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Prostitution Prostitution can be referred to as the act of engaging in sexual behavior or activity with another person in exchange for compensation which can either be in form of money or other valuable goods and services.

According to Love (2015), it is nearly impossible to know an exact number of women who engage in prostitution since the only figures available come from the ones arrested by the police.

Such numbers are considered to be too low as they do not capture the sex workers who have not been arrested. Street level prostitution is considered illegal and charged as a crime in many countries because it takes place in the open streets in major towns, cities, and urban centers. The term street level is self-explanatory in that it explains the term street-level prostitution as the one taking place in the streets rather than secluded places such as brothels. Romero-Daza, Weeks, & Singer (2003) points out that most of the past research has focused on looking at prostitution as an adverse effect which brings negative impacts to the social fabric of the society as well as bringing adverse effects on the health and well-being of the community at large.

Although, not all sex workers have the opportunity to leave this field of work and lifestyle. The paper below will focus on looking at the concept of street-level prostitution under the structural functionalism theory by reviewing the literature and making an analysis in the end.

A deviant topic refers to any discussion or subject which touches on any behavior violating societal or cultural norms of a certain place or region.

A norm refers to a social expectation that aims to guide human behavior in the society by helping society members to understand what is right or wrong.

Deviant behavior is usually of sufficient severity to warrant disapproval from the majority of the society who feel that such behavior goes against what the society members believe in (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011). The concept of deviance is usually structured into criminal and non-criminal deviance behaviors. Today, many people consider activities such as prostitution, alcoholism, being nude in public, stealing, lying and excessive gambling to be deviant behaviors since they go against the society rules classifying such acts as immoral.

The concept of deviance may be complex since norms vary from one society to another and therefore what is considered unethical in one community may not be immoral in another society. Also, escort services are legal, but prostitution is not. It is advertised and accepted over prostitution. The topic of street-level prostitution can be considered to be deviant in that it goes against societal and religious norms as the concept of engaging in sexual behavior to be paid is illegal in nearly all groups. The common norms of the society portray prostitution as a deviant behavior as it goes against the rules and expectations by which the societal members are conventionally guided (Cobbina & Oselin, 2011).

This becomes an issue of morality. Moreover, prostitution is also connected to drug abuse, drug dealing and the spread of HIV and other diseases thus making it even more opposed by community members. The concept of structural functionalism views the arrangement of the society as a complex system made up of different parts which work together to promote solidarity and stability (Gouveia, Milfont, & Guerra, 2014). The theory of structural functionalism attempts to explain the functionality of the society by focusing

on the connections between the numerous social institutions that make up a community including religion, government, law, and education.

The concept of structural functionalism sees the society in a structural way which is different from other theories. The theory views the community as a machine with various parts which work together meaning that each part of the society plays a more significant role in the overall picture. Even though the society is viewed as a complex system made up of different parts, in the end, they work together with the aim of promoting solidarity and stability.

The major understanding is that the primary reason for the various parts of the society working together is to ensure that the society members live together in a solid and stable society. The major emphasis of the structural functionalism theory is the emphasis on social functions.

The theory also centers on the understanding that all the individual functions make up a higher society when combined. By viewing interactions in the society as social functions, their significance and role can become easily apparent in the long run. According to Macionis (2012), the concept of the society works just like the human body where it has some parts such as organs, muscles, and bones. Even though each part of the body is insignificant, they all depend on each other so that they can function well in the end.

From the concept of functionalism, any disorder in the society leads to change and instability since the other parts have to adjust to achieve stability. The dysfunctionality of one part means that all other parts are also affected creating social problems and leading to social change.

Structural functionalism theory relates to the topic of street-level prostitution

in that it helps to explain how the deviant topic leads to a social change in the society through creating instability or stability. Based on the concept of structural functionalism approach, street-level prostitution continues to exist since many centuries ago because it continues to serve the society in many ways. The dominant understanding is that an act or function cannot continue to exist in a society where it is considered useless therefore meaning that prostitution continues to serve the society in many ways. In sociology, the term function is used to refer to the positive effects of people's actions while dysfunctions refer to the effects which harm the society.

Functions work to keep the society working in equilibrium while dysfunctions destabilize systems equilibrium. According to Goode (2008), the social customs and institutions which continue to exist over an extended period tend to be those that are good for society because they serve numerous useful functions. For instance, prostitution acts as a source of employment for many people who would otherwise be engaging in other illegal activities like crime and drug dealing. Moreover, prostitution also serves an important function in the society by providing sexually suppressed men with a sex life outside their marriages thus also helping to keep the societal system in equilibrium. Prostitution continues to exist because people will always engage in illicit sexual behavior and the fact that some are willing to pay for it makes the industry one of the most lucrative in the world.

Moreover, many women engage in prostitution as a form of business which even though highly risky, does not require any startup costs. Prostitution as a latent function provides a sexual outlet for people who have no chance of competing in the marriage market including the physically and mentally

disabled. Street level prostitution also continues to exist because it helps in reducing the incidences of rape and sexual harassment by providing men with people ready to engage in sexual activities for a fee.

However, prostitution has a major dysfunction in that it leads to increased crime and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Many countries around the world such as Muslim countries have completely banned prostitution after realizing it leads to a high prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. According to the theory of structural functionalism, there is a major confusion between prohibiting, regulating and legalizing sex work and prostitution with each approach having its benefits and challenges. For instance, street-level prostitution is viewed as a social problem because it is a deviant and illegal topic in the society. However, the practice continues to thrive despite many countries enacting laws meant to discourage the practice of buying or engaging in commercial sex. The fact that prostitution is illegal and immoral does not seem to deter the prostitutes bringing in the question as to whether it would be better to legalize and regulate its operations.

According to Williamson & Folaron (2003), understanding the motivations, risks, protective strategies and the experiences of street prostitutes is essential to enable the provision of meaningful intervention. Many people assume that prohibiting prostitution can be a final solution without understanding that the practice continues to thrive despite being considered illegal and immoral. Sullivan (2010) looks at the case study of Australia as one of the few countries in the world to legalize some aspects of prostitution such as legalizing licensed brothels in Queensland and legalizing commercial

sex businesses in New South Wales. According to Scoular(2010), laws matter a lot in the regulation and controlling of sex work to ensure that it does not result in criminal activities or erode the social fabric of the society. The author also questions the role of the law in regulating sex work especially in major urban centers where it can result in human trafficking and other crimes such as drug abuse and trafficking.

Furthermore, Street level prostitution is one of the oldest fields of work. Though, now we are seeing an increasing decline of the presence of the street prostitutes. Why is that? Well because of technology. Technology has made prostitutes easily accessible by just going online and calling one to meet you at a chosen place. As oppose to driving down the streets trying to locate one.

This practice seems safer but is not. Everybody is blindsided on who is really on the other side of the computer screen. One might believe they are meeting up with what they believe is the woman they saw on a website. They might be setting there self-up to be robbed. So why do people choose prostitution? The discreetness is the main reason. Being discreet from their spouse, family, friends, and society.

If someone gets hurt during the process of trying to participate in prostitution, that act will go unreported to the police. Therefore, online prostitution is extremely dangerous because criminals have the upper hand. This also goes the other way as well. The real prostitutes are vulnerable as well. They themselves cannot report any crime that happens to them because they themselves are participating in an illegal act. Not to say street

prostitution is safer but the positive side is you can see who you are dealing with. Another experience one would face is an encounter with law enforcement.

Law enforcement heavily participates in online prostitution stings to catch johns. Which leads to the next topic of criminalization. Prostitution is looked as immoral and deviant. Though, the prostitute workers are seen more as victims today than they were a couple of years ago. The one who pays for the acts are considered more criminal than the sex workers themselves. Not to say that prostitutes do not see their fair share of jail time, the focus is the Johns. Johns are those who pay for the sexual acts. Essential point is prostitution is illegal.

Sex workers feel they should have the opportunity to be treated fairly. An interview Emily Bazelon states, “ Would I like to live in a world where no one has to do sex work? Absolutely. But that’s not the case. So, I want to live in a world where women do it largely voluntarily, in a way that is safe” (Bazelon 2016).

The author implies street sex workers are not safe from harm. Most street prostitutes have Pimps which they report to and pay a portion of their money to. Most of these relationships between the pimps and Prostitutes are physical.

At a certain point many of these people want out but are not able to. Pimps have workers who regulate their prostitutes. Meaning street work is easier to keep an eye on them.



If paying for sex was legal, many workers would work feeling safe knowing that they can report any harm to them with authorities. They could contribute to society economically as well as mentally. Sex workers would also disappear from streets into a formal atmosphere such as business places. Continuing, according to the structural functionalism theory, one can feel that there cannot be a perfect society free from deviance due to the different views people have on matters such as prostitution, religion, and governance.

Without deviance, the general standards of behavior would be so high that the slightest slip would be regarded as a serious offense in the society. The research presented above is related to the topic in some ways such as helping to look at prostitution from a structural functionalism approach as well as looking at the role of law in regulating prostitution. In conclusion the concept of prostitution is usually termed as unacceptable in the society because of its legality and immorality. However, people must understand all laws made with the intention of criminalizing the act cannot succeed since it is the oldest profession in the world despite being illegal and immoral all along. The primary way of dealing with prostitution as a social problem is coming up with laws aiming to regulate instead of prohibiting the practice. For instance, some aspects of prostitution have been legalized in some Australia cities including Queensland where licensed brothels are allowed to operate. The structural functionalism theory applies to the topic in that it helps to explain the reason why prostitution has been able to thrive in the society despite being illegal and immoral. Functionalists argue that prostitution is still widely practiced because it serves the society through job

creation and gives people an opportunity to engage in consensual sexual activities outside marriage.