

THE USAGE OF AN ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE TO STUDY THE PHENOMENON OF STUDENT PROSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of the study is to prove the effectiveness of conducting Internet research when analysing controversial and embarrassing topics, such as e.g. providing sex services for money during studies.

Methodology. The research group consisted of 1877 people taking up studies at Polish universities. Empirical data was collected using a questionnaire form via the Internet. Respondents were asked about their own experience in prostitution and their attitude towards providing sexual services for money. Students expressed their opinions on a four-level scale and in open questions, where they had the opportunity to write a longer answer.

Results. Studies conducted via the Internet have shown that the phenomenon of student prostitution is popular in Polish academic circles. It turned out that the most frequent reasons for practising prostitution were: the unfavourable material situation in the family home, unfavourable material situation during studies, lack of responsibility for oneself and low level of religiousness. What is more, in the open questions the students indicated: laziness, above-average sexual drive and consumerism supported by the culture of promiscuity. The online survey gave the respondents an increased sense of anonymity, which made them willing to share their experiences and private stories.

Key words: online survey, Internet research, a screen-by-screen questionnaire, prostitution, student prostitution.

INTRODUCTION

Along with the popularisation of Internet access and the increase in its importance, the conduct of Internet social and psychological research was also popularised. In this way it is possible to reach a large number of respondents and to raise issues commonly considered as “difficult” and “embarrassing”. Such a subject may be e.g. providing sexual services for money. In my research, I used an online questionnaire to analyse the phenomenon of student prostitution.

THE PHENOMENON OF STUDENT PROSTITUTION

Over the last few years, the term "universitation" has become more and more common in literature. Although the phenomenon is still not popular in science, it is gaining more and more publicity in society. From an etymological point of view, the term consists of two components: university and prostitution. This indicates the environment, from which people providing money-based sexual services originates (Kurzępa, 2012).

This phenomenon is highly controversial. It would seem that young people standing on the threshold of adult life, full of ambitions and aspirations, are reluctant to sell their bodies for money. However, it turns out that students constitute the most numerous group among all those involved in this practice. Research shows that this is usually done by women aged 19-22 (Kurzępa, 2012). Often these women are well-groomed, intelligent, often speaking several foreign languages. What is important, the phenomenon of prostitution should not be identified only with women - the practice is equally popular in the male environment. Moreover, male homosexual prostitution brings the greatest material benefits (Klonowska, 2016).

In the field of Polish science, the issue of student prostitution was first raised by Jacek Kurzępa (2012). Interested and inspired by Kurzępa's research, I wanted to check what the contemporary phenomenon of student sponsoring looks like and what its intensity is.

PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the study was to analyse the phenomenon of student prostitution in two contexts:

1. Active prostitution by students and the influence of biological and psychological, cultural and economic factors on the decision to provide money-based sexual services during studies;
2. Students' opinions on prostitution during their studies, including the influence of biological and psychological, economic and cultural factors.

In order to achieve these goals, I set up two research problems:

- What are the students' experiences with prostitution?
- How do students assess prostitution during their studies?

No hypotheses has been constructed for these problems. The research conducted on paper was of a diagnostic nature, i.e. it assumed the description of a given phenomenon and not the verification of assumed dependencies. Danuta Urbaniak-Zajac (2009) emphasises that in this type of research, hypotheses are very rarely used. This, however, confirms the theory of Krzysztof Konarzewski (2000), according to whom the formulation of hypotheses in diagnostic research is unjustified and not required. In the detailed problems pointed to the existence of certain dependencies, so appropriate hypotheses were put to them.

Choosing the methods and techniques in the research I suggested Mieczysław Łobocki's typology (2009). Research maintained in the paradigm of quantitative research was carried out using the survey method, which Łobocki (2009) defines as a research method whose primary function is to collect information about problems of interest to researchers as a result of verbal relations between the respondents. A constitutive feature of the survey method is "questioning" or opinion polling. Thus, the questions asked to the respondents are a component of this method. The questionnaire I created for my work consisted of 51 questions. Most of them met the criteria of the estimated four-level scale. The respondent could refer to the chosen statement: *I strongly agree, I agree, I disagree, I strongly disagree*. I also placed two open questions in the questionnaire in order to get to know the analysed issue better. It was as follows: *What do you think of prostitution as a form of earning money during studies?* and *How would you describe your attitude towards students who work as prostitutes? Why?*. The next part of the questionnaire was a metric, which consisted mainly of questions about personal and demographic data. In the questionnaire, there were also three questions with a hidden option: the first one about the age, and the next two about the age of sexual initiation and the current number of sexual partners.

For statistical calculations, I used two programmes: SPSS and Systat. The tests used to present the measurements were Spearman's correlation coefficient and one-way ANOVA variance analysis. The correlation makes it possible to compare variables that do not have a normal distribution with each other. This comparison is made on the quantitative and order level. Spearman's correlation is a non-parametric correlation, which is applied in bases where the variables do not have a normal distribution or differ from normality in an uneven way (Kwiatkowski, 2017; pogotowiestatystyczne.pl, 2007-2019). On the other hand, one-way analysis of variance verifies the hypothesis of equality of averages in groups larger than two. Apart from the verification of the hypothesis of differences between averages, it can show the planned differences between averages (thanks to contrast analysis we can plan group comparisons) and conduct post hoc analysis (comparison of each group with each other) (Hryniewicz, 2019).

In view of the subject, which in the opinion of many recipients may have been embarrassing and controversial, the research was carried out in the form of an Internet survey. In this case, the use of an on-line questionnaire, in which the respondent is not required to disclose personal data, complied with ethical principles of research and gave the respondents a sense of freedom and confidentiality (Guziuk-Tkacz, & Siegień-Matyjewicz, 2012).

In my research, I decided to combine quantitative and qualitative methods. Apart from the above-mentioned method of the survey, I also used the analysis of qualitative content obtained with the use of an online survey. Piotr Siuda (2016) writes that this is a social research technique related to the questionnaire interview method (standardised).

This method gained popularity in the 1990s. Since then, it has continued to evolve. In my research, I used a *screen-by-screen questionnaire*. In this version, a few questions appear on the screen - in order to go to the next one, the respondent

must click on the appropriate button. In this way, he does not know how many questions he has left and how long the questionnaire is. Interviewers often use this procedure when their tool is long. Thus, the respondent does not reject the questionnaire because of its size. Moreover, some of the psychological methods of social impact emphasise that people who get involved in a quality activity feel obliged to complete it (Siuda, 2016).

It is assumed that online research methods have a number of advantages. The most important of these are:

- the psychologists and the sociologists are constantly proving that people are more honest on the Internet. The feeling of anonymity means that they share experiences and opinions that they would not give in the real world;
- the respondent is not forced how and when to fill in the questionnaire. He/she does not feel any pressure from the interviewer. He/she participates in the survey if he/she wants to and does it at any time. It gives him/her a sense of responsibility and a feeling of deciding on his/ her choices;
- when completing the survey on the Internet, the respondent does not have to be afraid of pressure or evaluation from the interviewer. In this way, it can be assumed that his or her answers will be reliable (Siuda, 2016).

The combination of several methods of techniques promotes a better understanding of the phenomenon. This is of great importance in the case of research into the phenomenon of student prostitution, which has still not been comprehensively analysed.

As mentioned earlier, due to its being a controversial topic, the study was conducted on the Internet. I made the survey available online on websites and forums. I particularly focused on Facebook.com. I applied to groups of students. It was important for me that these were closed groups and that Admin agreed to publish my content.

Students were recruited using targeted selection techniques. According to the assumptions of this technique, it is necessary to select population units that meet the planned criteria. Appropriate selection of the sample allows reflecting the opinion of the whole society. Despite the purposefulness of the selection, participants were recruited for the research. For this purpose, questionnaires were placed on websites - they were encouraged to participate and instructed how to fill in the form. This activity was based on reaching users who were also participants of this Internet group (Batorski, & Olcoń-Kubicka, 2006).

The research sample consisted of 1877 people - 386 men and 1491 women. The research was conducted for about six months, from October, 2018, to March, 2019. During which time I reached students studying in the following cities: Wrocław, Rzeszów, Toruń, Siedlce, Warsaw, Lublin, Kielce, Gdynia, Sopot, Gdańsk, Łódź, Opole, Częstochowa, Kraków, Bydgoszcz, and Katowice. The questionnaires were made available on university forums of all educational profiles. Therefore, the fol-

lowing faculties took part in the survey: humanities, arts, law and social sciences, medicine, science and technology and other faculties, defined in the survey as "other". Every few days I published the survey on a different group. This allowed me to observe how willingly students undertake to fill in the questionnaire and what their attitude towards my research is.

It turned out that medical students were the most willing to take part in the study (580 people) - they were willing to fill in the online form, gave exhaustive answers to open questions and often wrote to me in private messages that the topic of work is interesting for them. Perhaps this is due to the interest in topics related to human sexuality. However, the students of science and technology at the University of Warsaw reacted aggressively to the request to fill in the questionnaire. They went so far as to criticise me and vulgarise me. What is more, they often accused me of ignorance of the subject and confusing me of basic concepts. Perhaps the form of research made them feel so anonymous on the Internet that they had no problem insulting me.

TEST RESULTS

The online survey proved to be very effective in investigating the phenomenon of student prostitution. Thanks to an increased sense of anonymity, a group of 321 respondents (about 17.2%) admitted to providing (now or in the past) money-based sexual services. However, the group of 195 respondents (10.4%) admitted that they remained in the sponsored arrangements. Moreover, many students in open questions rate prostitution as "pleasant work". Confirmation can be found in the statements "pleasant with useful", "nice that there are people who pay a lot of money for an hour of pleasure", "sex is a pleasant thing, so why not make money on it?". This may indicate a strong influence of the promiscuity culture, which treats sex as an instrument. It also shows the tendency of young adults to have one-off, casual sexual contacts.

Both the quantitative data and the quoted quotations represent a wide range of factors conditioning the undertaking of prostitution by students. This illustrates the complex nature of the phenomenon. It is difficult to unequivocally determine what pushes young people into the world of the sex business.

The provision of sexual services for money may also be conditioned by a financial disadvantage during studies. Students, who most frequently involved in prostitution, admitted that their monthly income was within the limits of "up to PLN 1,000".

Another important factor is the low level of responsibility for oneself and one's decisions. This largely pushes young people into risky sexual behaviour, which also includes prostitution. There is also a strong correlation between the practice of prostitution and the level of religiousness. People who are zealous believers, brought up in religious families, less often take up employment as prostitutes (more precisely: the greater the religiousness, the less inclined they are to undertake prostitution during their studies) (Wylęty, 2019).

Gender has also proved to be an important factor - it turns out that women are more often involved in this practice. However, it is important to consider to what extent the participation of women in the sex industry is determined by biological and psychological factors, and to what extent by the needs of society. It should be stressed that clients are usually men, who are more likely to use the service of female prostitutes.

Least Squares Means

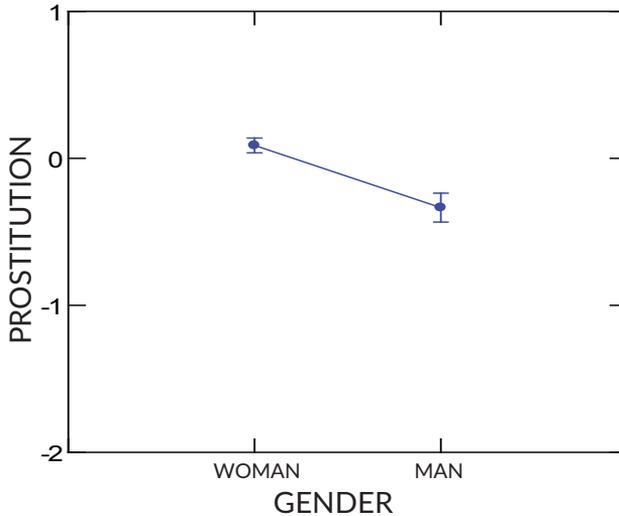


Fig. 1. The relationship between gender and prostitution.

Source: Author's own study.

It is worth noting that in open questions, students pointed to four basic reasons for practising: a difficult financial situation during their studies, an above-average sexual drive, a consumer attitude supported by the culture of promiscuity, laziness and unwillingness to take up "normal" work (Wylęgły, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted with an online questionnaire show that student prostitution is a popular phenomenon. A large group of students admitted to having (or having had in the past) sex for money. Student sponsorship is determined by three groups of factors: biological and psychological, economic and socio-cultural. There is a strong correlation between prostitution and a low level of self-responsibility and decision making as well as a low level of religiousness. The feeling of anonymity on the Internet is conducive to sharing confidential and intimate experiences. In the survey, many students admit that they accept such a way of "work-

ing" and/or would like to earn money in such a way. I believe that collecting such accurate empirical material would not be possible if the classic paper version of the survey form was used.

However, it should be remembered that research conducted via the Internet has several limitations. The first one is the lack of certainty that respondents actually meet the criteria. I assumed that the members of Facebook groups are people taking up studies at chosen universities. However, I am not able to confirm that the questionnaire was not filled in by random people who are not students. Another limitation is the lack of contact with respondents. Some questionnaires seemed to be very interesting and contribute a lot to my research. But I couldn't develop a given topic with the respondent, ask additional questions or dispel my doubts. I think that reaching the authors of some speeches would have enriched my research results.

Nevertheless, the use of an online survey has enabled me to collect data that has diagnosed the problem of student prostitution and confirmed my assumptions. I believe that the results of my research can be used as a prelude to further analysis.

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