical and sexual abuse and exploitation at home. And the cruelest irony is that when they run away from noxious environments, more often than not they run toward a homeless adolescent culture where sex is both a means of survival and a form of exploitation (Mariani, 2014).

Similarly, child neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse are commonly thought to be risk factors for commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of minors (Dalla et al., 2003; Williams and Fedderick, 2009). In fact, O'Neill (2001) argues that many adolescent girls have suffered from physical violence and repulsive male submission either from a stranger or from an acquaintance; and that this has pushed them into prostitution with the intention of regaining trust and confidence.

Relative to this, Radical Feminist Theory believes that women today do not have the equality that would allow for free choices. They argue that prostitution, in all its forms, is oppressive to women, full of violence, and serves to assert male dominance, and that women cannot achieve equality as long as prostitution, in all its forms, exists (Sloan & Wahab, 2000).

### **Effects of Sex Profession in the Personal Lives of the Kandong Girls Deceitful Lifestyle**

Lying to their family is one of the common effects of sex profession in the lives of the participants because they have been keeping their family unaware of their real job. They felt the need to lie about the nature of their work in order to maintain good relations to their family.

In support to this, Participant A has shared that "It is a hard situation because right now, no one in our family knew about our job so we prefer to be away from them. It is also difficult to look for reasons like every time I go home, they keep on asking where I got the money I'm sending them so I have no choice but to lie".

In the same interview with Participant B, she said, "My work has a great impact on me. My mother is always asking what is my real job, and why is it noisy every time she calls. I told her that I am working in a restaurant because I really can't tell her the truth about my work. Maybe, she will tell me that I am dirty".

In the study conducted by Cox and Whitaker (2009), it was shown that people involved in prostitution often lead to a double life and keep knowledge of their involvement in prostitution secret from their partners and or families. This denial of their situations inevitably provokes considerable stress on individuals, coupled with the stress produce from being immersed in frightening and illegal activities that caused a negative impact on the personal lives of sex workers. Many prostitutes often fell that they must lie about their profession to loved ones.

Likewise, Participant C, also mentioned that "They know nothing about my work. If my siblings will discover that my money comes from this job, they will get angry at me". It was shown that the Kandong Girls hide or minimize their work due to feelings of shame and stigma of what their families will say to them. They are afraid to fail the expectations of their families so they rather lie about the real nature of their work.

### **The "Whore" Stigma**

It is common for prostitutes to experience stigmatization attached to their sex occupation which gives a negative effect as to how people see them in the society. To support this, Participant A shared that when you're tired from work then you can hear judgments from other people, it's hard but I just accept it. It's painful but we don't mind them. Moreover, she said that "I am just being practical even if they see me like this, it hurts but I ignore it". This is in compatible to the statement of Participant B by which she said, "It's tough for we can't avoid being insulted by other customers".

In support to this, Hahn (2009) stated that shame is a central to conscience and identity and it lowers self-functioning. It can be a source of low self-esteem, poor body image and diminished self-confidence.

In the same interview with Participant B, she mentioned that "For me, I am ashamed that I am in this kind of work". She expresses further that "I feel ashamed and it isn't good when people tell me negative things, but I endured it for me not to look helpless".

Further, in the study conducted by Masson & Hedin in 1999, it revealed that most of the sex workers experience great amount of shame and are likely stigmatize because of their activities. Additionally, according to McQuid & Bursik (2005), this feeling of shame among sex workers is accompanied by a negative evaluation of the self. This negative evaluation of the self is in response to violating a societal norm. They stressed further that, when these female sex workers feel shame, they experience feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness and a sense of being alone in their experiences.

Being a prostitute, the participants have expressed that they were labelled with a dirty image by the people around them. As a result, they feel bad about themselves and they experience humiliation.

In connection to this, the Labeling theory suggests that prostitution is a social construction that can cease to exist if those who engage in it are not labeled as deviants (Taylor, 2010, p. 73). The society usually punishes those found to engage in prostitution. However, this does not prevent such individuals from engaging in the act.

As they continue to engage in prostitution, they get more severe punishments and stigma from the community. Eventually the prostitutes accept their status and continue to engage in prostitution. This means that the actions of the prostitutes are reinforced by the punishments that they receive from the community. However, despite that they are being judged because of their work, they still show how strong they are to endure such judgments. "It's okay even if they are saying negative things about me. I always convince myself that I do not work for them; I work for my child. That's why even if they drag me down, I don't mind them", as shared by one of the Kandong Girls.

#### **Vulnerability to Sex Related Diseases**

Both Participant A and Participant B mentioned that the nature of their work has a negative effect into their health because of the possible diseases that they may acquire from it.

According to Participant A, "We are aware of the danger of our job yet it is our own decision, so it is upon us on how we will take care ourselves". This is observed in the Utilitarian Principle in which Beccaria (1764) stated that "Benefits outweigh the Cost." He elaborated that people are rational and they act out of their free will. He suggested that people make calculated decisions in view of benefits. They weigh the costs and benefits of an action in order to decide how to proceed.

In relation to this, Ramaiah (2006) posited that sex work has a severe impact on women's health and social life. These sex workers are often in situation deprives them of the right to ask for their health and comfort. Wherein, in the study conducted by Bokhari et al., (2007), it claims that female sex workers are greatly exposed to sexually transmitted infections. Similarly, the risk inherent in prostitution, particularly STD and HIV exposure, and violence in the form of assault (Dalla, 2009). Moreover, the mental health consequence of prostitution can be severing and can include depression and anxiety (Farley et al., 2003).

Participant C has also confessed saying "It's really risky because you don't know who you are having sex with so there is a need for us to be careful. Also, we should not carelessly entertain our customers because it will be complicated if you have acquired any disease. The money being paid to us will not be enough for medication".

In line with this view, the physical health of sex workers may be affected by range of practices and strategies implemented by sex worker themselves to modify risks or cope with situations. These strategies are often based on their personal beliefs and experiences, traditions and cultures and advice from peers to reduce the risk that they may acquire from their job (Rekart, 2005).

#### **Conclusion**

Prostitution is clearly a social concern with terrifying consequences deeply affecting today's society. It has many identifiable causes that are primarily related to the economic situation or to the social environment of the women. In fact, the main reason why the Kandong Girls are engaged in sex profession is poverty. This factor creates sub-factors like considering prostitution as a source of easy money. Despite of the "whore" stigmatization, these women are still engaged into it for self-sustainment giving the ideas that prostitution is a survival behavior and not a sexual behavior.

Moreover, women in prostitution are constantly subjected to humiliation of all kinds as well as the health risks and that prostitution has been seen as both a social and a health problem. These women are also experiencing self-perception changes such as powerlessness, shame, guilt, stigma of being marked as different from others and having feelings of accepting a deformed identity. Thus, it is important to consider the stigma on women in prostitution in order to reduce and prevent their social exclusion that they experience.

#### **Recommendation**

The Local Government Unit (LGU) in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development of Buguias, Benguet may provide livelihood programs to the Kandong Girls in which the skills to be learned will be used in securing descent jobs. The DSWD may also facilitate the employment of these women.

The Rural Health Unit (RHU) of Buguias, Benguet may increase public awareness on the risks of having sex related diseases. This may be possible through the conduct of public health awareness campaigns that will educate both the community and the Kandong Girls about the dangers of prostitution to their health.

Because prostitution is a social phenomenon involving prostitutes, clients, managers or club, police and barangay officials, interventions through creation of local policies shall be made that will prevent women from engaging in commercial sex exploitation. Such policies shall be strictly implemented by the police or barangay officials such as conducting inspection in every bar of the locality.

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