



Perspective

COVID-19 and impact on places with sex tourism

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health crisis but has also propelled the world towards a global recession because of lockdowns. Travelling has become one of the most affected areas. Sexual tourism globally generates a significant amount of revenue, and COVID-19 has hit them hard. This pandemic has hit the intimacy sector brutally all over the world. This industry's development mainly accounts for lack of social equality, lack of jobs, lack of opportunities, and low education being most prominent. There is a sizable amount of population associated with this industry that is on the verge of collapsing and extremely vulnerable to various physical and mental health problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government and non-governmental agencies and humanitarian organizations need to help out these people living on society's margins.

Keywords: COVID-19, Sex tourism, Sex trade

Introduction

The lives of the people have been affected like never before by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is undoubtedly the most widespread pandemic in the History of Humanity. According to various studies and reports, the socioeconomic impacts have been significant (Mukherjee et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; PTI, 2020). There are

many reasons for the pandemic to reach such a large scale. We need to look into the causes of spread to understand the impact better. Historically there has been pandemic throughout the world that can be dated to the "Black Death" of the period of renaissance, followed by the Plague, Spanish Flu in the 1920s (Morens et al., 2020). The number of lives lost was more than what we are going through in COVID-19. The Global crashing of the economy, the complete lockdowns, and restrictions for travels have had emancipating effects on some industries. One of the Industries most affected by COVID-19 is the Tourism industry (Pak et al., 2020). Human trafficking and sex trade are one of the most dangerous trades that

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exist, which usually is related to the massive influx of money and has an underlying nexus of illegal drug trade; both of these human and illegal drug trades also are generally laden with diseases and life-threatening situations. In this article, we would like to focus on the industry of Sex tourism and the impacts of COVID-19 on places with such sectors. It is necessary to focus on this topic, so this article is discussed with the following headings: places and revenues generated from sex tourism, reasons for the development of sex tourism and associated businesses, the usual general condition of people working in such areas, pre-existing challenges complicated by the COVID-19, healthcare crisis in the marginalized people, mental health impact on the people associated with sex tourism.

Methodology

A review of literature, news, documentaries were done to write this review. Keyword searches on search engines like Google and yahoo were done, and news, documentaries published work was explored to write the article.

Places and revenues generated from sex tourism:

Prostitution being one of the oldest professions, has been worldwide in every country, legally and illegally. There are various countries in the world where prostitution is legal and comes under legally regulated mechanisms (Argento et al., 2019; Platt et al., 2018).

One of the most famous such countries is Germany, and Amsterdam is considered Europe's sex capital. In various districts where prostitution is legal, women from Romania, Hungary, and other East European countries migrate for the sex trade (Munsterman and Ellen, 2020). Here Brothels and freelance prostitution are legal, and Sex workers are covered under social

protection schemes. The COVID-19 pandemic precisely hit these districts, mainly affecting the active sex tourism in those districts, forcing them to live hand to mouth (Munsterman and Ellen, 2020). Germany did a great job of giving away social aid to its residents and stabilizing their national economy. Still, the underlying stigma and discrimination prevented many people involved in the sex industry to benefit from it. Although the government has been working, there is a dire need to improve and support the people associated with means to access testing and treatment of COVID-19 related problems; free supplies of the essentials, sanitizers, food, and basic utilities can be instrumental in helping the people out.

Mexico: Although in Mexico, prostitution is legal in some areas, it is America's most common places to procure sex (CNN, 2020). The COVID-19, with its gory consequences, haven't been able to reduce the number of Sex tourism significantly from the USA (CNN, 2020). But there are places in Latin America where many areas are notorious for their illegal sex trade. Mexico remains to be the to-go destination for the People of the USA, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sex tourism provides Mexico a steady flow of U.S. dollars. Still, the unsanitary conditions, low quality of living among the workers, and illicit drug use remain a significant challenge to meet (Beattie et al., 2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic has worsened their condition. The people involved in prostitution are mainly women and Trans women, usually with children and mostly underage. They are often economically deprived of primary, middle school education (Mexico city sex workers get aid in virus lockdown, 2020). They are one of the most vulnerable populations. They have been struck as sex tourism has seen a declining business which has pushed them to engage in risky sexual behavior

during the pandemic, causing them to be exposed to prosecution and health risks.

Columbia: The Columbian countries have long been a place where slavery and prostitution had been a trade and human trafficking has been an issue usually, people from these areas had been trafficked to the southern states of America for prostitution; this remains a problem even now (Florich, 2020), though now immigrants migrate on their own free will to enter the USA and thus often fall victim for poachers and illegal drug traders and end up in prostitution and get prosecuted for their actions.

Las Vegas: Las Vegas is the most sought-after place for sex tourism and gambling in the United States, where prostitution is legal, and escort services have a booming business. The COVID-19 has impacted the lives of those working as the interstate, and intra-state tourism was brought to a halt in March 2020. This affected the whole city's livelihood, which has led to the economic crisis as public establishments like Casinos, Pubs, and Bars are not operational. This has led to the loss of revenue in millions of dollars (Nunis, 2020).

Thailand: Thailand is one of Asia's most significant countries, which draws considerable tourism revenues. The national and international lockdown due to the COVID-19 has led to a complete stoppage of the travel from the international countries. The initial spike of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the economic recession of the nation. Although prostitution has been illegal in the nation, but illegal cheap sex trade has been an essential contributor to the national economy (Min xi, 2020). A billion-dollar sex trade industry forced the people to engage in the work to look for other opportunities, which became scarce in the COVID-19 lockdown and post-lockdown period (Skynews, 2020). Documentaries and news

reports have reported the worsening condition of Thailand's sex workers. They already belong to underprivileged societies. Aid from the international agencies are insufficient to provide for Thailand's commercial sex workers' needs.

Philippines: The Philippines', small island country in the Pacific, has been one of the poorest countries that provide constant export of human resources towards the other developing or developed nations. Their primary source of income is also through the export of cheap labor with liberal policies of the country. Philipino women and transgender people often work in the sex trade to meet their financial needs and support their families (Staff, 2020). The influx of tourists from Australia, the USA, Europe, and China leads to the development of the Pacific's tourism industries. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the complete halting of the tourists, and the already weak economy could only do so much to help their ailing populations (Staff, 2020).

Brazil and other South American countries: These have also been affected very severely by the COVID -19 pandemic. Brazil being one of the worst-hit in the game right after the USA, was also struggling to sustain its population, and it also has a tremendous illegal sex and drug trade problem which impacts the national system (Desperate times for sex workers in Brazil as COVID-19 paralyzes business, 2020). Brazil has been unable to control the transmission properly which has led to isolation, fear, and stigmatization among the people pushing the already underprivileged into the margins (Simões et al., 2020).

African countries: In many African countries where COVID-19 is continuing, there is already a scarcity of supplies and services; there is a dire need to focus on the

people living in the margins of the society who are associated with prostitution to get access to protect themselves and survive the global pandemic (Adebisi et al., 2020).

India: India is also home to one of the largest red-light areas; some regions have prostitution especially places like ‘Sonagachi’ of Kolkata, G.B. road of Delhi, ‘Kamathipura’ in Mumbai, ‘Mehboob ki mehendi’ in Hyderabad, and other small significant areas where prostitution is an area of work, the COVID-19 pandemic has been relentless. The people living in these areas fear the health crisis, but this pandemic has pushed them to their existential crisis limits. The government is doing little to aid their condition (Bose, 2020; The Hindu, 2020).

Reasons for the development of sex tourism and associated businesses

Humans are probably the only people in the world that require money and paperwork to live and survive. In the low income and middle-income countries, their increasing and exploding populations and lax government systems lead to an influx of people desperate in search of work and money. Their lack of work in the organized sectors and lack of industries make the people vulnerable to engaging in the sex trade and human trafficking for their livelihoods (Min xi, 2020; Simões et al., 2020; Staff, 2020), leading to the development of commercial sexual trades and tourisms.

The reasons for people engaging in Sexual trade, although in most regions, are considered morally incorrect are manifold. The reasons (of commercial sexual acts and works) have deep-seated roots in society. Their reasons are mainly as follows but are not limited to the ones mentioned (Fig. 1). This trade for easy money becomes a trap of stigma and poverty, and frustration among



the people involved in. Diseases and epidemics often flood these areas, bringing many catastrophes and fatalities (Min xi, 2020; Nunis, 2020; Platt et al., 2018).

The usual general condition of people working in such areas

There has always been an attempt to stop prostitution as it has been considered a derogatory socially unacceptable trade (Argento et al., 2019; Beattie et al., 2020). Unfortunately, social disapproval and regulations have not been able to stop the business of 'Sex trade'. Thus legally or illegally, these activities are happening in and across the nations throughout the world. The majority of countries involved in the sex trade are looked down upon and usually end up in this business due to economic and social deprivation and desperation (Adebisi et al., 2020; Simões et al., 2020; Staff, 2020). Most of the workers are female, thus increasing their vulnerability and chances of exploitation in terms of abuse involving physical, sexual, economic, and social domains of life (Platt et al., 2018).

Pre-existing challenges complicated by the COVID-19, health care crisis in the marginalized people

These people usually live in unsanitary conditions in congested neighborhoods where access to health care and sanitary measures are often scarce. This pandemic of SARS CoV-2 and the highly infectious nature of the disease has led to the development of fear, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness among the people associated with the sex trade (Adebisi et al., 2020; Argento et al., 2019; CNN, 2020; Hillis et al., 2020; Min xi, 2020; Munsterman and Ellen, 2020). There is a difficult dilemma among the workers; one is to meet the daily needs, another being able to prevent the Infection as the sex workers need to be intimate with their clients, which puts them at high risk for contracting the virus (Beattie et al., 2020). These people have poor access to the health care delivery system, and the pandemic has led them to be even more deprived of their fundamental rights. The clients of these people reportedly have tried to help them out, but that has been like a drop in the desert (UNCTAD, 2020). There is an enormous need for support to the underprivileged.

Mental health impacts on the people associated with sex tourism

The COVID-19 Pandemic has, in general, been a very stressful event for people throughout the world (Hiremath et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2020). Various population-based studies and surveys have reported heightened levels of anxiety and depression among the general population and increased fear and apprehension regarding the loss of livelihood and safety during the pandemic (Qiu et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2020). The people who work in prostitution and their families suffer an existential crisis during these times. Their livelihoods depend on their tourists; their daily food, clothes, and basic needs depend on the money brought in by the

tourists. Therefore as the nations are having the regional and national lockdowns, the marginalized populations which are involved in sex tourism face the threat of hunger and poverty (AFP, 2020; Desperate times for sex workers in Brazil as Covid-19 paralyzes business, 2020; Mexico City sex workers get aid in virus lockdown, 2020). They already are impoverished and lack proper education, lack other working skills, and stigma related to prostitution, which drives them to poverty, further exaggerating their misery and pushing them into a state of complete desperation. There has been some dilemma regarding the Government and Non-Government organizations' measures while helping them out of their misery (Florich, 2020; Simões et al., 2020). The general societal attitude of condescension about prostitution and work of a similar nature also leads to the lack of funding for the welfare of already marginalized communities of sex workers. Due to the illegal nature of their work, they are deprived of fundamental human rights, thus being subjected to public prosecution and public persecution (Adebisi et al., 2020; Min xi, 2020). Therefore their help-seeking often gets ignored and deems them struggle for their existence in the post COVID-19 world.

Conclusions and recommendations

The general social standpoint for the people involved in the sex trade and the associated businesses can be brought under legal and judicial systems. Many of the establishments pay huge taxes to the government, but people associated with the sex trade live in extreme poverty and insecurity. This leads to a host of mental health issues among the people. There is a presence of personality disorders, antisocial behaviors, drug use and abuse, and a host of reproductive and sexually transmitted diseases which can impact life in serious manners. Health care delivery systems must be put in place to cater to their needs. Mobile health vans can be introduced

to improve the access to healthcare. There is a dire need for advocacy at policy and legal levels in states and countries where sex tourism occurs. There is a need to help the residents of those regions by providing them with necessities and subsidized health care to access services directed to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. The health care providers who cater to their services in those regions need to be given more supplies and better infrastructure to deal with the pandemic. These regions need extra effort to manage the crisis and reduce transmission, morbidity, and mortality. NGOs and health care partners, and humanitarian organizations can play an essential role in making people's lives better.

Some of the simple measures to benefit them are the distribution of sanitizers, masks, condoms, face shields etc. to help them protect themselves. Education materials need to be modified and translated, and informed to the associated people with sex tourism and sex industries to access the health care measures and advisories associated. These efforts can improve people's lives and help them find other ways to source income and support themselves. Effective and targeted strategies during the pandemic can help the people living on the streets or organized sex tourism areas to find alternatives to earn money and support themselves. There is hope even if it looks so gloomy. Many people who suffer from substance-related addictive disorders and other mental health problems, thus being forced to live in establishments that support commercial sexual activities; this can be a lifetime chance for those people to seek, access, and receive help so that ultimately they can lead dignified and productive lives.

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