Being Left Behind: Phenomenological Experience and Narratives of Sex Workers in Rural Philippines Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic uncovered and highlighted the existing social inequalities in the country, which further suppressed the marginalized people. This includes sex workers who were often discriminated and stigmatized because the topic of "sex" remains taboo in our country. The sex workers and their stories and struggles during these challenging times are still undocumented and unheard. In this regard, using phenomenological analysis, this paper studies the narratives and experiences of sex workers in the rural Philippines, specifically in Central Luzon. This study showed the lived experience of five (5) sex workers doing different and "creative" tools to survive. From the "traditional" doing of sex work, with the advent of technology, it transitioned to online. They are using various "techniques" to lure more clients and gain money. They use "thirst traps" (provocative photos to catch/attract attention), online selling of explicit images, and making online viewer requests such as doing cosplays. The primal reason for doing it is because of economic necessity. Because sex work pays more than many office jobs or other service work averaging 500 dollars up to 2,000 dollars a month. Moreover, this study showed how sex work was reconfigured and the resilience of women due to the pandemic.

Keywords: Sex Work, Phenomenology, Lived Narratives, COVID-19 Pandemic, Sex

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 Pandemic has shaped every aspect of our society. It has shown and exposed the inequalities in social support systems around the world, revealing gaps that further marginalize vulnerable people (Lam, 2020; UNAIDS, 2020). In addition, the coronavirus outbreak has also uncovered and highlighted the existing social problems in our society. It cannot be contained without addressing poverty, mobility, and food security among the poorest and most vulnerable people (Fernandez et. al., 2020).

Almost all industry has struggled due to the pandemic. This includes sex workers, which has been severely affected as a result of the prohibition on physical contact. Sex workers around the world are facing difficulties, loss of income, and increased discrimination and harassment (Global Network of Sex Work Projects [NSWP], 2020).

Furthermore, in the global context, they experience severe stigma and discrimination (NSWP, n.d.). Sex workers' ability to defend themselves is determined and influenced by their "work environment, community support, access to health and social assistance, and larger elements of the legal and economic environment" (Platt et al., 2020:9).

However, these sex workers are excluded from government relief, protection program and health services. This cause sex workers, as one of the most marginalized groups, are being left behind (NSWP, 2020; UNAIDS, 2020; Abji et al., 2020; Jozaghi and Bird, 2020; Lam, 2020; Langille, 2020; Liem et al., 2020; Platt et al., 2020).

Moreover, the narratives of the marginalize with their experience during these devastating times were still undocumented and unheard. This includes the experiences and stories of sex workers in the Philippines. Because even in the digital era and with the internet, the subject of sex remains a "taboo" or forbidden topic in Filipino households (Jaymalin, 2019).

According to Yrasuegui & Esselborn (2009), there are around 800,000 prostitutes living and working in the country, with half of them being under the age of 18. While in Dumlao (2013)
report, he said that they were around 500,000 prostitutes in the country. This just shows that there are many prostitutes living in the country who needs to be heard. Through this study, I will try to locate the status and conditions of the sex workers in the rural Philippines particularly in the Central Luzon region during these challenging times. This research focuses on "views from below" to help understand these gaps.

The primary aim of this study is to document the narratives and experiences of sex workers in Central Luzon during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as to understand how they dealt with new approaches and strategies for gaining customers in the midst of the pandemic.

**Definition: Sex Work or Prostitution?**

The feminist community is split on how they feel about prostitution. There is a group that views all forms of sex work as violence against women, and another that views it as a legitimate and recognized job. To give a brief context, Carol Leigh (a.k.a. "the Scarlet Harlot") coined the phrase "sex worker" in 1979 or 1980, claiming that "the introduction of the term "sex work" heralds the beginning of a movement and she also wrote in her essay that “it acknowledges the work we do rather than defines us by our status” (NSWP, n.d.; Lister, 2017). While the term 'prostitute' was often used derogatorily to denigrate and degrade women's sexuality, it first appeared in English in 1530 as a verb meaning to sexually dishonor oneself; 'I prostytute, as a comen woman dothe herself in a bordell home' (Palsgrave as cited in Lister, 2017).

Lister (2017) narrates that when discussing the sex industry, people who want the eradication of the sex trade use the phrases 'prostitute' or 'prostituted women' instead of 'sex worker' (the preferred term of individuals who supply sexual services). Moreover, Open Society Foundations (2019) argued that the term "sex worker" recognizes that sex work is a type of work. On the other hand, prostitution has illegal and immoral connotations. Many people who provide sexual services prefer the term "sex worker" because they find "prostitute" as demeaning and stigmatizing, which contributes to their exclusion from health, legal, and social services.

As a result, because language is such a crucial battleground in the fight for social equality, this study will use the term ‘sex workers’ to refer to persons who work in the sex industry. Furthermore, in the context of modernity where cam-girls, phone sex operators, glamour models, and porn stars are all part of the contemporary sex market, and the term "prostitute" is utterly inadequate to convey the intricacies of the current sex industry while the term 'sex worker,' on the other hand, encompasses all of these jobs and gives them a sense of autonomy and professionalism. (Lister, 2017).

**METHODOLOGY**

In this study, a qualitative method was used, specifically the phenomenological analysis, because it allowed for the exploration of the experiences of people who use sex work as a primary source of income. The term "phenomenology" has been defined in a number of ways. However, the main purpose and goal of phenomenology is to get a deeper and greater understanding of the essence, nature, or significance of everyday "lived" experiences or occurrences from the viewpoints of individuals who are engaged (Van Mannen, 2007; Dickerson, 2014; Creswell, 2003; Finlay, 2009; Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007; Rossman and Rallies 1998; Munhall, 2007; San Jose, Bahket, and Al Alsalhi, 2017; Lester, 2014).
In-depth interviews were employed as a method of data collection. To give a brief definition, in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that entails conducting thorough individual interviews with a small number of respondents to investigate their viewpoints on a particular topic, program, or issue (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Phone call and zoom interview was also utilized due to strict compliance with health protocols.

Moreover, ethical considerations in research were taken into account. There was no information about the respondents' identities released. To keep their personal information secure, I utilized code names and held all data in strict confidence.

Participants

The study included five (5) sex workers who were chosen by purposive sampling. To obtain sufficient data for a small-scale phenomenological inquiry, at least three (3) to six (6) individuals should be used (Giorgi, 2009; Clark, 2013). To be eligible for the study, participants must be involved in sex work and live in any part of the Central Luzon region. Proximity to the author’s locale was also considered due to strict travel restrictions. The participants were mostly young adults between the ages of 19 and 33. All of the respondents were women.

Apart from traditional sex work, which involves acquiring clients on the street, they were all getting clients via social media and selling their explicit content online. All participants were not residents of the region; they came from neighboring provinces and were drawn to this place for a variety of reasons.

Angela is a 22-year-old Business Administration student from Metro Manila who is currently in her second year of college. She aspires to finish her studies and start a restaurant business. She juggled sex work with studies, but because of the pandemic, she had to relocate her work to online. Her mother is an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), and she is unaware of her father's whereabouts. As a result of the strict health protocols in Manila, she was invited by a friend to live temporarily in the Central Luzon region, specifically in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija. She is unable to conduct her job as a sex worker in Manila, so she accepted the invitation.

Miya is a Cavite native who is 28 years old. She is the mother of two kids, ages four and two. Her husband was killed as a result of Duterte's anti-drug campaign (Oplan Tokhang). She began working in the sex industry when she was only 19 years old. She merely completed her high school education before began working as a service crew member at a well-known fast-food restaurant chain. One of her customers was impressed by her beauty and charisma and approached her about a position as a Guest Relations Officer (GRO) in a local bar. She accepts the customer's offer to work as a sex worker because she is the breadwinner in the family and wants to earn more money in order to provide financial assistance to her children. She fled to Central Luzon in order to avoid being harassed, threatened, and linked to her husband's employment by the police. The authorities are constantly investigating her and enquiring about her husband's "bosses." Fearful for their life, she hides in this location with her two daughters.

Destitute and homeless, Lesley is a 25-year-old Bicolano high school student who ran away from her family. She was assaulted and molested sexually by her two (2) uncles when she was only nine (9) years old. She tried to tell her parents about it, but no one seemed to believe her. This prompted her to abandon her family and relocate and begin a new life in Manila, where she found work as a waitress in a bar. This was the beginning of her career as a sex worker; she was just sixteen years old at the time. She was a single mother to her three-year-old boy, and she traveled to Central Luzon to work as a sales associate in a clothes store during the day and as a sex worker.

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at night.

Alice is a 26-year-old stay-in worker in a brothel who is from Pangasinan. She is a college undergraduate with a two-year-old daughter who lives with her. She used to own a sari-sari store business in Pangasinan before becoming a sex worker. She has admitted that her husband is a drug pusher. Similar to Miya's story, her husband was also killed during police operations. Fearing for their lives and police harassment, they moved to her friend's house in Central Luzon, where they have remained since. She was approached about taking a position as a caretaker in a brothel. Initially, she had no intention of working as a sex worker, but when a wealthy businessman attempted to pay her a large amount of money in exchange for sex, her career was transformed from that of a caretaker to that of a sex worker.

Ruby is 33 years old and is the study's oldest participant. She is from Antipolo City, Rizal, but has been living in Central Luzon with her family for the past ten years. Having been in the industry of sex work since she was 17, she considers herself to be an "expert" in the field due of her extensive experience. She was a college student in Manila when she began performing sex work. Her family is aware of her activities and, while they have no regard for her work, they have learned to respect her boundaries. Prior to the pandemic, she worked as a brothel employee performing "service" or in-person work, but she shifted online due to the lockdown. She aborted thrice.

RESULTS

Dichotomizing Sex Work: Rising Debate Among Feminists

Before we analyze sex workers' narratives during the pandemic, let us first discuss some of the challenges surrounding feminist viewpoints on sex work. Historically, feminists and women's organizations held diametrically opposed viewpoints on the topic of safeguarding individuals who engage in sex for money.

There are two dichotomizing views on how to look at ‘sex work.’ Prostitution, according to one group, is an economic problem that must be tackled and eradicated. Another acknowledges that some are victims of human trafficking or are coerced into it. This corresponds to the views of executive director of Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP) Jean Enriquez rejects the idea of sex as work and against the legalization of prostitution (Capire, 2021). This is comparable to the stance of GABRIELA Secretary General Joms Salvador, who remarked that referring to prostitution as 'sex work' and advocating for its normalization and legalization glorifies the realities of exploitation, particularly of women (Abad, 2020).

While the Philippine Commission on Women (n.d.) supports decriminalizing but not legalizing sex work, it views prostitution as a type of sexual exploitation that commodifies and dehumanizes women, men, and children who are victims of the system.

The other axis is those who view sex work as a legitimate business that serves an emerging market in any society. Similarly, the executive director of Action for Health Initiatives Inc. (ACHIEVE) Amara Quesada advocates for sex work and believes that there should be decriminalization of prostitution to protect the people in the industry (Rivas, 2020). Even the Philippines' first sex worker-led group, Women Hookers Organizing for their Rights and Empowerment (WHORE), which was founded in 1989, officially advocated that sex work be recognized as legitimate job (Dumlao, 2013).
Furthermore, the Philippine Sex Workers Collective (PSWC) is a loose coalition of sex workers from various parts of the Philippines that advocates for sex workers' rights and decriminalization, and they envision a society in which sex work is viewed as just another type of job (PSWC, n.d.).

Because in the context of the Philippines, according to Article 202 of the 90-year-old Revised Penal Code (RPC) selling sex is a criminal violation and women are considered "prostitutes" if they “habitually indulge in sexual intercourse or lascivious conduct.” Individuals who sell sex may face penalties and prison time. The Magna Carta of Women then designated prostitution as a form of abuse against women in 2009. This means that sex workers are both offenders and victims in the eyes of the law. Both parties believe that the government has marginalized people involved in the sex trade even further (Rivas, 2020). This can also be seen on Parmanand argument where she stated that:

“The moment we say there is no possibility of someone making a considered decision, we enable interventions such as rescuing them when they did not want to be rescued. Or we remove any possibility of political agency – they can’t unionize, they can’t advocate for themselves. When they try to speak up for their rights, they are told they are too damaged or too traumatized to be able to adjudicate what is in their best interest” (Parmanand as cited in Abad, 2020)

Additionally, it is important to note that sex work is one of those jobs that has never stopped being in demand or supply, whether during wars or famines, and it would be naive to believe otherwise in the event of a pandemic and as a matter of fact, financial pressure caused by the pandemic has reportedly prompted former sex workers to return to the sector, while many newcomers have entered the profession as well (Ketchell, 2021). Lastly, it is also critical to stress that we hear the voices and concerns of sex workers, as not all sex workers are victims who need saving (Parmanand, 2019).

**Voices from Below: Sex Workers’ Lived Experiences**

The following are the most prevalent themes that emerged from the interview with the five sex workers participants. There were four recurring themes: (a) Economic Incapacity (b) Internal Migration (c) The Clientele, and (d) Dealing with the Pandemic.

**A. Economic Incapacity**

Poverty and the desire to survive are the fundamental reasons and motivations for all sex workers to enter this line of employment. The initial theme of this research will be centered on sex workers' experiences with economic incapacity. Due to a variety of causes that impacted their lives, from doing it for the family to maintaining their personal luxury, sex workers have motives for venturing into this line of employment. It is crucial to highlight that in a country where the average monthly salary is roughly ₱15,200.00 ($304) (Lalu, 2020), it is unsurprising that many people seek sex work as an alternative. This will focus on the sex workers' stories about how they ended up doing sex work.
According to Ruby, everyone who works in the sex industry does so because they need money. "Do you think I'll eat a dick and lash out and moan at small dick if I have money?" she continued. She bursts out laughing. If I were Pacquaio's son, I would pay a million dollars to each sex worker to get them to cease doing this type of labor. But no, life is difficult, and you must work hard to support your family. That's why I've had three abortions because I don't want my child to end up in trouble. Consider this: if I had a son, his classmates would try to persuade him that his mother has already tried all of the Novo Ecijano, and he would be depressed. So here I am, simply enjoying my life. It's my body, after all. Isn't this my life?

She jokes that once the pandemic is over and things have returned to normal, she will open her own brothel because this is always in demand. Despite the fact that there was a pandemic, there were still customers. She claimed that we need prostitutes for a better economy because the money is in the pussy, the answer to poverty is in the pussy, and the key to the country's prosperity is in the pussy.

Angela shared her story. Many people questioned why I chose this career path. My mother works as an OFW in another country. That is the issue; people believe that a large salary is always available abroad. In fact, as a sex worker, I almost make as much as my mother. My estimated income per month is around $500 to $1000 which I want to help, but I don't want my mother to be concerned about my comforts. I'm a party animal, and life in Manila is prohibitively expensive. As a result, I was surprised when I arrived here because the price was significantly lower. I also spend a lot of money on items because I want to treat myself and I enjoy traveling and partying. All we need now is a Sugar Daddy and she burst to laugh.

Alice opened up about her own personal experience. The main reason I do this is that I desperately need money to support my son. I no longer have a husband, so I'm the only one who can help him. Being a sex worker is difficult at first, but you will get used to it. Maybe you'll say something like, "How about my dignity?" It's more difficult to claim dignity when you don't have anything to eat. Perhaps the first year on the job, I felt as if I had lost my dignity and despised myself. Then I just cried myself to sleep at night. It will, however, vanish. When you don't have food to give your child, it's even more painful. It's sometimes acceptable to have sex in exchange for noodles or soup.

B. Internal Migration

The participants were all from outside of Central Luzon. They came here for a variety of reasons such as running away from the family and cops. Because of the push and pull factor especially with the influence of the pandemic, all participants experienced the internal migration. According to Siegel and Swanson (2004), internal migration is a type of people's geographic or spatial mobility characterized by a change in one's usual residence within a country (region, province, city/municipality) over a set period of time for economic, social, political, or cultural reasons.

Lesley shared her experience. Since my two uncles sexually exploited me, I've fled my family. It was difficult because I was only a child at the time. I was ashamed of myself. My mother did not believe me when I told her about them. But I had already forgotten about it, and I had
forgiven them as well. It's so difficult and painful that I've decided to abandon my Bicol family. Because of the incident, my neighbors used to talk about me every day, saying things like "you're dirty, you're no longer virgin," and so on.

I moved to Manila to work as a waitress after graduating from high school in Bicol. Customers look after me because I am still fresh at that time. That's where I first began selling my body. Due to the nature of my work, my husband and I were constantly fighting, so I left him and moved here with my son. It's better here because, unlike in Manila, the cost of living isn't as high. When I sell clothes in the morning and encounter customers who appear to be looking for a woman, I tell them to wait until 5:00 p.m., when I leave for home. Customers are hard to come by at this time of year because of the pandemic.

Here is Miya’s story, when I was a kid, I worked at Jollibee. Someone once asked if I wanted a month's pay in exchange for a night's work. I gave in to his offer after being enticed in. She turned me into a GRO after that. Because I am the owner's personal favorite, he only gives me to high-end clients.

I worked as a GRO for only two years. I then left to look for a new job. My husband and I met there. My husband sold drugs due to a lack of income. He was unfortunately killed during Oplan Tokhang's high point. It's painful because law enforcement hasn't touched those at the top; only those of us at the bottom have been. The cops were constantly harassing us and interrogating us about drug deals. I didn't feel safe, so I left and stayed away from our home. I don't have Mom or Dad any longer, so I don't have anything to look forward to. As a result, I've returned to my previous sex worker situation. I just feel bad for my four-year-old son because I'm sure he already knows something, so I'm hoping to get out of this job as soon as possible.

Alice recounted her experience with police officers in her hometown. In Pangasinan, we had a wonderful time. There aren't any significant issues. We ate three meals per day and went on holidays on occasion. We own a sari-sari store, but due to a lack of funds, my husband attempted to sell drugs like shabu. I told him to stop, but if he doesn't, we're going to go hungry. A police operation occurred one night, and the officers instructed my husband to cover his eyes before shooting him in front of me. My husband immediately left after I gave birth to our child. Because the police harassed me, I called a friend and asked for a job that was far away from our home. So, we came here because he hired me as a caretaker at his bar. We just hid because the cops were being naughty, and I was afraid for my son's life.

C. The Clientele

The third theme that emerged from the research is the type of client that the participants encountered. All of the five sex workers interviewed have one client they are trying to avoid and considered as threat, the law enforcers/police officers. The relationship between the police and sex workers in the country has a long and tumultuous history in which the women have been subjected to systematic police abuse, but the coronavirus outbreak has made matters much worse for the women. (Rivas et al., 2020; Abad et al., 2020).
Alice explained her encounters. It's nerve-wracking because my client could be a cop. We used to be constantly harassed at our previous location, but things are a lot more relaxed here. My family is being harassed by the police officers there. One police officer once threatened to kill me if I didn't cooperate, similar to what happened to my husband. Clients who are police officers pay here. According to other sex workers in Manila, the cops will extort you after they've fucked you.

Ruby recounts her personal experience. It was extremely difficult during the first month of quarantine because the government offered no assistance. One time, the client does not have money that is why I was given a sack of rice as payment. It was only delivered to my residence. They're making fun of me among my coworkers. *Babaeng Palit-Bigas*, they suggested. Because the client is a farmer, they can expect to be compensated in terms of crops. A sack of rice is preferable to no payment at all.

Miya narrates the clients she ‘served’ during pandemic. I was able to go out and travel again now that the quarantine is less strict, which I believe began in September 2020. Travelers make up the majority of my clientele. I've been hanging out on the other side of 7/11 and can get up to two clients overnight.

Angela describes her profits, during the pandemic's peak, incomes were lower. I've been without a job and money for nearly four months. What a waste of my lipsticks and make-up, because in this line of work, you must be attractive, fragrant, and beautiful. When a customer sees you, they should feel compelled to give you a large sum of money. We also face discrimination, particularly among older sex workers, because we are in higher demand than they are. I can offer a discount if my client is good looking.

D. Dealing with the Pandemic

The study's final theme is the sex workers' response to the pandemic. Here, I attempted to examine how sex workers are coping with the pandemic. This includes the use of technology to monetize their obscene images and films. Similarly, according to Bigtas (2021), a masculine dancer who performs has saved enough money to build a house worth roughly P2 million. This revealed that they employ innovative methods of survival. Additionally, as a result of the pandemic, sex works were reconstructed through the use of internet.

Lesley recalls how she gain back from being broke. Pandemic is hard, fortunately, I was introduced in selling and promoting my nudist and explicit videos on Telegram to limit public exposure. In contrast to Facebook, which is very public, Telegram has a private group. I only post sexy photos and videos on Facebook. I'll show you some ‘thirst traps’ photos and videos, and if you want more, you can pay for them there. Thirst traps, according to Dr. Rica Cruz, are provocative photographs meant to grab attention, and they've been around for a long time - though in many forms (Acosta, 2021).

I charged 170 to 500 pesos ($3 to $10) per set for my photos and videos (see Figure 1 and 2). Actually, it varies because I occasionally give promotions, but I do not make video calls. Only...
videos and photographs are sent. Almost all sex workers nowadays work online because it pays well. Simply follow the client's instructions, such as dressing up in cosplay. You will be protected from sexually transmitted diseases as a result of this. The only issue is your privacy, as people will judge and mock you if your pornographic material is publicized. I can gain $500 to almost $2,000 a month by working in this profession.

Ruby shows her expertise. The traditional method of obtaining clients by walking late at night is no longer viable due to the possibility of being apprehended by the authorities due to the curfew. You have no idea what the cops will do to you if you are apprehended. Because police officers are the most formidable adversary in this line of work. As a result, our work is primarily done online while the pandemic is still present.

The client will send the money through Gcash (virtual wallet), and I will transact with Telegram (see Figure 3). Because the fee is higher, I prefer selling my body online via Videocall. My rate is 150 pesos ($3) for 5 minutes, 200 pesos ($4) for 10 minutes, 300 pesos ($6) for 15 minutes, and 500 pesos ($10) until the client cum. It's even less risky this way (see Figure 4). We're doing it via videos. Cybersex is the same way. Presentations, such as wearing anime clothing or a school uniform, should be performed to gain more money. The client's request determines the outcome.
Angela explained how to gain more money using technology. We are all tech-savvy now, so we should be tech-savvy when it comes to sex work as well. I was surprised because I had assumed that I would no longer be able to afford my luxuries because I would no longer be able to work. However, selling nudes generates a substantial amount of income. All you have to do is use Facebook or Instagram to attract customers. It's simply a matter of being assertive. After you've asked the client if he wants to see more, you'll give him your price. I found clients on Facebook, but my package is sold on Twitter and Telegram. I accept video calls as well, but at a different rate. People became extremely creative as a result of the pandemic in order to satisfy their desires and rid themselves of the lust. I primarily use Facebook, but I also use Twitter and Telegram to market my videos.

This demonstrates how, as a result of the pandemic, these women restructured the traditional way of doing sex work. They utilize technology and "devised" numerous ways to survive, with the primary goal of sustaining and providing for their family. What they performed demonstrates the women's adaptability due to their capacity and resilience.

Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic not only devastated every element of our society, but it also highlighted the country's existing social inequities. Various groups and sectors, particularly the underprivileged, such as indigenous peoples and the poor, were pleading for relief and assistance in order to survive during these calamitous times. However, there are groups in our society who have been ignored and left behind, like sex workers, because even before the pandemic, they were among the most disadvantaged people.
This study examined the phenomenological experiences of sex workers in rural Philippines, specifically how they coped with the pandemic. Their life stories about how they ended up doing sex work, playing hide and seek with the cops, the types of clients they served, and how they used technology to continue doing sex work despite the pandemic were gathered. By examining the narratives of sex workers in Central Luzon, Philippines we might gain a better understanding of their experiences and plights, particularly during these trying times. Even though they were excluded from policy procedures, they devise alternate means of earning money in order to survive.

Furthermore, it is a sad fact that the law enforcement officers who should have been safeguarding sex workers were the principal perpetrators of why they are still oppressed in our society. The long history of toxic relationships between cops and sex workers, in which cops are viewed as a threat rather than a savior.

In a conservative society where the subject of sex is considered taboo, the process of recognizing sex workers' rights is still ongoing. Being unrecognized by the state, the women devised a variety of means of surviving, exhibiting their ability to be resilient and adaptable. The majority of sex workers do not work in their home province, but in neighboring provinces, as the majority of them conceal the true nature of their profession to avoid shame and discrimination. Even feminist organizations are divided on how to recognize sex workers.

Conclusion

The documenting of sex workers' stories and narratives is just the first step towards empowering and recognizing them as a significant actor in our society. This study highlights the adaptability and resilience of women, as they are willing to go to any extent to provide for their families. Additionally, as long as the government does not provide adequate resources, particularly for basic social services. There will always be groups of people who are left behind in our society. For these reasons, it has turned out that the challenge is now on us.

Recommendations

Given the scarcity of data on documentation and hearing the voices of sex workers' lives, academics can focus on these indicators to close the gap and strengthen the evidentiary base for their advocacy. Furthermore, the following are some of the recommendations that were made as a result of the study:

1. Compile more narratives and phenomenological accounts from other sex workers in the region, including members of the LGBTQ community and men sex workers.
2. Concentrate on other age groups of sex workers, particularly adult sex workers.
3. Attempt to locate sex workers who have switched their line of employment as a result of the pandemic.
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