

What drives a prostitute

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In a survey of prostitution, the majority of prostitutes say their own sexuality, sexual curiosity and money are the main reasons they chose their line of work.

Half of the prostitutes in a new survey say they became prostitutes because of sexual curiosity, and 68 percent consider their line of work as part of their sexuality.

“While there’s no doubt that money is the primary reason for the women becoming prostitutes, it is very surprising that sexual motivation ranks so highly,” says Jens Kofod, who holds a PhD in anthropology and is a researcher at SFI – The Danish National Centre for Social Research.

He was responsible for the survey and the subsequent report, ‘Prostitution in Denmark’, which also reveals that Denmark has fewer prostitutes than expected and that most street prostitutes are foreigners.

No child abuse

Women became prostitutes for many different reasons, but they often feel stigmatised by society as needing help to stop their work (fewer than half of the prostitutes have considered stopping), instead of society respecting their choice of work.

Child abuse is often regarded as a reason for prostitution by the media, politicians and general public, who feel the prostitutes need help to stop their work.

But the survey produced no clear conclusion on this – some prostitutes were abused as children, others were not.

Four groups of prostitutes

The SFI researchers calculate that there are a little over 3,200 prostitutes in Denmark, which is fewer than expected, for example because some prostitutes work at several clinics.

The researchers divide the prostitutes into four groups:

- Female escort prostitutes (about 900)
- Male escort prostitutes (no figure)
- Female clinic prostitutes (about 1,600)
- Street prostitutes (less than 600 foreigners, few Danes)

A majority of female escort and female clinic prostitutes gave sexual curiosity as a reason for entering prostitution; many had great interest in sex before becoming prostitutes.

Almost half of the female escorts and just over a sixth of the clinic prostitutes started their work because they saw an opportunity to make money through sex.

Street prostitutes, however, draw another picture: they are not in the business for the sex but to deal with problems such as drug abuse.

Working for money

Despite the sexual drive, the main reason for prostitution in all groups is money.

“Money is cited by 85% of the prostitutes,” says Kofod. “Some have to pay for housing, food and day care for their children, others must pay for their drug abuse, while others want an extra week’s holiday abroad.”




A typical story, according to the researcher, is that a man divorces a woman and takes all the money, and the woman then sees prostitution as the only way to earn a living.

A more nuanced picture

“Our study shows that prostitution is a much more nuanced picture than we have previously believed,” he says.

“Firstly, we have halved the estimated number of prostitutes in Denmark. Secondly, the public debate about prostitution as poor wretches or happy hookers is distorted – most prostitutes are somewhere between these two extremes.

“The prostitutes have widely differing lifestyles and reasons for their work,” says the researcher.

 [Some 85 percent of prostitutes in a Danish survey say they are sex workers because of the money. Their average earnings differ little from the national average. \(Photo: Colourbox\) \[7\]](#)
 [Street prostitutes are more likely than clinic prostitutes to have drug problems. \(Photo: Colourbox\) \[8\]](#)
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Fact box

The report is based on interviews with former and active prostitutes and with experts from the authorities and NGOs associated with the sex environment.

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Jens Kofod

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