



Effectiveness of Anecdotes and Logically False Arguments to Refute Analysis Based on Systematically Collected Data

Cecilia Benoit¹ · Michaela Smith¹ · Mikael Jansson¹ · Priscilla Healey² · Doug Magnuson²

Received: 16 August 2019 / Revised: 25 August 2019 / Accepted: 28 August 2019 / Published online: 3 September 2019
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2019

Those who write about prostitution/sex work agree that the “prostitution problem” is that people who sell sexual services face disadvantages in employment, health and safety, and other domains of their lives. Yet scholars disagree about what should be done to reduce or eliminate these disadvantages. In a recent Target Article (Benoit et al., 2018), we reviewed the academic literature to discern whether or not prostitution is a social problem and, if so, identify the causes of the problem. We were honored to receive eight different Commentaries, to which we responded to further clarify our position (Benoit et al., 2019). A supplementary Letter-to-the-Editor from one of the commentators was submitted (Farley, 2019), and this is our response to that Letter and an additional clarification.

To solve the “prostitution problem,” some argue that prostitution should be eliminated entirely and governments should accomplish this elimination using legal prohibitions and other policies. Others call for changes in social policies and laws, and for stigma reduction, because prostitution provides a much-needed source of income for people who willingly sell sexual services.

Both strategies have potential to reduce the disadvantage that sex workers face. However, we found stronger support for the second perspective, based on causal logic, information shared by participants in carefully designed and well-described samples, and our analysis of the laws and policies that affect sex work.

We argue that we cannot logically assume that the disadvantages in employment, health and safety, and other domains in the lives of those who currently sell sexual services would disappear with the eradication of sex work. Based on the

available evidence, we can logically assume that people who previously sold sexual services would face similar, if not identical, disadvantages in employment, health and safety, and other domains in their new jobs. Secondly, based on the information shared directly by tens of thousands of people who sell sexual services and reported in peer-reviewed journals, the vast majority are aware of, and have some access to, other income opportunities available to them. Third, we found that measures to outlaw sex work intensify prostitution stigma and hamper sex workers’ right to fair access to health and social services and social justice, and increase negative judgment by the public. Thus, our review of the academic literature showed that the disadvantages of those who work or who have worked as sex workers have little chance of being eliminated by attempts to ban sex work and that the disadvantages would be reduced by changing the social institutions that have the greatest impact on their work and lives.

We welcome further insights into sex work and will follow closely scholars who make advances based on sound logical arguments and who share their empirical findings and conclusions grounded in well described and systematically collected samples. We will continue to read with curiosity the work of those writers who provide illogical or anecdotal support for their personal beliefs and assumptions.

References

- Benoit, C., Smith, M., Jansson, M., Healey, P., & Magnuson, D. (2018). “The prostitution problem”: Claims, evidence, and policy outcomes. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1276-6>.
- Benoit, C., Smith, M., Jansson, M., Healey, P., & Magnuson, D. (2019). Unlinking prostitution and sex trafficking: Response to commentaries. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-1461-2>.

✉ Cecilia Benoit
cbenoit@uvic.ca

¹ Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria, 2300 McKenzie Ave., Victoria, BC V8N 5M8, Canada

² School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

Farley, M. (2019). Fact-free rationalizations used to promote legal pimping [Letter to the Editor]. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-01542-8>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.