

Chapter 10

Exploratory Research on Violence Against Transgender Prostitutes: Limitations and Challenges in Participant Recruitment

Catarina Capucho Conde
Universidade Lusíada, Portugal

Fabiana Rodrigues Gonçalves
Universidade Lusíada, Portugal

Beatriz Filipa Andrade
Universidade Lusíada, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This chapter delves into the intricate intersectionality of transgender identity and involvement in prostitution, shedding light on the heightened vulnerability of transgender prostitutes to sexual and physical violence. The primary focus of this chapter is an exploration of the challenges encountered during a qualitative and criminological study aimed at collecting first-hand accounts through semi-structured interviews with transgender prostitutes. Despite the importance of this research, building a representative sample proved to be notably difficult, highlighting the complexity of engaging this marginalized population in research endeavors. By addressing these challenges, the chapter aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the victimological phenomenon affecting transgender prostitutes and emphasizes the critical importance of overcoming obstacles in conducting empirical research in this field. The ultimate goal is to facilitate future scientific inquiry by raising awareness about the intricacies of researching violence against transgender prostitutes.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, perceptions of prostitution have been intricately linked to the shift from matriarchal to patriarchal societies. In matriarchal eras, women were revered as life-givers and esteemed as “Goddesses” resulting in the emergence of prostitution without negative connotations; instead, it was viewed as a respected societal activity (Teodoro & Silva, 2015). Sacramento & Ribeiro (2014) emphasize that, in ancient times, there are multiple examples illustrating how prostitutes held a relevant social status, indicating that neither prostitution nor the women engaged in this practice were subject to stigmas or considered deviant.

However, the ascent of patriarchy led to the confinement of women to the private sphere and their subordination to men. Notably, women engaged in sex work retained a distinct status by receiving payment for their services (Costa, 2008). Despite this, evolving societal attitudes gradually turned negative, resulting in the criminalization of prostitution under the influence of patriarchal norms (Ceccarelli, 2008). This societal shift discredited the sanctity of women, creating a stark division between the “*woman of the street*” and the “*woman of the house*” (da Silva, 2011).

Traditionally, homosexuality was stigmatized as a “maleficent, marginal and capable of perverting the social order” (Borges, Perurena & Passamani, 2013). Consequently, research aimed at treatment and control paralleled the criminalization of homosexuality, especially in cases of same-sex interactions, as evidenced by studies by LeVay (1996), Rydstrom and Mustola (2007) and Nussbaum (2010).

The state, represented by the police as the primary law enforcement entity, played a pivotal role in administering and upholding legal structures related to homosexuality, leading to strained relations with the LGBTQIA+ community (Dwyer, Ball, & Crofts, 2016). This tension manifested in discrimination and occasional violence, as highlighted by Dwyer (2014). Furthermore, transgender individuals face pervasive challenges, including prejudice, denial of fundamental rights by various institutions, barriers to education and employment, and various forms of victimization collectively termed “transphobia” (Stenersen, Thomas & McKee, 2022). This underscores the systemic issues that contribute to the marginalization and vulnerability of transgender individuals within society (Jesus, 2013).

Discrimination within the context of transgender identity persists, but an intriguing reversal of societal attitudes is observed when comparing it with prostitution (Stotzer, 2009). Initially unburdened by negative connotations, prostitution has evolved to be perceived as “dirty work”, while transgender identity has successfully shed its erroneous associations (Dwyer, Ball, & Crofts 2016). Transgender women working in the sex industry, particularly in prostitution, confront significantly elevated levels of sexual and physical violence compared to their cisgender counterparts (Cohan et al., 2006; Johnson, 2013; Nemoto,

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