

If they are prostitutes, why are they happy? Material correlates of satisfaction with life

Rildésia S. V. Gouveia
Leogildo Alves Freires
Rafaella de Carvalho Rodrigues Araújo
Layrthon Carlos de Oliveira Santos
Valdiney V. Gouveia



Rildésia S. V. Gouveia

Psychologist, doctor in Social Psychology , professor of the *Centro Universitário* of João Pessoa, Brazil

Left

Leogildo Alves Freires

Psychologist, collaborator of the Nucleus of Research of Normative Bases of Social Behavior, Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), João Pessoa, Brazil

Right

Layrthon Carlos de Oliveira Santos

Academic Psychology, monitor of Psychological Evaluation in the UFPB Joao Pessoa, Brazil

Rafaella de Carvalho Rodrigues

Psychologist, collaborator of the Nucleus of Research of Normative Bases of Social Behavior, Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), João Pessoa, Brazil

Front

Valdiney V. Gouveia

Psychologist, doctor in Social Psychology, researcher 1B of CNPq, associate professor of UFPB, João Pessoa, Brazil

Abstract This study aimed to know the relationship between consumer goods purchased and life satisfaction of sex workers from Joao Pessoa, PB. The influence of this relationship on life satisfaction is something that has not been studied empirically. Participants were 100 prostitutes with aged ranging from 18 to 46 years ($m = 26.2$, $sd = 7.00$), most of them unmarried (71%) and with child (73%). They answered the *Satisfaction with Life Scale*, *Inventory of Consumer Goods*, and demographic questions.

Results showed a positive correlation between consumer goods and life satisfaction ($r = 0.42$), with consumer goods showing evidences of mediating the relationship of life satisfaction with amount charged for each sexual program. These findings were discussed in light of evidence about the importance of material goods to promote subjective well-being in a context of scarcity, stating that future studies may contribute in this area.

Keywords: Prostitution. Personal satisfaction. Happiness. Economics.

In the historical records, prostitution is pointed out as one of the oldest social occurrences, and is commonly referred to as the most primal professions in the world. The prostitution existed in all societies, especially because, until the mid-thirteenth century, there was no remuneration options for women – who, to ensure their economic survival, should be married, be part of the cleric or being a prostitute^{1,2}.

Even today, sexuality is still one of the most controversial and of difficult approach themes. Regarding the practice of prostitution, the freedom of the use of own body in economic activities related to the exercise of sexual autonomy, has an history of undeniable damages (mainly to women) resulting from sexual exploitation, under threat of violence or in situations of absolute need. In this sense, guided by bioethical principles of social justice promotion, autonomy and non-maleficence it is demanded the combat of situations of female vulnerability, whether cultural, economic or psychological, which presupposes the attention to psychosocial conditions of this stigmatized group³.

It is noteworthy that the profile of female prostitution in Brazil is intricate to the demographic multiplicity, along with the country's political, economic, social and cultural configuration. To set it becomes necessary a refined look to dimension the factors that are structured in their needs as part of this activity belonging to the marginalized world. Given the scope of this phenomenon, it must be adopted the conceptualization of the United Nations (UN)⁴: prostitution includes a process in which persons for remuneration in an usual way, under any forms, submit themselves to sexual intercourse, normal or abnormal, with persons of the same or opposite sex, all the time. It is understood that the commercial sexual practice as any general commercial act, where something of value is given or received by anyone.

The economic misery is seen as a major reason to enter the world of prostitution⁵. Studies show that, for example, in London, prostitution generates about 200 million Euros annually⁶; in New Zealand, almost one in every 150 women aged between 18 and 40 is employed in some form of sexual work⁷; and in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand the sexual sector represents about 2% to 14% of the gross domestic product⁸. Therefore, it may be concluded that prostitution comprises both a sexual and economic institution, strictly accomplishing with the supply and demand lei.

Lucchini⁹ alerts that it is not uncommon nowadays to find teenagers who have sex with clients who please them, just to buy a dress they want much or to guarantee a job, making clear that the force exercised by the pressure of consumer society on the psychosocial aspects of prostitution, which weaken the resistance that may exist for this survival alternative or the obtaining of material resources. Thus, despite the devaluated and depreciated context of prostitution, many women are attracted to it. Through

prostitution they find a way of getting material goods, since, for many, there seems not to be another option to acquire them except through the exchange for their own body.

According to the dictates of social justice, ensure to all individuals a dignified existence refers to the idea that the purpose of all economic activity is to ensure a dignified existence to the members of society⁴. However, it is not only isolated concrete factors (money, material goods), since it seems that the subjective well-being experienced by the acquisition of certain assets of consumption can reduce the discharge of the prostitution stigma, because despite the conditions to which are subjected, mainly because of scenarios of sexual and physical assaults¹⁰ and to the increased in the incidence of sexually transmissible diseases¹¹ the professionals of sex, like any other persons, they also seek the best, happiness. And strangely it may seem, non systematic observations seem to suggest that some find it, albeit in a less conventional way.

Perhaps one reason for this is money and goods that they obtain as a result of selling their bodies. By the way, Myers and Diener¹² comment that few agree that money can buy happiness, but a little more money would promote some happiness, especially in the context of prostitution, where it seems to be the more palpable reward. Specifically, this study is interested to know at to what extent prostitutes may be satisfied or happy with their lives, assessing the role of economical indicators to explain such satisfaction. It must, within this framework, be known something else about this marginalized group.

Prostitution in Brazil

In Brazil, prostitution came with the first colonizers. The Portuguese crown sent to the new Colony, in the tropics, the criminals, convicts and prostitutes. With the scarcity of women in the Colony, the indigenous women and later black women also became prostitutes. Then came the European women, mainly French women, who operated in luxury homes in the Court⁴.

Since then, despite being a marginalized activity, it was never considered a crime, something illegal. In fact, *according to Articles 227 and 231 of the Brazilian Penal Code, dealing with crimes against morals, are defined as crime pimping and trafficking in women, i.e., the exploitation of others prostitution. In these items it can be framed pimps, thugs and owners of prostitution hotels and houses*¹³. So this Code understands prostitution as the practice of selling sex for the pleasure of other persons, not being considered a crime when the person becomes a prostitute by her own choice. However, she becomes a prostitute when a person persuades, induces, or attracts someone to perform a sexual act with others; likewise, preventing anyone to abandon prostitution, to profit or be supported with the prostitution of another person or keep a prostitution house are evidences of crimes. The penalty provided for in these cases is imprisonment from 1 to 10 years and a fine¹⁴.

Due to the Brazilian geographical and cultural characteristics, sex tourism is one of the activities that have been consolidating in the routine of most prostitutes. Some capital cities, like Aracaju, Belem, Fortaleza, Recife, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, lead the ranking of cities with the highest incidence of activities related to prostitution. In the Northeast, the average age to start the life in prostitution ranges between 12 and 14 years old, and they reach 20 they already considered old and seem already to have 30 to

60 years. In the case of Joao Pessoa, despite the lower incidence of prostitution when compared to other previously mentioned cities, this activity is easily perceived, probably because of its geographical location, situated between an industrial center (Recife) and other touristic one (Natal), which makes it better known, attracting visitors in transit, who see opportunities for fun and sexual pleasure ¹⁵.

In cities whose economy is strongly based on tourism, such as Fortaleza, Recife and Salvador, customers consuming sexual tourism are usually middle- age, from European countries, the example of Germany and Italy, that promote their trips from the negotiation of “touristic” packages with strong sexual appeal¹¹. By the way, Vasconcelos ¹⁶ states that in the Northeast sex tourism is a reality, with at least two agency factors that affect both the consumer and those who perform this activity: 1st) those who use sex tourism are encouraged by promotional tourism packages, which including adolescents as sexual attraction, that have the connivance of owners of hotels, taxis, beach huts and night clubs, which form an organized network around this business, and 2nd) those who are used for sex tourism are induced with the promise of marriage to foreigners that take them out of the country - which often involves forced prostitution in the destination locations.

These disadvantaged has appreciable consequences in different facets of life. Gomes¹⁷, in a study about child prostitution, revealed that among the girl’s prostitutes, that make part of the poorest segments of society, are common cases in which their mothers have to give them to relatives, or place them in institutions to be raised. The problem also asserts social issues, producing or intensifying family conflicts and the abandonment of home by one of the spouses, which further aggravates poverty.

According to this framework, Braga¹⁸ indicates that one of the ways to enter or consolidate in the world of prostitution is when some adolescents, taken from home by friends or sent by their own family, arrive to big cities , derived from countryside cities, searching for a job that allows their support and sometimes the support of their families. With no school education or adequate qualifications, often with irregular and incomplete documentation and lacking any references, they submit themselves to the exploration of all kinds. In this adverse context, prostitution presents itself as an option, an apparently easier way of ensuring their survival, conquers goods never imagined before. However, soon they realize the adversity of this condition, which seems to indicate that there is always another program to do, like it was the last one , a longing that never turns out to consolidate.

On difficulty of leaving the world of prostitution, and Fona and Delitto² performed a research that throws light on understanding to the theme. They tried to understand the probable reasons that perpetuate the behavior of prostitution, i.e., maintaining relations with a customer in exchange for money. Specifically, the study investigated the reasons that reinforce and maintain the behavior of prostitutes, besides analyzing the relevant factors to change such behavior.

Several reasons were listed, including: issues related to future perspectives, previous problematic situation , generalized boosting regarding attention, affection and power, immediate rewards (e.g. money, gifts, trips), and avoidance of punishment imitation by other colleagues who already worked as prostitutes. The reasons most mentioned were

the social and economic deprivation. Therefore, although prostitution may be, in principle, undesirable, leaving this activity is not easy. But, how women who need to engage in prostitution handle their lives? It is possible to be happy, satisfied with the life in this condition? To what extent the material or economic aspect might explain their presumably satisfaction? These questions guided the present study, demanding to know the sense of life satisfaction and variables that may affect it.

Satisfaction with life and its socio-demographic correlates

According to Pereira¹⁹, the quality of life is subdivided into two main components: objective welfare, which the objective circumstances of life are taken into consideration (e.g., income, education, health, transport, social class), the subjective well-being (well-being), as explained by subjective experiences and emotional indicators. The main focus of this study is the subjective experience concerning quality of life, specifically the subjective well-being – which concerns the satisfaction with oneself and the environment in which the individual is inserted. It includes, for example, judgments about the satisfaction with life.

Satisfaction with life reflects cognitive elements that can translate an evaluation in terms of specific areas (e.g. recreation, marriage and the economy) or reflect a general appreciation of it, taking life as a whole. The latter view has received special attention, especially due to the probability to be less dependent on culture and context, and since is not the researcher who imposes a pattern or defines an area of interest, because it is the person himself who builds his comprehensive evaluation, weighing all aspects that he considers important and, therefore, defining what is or is not a priority in his life²⁰. This global dimension is what matters in this study.

Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin²⁰ developed a measure of satisfaction with of life with independence of domain, i.e., the items that make up its scale are of global nature, evaluating the overall judgment of satisfaction that the person has to his own life. The main advantages of this measure are to have multiple items, covering a single factor, be brief and present the simple response format²¹ This measure has a Brazilian version called Scale of Satisfaction with Life (ESV), whose evidence of psychometric parameters (factorial validity, convergent validity and internal consistency) have been observed in multiple samples^{22,23}.

Dimensions of subjective well-being have shown a relationship with some variables that may reflect conditions of life, such as needs. For example, it is estimated the prompt satisfaction of needs as the foundation of happiness, while his non compliance would determine the misfortune²⁴. By the way, Myers and Diener¹² suggest that after the individual meets the basic needs money is no longer so important. In this direction, in the United States, a context where most people have their basic needs met , Diener and Larsen²⁵ found a weak correlation between income and happiness ($r < 0.20$), something already noticed by Inglehart²⁶ in the European context. Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz Diener²⁷ present surveys showing that, although the Americans in 1957 were receiving half the income earned in 1990, considering the rising high rates of depression, divorce, violence and suicide in adolescence in the country during this period, despite being the wealthiest cannot be considered equally happy.

Csikszentmihalyi²⁸, in an article entitled *If we are so rich, why are not we happy?*, suggests some explanations for the lack of relationship between material welfare (wealth) and indicators of subjective well-being (e.g. happiness, life satisfaction). It is particularly noteworthy the growing disparity of wealth, which makes that even some rich people feel themselves reasonably poor in relation to the others considered richer. This process of social comparison, taking as a reference a reference group, is fundamental to the explanation of the degree of satisfaction that people report with their lives; for example, one can consider that life is good, but could be better. Similarly, although it is understood that she is not good, it is thought that could be worse. So, possibly, when someone evaluates his success, for example, he takes into account a range of expectations, what makes a few to be always satisfied for a long time with what they have or achieved.

Diener and Diener²⁹, relying on the Maslowian's theory of hierarchy of needs, help to understand the relationship between wealth and life satisfaction. They affirm that in poor societies [perhaps also in specific groups] in which the income is low for many people, most basic needs may not be met for everyone. In contrast, in rich societies more people can afford to meet their basic needs, making emerging more psychologically needs (which are not deficient, but in development) less related to income. Thus, it is argued that the life satisfaction may be more strongly correlated to economical gains in poorer cultures or groups, as the case may be of Paraíba context, and in particular the group of prostitutes. Consistent with this reasons, Veenhoven³⁰ observed that the correlation between life satisfaction and income was stronger in poor nations.

Finally, despite evidences about the relationship between life satisfaction and economic indicators (e.g., personal income, wealth of countries), most studies have considered university students, people in the general population or those with better economic conditions²³. It was not found any study related to a marginalized group such as prostitutes. However, it seems obvious that knowing the relationship between life satisfaction and economic indicators in this group could throw light to the thematic of subjective well-being, comparing its relationship with material aspects or the material well-being. Accordingly, the present study had as its main objective to know how satisfaction relates to life and dimension of *wealth* among people that work in a depreciated and devaluated context, such as prostitution.

Method

Participants

Participants were 100 prostitutes working in Joao Pessoa (PB), aged 18 and 46 ($m = 26.2$, $dp = 7.00$), charging for sexual program between 10 and 150 reais ($m = 54.2$, $dp = 32.40$). Most of them said to be Catholic (69%), single (71%) and have at least one child (73%). It was a sample of convenience (not probabilistic), with people who were invited and agreed to participate voluntarily in the study.

Instruments

The participants answered to a questionnaire that, in addition to the demographic questions at the end (age, marital status, religion, if they had children and amount

charged per sex program) consisted of two main tools: the Scale of Satisfaction with Life (ESV) and the Inventory of Durable Consumer Goods.

The Scale of Life Satisfaction (ESV)

This instrument was developed by Diener and collaborators to evaluate the adequacy of psychometric parameters adopted in their research in the U.S. context^{21, 31}. Its purpose is to evaluate the judgment people make about their satisfaction with life, and they own to elect, in accordance and they were supposed to elect, according to their values and interests, the aspects to be considered to express such satisfaction. It consists of five items (e.g. "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal ". " If I could live a second time, I would not change almost anything in my life) ", answered in a Likert scale , ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree. It was considered in the present study, the Brazilian version of this measure. The findings obtained with samples from several groups confirm that this is a unifactorial measure, with internal consistency above 0.70, which meets recommendation from the literature^{22, 23}.

Inventory of Durable Consumer Goods

This is a measure developed by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)³² for the Brazilian context, which evaluates the amount of durable consumer goods that people have in their households. It comprises 13 items (e.g., television, sound equipment, refrigerator, DVD), with responses graded on a scale ranging from 0 = does not have any to 4 = has four or more of the objects. asked This instrument draws the socioeconomic profile of respondents and was employed in this study as an indicator of wealth or material well-being.

Procedure

In an attempt to find the participants in the study, a contact was initially established with AproS-PB (Association of Sex Professionals of Paraíba). However, due to the reduced number of professionals registered with the association, we had to perform the field work, searching for them in public places where it is known that there are prostitution activities. Because they constitute population of difficult access, fearing to participate in surveys, we also had the support of professionals from the association for the approximations of the other participants on the survey. We followed the following inclusion criteria: women who were engaged in prostitution for their of others livelihoods , over 18 years, and who worked as sex workers in the surveyed locations. Were excluded women who had aggressive behavior under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and showing resistance to participate.

Data collection was performed by applicators duly trained, individually addressing participants in public and private places in which the interviewees work as prostitutes in João Pessoa (Rua da Areia, Pavilhão do Chá, private establishments in downtown and access routes to the beaches of Tambau, Manaira and Cabo Branco).

All instruments were self-applied, using pencil and paper. However, whenever need, i.e., because of the low index of education of some participants and the conditions of application (usually at night, under low illumination), the applicator was willing to help,

reading and explaining the questions slowly, writing down the due answers . In all cases, it was informed to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers, and that it is essential that they honestly express what they think, feel or behave in everyday life. It was emphasized that their participation would be voluntary, that they could leave the study at any time without any penalty, and that anonymity and confidentiality of information provided would be assured, which would be addressed only collectively. All participants signed or initialed a free and informed consent form (TCLE), as provided for by Resolution CNS 196/96. On average, about 30 minutes were sufficient to complete each interview.

Data analysis

The Paws (version 18) was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics were computed (measures of central tendency and dispersion, frequency distribution), mainly to characterize the participants in the study. The factorial analysis of the main axes was employed to determine the structure of indicators of consumer durables, using Cronbach's alpha to assess the Internal consistency (precision) of resulting factor (s)³³. Furthermore, we tried to calculate factorial scores of the socioeconomic indicators through the regression method and finally estimate the correlations of Pearson between these scores and the measure of life satisfaction.

Results

Seeking to reach the objectives of this study, the key findings are presented below, organized according to the statistical analysis made. First, are presented the results corresponding to exploratory factorial analysis and the Internal consistency of the Inventory of Consumer Goods. Subsequently, it is detailed the Pearson's *r* correlation between the factorial scores of the socioeconomic indicators and those of life satisfaction.

Factorial structure of the Inventory of Consumer Goods

Initially, we sought to prove whether the matrix of inter-items correlations was favorable, using the following indicators: Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and test of sphericity of Bartlett³⁴. The first one works with the partial correlations of variables and should accept values equal to or greater than 0.60. The second one, proves the hypothesis that the covariance's matrix is an identity matrix, i.e., presents 1 (ones) on the diagonal and 0 (zeros) in the remaining matrix. Significant values indicate that this hypothesis is rejected, favoring the realization of a factorial analysis. Results supported the appropriateness of performing a factorial analysis, and the following values were observed: KMO = 0.71 and Bartlett's sphericity test, $X^2(55) = 370.41, p < 0.001$. We conducted an analysis of the main components , by fixing the extraction of a single factor, it presented a own value of 3.57, explaining 27.5% of the total variance. The results of this analysis are shown on Table 1.

Table 1 - Factorial structure of the Inventory of Consumer Goods

Item	Saturation	h ²
8. DVD player	0,80*	0,64

1. TV set	0.76*	0.58
7. Washing machine	0.70*	0.49
9. Refrigerator	0.61*	0.37
6. Vacuum cleaner	0.57*	0.32
2, Sound system	0.57*	0.32
4, Automobile	0.42*	0.18
3, Bathroom	0.40*	0.16
13. Swimming pool	0.39*	0.15
5, Domestic servant	0.38*	0.14
7. Dishes washing machine	0.35*	0.12
10. Freezer	0.25	0.06
12. Bath tube	0.18	0.03
Number of items	11	
% total variance	27.5	
Cronbach's alpha	0.77	

Note: * item considered for interpretation of factor ($a_{if} > 0.32$).

As it can be seen on the table, from the 13 items that comprise the inventory of Consumer Goods, 11 were adequate, i.e., showed a factorial load (a_{if}) greater than $|0.32|$, a value commonly suggested in the literature³⁵, ranging from 0.35 (dishes washing machine) to 0.80 (DVD player). This general factor showed a value above the 1 recommended (Kaiser criterion), with internal consistency that surpassed the cutoff desirable point (0.70)³⁶. Therefore, it was created a total score for material well-being or the economic level, corresponding to the sum of answers for the 11 items.

In the case of life satisfaction it was also checked the possibility of extracting a single factor, which was confirmed: KMO = 0.67 and Bartlett's sphericity test, $\chi^2(10) = 80.10$, $p < 0.001$. The analysis of the main components revealed a general factor with own value of 2.10, explaining 41.9% of total variance. A single item showed saturation below the level considered adequate ($a_{if} > |0.32|$). Specifically, item 5 (*If could live a second time, I would not change almost anything in my life*) showed a saturation of 0.25; the others showed saturations between 0.49 (item 1. *In most aspects my life is close to my ideal*) and 0.84 (Item 5. *I am satisfied with my life*). The Cronbach alphas with ($\alpha = 0.62$) and without ($\alpha = 0.67$) item 5 did not statistically differ ($t < 1$). Therefore, trying that the instrument retained the original form, it was decided not to delete this item; though not desirable, we must consider that its saturation (0.25) statistically differs from zero ($t = 2.56$, $p < 0.05$). The prostitutes, on the average, achieved 17.9 points ($dp = 6.41$) to the extent of welfare (life satisfaction).

Once defined the unifactorial structures of indicators of economic level (wealth, material well-being) and life satisfaction, two total scores were set up, including the summations of the respective items that compose each of these variables – which were correlated among them, revealing a statistically significant value ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, it is evident that the higher the economic level, the greater the life satisfaction among prostitutes participants in the study; this relationship is further clear when the correlation coefficient is corrected as a function of the imperfection of the alphas Cronbach ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, almost a fifth of the variance is shared between these variables (17.6%).

Finally, despite becoming clear the relationship between consumer goods and satisfaction with life, it is important to note that the level of satisfaction expressed by the participants in the study did not have any relation with the amount they charge for the program ($r = 0.01$). However, this value is correlated with the consumer goods they inform to have ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$). This made suppose a *mediation model*, i.e., the amount charged per program has its effect on satisfaction with life mediated by the amount of material goods of the respondents. *The Sobel test*, although not significant (1.78 , $p = 0.07$), seems to suggest that this model is heuristic³⁷.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to know at what extent the consumer goods and satisfaction with life may be interrelated, considering a group of people who obtains its livelihood in a depreciated and devalued context: the prostitutes. One trusts that the goal has been achieved. However, it is not possible to not recognize that the considered sample and the level of prostitution restrain the generalization of findings, which need to be seen as heuristics, enhancing future studies on the subjective well-being in equivalent groups. However, some considerations shall be made on the results, which are supported by findings previously described in the literature, which favors thinking about its suitability.

The measure of material and subjective well-being

The Inventory of Consumer Goods and measure widely used in the Brazilian context as an indicator of socioeconomic class, looking to include elements featuring the buying power of people³². Its 13 items were thought to reflect this aspect, without differentiating the country's region. However, the exclusion of two of the items perhaps indicates the need to rethink it. Specifically, the item *tub* diverged clearly from the set, possibly indicating that this not a good in the Paraíba reality, not differentiating the purchasing power people.

In relation to the Satisfaction Scale with Life, its parameters were lower than those reported for the Brazilian population²³. The one-factor structure was clearly theorized³¹ identified when considering the criterion of Horn (parallel analysis)³⁸, assuming if 1,000 simulations of a structure data equivalent to this study (100 participants and five variables). However, the Item 5 (If you could live a second time would not change almost anything in my life) had low saturation, in the other samples saturation of his parents was among the most

low this range, but not less than 0.40. In this sense, the notion of no change nothing if there was a second life, not seems to match the satisfaction that prostitutes with the life. This reveals a particular meaning that such a satisfaction to have these people. Probably for this reason, the consistency this measure was below internal 0.70 recommended in the literature of 35.36, but permissible because of the number of items that to compose. It is noteworthy also that except this item that showed correlation corrected 0.15 from your total score, all others were above 0.30 ($p < 0.01$), value suggests that the homogeneity of the set Item³⁹.

Subjective well-being and satisfaction with life

Happiness, satisfaction with life and positive affections have been frequently studied in the framework of Positive Psychology⁴⁰. This has prevented the prioritization of issues related with the disease and the negative aspects of life, typical in many psychological approaches⁴¹, focusing on health and in the positive aspects of human life^{12,42-44}. Such perspective emphasizes the increase of the positive aspects of life and obtaining pleasure, as advocated by the lowering of the negative aspects⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷. For example, it is prioritized the study of subjective well-being, understanding it as one of its cognitive dimensions satisfaction with life, which may reflect specific and general criteria that people take into account when evaluating their lives. Although this study has worked with a group that may be more exposed to adverse situations, it emphasized one positive dimension : the satisfaction with life. Understanding how, in spite of adversity, some prostitutes achieve a level of satisfaction with life seems to be an important contribution to ensure them better conditions of life and psychological comfort.

Considering the total score obtained by prostitutes in the measurement of satisfaction with life and comparing it with those obtained by different groups in Brazil (nurses, university students, physicians, people of the general population, military police, elementary school teachers and psychologists)^{22, 23}, they are clearly less satisfied with their lives (differences in absolute values between 3 and 25 points). Perhaps the meaning of the results of these participants remain more clear when considering the individual items of the Scale of Satisfaction with Life. They achieved the highest average in item 4 (*As possible, I have achieved the important things that I want in life*; $m = 4.8$, $dp = 2.08$) and lowest in paragraph 5 ($m = 2.9$, $dp = 2.28$). In this sense, their satisfaction is , probably conjectural, situational; in what fits, they are satisfied, but would like to change something in their lives.

Satisfaction with life and material goods: ethical and social implications

The Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, of 1988, in its preamble, established a Democratic State, to ensure the exercise of social and individual rights, freedom, security, well-being, development, equality and justice as supreme values of a fraternal, pluralist and unprejudiced society⁴⁸. From these reflections, the moral disapproval of society with prostitution should be seen as a manifestation of incoherence that while it takes advantage from the services provided by this group, it rewards women with the social invisibility or the burden of exclusion, which is configured as true ethical deformation⁴.

Probably the negative experience with prostitution, their condition of marginalized and the blame as a result of that choice makes them want another kind of life and explain the desire of a different life¹⁰. Thus, it is possible that the *logic* inherent to prostitution is pragmatic: it one needs to sell her body to survive, at least it should result in tangible assets, such as evidenced through the points in the Inventory of Consumer Goods.

However, this satisfaction is not the direct result of the price charged, i.e., it does not matter precisely how much they earn, but how much they have, perhaps how much they got from activities as a prostitute. Material goods may are what they have most concrete, producing some psychological comfort ; the highest payoff, however, does not necessarily ensure this possibility. Perhaps, the prostitutes who charge more they spend much more to stay presentable, not reaching any great profitability from their efforts.

However, this is only a conjecture, which will need to be assessed in a future study; currently, according to the mediation analysis, it seems to be a plausible possibility.

It was found a positive correlation between consumer goods and satisfaction with life, supporting some findings^{27, 30}. Maybe this corroborates what Diener and Diener indicate²⁹ when they suggest that the correlation between income and satisfaction with life is greater in contexts of scarcity, as in poor nations (under development); probably also for people living and / or working in adverse conditions. For example, receiving ten reais for a sex program, as some women informed in this study, seems a clear evidence of shortages and poor life and health conditions; it is worth noting that almost half of them receive up to 40 reais per program (47%), a value close to what is usually paid for a day's work of daily domestic employee in that city. In this scenario, to have various goods may involve a multiplicity of partners increasing the risks of sexually transmissible diseases, unwanted pregnancy, exposure to violence, elements that can make women less likely to want this same condition, if they had the chance to live a second time.

This research, it is known, has a limited generalization and does not represent a definite position on subjective well-being in the context of prostitution. Remembering, only one variable of cognitive nature was considered: satisfaction with life. In this sense, it is recommended to take into account other indicators, like the affects (positive and negatives) and measures of psychological distress, as provided by QGS-^{12 49}. However, it will be important to insist on positive aspects, like the gratitude and sense of life; it may also be important to consider the resilience construct, since even before the adverse situation some women who engage in prostitution can keep themselves away from drugs and build a better life within what is possible. It could also be important to characterize the axiological principles that guide the lives of these people; perhaps they are less different from other women, not prostitutes, than one might imagine *a priori*. Moreover, comparative studies are needed to evaluate the congruence of the findings of this study in other Brazilian capitals. Therefore, there is still much to research, and this is only, at this time, a contribution to the theme.

Finally, although some people think that money does not buy happiness^{12, 25, 28}, the findings of this research suggest the opposite, at least in the case of sex workers with a poor profile. They live in difficult situations are widely explored, possibly some of them can achieve the happiness or specifically the satisfaction with life due to their low expectations; no education, with few resources and without people who support them, when they manage to have some consumer goods, probably resulting from their exercise as a sex worker, enjoy greater material comfort and, as a consequence, may feel more satisfaction with their lives, although, if they had a choice, they could elect another option. This suggests that being inevitable the condition of a prostitute, to ensure better conditions for these people, perhaps with more decent pay and personal orientation, could guarantee them a psychological comfort.

Despite struggles increasingly visible and articulated of social movements in defense of minority groups, it is noticeable that much remains for the participation in equal conditions of such groups in the social sphere; even with the relevant achievement of certain rights, the shortage persists of effectuation and expansion of segments important in society³. It is not possible to remain alien from the precarious conditions of sex workers; knowing their problems and their expectations seems central to assure

bioethical principles so essential as the autonomy and social justice, promoting the respect for these women. We trust that these findings will stimulate the elaboration of public policies in their defense, especially regarding the preparation of these professionals to deal with such basic elements as economic gains and acquisition of material resources to ensure a better quality of life.

Resumo

Se são prostitutas, por que são felizes? Correlatos materiais da satisfação com a vida

Este estudo objetivou conhecer a relação entre bens de consumo adquiridos e satisfação com a vida de profissionais do sexo em João Pessoa, PB. A influência dessa relação na satisfação com a vida é algo que não tem sido estudado empiricamente. Participaram do estudo 100 prostitutas com idades entre 18 e 46 anos ($m = 26,2$, $dp = 7,00$), a maioria solteira (71%) e com filho (73%). Estas responderam a Escala de Satisfação com a Vida, o Inventário de Bens de Consumo e perguntas demográficas. Os resultados indicaram correlação positiva entre bens de consumo e satisfação com a vida ($r = 0,42$), com os bens de consumo apresentando indícios de mediar a relação desta satisfação com o valor cobrado por programa sexual. Os resultados foram discutidos à luz das evidências sobre a importância de bens materiais para promover o bem-estar subjetivo em contexto de escassez, indicando-se estudos futuros que possam contribuir nesta área.

Palavras-chave: Prostituição. Satisfação pessoal. Felicidade. Economia.

Resumen

Si son prostitutas, ¿por qué son felices? Correlatos materiales de la satisfacción con la vida

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo conocer la relación entre los bienes de consumo obtenidos y la satisfacción con la vida de trabajadoras del sexo en João Pessoa, PB. La influencia de esta relación en la satisfacción con la vida es algo que no se ha estudiado empíricamente. Participaron en el estudio 100 prostitutas con edades variando de los 18 a los 46 años ($m = 26.2$, $dt = 7.00$), en su mayoría solteras (71%) y con hijos (73%). Ellas contestaron la *Escala de Satisfacción con la Vida*, el *Inventario de Bienes de Consumo* y preguntas demográficas. Los resultados indicaron una correlación positiva entre los bienes de consumo y la satisfacción con la vida ($r = 0,42$). Sin embargo, los bienes de consumo presentaron evidencias de mediar la relación de esta satisfacción con el importe cobrado por programa sexual. Los hallazgos se han discutido a la luz de evidencias sobre la importancia de bienes materiales para promover el bienestar subjetivo en contexto de escasez, sugiriendo estudios futuros que puedan contribuir en este ámbito.

Palabras-clave: Prostitución. Satisfacción personal. Felicidad. Economía.

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Contacts

Rildésia S. V. Gouveia - *rsvgouveia@gmail.com*

Leogildo Alves Freires - *leogildo.alves.freires@gmail.com*

Rafaella de Carvalho Rodrigues Araújo - *rafaellacr@hotmail.com*

Layrthton Carlos de Oliveira Santos - *layrthton@hotmail.com*

Valdiney V. Gouveia - *vvgouveia@gmail.com*

Valdiney V. Gouveia - Universidade Federal da Paraíba CCHLA/Departamento de Psicologia CEP 58.051-900. Joao Pessoa/PB, Brazil.