



## Research Article

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# Perception Against the Activity of Commercial Sex Workers in Slorok Village

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### Abstract

*Prostitution has been renowned as social phenomena since ages ago. It becomes a disguised profession under the needs of sexual and social perspective. Prostitution usually occupies a specific area to establish the sex commercial activities to gain more profitable economic benefits. The sex workers and other parties have engaged intensely to defend the existence of prostitution activities and the corresponding area. This study is aimed to identify the perception of commercial sex workers about their professions. It is intended to reveal the motivation and expectation towards their sex activities. The study is conducted in the village of Slorok, Malang East Java, which have known as a prostitution area since the Dutch colonial era. The study applies a qualitative method to analyze the life of a phenomenon of the commercial sex workers especially in the prostitution area where sex activities are concentrated. From the research we found that the main perception of these sex workers emphasize the profession that occupied during a livelihood successfully meets their needs. Although there is a negative stigma from the society upon this profession, the commercial sex workers assume this profession is a self-selected with clear direction and objective which define as an action to survive their living and to meet the needs upon their life expectation.*

**Keywords:** Prostitution, sex workers, prostitution area, social phenomenon, perception

## 1. Introduction

The prostitution is a problem that is always actually assessed due to its development towards the recent update. The issue of prostitution has risen extensively in recent time due to the spread of internet use across generations. Sex video and online prostitution are available to be accessed easily. The sexual activities like kissing and canoodling are commonly observed in public, while for particular group of people seeing the sordid scenes easily accessed by anyone through the internet and television. Meanwhile, the prostitution itself has considerably discussed in many aspects, it also remain inconceivable by some groups of people. It is encouraged by the distinct social perspectives of how prostitution evolves, thus create bias understanding. It compounded by the fact that the prostitution was considered erroneously and the discussion obtained also tends to be not objective. It causes the secrecy among the sex workers which worsen the incomprehension of this prostitution issue itself.

On the other hand, there is a privacy that always covered to maintain the existence of sex workers profession. In some societies, this profession is considered as a shrouded job and even illegal. The sex workers who usually involve in the prostitution have low economic background with lack of skills and abilities. The activities particularly locate in a specific area, giving the image of exclusivity and also obscure. It creates the enclosure about the workers and their activities which hampers the preferable approach for understanding the prostitution.

This research found an interesting phenomenon and unique in comparison to the prostitution area in Slorok village. Prostitution area of Slorok existed since the Dutch colonial era where this place used as a "dumping" sexual desire of the migrants either to trade or to just play. As an agricultural producer, especially the coffee bean approximately within 5 km from the national plantation company, the village area is filled with the coffee farms and vast rice fields. There are many traders, drivers and workers both from outside and inside the area that stop at this place. The colonialism creates a weak and powerless mentality of the local people, giving to pessimism on the existing conditions, as well as resentment over the treatment deviate as a sex slave. They survive in this location because of the experiences; whereas the past as well as the environmental conditions are more accepting of their presence, supported good tolerance among sex workers, pimps as well as with residents in the neighborhood.

Brief condition of Slorok village shows that most of the time the commercial sex workers in the area are staying or residing in a place of prostitution. They will return to their home areas after collecting enough money to be given to their families. There are several home stays, motels and brothels where the prostitution activities took place. Most of them are well maintained with sufficient and modest facilities such as water and sanitation. There are approximately 57 commercial sex workers actively having their job there, which the youngest is 20-year-old youngest and the oldest 48 years old. Average commercial sex workers are age of 35 years, which is not quite young for the average prostitutes in general. When approaching to the older age, there many conflicts arise on the prostitutes themselves, especially relates to the beauty and stamina as their asset of becoming a prostitutes. Despite of its deficiency in the area, Slorok village still actively operates as of the famous prostitution area in Malang district.

The prostitution activities of Slorok village remain exists despite the limited condition. Thus, it becomes the interesting part that needs further investigation especially toward the perception of sex workers about their profession. Some questions regarding that matter are: (1) what are the motivations to works as prostitutes? (2) What are their expectations about their job? (3) Are there any concerns about their prostitutes' profession?

Theoretically, this study is expected to give contribution to the respective field of social science. Practically, it is designed to support government policy and to become source of consideration in the decision-making process of prostitution issue as well as giving brief suggestions to improve the quality of life of the sex workers in the Slorok Village.

## 2. Literatures Review

### 2.1 Perception

Perception can be understood as the experience of objects, events, or relationships obtained by concluding information and interpret the message (Jalaludin, 1995). While Marquis (1962) argued that perception is a process that is preceded by the sensations. Sensing is a process of receipt of the stimulus by the individual through a receiver that sensory organs. But the process does not stop there, generally stimulus passed by nerves to the brain as the central nervous system, and the next process is the process of perception which cannot be separated from the process of sensing, and usually precede the perception itself.

The perception also arisen because of the response to the stimulus. The Stimulus received a very complex person, stimulus into the brain, then interpreted, construed and given meaning through a complicated process and then generated the perception (Atkinson et al, 1991). In this case, perception includes an admission stimulus (input), the organization of the stimulus and the translation or interpretation of the stimulus that has been organized in a way that can affect the behavior and forming the attitudes, so that people can tend to interpret the behavior of others towards the case itself (Gibson, 1987).

In addition, the process of formation of perceptions described in Yusuf (1991) as meaning the observation that begins with the stimuli. After receiving some stimulus, on the next stage of selection that occurred interact with the "interpretation", as well as interact with the "closure". The selection process occurs when a person obtains the information. This information attempts on the

process of differing more and less important messages. The closure process occurs when the selection results are compiled into a single sequential and meaningful, while the interpretation takes place when the concerned given the meaning to the information thoroughly.

Jalalludin (1995) also explained that what determines the perception is not the type or form of stimuli, but the characteristics of people that responding to stimuli. The perception also includes knowledge, which includes the interpretation of objects, signs, and experiences (Gibson, 1987). Moreover, Jalalludin (1995) also argued that the perception is also determined by the functional and structural factors. Some functional factors are determined more personal between individual need, experience, age, past, personality, gender, and others which are subjective. While the structural factors are outside the individual aspects, among others: the family environment, applicable laws, and values in society.

## 2.2 Commercial Sex

Commercial sex or prostitution is from Latin, *prostituere* or *pro-stauree*, which means allowing oneself to commit adultery, fornication, and sexual abuse (Purnomo and Siregar, 1985). According Kartono (1983), approximately 75% of prostitutes are young women under the age of 30 years. They commonly enter the prostitution at very young ages, are 13-24 years old, and generally at the age of 17-21 years. According to Kartono (1983), the sexual immorality in women is generally not driven by the motive of satisfying sexual desire like what men usually have in general. The driving factors tend to self-indulgence and compensation against psychiatric instability because they are not happy or satisfied with their condition and environment. This dissatisfaction is caused by some factors which are: (1) Oppose the authority of educators, and conflict with parents or a family member; (2) Unable to do well in school, conflict with school friends or teachers; (3) Dissatisfied of self for poor households, for example broken home, a lot of conflict and tension, not to give warmth and affection, always feel the cruelty and arbitrary acts.

In addition to the several types of prostitution, there are several types of prostitutes could be identified in the life of a civilized society (Soedjono, 1977), among others: brothel prostitutes, prostitutes call, and prostitutes. There are also a kind of disguised prostitution and usually under the guise of some of the activities permitted such as Hotel, Cassino, Pub and Massage service. Some of her masseuse gives more than just a massage service. The disguised prostitution is also common among nightclubs girls that serve dancing or drinking buddies. The proliferation of prostitutes disguised in various hotels are also encouraged by the fact that certain hotels threatened with bankruptcy if it does not receive the call and the woman seemed to be a brothel shadow.

There are many ways to stimulate the sexual atmosphere among men and woman in general situation. According to Ford and Beach (1951), there are at least five common ways women to attempt sexual invitation. First, the exposure of the genital deliberates by a woman to a man. It is a common form of sexual invitation in some communities. In this case, the woman deliberately showed a prominent part of the sexual organs to catch a man's sexual excitement. If this behavior has occurred, and the man had also responded positively to the sexual invitation like that, then sexual relations are likely to occur, either in exchange for money or not. Second, the employment of odor such wearing perfume by women. In many ways, it can improve their sexual attractiveness. This fragrance is used to evoke erotic stimulation in social intercourse with men. The assumption is that the stronger the scent she was wearing on the side of men, it will be the stronger its gravity power near or in front of him. The end goal is to attempt sexual relations between them, even in exchange for money or not. Third, some women use musical instruments such as songs and vocal gestures to attract the attention. Musical instruments, songs and gestures that appear likely to deliberate excite male sexuality who witnessed it. Hopefully, with sexual stimulation through musical instruments, singing and this gesture, the men who witnessed will become aroused and willing to have sex with a prostitute, either in exchange for money or not. Next is the presentation of gift. For some women, the habit of giving something to the man who would be expected to have sex is a form of sexual invitation commonly existed in the community or specific communities. For example, women give some food or drinks for free, so the man is willing to have sex with him either

in exchange for money or not. And lastly, the symbolic invitation through language is a common form of sexual invitations to invite sexual intercourse. In certain communities, women have verbal symbols that clearly show that sexual activity and sexual organ. Some women engage in vulgar to have sex, either in exchange for money or not. Sometimes they use symbolic language that is likely to apply an understood in a particular community.

In general, the main cause of prostitution is a powerful and uncontrollable sexual desire of men. This desire is so strong that it can cause pressure to have sex outside of marriage. In practice, such a man is willing to pay, from the lowest rate to the highest rate, to achieve sexual satisfaction. This logic is underlying the emergence of a professional prostitute (Soedjono, 1977). In addition, there are also other factors that encourage men to go into prostitution namely: (1) No or lack of outlet for his sexual needs; (2) Associated with prostitutes is easier and less expensive for those who need a portfolio; (3) In connection with a prostitute paid, after completion of the event could be forgotten.

Meanwhile, on the part of women, there are several factors that drive women into prostitution (Soedjono, 1977) as follows: (1) Economic pressures. Without income, a woman cannot meet their needs, and without adequate skills, they tend to be forced to sell themselves to the street life and the easiest way, such as by being a commercial sex; (2) Dissatisfied with the existing job situation. Despite having a permanent job, but not satisfied. This may be caused by inability to afford luxury life, thus encourage women to enter into prostitution; (3) Ignorance. Women who do not have adequate education and intelligence, and considers themselves with no meaning in social life, are easily tempted into prostitution. There are many women who are educated and high intelligence but also involved with the world of prostitution, even in high-profile prostitution; (4) there are flaws in their soul. Women with abnormalities of the soul are also difficult to escape from the prostitution if there was a chance to get in there or someone who asked her to go into it; (5) Getting hurt and abandoned by a husband or a wife. There are certain women are not resilient to accept the fact of being hurt by a spouse, for example betrayed boyfriend, raped, became pregnant without any partner, which can trigger the feeling of revenge by becoming a prostitute; (6) Dissatisfied with the sexual life. Some women suffer a hypersexual condition. Women with hypersexual characteristic tends to be open to the world of prostitution, especially when they later found the man in the sex that is able to meet the sexual needs that exceed the threshold of general needs.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research focus*

This research was conducted on perceptions and social behavior of commercial sex workers in prostitution area Slorok village, sub-district of Kromengan, Malang district, East Java. To identify the perception of these commercial sex workers toward their activities, this study attempt two indicators, among others, 1) This opinion of commercial sex workers about their profession; (2) and their anxiety and hope upon their activities.

#### *3.2 Research Methodology*

This study applies a qualitative approach with the main data sources are words and actions from the research object. There are also the additional data or second data sources such as data from documentation. The words and actions of people who obtained through in-depth observation and interviews, is the main data source. The data was obtained through primary data source is recorded through written notes or by recording a video / audio tape, taking photographs or movies. In addition the data can be obtained through primary sources, named direct data sources provide data to the researcher and secondary sources, named data obtained by researchers through the informant research (key person) (Sugiono, 2006).

As a guideline, researchers used several criteria for determining the source of data / key informants as stated by Faisal (1998) as follows: (1) they control or understand and appreciate the object through the process of enculturation; (2) they are still engaged or engaging in activities the

object; (3) they have a lot of time to provide information; (4) they do not tend to give information on the results packing itself; (5) They were originally not quite familiar to the kind of research, thus encourage them more excited to give the information as a teacher or speaker.

The main purpose of this study is to identify the commercial sex workers behavior upon their motivation and expectation in Village Slorok Kromengan Subdistrict Malang East Java province. Therefore the key informants were used as a source of qualitative data relative are; (1) Commercial sex workers; (2) Pimps; (3). Sellers at stalls around localization; (4) Citizens who know the ins and outs of the practice of prostitution; (5) The local government officials who have the authority to regulate or even displace the location of prostitution; and (6) Other parties involved to guidance, as Muspika, health centers, and non-governmental organizations.

### 3.3 Research Instruments

This study used a qualitative approach, the research instruments can be divided into 2 (two) groups. First the main instrument is the researcher himself using analytical thinking is able to create / draw conclusions/verification of the phenomenon under study. Second, the instruments or tools that can help the researcher (main instrument) draw the conclusions or obtain the verification of the phenomenon.

The main instrument in this study were researchers (researcher is the instrument), and also additional instrument, such as a tape recorder and camera recording devices. Collection and observation of information required in the study are conducted by the researcher with direct involvement. The process is firstly started with getting in or approaching the informant with the customary politeness, to reduce the social distance between researcher and informants. It is continues with getting along that can be explained as the researchers interact with the object, observe carefully, looking for and complete information needed as well as capture the meaning of the information and observations obtained. Eventually, the researcher should complete the process with logging data or collecting the data. This process includes participant observation, interview and documentation.

Observation is commonly understood as a process to observe the event in the form of social interaction action carefully, systematically and participatory (participant observer). The researcher act as an observer in observing the social situation lasts; observe the process, what to do, what to think, what is felt the actors associated with the phenomenon of research. It also conducted participant observation in places and situations as much as possible during the field to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study. Whereas in-depth interview informants, can be explained as ability to reveal the orientation of their lives or the world that are relevant to the research topic. In-depth interviews (depth interview) conducted systematically and dived to dig specific data. In-depth interviews, in order not to lose their way during the talks, the researcher also used a semi-structured interview guide, along with a check-list when making observations on the social context in the environment of the subjects studied. The additional instruments are not decisive, but it is expected to help the process of qualitative primary data collection, more precisely, accurately and reliably, especially during the interview process. The method aims to obtain certain forms of information of all informants, but the wording and order customized with the characteristics of each informant. This assessment supports a meaningful understanding on the human behavior and human research needs (Mulyana, 2001).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 The Motivation

The factors that influence the perception of commercial sex workers consist of two indicators; the opinion and expectation of commercial sex workers upon their activities. Each worker has different opinion and expectation, however their share similar thought based on their experience and living environment. They shape the general notion about the profession which maintains their continuity of doing prostitution as their main job.

According to the thinking of Gagnon and Simon (1990) who maintains a non-essentialism or social construction, the results of this study are in line with the notion that human sexuality is the result of a historical process which then contribute to the understanding and experience of human sexuality. This also can be used to analyze the mental aspect, cultural and interpersonal sexuality. The expression of sexuality is governed by morality, taboos, rites and rules of society. Therefore, the content and the implications are different from one community to another community, or in the same community but in a different time period.

Furthermore, the commercial sex workers they believe the profession that occupied during a livelihood successfully meets their needs. It is also intended to balance their physical needs to the spiritual needs as a source of income for themselves and their families which practiced by the activity of "selling themselves" to get money. For them, this profession is a struggle that require a creativity and renewal, to provide satisfactory service to customers. The satisfactory service invites more regular customer with extra amount of money. The innovation from sex worker itself is a compulsory for a sustainability of their job, including getting a sympathy from the targets, enhance the beauty and attractiveness, and giving the vary services to maintain customers using the sex service. This situation can be explained by the ability of voluntarism by Parsons (1977). He suggests that voluntarism is the ability of individuals taking action in terms of establishing ways and means of a number of alternatives available in order to achieve its objectives. The actor chases the goals in situations where the norm directs in choosing the alternative ways to achieve the goal. Those norms do not specify his choice of means or instrument, but is determined by the destination chosen.

These most common actions from commercial sex workers are in accordance with the suggestion from Blumer (1969) that urges man is an actor who will choose, examine, think, organize and transform meanings in relation to situations where, and where the direction of his actions. The interpretation should not be considered only as the application of the meanings that have been set, but as the process of formation, being used as an instrument for guidance for their actions. Humans actually design several different objects, giving a sense, assess compliance with the act and make decisions based on that assessment. This is what intended to act on the interpretation or symbols which called an indication, "Self indication is a moving communicative process in which the individual would highlight, assesses, assign a meaning, and decides to act on the basis on the meaning" (Blumer, 1969). The process of self indication occurs in a social context to anticipate the other unexpected actions and try to adjust the actual action in line with the particular context. Thus, the human actions are full interpretation and understanding, measured by the harmony to each other and become what is known as a function of the social structure.

In addition, there are some stigmas attached to the commercial sex workers as perpetrators and victims, among them: First, the internal stigma that blame themselves which judging with self-closing, self-punishment, considers himself a shame, loss of self-confidence, and trauma. Second, the external stigma that put the society blames the commercial sex workers with social judgment. In some cases, a community can easily punish the prostitutes without empathy, proclaiming the case with commercial sex workers openly and ignoring their privacy rights. This is largely supported by the role of media and the spread of subjective information. Therefore, the results from the negative stigma and judgment led to destruction of ethical values and social order which assign the prostitutes in a difficult position within the society.

Some factors can be identify as a trigger to get involves in the prostitution are stress or excessive anxiety. Individual who are frequently exposed, or suffered as a victim, tend to have emotional problems, among others: always feel worried, scared, and behaving aggressively. Other consequences can also led them to avoiding from the problems by doing things that deviate from the social values and norms. When refer to an economic problem, the prostitution can be considered as the best and quickest solution to deal with their situation, especially for people with lack of skill and education background.

#### 4.2 *The Opinion and Expectation*

The particular opinion and expectations of some group of people can be encourage by the kind of interactions exist within the community. According to the theory of symbolic interaction from Blumer



(1969), individual that develop social interaction particularly create participation among the members. The interaction involves such individual with self personality, internal opinions and emotions towards their social behavior. According to this theory, the individual is seen as an active shaper of his own character in interpreting; evaluating, deciding and planning every step he takes in the future. Hence, even though the environmental condition is substantial but the kind of character and action of every individual is taken consciously by him.

Commercial sex workers actually realized that her current profession is a despicable and shameful compares to the other noble professions that are more accepted by society. But they consider this job is much better than stealing and robbery which become their major justification of this profession. Feelings of shame were defeated by the necessities of life and the proud of the success from "selling themselves". They pursue this profession by a compulsion because there is no other proper job could replace their current profession. It is compared to the amount of income generated by the prostitution job and also lack of skills and education background that supposedly needed to gain a better profession. In addition, the commercial sex workers assume this profession is a self-selected with clear direction and objective which define as an action to survive their living and to meet the needs upon their life expectation. In some ways, they consider the job is agreed and accepted by the social community. The acceptance is defined from the kindness and tolerance from friends and family towards their profession. However, in the reality, the acceptance is quite bias and led to misconception especially if it is viewed from religious perspective. It is in line with the notion from Oetomo (1991) that explain what is classified as a sexual act in a society cannot be considered as such a culture. The society may attempt kindness as a form of respect for a general humankind but remain judgmental for the prostitution profession itself.

Eventually the prostitution in the village Slorok interpret the commercial sex workers as subjects for their profession and the external situation put them as an object in the process of interaction among other workers. Looking for the rational reasons of their deviant behavior, this study relies on the theory of symbolic interaction to explain this situation. According to Blumer (1969) at least the behavior of commercial sex workers relies on three premises: First, humans act on something (an object, person or idea) based on the meaning given to that matter. Second, the meaning that obtained is formed including through a process of social interaction in a daily life. Third, the meaning of every action does not generated from mechanistic process, but rather involves the interaction process. These premises suggest that action taken by a human tend to be more situational, which depending on the definition of the situation faced at the level of the interaction itself.

**Table 1.** Perception of Commercial Sex Workers in Slorok Village

No	Indicators	Source of Information	Perceptions
1	Opinion about commercial sex workers	Prostitutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of skills and education background</li> <li>• Consider the regular job like other jobs</li> <li>• Quick solution to earn money</li> <li>• Feel powerless to try other profession</li> <li>• Mostly act as a main source of family income</li> </ul>
		Pimps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prostitutes always need a place to run their job</li> <li>• Sometimes loose the workers when they get married with the customers or outsiders and stop being a prostitutes</li> </ul>
		Non-Governmental Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the sex workers as a marginal and powerless people</li> <li>• Attempt the prostitution area as the rehabilitation place by doing a mentoring and assistance for the sex workers</li> </ul>
		Religious Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the sex workers do not disturb the surrounding community</li> <li>• The sex workers act normally without arogans attitude</li> <li>• Some of them also can socialized nicely with the community</li> <li>• The leaders wisely try to understand their condition with tolerance</li> </ul>
		Community Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the sex workers are fine just like other member of community</li> <li>• Consider sex workers can obey the community rules and maintain a dicipline</li> <li>• The leaders can give sufficient tolerance to the sex workers</li> <li>• The leaders respect the sex workers because they have their own place separated from the general community</li> </ul>

No	Indicators	Source of Information	Perceptions
22	Anxiety and expectation	Prostitutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The sex workers are worry getting infected sexual diseases like AIDS.</li><li>• There is the anxiety towards customer who did not use condom and got drunk while having their services,</li><li>• They expect to retire from the job, gather with the family, or start a small business to earn money, or married with a good guy.</li></ul>

**Source:** Observation and interview result from the writer, 2010

## 5. Conclusion

Factors that influence the perception of commercial sex workers consist of two indicators; the opinion and expectation of commercial sex workers upon their activities. The main perception of these sex workers emphasize the profession that occupied during a livelihood successfully meets their needs. It is also intended to balance their physical needs to spiritual needs as a source of income for themselves and their families. Although there is a negative stigma from the society upon this profession, the commercial sex workers assume this profession is a self-selected with clear direction and objective which define as an action to survive their living and to meet the needs upon their life expectation. The choice of prostitution is triggered by factors; lack of skills and low education background. In addition, the anxiety felt by the commercial sex workers are exposed Sex Diseases Transmitted Infections, HIV/ AIDS, lonely customers and did not get another job then they expect other than the wish to have a lot of capital also got a good man to marry as a form of safety and the security needs. However, despite the implementation of this job is seemingly taken by a compulsion, the fact that it is more on more situational, which depending on the definition of the situation faced which can encourage human to take actions consciously.

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