

The Sad Secrets of Hidden Educated Population

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Despite a criminal activity student sex work is an alarming and widespread sensation in the universities of Pakistan. The purpose of the front-line study is the understanding of question; why student sex workers stay in the industry and what kind of challenges they face? Author used a qualitative approach is used to explore the study which helped to find the trajectories of stepping into the sex work through inductive reasoning. Findings of the front-line study reveal that students form the popular universities of capital city are indulged in commercial sex work for the sake of money, emotional, and material gains. The results show that student sex workers used different strategies to combine their academics and sex business. The education ministry, university authorities, religious leaders, motivational speakers, and non-governmental organization are required to organize workshops, trainings, seminars, and webinars to prevent our students from sex along with different job opportunities for student to fulfill their financial need. There is also a need to conduct further research relating to behavior of student sex worker to prepare an appropriate policy to prevent students from sex work.

org/licenses/by/4.0/). **Key word:** Student sex work, Pakistan, Universities, Educational gap, Education expenditure, Hidden Population, Dark Secrets

Introduction

The word “commercial sex worker” has been derived from the Latin word “Prostare” which means “selling oneself publically” (Bullough, 1987). Prostitution profession dates back to ancient times and grow through the human societies (Sanger, 2022). Age long phenomenon for financial assistance and non-financial favors has recorded history between 640-556 B.C (Coy, Wakeling, & Garner, 2016). In broader term, it consist on sexual exchange, like striptease and lap dance, and in short it may be a sexual intercourse (Sagar, Jones, Symons, & Bowring, 2015). However, various types of sex work are discussed in literature such as “indoor” and “street” prostitution, voluntary or forced sex worker, similarly various terminologies evolved over time to describe sex worker like, commercial sex worker, paid sex worker, prostitute, sly queens, hidden population, etc. Literature focused on the differentiation of survival or forced sex to sex work carried out for the purpose of economic settlement (Morton, Klein, & Gorzalka, 2012). This differentiation may be supportive in de-stigmatization of sex industry (Sandy, 2006; Abdallah et al 2025; Aslam et al 2026; Nawaz et al 2025; Shabbir et al 2026).

Participation of students in hidden industry is not a new phenomenon. Debate moved from the late 1970's polarized feminist “sex wars” which categories sex work into forced or voluntarily (Outshoorn, 2005). Numerous human activities have multiple rather than singular aspects, meaning, and consequences, among all of these, sex work perceived as more nuanced spectrum (Barton, 2002). Various students compare sex work to other student job and highlight the advantages and disadvantages of this industry. Most of times their entry into the work is unexpected, they just enter into the relationship, face harassment, or sell their time (Aslam et al 2026; Nawaz et al 2024; Shabbir et al 2026). However, societal prejudices are deeply

rooted and sense of respect being student of noble belonging forces them to keep their work secret. Students being “outed” as related to sex industry face consequences, like suspension from university, because this is perceived and misconduct which bring the future of that student at risk (Bott, 2006). Student's narrative of self-employment fit with this job along with vlogging, blogging, and other forms of freelancing. They believe in the potential of increasing income in said industry is greater in comparison of salaried person. The consequences of increasing competition and instability create stress and difficulties in self-branding and promotion (Gandini, 2016).

Despite of all problems, student sex work is an alarming and widespread sensation around the world, in United Kingdom about 6 percent of the university students are involved in sex industry and about 7 percent student from Germany are working in sex industry (Betzler, Köhler, & Schlemm, 2015; Sagar et al., 2015). Till now we are not completely aware from the factors cause the entrance of students in sex industry because few studies concentrated on the motivations behind it (Aslam et al 2026; Nawaz et al 2024; Saleem et al 2026). All these studies conducted in the countries which demand relatively high fee for higher degrees and it became the primary inspiration to enter into the industry. The most frequent motivation explained by number of students (63%) to attain a particular lifestyle. Although, the decision of entrance or staying in the sex industry are not just financial based but often more complex and multifaceted. In comparison of other part time jobs, sex work have more potential of higher income, flexibility in working hours, autonomous, fun based, more excited and filled with sexual pleasure (Sagar et al., 2015). Comparatively, this industry is much diverse, covering broad range of relations and labor management, started from direct sex to pornography, telephone sex, oral sex, erotic

dancing, and webcamming etc. (Weitzer, 2009). Whereas, Bernstein (2007) claims that widening use of internet has created the environment which is more appealing to the students and women of marginalized class of the economy to enter into the sex industry. Digitalization offers protection, privacy, and autonomy against the traditional shameful feelings associated with sexual labor. The researchers argued that sex working has become a “respectable” work like other professional offline and online activities. This enables the sex workers to face the dominated challenges surrounding their workplace (Bernstein, 2007; Dagunduroet al 2026; Feldman, 2014).

Number of researchers carried out their research in various international universities. However, this topic is under-researched in developing countries like Pakistan. Research didn't focus on the trajectories from where students enter into this industry and to find the total number of students involve in sex industry (Shabbir and Putra 2026; Hassan et al 2025; Cheisviyanny et al 2024;). Literature found primarily student enter into sex business for financial support. Unfortunately these trajectories are more complex in comparison of their expectations therefore; they remained stuck and didn't find ways of extraction. They cite them for fun, money, and increasing autonomous power (Fahamsyah et al 2026; and Sadiq et al 2026). Keeping in view the structural prospective, changes in the attitude towards sex work and nature of working environment are interlinked to give reason why this turnover is increasing day by day. Increasing use of internet by sex-workers, rising opportunities of digital sex like webcamming, and mainstreaming of strip clubs is a typical frequent space for students in night economy.

In Pakistan, commercial sex activity is considered as crime and defined as “offering person's body for sex in reward of money”. In spite of, criminalization sex industry is gaining ground even among children particularly in metropolitan and cosmopolitan cities of

Pakistan (Bilgrami, 2019). Historically, the areas ruled by Mughal king, who were patron of art and music, and promote them equally. This dynasty was famous for their kindness and support towards singer, dancers, and artists. These performers were allowed to live near the King's fort and their residence was known as “Shahi mohallah”. In these mohallahs practicing of dancing, singing, music, and sex selling sex go side by side. Due to the unique social context of the prostitutions noble sent their youngsters to them for grooming. They learn about sitting in get to together, appear in classical music, write poetry, and enjoy the company of beautiful women and a glass of wine (Saeed, 2006). One from that area is just next to the Lahore fort known as “Heera Mandi” means a diamond market also called “Bazar e Husan” a beauty market. Over the period of time, the art and profession of selling sex passed to the next generations, like from mother to daughters and grand-daughters. During the military regime sexual activities were banned in all these areas. As an outcome, tawaifs of heera mandi relocate themselves in the residential area of the city. Recently, women showcasing themselves in showbiz, selling sex at brothels, homes, and streets of the concentrated areas (Khan et al., 2010). Anecdotal indication has shown the proliferation of sex work in and outside the universities. However, student sex work is an under researched phenomenon in comparison of general sex work. Unfortunately, there is a lack of firsthand experience reports directly from people, but all over the world student sex work is considered as wide spread phenomenon (Betzler et al., 2015; Sagar et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The front line research is based on the social epistemology which hooks the idea that multiple truths are waiting for explanation a phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2005). The constructive approach of the article holds the notion that eliciting views relating human centered issues and discussion of differences on specific context can give better understanding of

prevailing situation (Gbagbo & Gbagbo, 2021; Ponterotto, 2005). In the current study, the researchers need social constructive approach to establish worthy rapport with the student sex workers, so that they can solicit their experiences on given topic.

Methodology

A qualitative approach is used to explore the study which helped to find the trajectories of stepping into the sex work through inductive reasoning (Thomas, 2006). A qualitative component pursued to elicit the experiences, and reasons in sex work being student. With the help of this approach, the researcher was able to examine commercialization of sex work among university students without adding self-impression to the outcomes. In depth interviews were conducted from the sample of fifteen students to find the reasons and highlighting their experiences. In qualitative research the sample size must be adequate if it possess all the said characteristics of target population, to achieve maximum variations sample size may be adequate (Iram, Ilyas, Bilal, & Parveen, 2019; Sandelowski, 1995).

Sampling

Three research assistants comprising two males and one female selected from three different universities were trained for the collection of data. The selected sample of student sex workers belong to different universities of Islamabad, Pakistan. Fifteen in depth interviews were conducted randomly sampled BS, and MPhil female students involved in commercial sex activities. The ages of all the respondents were 20 to 35.

Data collection procedure

Respondents were selected through snowball sampling technique. Assistants collected data between 2024 and 2025 through interviews which were more like friend's get together conversation. Interviews focused on the information regarding emergence of sex work at university level, mode of operation, entrance

into sex work, reasons, family background, experiences, and challenges. Participants provided the verbal consents and we did not compromise on the privacy of the members, their names, institutions, contact numbers, addresses were excluded from research. Along with, we have no photograph, recording of interview, messages, call recording etc. which can be used to trace the respondent or the assistant. All the participants and research assistants were fully professional. To check the validity thick description and triangulation method are applied with the consensus of researchers and reliability of data has been checked by member checking (Almalki, 2016).

Results

Table 1; represent the background characteristics of the respondents. They all were well educated and belongs to the renowned institutions of Islamabad Capital territory. Majority from them were young, energetic, and passionate people aged 20-35.

Table 1: Class wise sample		
Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
11	4	15

Source: Author's calculation

Following are the main themes of result discussion.

- 1: Commercial sex emergence at university level
- 2: Mode of operation used by sex workers
- 3: Views of respondents
- 4: Reason behind involvement in sex activities
- 5: Challenges faced by student sex workers

Commercial sex emergence at the university level

Information from the respondents shows that university students are practicing in commercial sex. It is multifaceted issue in the countries like Pakistan where sex itself is viewed as taboo. Emergence of sex work in higher educational environment may be due to numerous socio-

economic, psychological, and cultural pressures. Educational institutes in urban hubs can be microcosms where social trends, behavior, and race of prosperity amplified upon student's life and navigate the complexities of their lives.

Mode of operation used by the sex workers

Respondent states that some student sex workers visit different areas around the university to find the customers, few operate from the guest houses, hotel rooms, and brothels. There are different categories, first, highly paid student sex worker; they work by the appointments with clients. They leave their contact numbers and pictures in guest houses and hotels to be contacted by clients.

Words of the respondent:

Prostitution is not allowed anywhere in the country and other jobs are hard to find. So, we being student leave our phone numbers and pictures at hotel desk, in case any customer wants to hang-out and spend quality time with us they can contact.

It might be concerning that student sex worker face high risk, harmful methods, no protection in their duties. It's true that illicit work give quick financial reward but it had long lasting emotional and physical consequences. In this context it's alarming that 'students earn more than fifty thousand rupee in a single trip outside the city. One of respondent told that one week trip of Northern areas of Pakistan with a businessman means hundred thousand rupees and foreign trip paid more than one lac. Second, rider from different areas linked the students to clients, provide them pick and drop services and get their commission. Student who lived in apartments convert their living place into brothels. Third, two respondent were working with escorting agencies which function as intermediaries between client and sex worker. These agencies provide safety measures, proper structure, and set prices as per service offered. Fourth, one from the sex workers told us about her participation in "sugar dating". She involved with a guy who arrange gifts, money, and all type of financial and emotion support for her in

exchange of companionship. It seems more socially acceptable form of sexual relationship. Fifth mode of sexual transactions is digital sex; rising use of internet open the new horizons for all the industries, many sex workers engaging themselves in online forms of sex, like webcam modeling, virtual sex, and selling naked content. These digital platforms allow the degree of anonymity and safety. Sixth, the most popular mode which we came to know is street based sex work, our respondent explain that most of the time they offer their services at designated hot spots, due to busy intersections, tourist frequented areas, and where the depressed people come for temporary companionship. In the presence of Marghala hills and jungle around the universities and city it is easy to schedule sex work in an isolated place. These places serve as meeting point for both parties, away from public appearances safe them from public judgments.

Views of respondents

All fifteen respondents were educated and unmarried women who have sex with men for financial, emotional, and material well beings. A respondent view about commercial sex work:

If you are not married and sleep with more than one man for any reason that may be money, body need, or anything else then technically you are a commercial sex worker (Graduate student).

Reason behind involvement in sex activities

It was hard to recall how they entered into sex industry. Mostly explain that, it was peer pressure of making money, weak financial and emotional support from family, living luxurious life, and other material gains for the betterment of life. Few from our respondent said that the sophisticated living style of peers was the key of motivation for stepping into the commercial sex work.

Respondent 1: *I have been doing sex work since 2022, after the death of my father my siblings were not compelled to take care of myself, without any source of financial assistance it was difficult to manage the life, my*

boyfriend bring me to sex world and I found financial sustainability.

Respondent 2: *Being unwanted child I experience emotional negligence which lead me to form physical relationship for emotional fulfillment. My friends introduced me to this business which is full of entertainment, joy, and money.*

Respondent 3: *I belong to a rich family and my friends were surprised when I told them that I am in sex industry. Sometime, I pay for sex, sex is good, it makes me happy, relax, and emotionally stable. I usually change sex partners for mental and physical satisfaction.*

Respondent 4: *I am a research student; it's hard for me to manage classes, research projects, relationships, and other matters of life. Therefore, I used to go for good sex, which give me relaxation, and put me in good mood to manage all my work.*

Challenges faced by student sex workers

Beyond the flexible hours, money, and enjoyment there are number of challenges faced by student sex workers like unwanted pregnancy, violence, and sexually transmitted infections. Horrifying experiences shared by the sex worker made the author cry. Watching the porn videos and exercising the same practice is sometime become a violent treatment. Such as one respondent explain:

I was gagged, my body was numb, I just breathed and held it ... unable to resist, It was not just sexual violence but I felt hate against women.

Another respondent report:

Whenever we refuse to do what they want they close the doors of their houses for us. Many times we are beaten by them just because of taking protection against pimps.

Another respondent indicate:

We charge high prices for raw sex, because in some situations condom get burst and we have to buy medicine to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Another respondent explain:

After negotiation client give use extra amount for protection, sometimes they breach the contract and remove to condom, and forcefully fuck you when they are on your

top....few become more aggressive so we try to refuse them because the abuse sexually and emotionally.

Students are much aware from the pros and cons of sex industry so they adopt different strategies to mitigate the risk associated with business. Numerous students indicate the negative consequences on their academic performances.

When business is on its peek we forget about lectures in following client's instructions. We are not able to take classes, managing lectures, preparing notes, and sometimes examinations. Due to the disturbance by clients we just loss our concentration on all other activities of life.

Sometime these students devised different tactics including sexual attachment to allure attention of their instructors in exchange of getting favor in obtaining marks and passing the examination. However, it may also cause the sexual harassment by the instructor for other students.

As per respondent:

I used the seducing strategies to scheduling my classes and getting good marks in exchange of good sex. However, all the instructors are not morally weak; therefore I pay full attention to all those subjects which are taught by such instructors.

Discussion

The purpose of the front line study is the understanding of happenings in and around the universities. Student sex workers stay in the industry due to their addiction, emotional attachment and money-to-time ratio. They charge high rate because they are student, flexible working hours, and pleasure attach to the sex activity cause to pursuit the career along with studies. However, various consensus relating to the ethics, students' physical and mental healths are exist. The link with the sex industry is greatest concern, because this industry is not acceptable in the societies like Pakistan where there is a Muslim dominating culture.

Despite the moral, religious, and social stigma, commercialization of sex work is a criminal activity among the universities of capital city. Sex practice is becoming common, different strategies including hang out with boyfriend, girlfriends, leaving photos and contact numbers in hotels, operating the network by their own, finding the customers, providing required services, are used in the spread of sex industry. The background characteristics of student sex workers observed which indicate the involvement of young, enthusiastic, unmarried and energetic students. All the results of the indicators researched in a study encourage the students to get involved with the sex work. Student sex worker treat it as business and the revenue is determined by the sex duration, type, place, and according to the requirements of the clients. It was observed that customers show willingness to offer high rates for unprotected and aggressive sex. Students are very well aware from the health risks associated with this business therefore they try to get compensation in form of money.

Conclusion

Findings of the front line study reveal that students from the popular universities of capital city are indulged in commercial sex work for various reasons. Number of students enters into sex industry due to the combination of emotional vulnerability, economic hardships, and weak family ties. All these factors make the susceptible to seeking alternative means for emotional validation and financial stability. The results show that student sex workers used

different strategies to combine their academics and sex business. The spiral of the hotels, guest houses, and student apartments in the surroundings of the university campus required law enforcement to prevent from sex practices by students. Prices of the sex are based on the environment, style, duration, and consequences of activity not only expose the level of involvement but also its impact on the cultural, social, behavioral, and moral norms of the society. In underdeveloped countries like Pakistan if the students indulge in sex business to fulfill their need it means the future of the nation will be not in good hands. The dark side of this society is; people involved in sex business are considered characterless, shameless, and religion-less. The education ministry, university authorities, religious leaders, motivational speakers, and non-governmental organization are required to organize workshops, trainings, seminars, and webinars to prevent our students from sex along with the production of different job opportunities for student to fulfill their financial need. This is the only to save the future of the nation from illegal and unethical activities. There is also a need to conduct further research relating to behavior of student sex worker to prepare an appropriate policy to prevent students from sex work.

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