



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**CHARACTERISTICS AND COPING PATTERNS OF YOUNG ADULT PROSTITUTE
MOTHERS IN KUALA LUMPUR, AND FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR
INVOLVEMENT**

ROSE JACOB

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**CHARACTERISTICS AND COPING PATTERNS OF YOUNG ADULT
PROSTITUTE MOTHERS IN KUALA LUMPUR, AND FACTORS
CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR INVOLVEMENT**

By

ROSE JACOB

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2008

Chair: Jamilah Othman, PhD

Faculty: Institut Pengajian Sains Sosial

The study describes the characteristics, contributing factors and coping patterns of young adult prostitute mothers in Kuala Lumpur. The study sought to understand this marginalized group whose involvement in prostitution has caused much conflict which has not given them peace within themselves. The study is guided by four research questions: 1) What are the characteristics of young adult prostitute mothers? 2) Why did the young adult prostitute mothers get involved in prostitution? 3) Why did the young adult prostitute mothers continue in prostitution? 4) How did the young adult prostitute mothers cope in prostitution?

A qualitative methodology was the research design used in this study. Data was collected mainly through interviews using a semi – structured question interview guide. Five young adult prostitute mothers participated in this study.



The main findings emerged from this study have been classified into four categories which are characteristics of young adult prostitute mothers, pushing factors for young adult prostitute mothers involvement in prostitution, continuing factors for young adult prostitute mothers continued involvement in prostitution and coping patterns of young adult prostitute mothers.

The study showed that young adult prostitute mothers are just like any other women who are non-prostitutes. Their main concern is to provide care and protection towards their child thus fulfilling their responsibilities as a mother. Conflicts experienced by young adult prostitute mothers encompass religious values, social norms and individual principles. However, to be at peace with themselves, young adult prostitute mothers have identified various strategies to help them cope with their conflicts.

The study seems to suggest for policy makers to give attention to an Act for the benefit of this marginalized group. Basic survival needs to young adult prostitute mothers and their children must be looked into by the relevant authorities for their social well being. This study helps the readers and others to understand better young adult prostitute mothers.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

CIRI-CIRI DAN CARA-CARA MENANGANI OLEH IBU PELACUR DEWASA MUDA DI KUALA LUMPUR, DAN FAKTOR-FAKTOR MENYUMBANG KEPADA PENGLIBATAN MEREKA

Oleh

ROSE JACOB

Januari 2008

Pengerusi : Jamilah Othman, PhD

Fakulti : Institut Pengajian Sains Sosial

Kajian ini menghuraikan ciri-ciri, faktor-faktor menyumbang dan cara-cara menangani oleh ibu pelacur dewasa muda di Kuala Lumpur. Kajian ini memberi pemahaman mengenai kumpulan yang disingkirkan ini. Penglibatan mereka dalam pelacuran telah menimbulkan konflik yang tidak memberi ketenangan dalam diri ibu pelacur dewasa muda. Kajian ini dipandu dengan empat soalan kajian seperti berikut: 1) Apakah ciri-ciri ibu pelacur dewasa muda? 2) Mengapa ibu pelacur dewasa muda melibatkan diri dalam pelacuran? 3) Mengapa ibu pelacur dewasa muda meneruskan dalam pelacuran? 4) Bagaimana ibu pelacur dewasa muda menangani pelacuran?

Kaedah kualitatif digunakan dalam kajian ini. Data diperolehi melalui temuramah dengan soalan-soalan yang telah dirangka sebagai panduan. Lima



ibu pelacur dewasa muda telah menyertai kajian ini. Aspek-aspek utama pembelajaran mengenai ibu pelacur dewasa muda yang terhasil melalui kajian ini telah diklasifikasikan kepada empat kategori, iaitu ciri-ciri ibu pelacur dewasa muda, faktor-faktor menolak untuk ibu pelacur dewasa muda melibatkan diri dalam pelacuran, faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada ibu pelacur dewasa muda meneruskan dalam pelacuran dan cara-cara ibu pelacur dewasa muda menangani pelacuran.

Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa ibu pelacur dewasa muda adalah sama seperti wanita lain yang bukan pelacur. Perkara yang utama bagi mereka ialah untuk memberi perlindungan dan kasih sayang kepada anak-anak mereka. Dengan ini, mereka dapat menunaikan tanggungjawab mereka sebagai seorang ibu. Konflik yang dialami oleh ibu pelacur dewasa muda merangkumi nilai-nilai keagamaan, norma-norma sosial dan prinsip-prinsip individu. Namun, untuk mendapatkan ketenangan dan ketenteraman diri, ibu pelacur dewasa muda telah mengenalpasti beberapa strategi untuk membantu mereka menangani konflik-konflik mereka dengan lebih baik.

Kajian ini mencadangkan supaya penggubal dasar memberi perhatian kepada kumpulan yang disingkirkan ini. Keperluan asas hidup perlu diberi kepada ibu pelacur dewasa muda dan anak-anak mereka oleh pihak-pihak yang berkaitan demi kesejahteraan hidup mereka. Kajian ini membantu pembaca dan orang lain untuk memahami ibu pelacur dewasa muda.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 24th January 2008 to conduct the final examination of Rose Jacob on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Characteristics and Coping Patterns of Young Adult Prostitute Mothers in Kuala Lumpur, and Factors Contributing to Their Involvement” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Examination Committee were as follows:

Jegak Uli, PhD

Associate Professor
Institute for Social Science Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Azizan Asmuni, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, PhD

Lecturer
Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Ismail Baba, PhD

Associate Professor
School of Social Sciences
Universiti Sains Malaysia
(External Examiner)

HASANAH MOHD. GHAZALI, PhD

Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 1 April 2008



This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Jamilah Othman, PhD

Lecturer
Institute for Social Science Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Hj. Azimi Hj. Hamzah, PhD

Professor
Centre for Extension, Entrepreneurship And Professional Advancement
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Maznah Baba, PhD

Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

AINI IDERIS, PhD

Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

ROSE JACOB

Date: 14 March 2008



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Context

The words “sold for sex”, “sex slaves” and “young girls lured into prostitution” are often heard in the mass media. In Malaysia, girls involved in prostitution are labeled as immoral (Lukman, 2002). However, there is a lack of statistics or information available regarding the number of prostitutes in the country according to age and race, the children of prostitutes – their age and schooling and a place for prostitutes who are mothers to cater for their needs and the needs of their children.

The Department of Social Welfare Malaysia provides rehabilitation programs for young girls below the age of 18 years involved in prostitution as stated in the Child Act 2001, which replaced the Women and Girls Protection Act 1973. These girls are placed at the Rehabilitation Centers for a maximum of 3 years with a court order. After completing the rehabilitation programs at the Centers, they are left to fend for themselves with hardly any supervision. Having no place and no other job, these young girls continue to be involved in prostitution. However, girls over 18 years old do not fall under the administration of any department as there is no Act or policy to cater to their needs. These girls are continued to be labeled as “immoral” without any help or guidance from the relevant authorities.



Background of the Study

Scenario

Prostitution has been called “the oldest profession in the world” and the economy in almost all countries has a sector engaged in this activity. But the size and scope of activities within the sector tend to vary with the degree of economic development and related factors that affect the growth of the sector (Nagaraj & Yahya, 1995). However, the society at the 21st century cannot view prostitution lightly. This is because the effect of prostitution not only gives an impact on the activity of prostitution but to the society at large. Prostitution is today a phenomenon of global magnitude that violates the human rights of millions of women and girls all over the world. It operates in conjunction with practices where women are sexually exploited such as in brothel prostitution, military prostitution and sex tours. It is a sexual exploitation that continually reinforces the subordinate status of women. It is also a system of male sexual privilege and domination that commodifies and dehumanizes the bodies of women and girls for the profit and pleasure of men. Prostitution of women and girls is clearly seen in all countries in the region whereby it has become a flourishing and powerful business sector whether in countries with weak or strong economies (Parel, 1996).

Prostitution is so technologized that a woman is broken down to body parts. She can be just a voice in phone sex or an image in pornographic videos and acts the way the client wants her to in tele-conference sex. A woman is merely a body of breasts, legs or buttocks implying that her body is a consumer good.



Yet even these indirect forms of prostitution need warm bodies for its performers and Asian women have been filling this growing universal demand for women's sex (Parel, 1996).

In recent decades, the growth of prostitution in the Asia Pacific region has been due to a number of factors. In the area of tourism, as a large number of male tourists needed sexual pleasure, the business of sex tourism was established. In Thailand and the Philippines, prostitution was established by the presence of United States military bases for "rest and relaxation" during the long years of the Vietnam War. In Korea and Okinawa today, military prostitution remains an aspect of the continuing presence of United States bases. In Burma and Sri Lanka, internal conflicts and civil war have led women and girls to cross borders for safety or for work and are extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse in prostitution. Over the past ten years in some countries, women migrant workers often find themselves in hostile foreign settings unprotected by local or international laws and are trafficked into prostitution. Economic growth has increased the purchasing power of males in becoming consumers of sex and more women and girls are being absorbed into the growing prostitution business (Parel, 1996).

The strong economic motivation for women entering prostitution is the same for anyone entering the work force. This is a strong indication that prostitutes are seeking incomes and not just some imagined or real psychological propensities. What prostitutes have to exchange for this income is the use of their bodies and



time in a sexual service. In the 1983 (Perkins & Bennett, 1985) study of Sydney's inner city prostitutes, nearly 97% of the sample of 121 women stated earning an income as their reasons for entering prostitution and 62% of them claimed their only other alternative was a welfare pension. An American study arrived at similar findings. Nearly a third of 29 mid-west prostitutes worked in commercial sex for entirely economic reasons (Australian Studies in Law, Crime and Justice, 2002).

The argument that prostitutes exchange their labor for cash is different from the non-sex labor for cash is that prostitutes enter an intimate arrangement with another person by physical contact with that person's sexual parts. Doctors, chartered accountants, lawyers, typists and tradesmen also exchange their labors or skills for cash. Prostitutes counter argue by saying that they do not feel emotionally intimate with their customers. Besides, doctors also make a living which includes physical contact with the sexual parts of their patients and no one seems to question their right to take money for it or treat it as work. Some office secretaries have been known to sleep with their bosses for a higher income, and no one would consider calling them prostitutes (Australian Studies in Law, Crime and Justice, 2002).

Commercial sex is widespread in Asia. In fact it is probably even more common than in the West. The difference is that it is a very, very quiet business. The West has highly visible sex industries. Female sexuality is used to sell virtually all products and sex is bought on the streets, in brothels, in massage parlors, in

clubs and through advertisements. Asia has a similar phenomenon, but you have to be an Asian man to know where to look for it. That is why it is hard to write about the sale of sex in the region. It is also why it is important for the rest of the world to listen to the experiences of women who sell sex and who are sold for sexual recreation in Asia. It is especially important when the consumers of these young women and girls are men who are supposed to be morally upstanding to be buying the product in the first instance (Brown, 2002).

Prostitution in Malaysia

O'Neill (1996) is of the view that in the 1960s and before, prostitution in Malaysia is seen as a moral declination among a group of women who were classified as “deviants”. In the 1970s, this opinion had changed whereby society felt that prostitution took place due to gender economic imbalance. In the 1980s, prostitution involved women whose ages ranged from 21 to mid thirties. There is an estimated of 142,000 women in prostitution of which 8,000 – 10,000 of them are in Kuala Lumpur (Parel, 1996). However, until now, adolescent prostitution has taken shape and moving vastly and widely. This has aroused various doubts and questions in the society. The demand for adolescent prostitutes is on the increase and competing with adult prostitutes (Lukman, 2002).

It is important at the outset to emphasize that social and religious norms in Malaysian society do not support the profession or the practice of prostitution.

The Malaysian case is also interesting due to its multi-ethnic population. The Muslim and non-Muslim religions also abhor prostitution as a profession for women but couch the rules for the man within the broader and more acceptable term “adultery”. In line with society’s public rejection of prostitution, the sex sector today works discreetly to serve the needs of its customers/clients. Raids are frequently conducted on both legal and illegal establishments to pick up girls below the age of 18 years under the Child Act 2001 and admit them to one of the five rehabilitation centers known as Taman Seri Puteri in the country which are located at Rembau, Cheras, Batu Gajah, Kota Kinabalu and Miri. The previous Women and Girls Protection Act 1973 which detained girls involved in prostitution below 21 years has been abolished (Nagaraj & Yahya, 1995).

Prostitution has different meanings for different groups in society as each group tends to interpret it according to the dominant values of its culture. To the prostitute it represents work, with the same values and norms found in industrial relations and commercial enterprise. To the religious it is an immoral act and contravening the codes of behavior in their religion. To the academic it is an interesting social phenomenon requiring research and theoretical analysis to explain its existence. To the legislator, it demands legal regulation. To the customer of the prostitute it is sexually exciting and to the average woman it can be forbidding yet intriguing (Australian Studies in Law, Crime and Justice, 2002).

For the young migrant worker, increased income is often accompanied by increased expectations of a more materialistic lifestyle and the opportunities to participate in the night life available in the urban setting. In order to cope with the cost of this preferred lifestyle in an urban environment, they are tempted to find work in the sex sector. Thus, women in the lower income groups who do not do well academically and are lack of parental guidance can then afford the lifestyle of their middle or higher income friends. Many of the families who are struggling in the urban environment may find the sex sector an attractive source of income (Nagaraj & Yahya, 1995).

Situations and methods of operation may change in prostitution, but the essential element of commercial exchange, in which one party pays for a service and the other party receives the fee as part of her income, remains the same throughout the ages and across cultures. The prostitute depends on her skills, expertise and bodily labors to conduct a service; it is work for an income. For the more fortunate among them this work can be pleasant, even fun or stimulating. For the less fortunate, it is tedious, boring and tiresome, or even dangerous. There are those who are traumatized by it and do not last long. On the other hand, there are those who gain enormous satisfaction from it and make a career of it. Like all human endeavors and experiences, prostitution is not the same for all people (Australian Studies in Law, Crime and Justice, 2002).

A surprising number of women and girls opt to stay in prostitution, sometimes because there is nothing for them to turn to. Some stay in prostitution due to circumstances, some are held by force, others remain due to a desperate sense of the loss of self. Others are due to poverty, unemployment, lack of proper reintegration services, lack of options, stigma and adverse social attitudes, family expectations and pressure, acclimatization to the prostitution life. In countries where discrimination against female children is severe, daughters are made to feel keenly their financial obligation to the family as they constitute the main family income or a significant addition to it. The degradation and violence involved in prostitution are not widely known since most women will not talk about it. Also, most women and girls will not be accepted back by their families and communities (Parel, 1996).

Age of Entrance

The reality is then that the vast majority of prostitutes have entered the business for money and remain in it for money. In other words, prostitutes see and treat prostitution as a job option, unlike most non-prostitutes, who see it as an expression of a psycho-social deficiency. The general assumption is that no woman in her right mind would freely choose prostitution as an occupation; some powerful driving force over which they have no control gets them involved (Australian Studies in Law, Crime & Justice, 2002).



The age of entrance for the prostitute sample of 128 prostitutes in Australia provides insight into this phenomenon. Most prostitutes seem to enter the sex industry in their twenties as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Age of Entrance to Prostitution

Age (years)	No. of Prostitutes
Under 12	1.6
12 to 15	3.0
16 to 18	26.5
19 to 20	16.4
21 to 25	32.8
26 to 30	7.8
31 to 35	6.3
Over 35	3.0
Not disclosed	0.9

(Source: Australian Studies in Law, Crime and Justice, 2002)

The table above shows that a large number of prostitutes entered the industry when they were in their twenties. Very few were in their early adolescence and little over 10% were over 30 years when they began. The mid adolescence group saw the entry of many girls who had experienced early coitus. These girls may have been promiscuous teenagers with a long history of coital activity, or