

A Descriptive Analysis of How Sex Work Impacts the Psychological well-being of Transgender Sex Workers (Male to Female) in Sri Lanka

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Sex work is a controversial profession that exists globally. It is also present in Sri Lanka, but it is perceived rather negatively by society, and those who engage in it are stigmatized, marginalized, and criminalized. Research focused on the sex work industry in Sri Lanka is scarce. Existing studies primarily highlight the difficulties, discrimination, exploitation, harassment, and abuse faced by female sex workers, with less attention given to minority groups within the industry. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the impact of sex work on the psychological well-being of transgender sex workers in Sri Lanka. The study has been conducted in a qualitative manner using semi-structured interviews and utilized a purposive sample of nine transgender sex workers selected from the Colombo district. The interview questions were designed based on Ryff's Psychological Well-being scale, encompassing Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and self-concept. The data were analyzed along these six dimensions using the thematic analysis method. The negative effect was predominantly observed and held particularly true across all six dimensions of Ryff's framework. Notably, the study uncovered that their gender identity and profession led to repeated betrayals by romantic partners, leaving them with a sense of emptiness and disappointment, which subsequently influenced their negative perception of men. Moreover, while the study suggests some positive insights into transgender sex workers' access to healthcare services in Sri Lanka it is evident that they have been still adopting poor coping strategies for an extended period. Overall, the findings of the study show that there is a considerable impact of sex work on the psychological well-being of transgender sex workers and the adoption of poor coping strategies for a long period.

Keywords: Psychological Well-being, Sex Work, Transgender Sex Workers, Sri Lanka, Ryff's model of psychological wellbeing, Eudemonic Wellbeing

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