Prostitution and the Sugar Baby Phenomenon in France

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ABSTRACT

The practice of prostitution in various forms in a country, including in France, cannot be avoided, as is the form of its promotion. For example, through trucks around universities in Paris that promote a sugar dating site. With the rise of sugar dating advertisements in society, sugar dating has become public consumption because it is considered to change the concept of escort which is part of the elegant side of prostitution. This study attempts to investigate the factors that motivate university students to decide to practice sugar dating. Moreover, this study aims at finding whether sugar dating itself is a part of prostitution and its position in front of French Laws. Using the qualitative method of Wahidmurni and Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, the work shows differences in practices between sugar baby and conventional prostitution. Moreover, the findings show that sugar baby practice is a form of prostitution and is punishable under French law.

Keywords: Prostitution; prostitution of students; regulations; sugar baby; sugar dating

1. INTRODUCTION

The definition of prostitution is still very ambiguous. Finding the definition of prostitution is difficult since the term prostitution always has additional criteria (Mathieu, 2015). However, in general, prostitution can be defined as an occupation that involves sexual or non-sexual activities in exchange for compensation. Non-sexual activities include traveling or becoming a storytelling companion. As times goes by, prostitution appears in various forms, such as street prostitution, call girls, brothels, bar or casino workers, massage workers, and dating or escorts, someone who is paid for their time and often compared to prostitutes (Lavallée, 2003; Weitzer, 2009). According to Gil (cited in Bordenet, 2014), there is a new form of prostitution with the escort concept, but it is more elegant, named sugar dating. Sugar dating is the meeting between sugar daddy or sugar mommy with their sugar baby; sugar baby will give her time and even her body to sugar daddy or sugar mommy to get rewards such as cash and gifts that sugar daddy or sugar mommy give them.

Lavallée (2003) said that four elements make people involved in prostitution are the demand for sexual services, the interests of individuals and groups that benefit significantly from prostitution, the conditions of poverty experienced by women, and sexual harassment in which many women become the victims. Also, UNESCO in Qayyum, Iqbal, Akhtar, Janjua, and Tabassum (2013) added that there are two different categories in prostitution activities to take the initiative of women in sex work, voluntarily and involuntarily. Women start as prostitutes voluntarily because of poverty, hunger, economic crisis, family pressure, but women who involuntarily work as prostitutes are women who enter the sex industry with violence such as human trafficking, coercion, kidnapping, and being deceived.

The practice of prostitution is still being debated in many countries. Some countries legalize this practice. However, many countries do not legalize it. Up until 2016, France is a country which legalized the prostitution and has issued policies to further regulate the practice of prostitution. In 2016, François Hollande abolished Sarkozy’s policy, la Loi pour la Sécurité Intérieure (le délit de racolage), the law regarding racolage acts (peddling the body for profit) which was carried out actively or passively was categorized as a criminal act that could be sentenced and implemented la Loi de
**3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### 3.1. The 2016 prostitution act and the practice of prostitution in France

France’s latest prostitution law passed in 2016 has received a lot of attention from the public due to its abolitionist nature. This means that this law aims to eradicate prostitution in France and does not recognize the practice as a type of work. In addition, what is also different from the previous law is that this law aims to punish customers or potential customers for verbally requesting prostitution services. Meanwhile, sex workers are given the option to participate in a coaching program to leave the job (Soubigou, 2019).

The article *La prostitution en France* states that *Le Code Pénal français* or French Criminal Code does not define elaborately regarding acts that is classified as prostitution. Consequently, the judges of French Court of Cassation elaborate the definition of prostitution through the verdict of *la Chambre criminelle du 27 mars 1996*. The judges regard that prostitution is every activity consisted of physical lending, regardless of physical contact, in order to fulfill others’ sexual desire in exchange for renumeration (Legifrance, 1996).

In 2016, Hollande enforced the law through *la Loi de Pénalisation de Client de Prostituée* with the purpose of strengthening the fight against systemic prostitution and protecting the sex workers (Legifrance, 2016). Therefore, according to that law, there is the penalty of fines for individuals who engages in the service of sex workers. Moreover, there is also an additional penalty of the obligation to attend and complete training courses regarding the danger of prostitution.

As stated earlier, the French government punishes clients of sex workers and provides programs for sex workers to get out of prostitution. It is clear that what concerns the laws on prostitution the most is the problem of human trafficking which is written in its first chapter regarding *Renforcement des moyens de lutte contre le proxénétisme et la traite des êtres humains aux fins d'exploitation sexuelle* [Strengthening of the means to fight against procuring and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation] (Legifrance, 2015). In the third chapter of *Circulaire du 22 janvier 2015 de politique pénale en matière de lutte contre la traite des êtres humain* [Circular of 22 January 2015 on criminal policy in the fight against human trafficking], it’s defined as the recruitment, transportation, displacement,
accommodation, or acquisition of individuals by means of threat, force, or other means of coercion, kidnapping, deceiving, abuse of authority or situation of vulnerability, or offer or acceptance of payment or benefit to obtain a permission of an individual with authority for operational purpose. Within the word « exploitation », it refers to all forms of sexual exploitation, exploitation through forced labour, or forced servitude or practices like slavery, or organ harvest.

One of the barriers to the main objective of the French government with this law is the latest technology that allows the practice of prostitution using the internet. The first problem is that most of the online prostitution or escorting sites are based overseas and are therefore not subject to French law (Jaussent, 2013). In addition, in the same article, Carole Gay from the Association of Internet Service Providers (AFA) explains that sites that are blocked by the government are very easy to reopen to the public. Various types of online dating, escorting, and prostitution sites are rife in France and are very popular because they work like social media by providing names, profiles, photos, and even testimonials from previous customers (Goupil, 2019). This convenience is what attracts the attention of many sugar dating actors among students.

3.2. Student financial problems and practice of prostitution

A survey carried out by HSBC states that 70% of French parents believe that funding their children’s education is more important than their pension, and these parents are ready to do everything for their children’s education (Bodescort, 2016). However, according to Clouet in Landré (2017), there are 225,000 French students who have financial difficulty in financing their studies. According to De Coustin (2014), it states that the factors affecting the students’ difficulty to finance their studies are: the social background of their financial stability, and the family members who do or do not assist with their tuition. In addition, Dequiré (2011) mentioned that other additional factor is whether the students live with their parent or not. If the students don’t live with their parents, they will end up having to cover significant costs of rents, food, and transportations. Dequiré (2011) added that the students with this unfortunate background will have to split their time for studies and work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for having paid employment</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Very much agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making use of free time</td>
<td>47,0%</td>
<td>26,4%</td>
<td>26,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining professional experience</td>
<td>12,2%</td>
<td>12,9%</td>
<td>74,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising standard of living</td>
<td>10,2%</td>
<td>14,4%</td>
<td>75,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence from parents</td>
<td>21,7%</td>
<td>14,4%</td>
<td>63,9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dequiré (2011), in his article Pensée Plurielle expresses that there is an assumption that public aid or scholarship could be beneficial for the students with unfortunate background. State aid is not enough to meet the students need (“En moyenne, les ressources des étudiants s’élèvent à 887 euros par mois,” 2019). According to Les Décodeurs (2019), UNEF (Union nationale des étudiants de France) published an annual report regarding students’ living cost. The result show that it increased by 2,09% compared to 2016, at the same time when the aid for l’allocation personnalisée au logement (APL) [personalized housing allowance] is reduced to 5 euro per month. It categorically increased constantly for a decade, with the highest point being between 2009 and 2012. Those factors eventually drive the students to look for paid employment.

Observatoire Nationale de la Vie Étudiante (2017) published a national survey of students living condition in 2016, which randomly select the samples from the students in France with over 220,000 students being invited to answer their questionnaire and 60,700 among those was participated. The results show that 46% of the students have paid employment. Table 1 shows list of the students’ reasons for having paid employment in 2016:

The table above showed that 54,4% of the students or more than half in the survey agreed that they have paid employment to fulfil their daily needs. 36% of the students who have paid employment feel dissatisfied with the monthly wages of their part-time employment. For that reason, there are a lot of students who look for other employment providing higher wages with flexible time. This is in line with the information obtained from article Prostitution: des victimes et des proxénètes de plus en plus jeune about the younger they are starting their work. It is further said that young prostitutes are divided into two groups, the school students and the
university students. The services provided and the fees received are also not the same, ranging from just gifts or invitations to parties for students to cash among students (“Prostitution: des victimes et des proxénètes de plus en plus jeunes,” 2019).

Clouet (2007) and Vigoureux (2008) (cited in Wallenbrock, 2015) mention that reports regarding student’s prostitution appear in almost French news outlet in 2009: Le Point, Le Figaro, Le Monde, Le Nouvel, L’Express. In the article Les étudiants et la prostitution: entre fantasmes et réalité, there is an investigation report from Syndicat Sud-Étudiant which states that students in France, particularly female, sell themselves to fund their studies, to pay their rents, and to get pocket money. Prostitution among students happens because of their living environment and the other important factor is their living arrangement, whether they live with their parents or don’t. According to Landré (2017), students’ prostitution is often hidden behind prostitution in general and due to their situations being close to poverty, the hourly wages that prostitution offered is high enough for them to make a living. L’escorting or date partner which is one of the forms of prostitution practice offers around €100-150 per hour, which is much higher than the part-time jobs which offer around €30 per month (Dequiré, 2011). This situation is then supported by the online sites of escorting and prostitution that facilitate the practice.

3.3. Sugar Baby: new term for student prostitution?

The problem of prostitution among students and university students in France is nothing new. However, the sugar baby phenomenon has its own aspects, so it is often associated with young women. According to Oxford English Dictionary (2017) in Daly (2017) sugar as the most used word as modifier to “sweeten” something and as a euphemism for money. Sugar also has an analogy of sweet and expensive, hence it is the analogy for money dan baby has an analogy of dependency and pleasure. If a baby is your baby, it means that baby is your possession which you have to take care of and look after. The terms sugar daddy is used to describe men who is generally older (middle-aged) and rich which gives gifts to women who is younger in exchange for companionship and sexual intercourse. These younger women is called sugar baby. In other words, the object of this sugar dating is younger individuals, especially women. The word “baby” also implies long-term maintenance, which can then be seen in the type of relationship between babies, the designation for the beneficiaries of this practice, and the daddies/mommies who provide money for certain services. This shows that there is sustainability in the sugar dating relationship when compared to the conventional types. In addition, a more sustainable relationship allows payment by gifts of luxury goods. However, this type of relationship does not guarantee that a person serves only one daddy/mommy. In the following, we will look out some testimonials from several sugar actors coming from various sources.

Year of 2014 is the beginning of the development of sugar dating in France with the appearance of a sugar dating site which originated in United States, SeekingArrangement.com (Bordenet, 2014). Françoise Gill who specialized in the field of prostitution said that sugar dating is a lighter and more elegant formulation of a dating partner or escort (Bordenet, 2014). In that article, it is also mentioned that the police service, particularly la Brigade de répression du proxénétisme (BRP), who is responsible for monitoring prostitution and the suppression of pimps and sexual crimes, faced a hard difficulty in controlling the activities of sugar dating sites. (Bordenet, 2014). In June 2014, the draft of codes regarding prostitution was going to be examined by the senate and had been validated by the deputies and can be applied to French and foreign customers. In 2016, Françoise Holland applied the policy of la Loi de Pénalisation de Client de Prostituée, which is proven inefficient to regulate the sugar dating practice because in 2017, advertising trucks of RichMeetBeautiful.fr appeared in the parking lot of universities in Paris in order to invite the students to go on a date through the site and offered them a variety of benefits.

The procedure of doing sugar dating is subscribing to one of the sugar dating sites (for example, RichMeetBeautiful.fr): for the sugar babies, they have to register voluntarily and input their physical description, complementary photographs, and types of expected financial compensation. Then, the potential clients of sugar daddy/sugar mommy will contact les babies of which the profiles appear for them and arrange an appointment. Personne (2015) reports that sugar baby possesses the right to accept or to refuse the sugar daddy/sugar mommy and the fees that the sugar babies has specified at the start is non-negotiable. The appointment will run for a period of time because once sugar baby has agreed to an appointment with sugar daddy/sugar mommy that also compels them to agree to effectively be
possessed by sugar daddy/sugar mommy. In other words, sugar baby has to obey all the requests of sugar daddy/sugar mommy. The sugar babies, who work through a website has more control compared to other types of sex workers because they can choose to accept, or refuse offers. In their case, there is no intervention of pimp. Everything depends on what the sugar babies want. There is a bit of « freedom » in their options. There is also the element of consent in the sugar baby practice and there is less coercion than conventional prostitution. By using dating websites as intermediaries, les babies feel safer because they can easily choose and track potential client whose data is stored in the sugar dating sites.

The easy practice through website and promising remuneration are the answer for students who have to split their time between studies and jobs with flexible schedule. According to Cortes (2017), the clients of sugar babies are directors and executives, and 50% of those are married individuals. If a sugar baby agreed to said appointment then the sugar baby will receive cash remuneration, which has already been specified in their profile and is non-negotiable. Other gifts or bonuses usually depends on the service provided by the sugar babies. One of them testified having a monthly income around €1000-2000 (Cortes, 2017). As for the other student, hers is around €1000-10000. (de Queiroz, 2014). Among the activities performed by les babies when accompanying sugar daddy/sugar mommy are visiting museums, having meals in restaurants, going to the cinemas, and having sexual intercourse. (Cortes, 2017).

Another testimony from a 20 years old student majoring in marketing in Paris said that her intention of becoming a sugar baby is rooted in the reality that she is a student that also has to pay the bills, tuition, and rent (Cortes, 2017). The same statement coming also from a student in Paris who said that her reasons for becoming a sugar baby is the financial demand of paying her tuition. (De Quieroz, 2014). However, she also said that attaining a higher standard of living could also be considered a reason for being a sugar baby. This corresponds to the possibility of receiving a luxury gift as payment for services rendered, a practice not found in conventional prostitution. It can be discerned that financial situation is a primary factor for the students to be sugar babies but, in addition to that, the possibilities of tasting luxurious life and access to higher social strata is also a reason. This statement is in accordance with the results of the survey of Observatoire Nationale de la Vie Étudiante (2017) which shows that from various reasons behind the students looking for a side job is to raise the standard of social life, more than 75% respondents, which is almost the same as the reason for getting work experience. In addition, financial freedom is also a symbol of freedom from parental control.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that economic factors were the main reason behind the practice of sugar baby among university students in France. Other factors are the desire to achieve higher social strata and access to the upper classes. This can be seen from the testimonies of the babies and also the fact that sugar baby customers in France are generally executives whose income is far above average. Students who do this practice generally use intermediary sugar dating sites that are considered safe and provide a lot of convenience in selecting customers and setting rates. The relationship between a sugar baby and sugar daddy/mommy is also generally sustainable. This makes it possible to give gifts beyond the agreed rate, which are usually in the form of luxury goods. This is what mainly makes sugar babies actors feel different from conventional prostitution workers. France’s 2016 prostitution law has so far not been able to address paid dating via websites because the majority are based abroad and are easy to reopen if blocked by the government. The activity of exchanging money and sexual services included in sugar baby services makes this practice the same as conventional prostitution as stated in the definition of prostitution in la Chambre criminelle du 27 mars 1996 so that it must be eliminated, following the French prostitution law 2016 and its abolitionist nature. Yet, it cannot be realized. Furthermore, the problem of human trafficking is also increasingly difficult to overcome with sophisticated technology that offers convenience in the practice of prostitution and paid dating services without prior physical meetings.

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