

# The Strategic Agency of Migrant Adolescent Prostitutes in Cape Town, South Africa

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‘Children on the move in the developing world’

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# Structure

- Adolescent prostitution: a review
- Strategic Agency
- Female adolescent prostitutes in S.A
- Migration and the initiation process
- Migration and sex work
- Conclusion

# Adolescent prostitutes: A review

- ‘Guestimates’: 400 – 400,000
- Agency as rationality: denying children choice
- Direct and indirect force: perpetrator/system
- ‘Best of a bad set of choices’
- Survival sex: instinctual response
- Adolescence: drifting into delinquency
- The lived reality: duty bearers
- Powerful perpetrators and powerless victims

# Strategic Agents

- Tactics of the powerless
- Power in action and relationships
- The strategy of struggle and resistance
- Beyond agency as rationality and practice
- Agency as intentionality
- Bounded agency
- Weapons of relatively powerless
- ‘Appropriate adaptive strategies’

# Sample: 08/2003-03/2005

- 24 female adolescent prostitutes (13-18)
- 26 female adult prostitutes (18-57)
- 40 children in shelters (8-18)
- 15 unemployed youth (17-25)
- 8 male and transsexual prostitutes
- Key informants (state and non-state)

# Strollers: Migration and the Initiation Process

## **Interactive story:**

Researcher: What happened when she was a little girl?

Girl A: She saw her mommy do it.

R: Did her mom make her do it or did she want to do it?

Girl A: She wanted to do it.

Girl B: Her mommy never loved her

A: and when her daddy was drunk then her daddy every time hit her.

R: Why?

A: her parents drank alcohol...

B: and they used violence...

R: What type of violence?

A: All kinds

B: And her mom and dad were fighting...

C: Every day...

R: Why did they fight all the time?

A: When they were drunk they just wanted to fight, fight, fight.

R: Why did they drink so much?

C: Because its nice

B: They like drinking,

R: So what happened next?

A: She decided to follow her friends.

R: What did her friends say?

A: Come with me, its nice to stroll, its nice to stay up out of hours...

R: So she followed her friends who said its nice to stroll. So was her family sad that she left?

A: No, they were glad that she left.

B: Then she sell her body...she stand there...

R: When she arrived on the streets, did she sell her body straight away?

A: No, first she met her friends. They said do you want some action. And so they went to go jol (party).

B: Standing there under the bridge...they showed her how to

A: One car stopped and she got in and then

B: Action...action...

# Self-efficacy in shelter

“If I was her [the director] I would let a child go and if she wants to go, because she is a big girl who knows what’s right and wrong. I am a big girl. I don’t look 13, I tell people I am 18”

“They can control themselves. No-one can tell them what to do...they can even sell their body to people and no-one would know about it”



# Decision-making in shelter

	<b>Eat</b>	<b>Sleep</b>	<b>Friend</b>	<b>Boy friend</b>	<b>Cash</b>	<b>Duties</b>	<b>Touch</b>
<b>Me</b>	□	▽	●	●	●	▽	●
<b>Staff</b>	●	●	□	□	▽	●	●
<b>Head</b>	▽	●	▽	▽	●	▽	●
<b>Friend</b>	□	▽	□	□	□	▽	□
<b>Family</b>	▽	▽	▽	▽	▽	▽	▽

▽ “A little say” □ “Some say” ● “A lot of say”

# Decision-making on streets

	<b>Eat</b>	<b>Sleep</b>	<b>Friend</b>	<b>Boy friend</b>	<b>Cash</b>	<b>Jobs</b>	<b>Touch</b>
<b>Me</b>	▽	•	•	•	•	□	•
<b>Friends</b>	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Police</b>	▽	•	•	□	□	•	▽
<b>Mamma</b>	□	□	•	•	•	•	▽
<b>Family</b>	▽	▽	▽	▽	□	▽	▽
<b>Men</b>	▽	•	□	□	▽	▽	□
<b>Teacher</b>	•	▽	•	□	□	□	□
<b>Big children</b>	□	□	▽	▽	□	□	▽

▽ “A little say” □• “Some say” • “A lot of say”

# Multiple identities

**The exploiter and the victim:** “I enjoyed Friday night on the street but not Saturday night. A man tried to take me with him; he had a knife. Christy said that I must go with him because Christy will get money. I said no and spent the night at the police station. On Sunday I came back to the shelter. I am cross with Christy, but I am scared of her...”

**The student:** “I say how fast the girls make money. I went with her a second time and the third time I did it by myself”

**The apprentice-master:** “She went with a client and I went with her in the same car. So I saw how they do business”

# Gendered (in)dependency

“You runaway from the shelter because you are used to the street where no-one tells you what to do, where to sleep, what to drink....you don't know how to survive without a boyfriend. So you get another boyfriend. The girls fight over guys...If you don't have a boyfriend, other boys will take a chance with you. So you go to Quarry Quarry Club and the Nigerians buy food and alcohol for girls. Then they tell girls to sleep with them to pay it back or they beat you”

# Migration and Sex Work

# Supply and demand

**Youth and beauty:** “I am getting too old. Guys are always looking for young girls. I don’t just go with anyone, but nowadays I have no money, so I can’t be choosy”

**Sexual variety:** “The guys know all the old girls, so they want to try young ones out. They don’t want to eat meat everyday, they want to try some fish”.

**Manipulating age:** “Guys like me because I look younger. It is not good to lie but sometimes you have to do it”

# Finding the clients



# The sex industry

	Type	Safety	Income	Choice & Control
Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•White/coloured</li> <li>•High socio-econ</li> <li>•Older</li> </ul>	High	High	Low
Hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•High socio-econ</li> <li>•Older</li> </ul>	High	High	High
Night-clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Younger</li> </ul>	Low	High	Mixed
Shebeens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Good time girls</li> <li>•Black and coloured</li> <li>•Younger</li> </ul>	Low	In kind	Low
Streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Low socio-econ</li> <li>•Black and coloured</li> <li>•Young and old</li> </ul>	Low	Low	Varies: age, location, socio-economic status



# Survival strategies

- The reconstruction of age and youth
- The sexual health bargain
- Migration to meet the 'demand'
- Violence: direct and indirect
- Collectively: other prostitutes
- Proxy: boyfriends and gang-members
- 'Cooling the mind'
- Self-evaluation

# Conclusion

- Beyond simplistic powerful/powerless dichotomies
- Bounding migration and prostitution strategies
- Interplay between structure and agency
- Power struggles within the interpersonal
- Agency: alone, proxy and collectively
- Unintended consequences: agency in short/long term
- Multiple roles and identities: victims and perpetrators