

SOCIAL PATTERN OF HOMELESS WOMEN WHO WORK AS PROSTITUTES IN KUALA LUMPUR CITY CENTRE

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the social pattern of homeless women who work as prostitutes in Kuala Lumpur city centre. This study adopted qualitative approach by using in-depth interviews with ten respondents' homeless women who work as prostitutes in the area of Kuala Lumpur city. The respondents who involved in this study were among primary (genuine homeless) and secondary (rented room and stay with their friends occasionally) homelessness category. All of the respondents aged above 30 years old which have more experience working as prostitutes. All of the respondents were Malaysian who were not originally from Kuala Lumpur, yet were among internal migration from other states. Five of the respondents were Malays, two Indians, one Chinese and one Sarawakian. Majority of the respondents indicated that hotels were the most preferable location for their job. The respondents usually provide their sexual services at night. Many of the respondents were self-employed prostitutes rather than under pimp controlled. This paper concludes that majority of homeless women who engage in prostitution were among those who migrated to the city to seek for job and have a better life. They can be considered as desperate as they do not have other job due to living in poverty. Hence, homeless women who work as prostitutes in Kuala Lumpur city can be considered as vulnerable, at high risks and continue not to disclose their identity to public due to social stigma.

Keywords: homeless women, prostitutes, social pattern

SOCIAL PATTERNS OF HOMELESS WOMEN WHO ENGAGE IN PROSTITUTION

Generally, prostitution is related to an activity of sexual service given by women to their male clients. Most of them (female prostitutes) come from various groups such as those who are homeless, trafficked, migrated and others (Women's Support Project, 2002). In relation to this study, the focus is about homeless women and their activity in prostitution. People are usually ignorant about the hardship faced by homeless women as they are being vulnerable, helpless, hidden and easily exposed to negative waves such as prostitution (Hanman & Roberts, 2013), drugs (Lawless & Corr, 2005), human trafficking (Bigelsen, 2013) and others.

Women homelessness can be stated as a global issue, as all the countries around the world face the similar concern (Sikich, 2008). The involvement in prostitution among the homeless women is not recent concern as it already hit in many years back. This can be supported through the studies done by Durchslag and Goswami (2008), Moss and King (2012) and Day (2008) mentioned that most of the prostitutes are among the homeless women who engage in prostitution. Through the study done by Durchslag and Goswami (2008), 27% of men who purchase sex through prostitution claimed that majority of the prostitutes are among the homeless women. Meanwhile, in a study done by Moss and King (2012) also mentioned that those individual prostitutes had experienced homelessness before they engaged in prostitution. Besides, the study done by Dr. Farley also declared that majority of the respondents (prostitutes) had experienced homelessness before engaging in prostitution (Day, 2008). However, in Malaysia, a study about homelessness and prostitution are limited. Not much empirical in-depth research was carried out to address this issue. The literature search found that there are studies conducted which linked children with prostitution (Mohamad, 2011), young adults prostitute mothers (Jacob, 2008) and women in general involved in prostitution (Nasir et al., 2010).

The number of homeless women is rising in many parts of the world. For example, in Germany, 25% out of 254,000 homeless people consist of homeless women. In Australia, 44% out of 105,000 homeless people are women (Homelessness in Australia, 2012). While in Canada, 26.2% consist of homeless women (Homeless Hub, 2016). Meanwhile in India particularly in New Delhi, there are 10,000 of homeless women who resided at that area (Chaudhry, Joseph & Singh, 2014). In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 15% of them are homeless women and 22% are above the age of 60 (The Rakyat, 2014). However, it is argued that there is no exact statistics for homeless women who engaged in prostitution in Malaysia. However, the Royal Malaysian Police (2016) recorded the number of prostitutes in Malaysia—this represents cases of prostitutes recorded by the Royal Malaysian Police. As stated in Table 1, the number of prostitutes in Malaysia keep increasing yearly. In 2015, the number of local people who reported as prostitutes has increased to 9,514 (See Table 1).

Table 1: The number of prostitutes in Malaysia

Year	Illegal Immigrants	Local People
2012	13,428	2,795
2013	14,638	1,569
2014	20,084	1,597
2015	10,913	9,514

There are a number of reasons why homeless women involved in prostitution. The involvement or engagement of women into prostitution closely related with homelessness and their lifestyle characterised such as poverty, chaos and desperate choice (Davis, 2004). Beside, the causes of family breakdown like divorce also lead homeless women into prostitution (Micollier, 2004). This can be supported through the study done by Reeve et al. (2009) who stated that there are number of women prostitutes who had experienced being homeless due to divorce, being convicted and others.

There are a number of aspects of discussing social pattern of homeless women who engaged in prostitution, such as location, time, people involved and pimp controlled prostitutes. In term of location, there are certain areas which are considered as red light district areas which have become a hotspot for the homeless women who work as prostitutes to carry out their services to obtain money (Bindel, Breslin & Brown, 2013). For example, Amsterdam currently has several locations categorised as red light district areas for the prostitutes who come from various backgrounds to obtain money. In these areas, there are many cheap low standard hotels. According to Kevemann and Rabe (2007), they disclosed that most of the prostitutes in German rent hotel rooms based on hours, particularly around red-light district areas besides their own rooms, clients' room, motorway service stations, cars and other places.

Meanwhile, in terms of time, it refers to the preferred period that they usually carry out their services after attracting clients. Through the study done by other researchers in other countries, most of the findings show that majority of the respondents who are homeless, women and prostitutes mentioned that they normally carry out their sexual services at night. This can be supported through the study done by Mallah (2011) where most of the prostitutes in Monrovia, California mentioned that they do their sexual services with their clients normally at night. This present study argues that there must be the substantial reasons as to why they prefer to conduct their sexual services at night rather than daylight such as to avoid from getting any anti-vice enforcement during the day.

In another aspect of prostitution, the role pimp is noticeable in controlling prostitution activity. Pimps are the most influential people who control all operations and movement relating with individual prostitutes. Most of the study done usually mention that each of the individual prostitutes has a pimp who dictates them (Williamson & Tolar, 2011). These individuals who engage or are involved in prostitution usually work under their pimps, engage in prostitution with pimps and others. As mentioned by Giobbe (1993), around 53% of prostitutes engaged in prostitution through pimps. This present study believes that, as being a part of the homeless group especially among the homeless women, pimps play their roles effectively in luring them to engage in prostitution and to work under them as prostitutes.

METHOD

This study adopted qualitative approach. All the information or data obtained from ten respondents of this study is using in-depth interviews via semi-structured interviews. All the respondents involved in this study were willingly to participate in the interview. As this study covers two areas which are homelessness particularly homeless women and prostitution, the respondents in this study were purposely approached or selected among the homeless women who work as prostitutes or who have had experience being homeless and work as prostitutes in Kuala Lumpur. The data collections (interview) were done at Chow Kit area. Chow Kit is one of the hotspot areas in Kuala Lumpur that is popular with prostitution industry, in the capital of Malaysia and it also consist a large number of homeless people including homeless women.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Respondents (R)	Socio-demographic (Age)	Socio-cultural (Ethnic)	Socio-economic (Working)
R1	37	Bumiputera, Sarawakian (Christian)	Self-employed prostitute
R2	46	Malay	Self-employed prostitute
R3	51	Malay	Self-employed prostitute
R4	50	Malay	Self-employed prostitute
R5	49	Malay	Self-employed prostitute
R6	60	India	Self-employed prostitute
R7	60	India	Self-employed prostitute
R8	58	Malay	From pimp-controlled prostitution to self-employed prostitute
R9	31	Chinese	From pimp-controlled prostitution to self-employed prostitute
R10	57	Malay	Self-employed prostitute

Majority of the respondents in this study were in their middle fifties which was four respondents. Meanwhile, there were two respondents who in the middle of thirties, two in their middle forties and two in their middle sixties. In terms of ethnicity, most of the respondents were Malays. However, there were also other ethnicities involved in this study which were two respondents who were Indians, one was Chinese and one was Sarawakian. Through this study, the findings revealed that each of the respondents comes from various states in Malaysia. In fact, they were those outside of Kuala Lumpur.

In terms of being classified under homelessness categories according to Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992), there are two homeless groups that are highlighted in this study which are primary (genuine homeless) and secondary homelessness (rent rooms and stay with their friends occasionally). From the findings, most of the respondents (eight) were classified under secondary homelessness category. Majority of them mentioned that they rented a room and also were staying temporarily at their friends' room around Chow Kit area.

RESULT

The findings of this study were classified based on themes which include: (1) location of the activity, (2) time and (3) pimp-controlled prostitution. The findings are exemplified below:

(1) Location of the activity

Hotel

The findings of this study disclosed that eight out of ten respondents mentioned that their topmost location in providing sexual services to the clients is at hotels. Hotels around Chow Kit area especially cheap hotels become the attraction among the homeless women who work as prostitutes. For example, Rooms Hotel, Sunia Hotel, Vincey, Paris Hotel and others. Usually the hotel charges in Chow Kit area are based on hour, RM10.00 per hour. One of the respondents of this study stated that:

*Ermm, I usually go to **Hotel Rooms; Hotel Sunia, Vincey** to deliver my sexual services, not at my own place [...] (Respondent 1, aged 37).*

Client's Room

Out of ten respondents, only one respondent stated that she conducted the sexual services at the clients' room rather at hotels. She usually goes to the clients' room to provide sexual services. She mentioned that her room was only for her and it was private. However, in doing this activity, she will go to the clients' room. The respondents mentioned that:

*[...] Yes, at the **client's room**. I usually go there to do my sexual services [...] My room is only for me to rest or take a nap, not for these things (Respondent 10, aged 57).*

Own Room

One of the respondents declared that her own room was the place for her to do this activity. Doing the sexual activity at own room is more safe than conducting it at other places. There is no public suspicion and police harassment if she done at her own room. The respondents stated that:

*Like me, I do it at **my house, my own room**. It is safe if I do it in my own room, there will be no police [...] I will not be suspected if I am doing at my own room. I also have my regular clients. They will call me if I am at home and they will come around 11 o'clock at night [...] (Respondent 4, aged 50).*

(2) Time

Night

Out of ten respondents involved in this study, six respondents stated that night was the most preferable time for them to do the sexual services. Most of them mentioned that doing this activity at night is safer than daytime. In fact, there are certain difficulties if they conduct during daytime like anti-vice enforcement by the police. One respondent asserted that:

*Mostly, at **night** [...] I prefer night rather than daytime (Respondent 6, aged 60).*

Daytime

Meanwhile, there were two respondents who mentioned that they did the sexual services during daytime. They usually started their work from 10 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening. For example, one woman (respondent of this study) stated that:

*We conduct it during the **evening**. There are a lot of people if I do my sexual services during daylight. I will feel shy [...] (Respondent 2, aged 46).*

Depending on situation

Two respondents claimed that they performed their sexual services depending on situation. There are several situations when they started looking for clients to get money through the sexual doings such as have no more money and also follow their mood if they want to work. For example, one woman (respondent of this study) mentioned that:

***Not sure.** Like me, it depends on budget. If at that time I do not have enough money to support my daily needs, so I will start finding clients [...] (Respondent 1, aged 37).*

(3) Pimp-controlled prostitution

Self-employed prostitutes

Majority of the respondents of this study revealed that they were working as self-employed prostitutes rather than under pimp-controlled prostitution. Eight of them stated that they freely worked at any time that they want and can put any range of charge rather than working under pimps. Most of those who workings under pimps find it is hard for them and completely being controlled by pimps. They cannot do and decide anything for themselves. That is why they prefer to work as self-employed prostitutes rather than working under pimps. For example, one woman (respondent of this study) mentioned that:

***I do not have a pimp.** I am working by myself. I am the one who finds the clients and put charge on it [...] (Respondent 3, aged 51).*

From pimp-controlled to self-employed prostitutes

Two respondents mentioned that they had experience working under pimps before they became self-employed prostitutes. It is hard for them to escape from their pimps. However, when they were no longer have any relationship with their boyfriend, so there is no pimp control. This is because their boyfriend acts as a middle person between them and the pimp. For example, one woman (respondent of this study) revealed that:

***There used to be, now no.** This is because, they (pimps) will put charge more than usual amount [...] (Respondent 8, aged 58).*

DISCUSSION

This paper concentrates on social pattern of homeless women who works as prostitutes in the area of Kuala Lumpur city. The respondents were among homeless women who choose to work as prostitutes as their source of income to support their life. Despite their willingness to work as prostitutes; there are many factors influencing the decision of homeless women to work as prostitutes. Notably, this paper only presents the socio-demographic, socio-cultural and the operation of the homeless women who works as prostitutes in the area of Kuala Lumpur city.

The findings of this study revealed that majority of homeless women who works as prostitutes were Malaysian citizen, Malays and aged 30 years and above. However, this finding did not indicate that there is no non-citizen and other ethnicities that involved in prostitution; rather, they were not willing to participate as the respondents in this study. Although this study explores the ethnic background of the respondents, religion background was included due to the sensitivity of discussing the issue of homeless women who works as prostitutes from the religion perspectives.

In terms of the location, majority of the respondents of this study mentioned that hotels are the topmost place for them to meet the clients to do their sexual services. Cheap or budget hotels around the Chow Kit area in Kuala Lumpur usually become the hotspot for them to rent. Most of the hotels around that area usually rent based on hour (RM10.00 per hour). The price is cheap and they (homeless women who work as prostitute) afford them. This trend is also similar with several studies such as Kavemann and Rabe (2007) and Edler (2004). In Germany, especially around red-light district areas, there are many budget and cheap hotels for rent. In a study conducted by Kavemann and Rabe (2007) revealed that most of the prostitutes in Germany can usually be found with their clients around those areas. In fact, the hotels are rented based on hours. Besides that, in New Zealand, hotels are one of the top places among the prostitutes to carry out their sexual services (Edler, 2004).

On top of that, most of the respondents of this study stated that night is the preferable time for them to find the clients and carry out their activity. Doing this activity at night is more convenient as compared with daytime. In fact, there are many kinds of activities during the day from related agencies such as anti-vice enforcement (*Operasi Tangkap*) by the police. This can be supported by a study conducted by Mallah (2011). In California, especially in Monrovia, majority of the prostitutes mentioned that night is the usual time for them to deliver their sexual services to the clients.

Last but not least, in terms of pimp-controlled prostitution, the findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents of this study were self-employed prostitutes rather than under pimp-controlled prostitution. Working as a self-employed prostitute is much easier for them to do anything that they want. The findings of this study contradict with other countries' trend where most of the studies showed that prostitutes are usually under pimp-controlled prostitution. Likewise, in Stoke-on-Trent, England, most of the prostitutes who are homeless women are engaging in prostitution under the name of pimps (Reeve et al., 2009). They are under pimp-controlled prostitution rather than self-employed prostitution. Meanwhile in Chicago, majority of the respondents who are among the homeless women, abandoned by their mother, a victim of childhood abuse and others claimed that they have pimps. They were being subdued with sweet promises, luxury life and taken advantage by pimps.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are certain trends in operations that are similar with other countries such as in terms of location of the activity and time that usually homeless women who work as prostitutes carry out their activity. Meanwhile, in terms of pimp-controlled prostitution, the trend in Malaysia contradicts with the global trend. In Malaysia, particularly in Chow Kit area, most of them are self-employed prostitutes.

In terms of being classified according to the homelessness category, majority of the respondents of this study fall under the secondary homelessness category. Most of them rent a room and temporarily stay with their friends. This study argues that, due to safety and protection while living in Chow Kit, they need to rent a room especially for those individual women who have children with them.

This paper explores in the context of Malaysia, particularly in Kuala Lumpur. Although many argue that prostitutes are usually among foreigners, however, this study discovered that Malaysian people are also among the prostitutes involved. Through the findings of this paper, it proves that the responsible authority needs to take serious action in addressing this issue. The related agencies need to understand and identify the root of the problems of homeless prostitution before formulating any policy and enforcing any actions.

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