Reviewer’s report

Title: Factors influencing women’s sex work in a Lebanese sample Results of a case-control study

Version: 0 Date: 05 Nov 2019

Reviewer: Susan Dewey

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I was initially very excited to read a paper based on research in Lebanon, which is understudied in an otherwise quite crowded field of studies on women in sex work. Unfortunately, review of the abstract considerably dampened my enthusiasm after I saw the study's framing of women in sex work as mentally ill addicts whose previous experiences with abuse in various forms led to their current predicament. This is already well-trodden terrain, as is the recruitment of women from settings where they are most likely to have had terrible life experiences (i.e. prison), and simply offering a repetition of findings from a Lebanese case study is insufficient to warrant publication without revisions.

Here is what I suggest in terms of revisions, because I strongly believe that this work with incarcerated women should be published:

1. Include consideration of whether factors currently experienced by sex worker study participants are potentially the product of the pervasive stigma that universally accompanies prostitution, rather than prostitution itself. The authors need to do at least some work in the introduction and the literature review to emphasize why they chose the factors that they did—trauma, child abuse, depression, anxiety, and stress—since a boatload of studies have already explored these issues among women in sex work.

2. Specify in the title and throughout the paper that the sample was selected from a women's prison, so that readers will know that the women included are more likely than their peers who are not incarcerated to have had negative experiences in lower paid forms of prostitution where they are more likely to be assaulted and otherwise harmed. In some ways, conducting a study of prostitution in a women's prison is like conducting a study of marriage in a shelter for victim-survivors of intimate partner violence—the researchers are nearly determined to find that women have had negative experiences.

3. Emphasis how the case control provides new and unique contributions, as most studies of women in prostitution do not include this benefit. To this end, it will be important for the authors to emphasize the experiences of incarcerated women who did not admit to being involved in prostitution. What, in the authors' view, might have informed women's decisions to disclose being involved (or not) in prostitution? Case files are insufficient to determine a woman's involvement in prostitution, as this information is self-reported. What implications does this have for study results?
4. The literature review needs a major revision to emphasis key debates about sex work (sex worker rights, neo-abolitionism, harm reduction, public health, etc.), the dearth of literature from the Middle East, and engage with the literature on women in prison to emphasize the uniqueness of this population.

5. The paper needs a thorough edit to ensure it complies with formatting standards and standard English.

6. At present the paper reads like a long list of statistical results that would likely be easier to process as a table, graph, or chart. A careful revision will emphasize analysis of the work by evaluating the significance of these findings more thoughtfully, rather than just reporting them.

I realize that implementing these revisions will require quite a bit of work but I think that it will be worth the effort, as just by virtue of producing research from Lebanon the authors are likely to receive a high number of citations.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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