

# IMPACT OF FORMER SEX WORKERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS ON JOB SATISFACTION OF WORKERS IN INDUSTRIAL ZONES IN VIETNAM

**Dr. Vu Quang**

Institute for Educational Management HCMC

**Dr. Nguyen Thi Huyen**

Lecturer at the Department of Psychology, National Economics University

**Nguyen Ha An**

St. Paul American School Hanoi

Email: [nguyenhaanha05@gmail.com](mailto:nguyenhaanha05@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The downside of the market economy is the increase in social evils. One of the hottest issues in Vietnam is prostitution. They can be people who have made mistakes or who are unlucky to have had a harsh life. However, when they repent and turn around, they have the right to a better life. Supporting former sex workers to remove psychological barriers, achieve their current job satisfaction, and integrate into the community will help society become more sustainable. Towards this, the study conducted interviews with 56 people who used to work as prostitutes in industrial zones of three provinces of Bac Ninh, Bac Giang and Vinh Phuc in Vietnam in order to understand the difficulties, especially in women. psychological obstacles, making them feel insecure, unsatisfied and lack motivation to develop in their current job. At the same time, their wishes for a new life are also explored to provide policy implications for this target group.

**Keyword:** Psychological barriers, Job Satisfaction, Former Sex Workers, Vietnam.

## 1. Introduction

Since the Doi Moi (renovation) program was introduced in Vietnam in the early 1990s, there has been a noticeable transition from a centrally planned to a market-based economy. The nation has undergone accelerated urbanization, expanding business development, and a thriving tourism sector. A variety of structural and social issues have also emerged at the same time, such as widespread unemployment in some industries (such as state-owned businesses), a rising wealth disparity, an increase in rural-urban immigration, and significant changes to rural family life (Elmer, 2001). The current increase in sex work in Vietnam can be attributed to these emerging issues.

According to research that are currently available, there are many categories of female sex workers in Vietnam, including street walkers, brothel-based sex workers, venue-based sex workers in nightclubs and spas, "call girls," and escorts (Rekart, 2002). According to estimates, 70% of FSW in Vietnam work in leisure settings as servers, massage therapists, or karaoke hosts in addition to their legally recognized jobs as sexual service providers (Elmer, 2001). Under the government's anti-prostitution law, sex work is legally classified as a "social evil" and is prohibited in Vietnam. Repressive actions such as gathering up sex workers and sending them to forced rehabilitation facilities are part of a social evil approach to the sex industry. These facilities

offer required STI testing, treatment, and evaluation for detained sex workers in addition to HIV testing. A few facilities provide HIV education, counseling, and vocational training (such as sewing) in order to help the women find alternative jobs after their release. However, due to a lack of supportive services in the neighborhood, recidivism rates are high (e.g., 80%), and many women return to the centers (Rushing, 2006).

Studies of sex workers around the world suggest that social relationships, the environment in which the women are embedded, and the women's conception of their own personal identity—specifically, whether or not they identify as sex workers—are mediating factors in how women behave in ways that compromise their health and cope with victimization and stigma (Dalla 2002). There have been an increasing number of research conducted on female sex workers in Vietnam. The majority of these have concentrated on sociodemographic and occupational variables, sexual risk preventive behaviors, knowledge and practices linked to HIV and sexually transmitted illnesses, frequency of sex, categories of clients, and price (Nguyen et al. 2002; Thuong et al. 2005). There hasn't been much focus on other concerns that are important to the lives of women who exit prostitution. Additionally, their psychological and emotional needs aren't given much care in Vietnam. As a result, questions regarding obstacles to the former worker's social reintegration are still unclear.

As of the end of 2016, Vietnam had 11,240 women who were sex workers. Although prostitution is illegal, the government has begun to change its handling of the problem from focusing on prostitution to supporting harm reduction. However, women who used to work as prostitutes still suffer from stigma, discrimination and violence. *“Does anyone know that 76% of us are being abused while practicing, mainly by our clients. Even when we were found to be practicing, 12% of us were beaten and humiliated by those who were on duty. Is it because of being a prostitute that when we were beaten, no one was willing to protect us. We are also afraid of not calling out, afraid of being caught, afraid of being punished, afraid of being scorned, afraid of being humiliated”*. Women who have worked as prostitutes need to be recognized by society for their ability in work and human qualities in a more sympathetic and shared way. Especially in industrial zones, where the majority of former sex workers are psychologically received and where social problems are difficult to manage, former sex workers need to learn about the barriers to feelings that make them unsatisfied with their current job. From there, it is necessary to have policies to support these so that they can have a better job and life, be more satisfied and socially connected, and prevent the risk of re-entering the sex industry.

## **2. Literature**

### **2.1. Job satisfaction**

#### **2.1.1. Definition**

Job satisfaction has been defined in a variety of ways. The formal definition of job satisfaction can be traced back to Fisher and Hanna's studies in 1931. They described job satisfaction as a result of a non-regulatory mood tendency based on a large number of case studies. Measuring the Job Satisfaction of Industrial Salesmen was a 1974 article by Churchill et al. that made the

following claim: "Job satisfaction, as a constitutional notion, incorporates the aspects of the job as well as the elements of the job-related environment." In a favourable assessment of the constitutional idea of job satisfaction, Churchill et al. proposed an operational definition of job satisfaction, i.e. work-related affection states covering five components, namely supervisors, jobs, work colleagues, compensation, and promotion chances. Job satisfaction is a form of happy or positive affection that emerges during the process of appraising a person's work experience, according to Locke's 1976 expansion of Fisher's research and explanation of the term. Job satisfaction is being gradually acknowledged as an emotional expression of the work. In 1985, Organ and Near acknowledged that job satisfaction may be explained in terms of attachment or cognition. The comprehension of a psychological process of recognition, which encompasses consciousness, perception, reasoning, judgment, and other characteristics, is how the cognition perspective interprets job satisfaction. In 1989, Brief reviewed earlier research and posited a paradox: while job satisfaction is typically understood as an intellectual concept with emotive components, the affective contents are not well-measured. Cognition is the main area of interest in job satisfaction measurement. The Influence of Cognitive and Affective Based Job Satisfaction Measures on the Relationship Between Satisfaction and Organizational Citizenship was a 1993 paper written by Moorman. From the affective standpoint, job satisfaction is an overall positive subjective assessment; from the cognitive perspective, job satisfaction is a more logical and reasoned assessment of working conditions. For cognition, effective judgment is not necessary. From a cognitive perspective, job satisfaction is an evaluation of the working environment, possibilities, and output. Measures of job satisfaction do not take into account the description of emotions. In conclusion, affection-based job satisfaction is a favorable affective assessment of one's work. This definition says that whether a job makes people feel good and inspires positive emotions is a measure of work satisfaction. The affection-oriented job satisfaction scale is used to measure how happy employees are with their jobs. High levels of positive emotions or sentiments are a sign of job satisfaction. A more logical and sensible evaluation of working conditions is provided by job satisfaction based on cognition. This concept incorporates a comparison process in job satisfaction that is cognition-focused. It is an individualized idea. A comparison to references forms the basis of the evaluation. It doesn't rely on feeling or intuition. It is an evaluation of the working environment, career opportunities, and production. The cognition-based job satisfaction scale is designed to determine whether an individual's needs are met by the nature of the job, the working environment, and the development opportunities. Relevant indicators tend to focus more on professional assessments than subjective descriptions of feelings. In 1996, Motowidlo defined self-reported job satisfaction as a determination of the friendliness of the workplace. Based on paradox theory, Brief defined job satisfaction in 1998 as the expression of an internal state regarding liking or disliking the job and the degree, as shown by affection or cognition. Weiss offered a definition of job satisfaction in 2002 that was comparable to Motowidlo's. A person's favorable, quantitative evaluation of their working conditions is what Weiss defined as job satisfaction. The institutional idea of job satisfaction, which describes employees' working attitudes, is shown to gradually change in terms of definitions when analyzing job satisfaction research. The evolution of definition follows a cognitive process from general perception to focused cognition as well as a line from a single perspective to numerous perspectives. The five elements of job satisfaction, according to Smith et al., are pay, job, promotion, supervisor, and coworkers. In conclusion, it doesn't matter which

academics analyze job satisfaction from which perspectives because their definitions of the concept center mostly around personal attachments. If employees have positive and enjoyable experiences at work, their attitudes toward their jobs will be seen to be satisfied. In contrast, if workers feel unfavorable and uncomfortable at work, their views about their occupations will be characterized as dissatisfied (Yuewei Chen, 2005). In conclusion, researchers gave a range of viewpoints on the job satisfaction studies. There is a clear progression from one point of view to several points of view in the definition of job satisfaction.

### **2.1.2. Expression of job satisfaction**

While there are many factors that contribute to job satisfaction, some researchers, including Glisson and Durick (1988) and Yuan Ting (1997), suggest that three sets of variables—job characteristics, organizational characteristics, and individual characteristics—can be used to assess employee satisfaction. Job characteristics are terms used to describe aspects of the work that employees do.

#### **Job Characteristics**

According to early organizational theorists like Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg, a person's desire to meet their own needs, which include intrinsic and extrinsic demands, is what leads to job satisfaction (Abraham Maslow, 1954). The degree to which work features fit an individual's needs, according to researchers who use this technique, determines how satisfied they are with their jobs.

#### ***Career advancement and pay satisfaction***

As a result of their strong theoretical connections to the development of unique job attitudes, pay satisfaction and the desire for career progression have been identified as two of the most significant determinants of job satisfaction (Emmert & Taher, 1992). Those who are happy with their income and possibilities for progress may incur higher costs if they leave their firms. They are more prone to acquire positive attitudes toward their professions as a result. Several studies have also discovered that public servants' job discontent and propensity to leave the civil service are related to lower compensation and less prospects for growth (Gregory Lewis, 1992).

#### ***Clarity of Objectives***

Task clarity refers to the degree to which job duties and the rules controlling how to do them are made obvious to individuals. It affects how people view what is required of them and what they ought to do. According to study, having a clear grasp of the demands of the job can aid individuals in adjusting to their positions by avoiding ambiguity and the risks associated with learning by doing, as well as foster favorable attitudes toward their work (Yuan Ting, 1997).

#### ***The Task's Criticality***

Task importance is defined as the extent to which people believe their jobs contribute to organizational missions (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). People who have higher intrinsic needs should be more affected by this element, which affects how meaningful people perceive their professions to be. The nature of public service necessitates the use of professionals, who are likely to have higher intrinsic needs for work significance, according to researchers (Cherniss & Kane, 1987; Emmert & Taher, 1992).

### **Organizational characteristics**

Researchers in human relations contend that the development of job attitudes is also significantly influenced by people's encounters with the larger organizational context in which tasks are done. These researchers found that parameters describing the relationship between people and their work units and organizations, such as dedication to the organization and relationships with coworkers and superiors, are also important in determining job satisfaction (Glisson & Durick, 1988; Posner & Schmidt, 1994).

#### ***Organizational Dedication***

Organizational commitment is defined as people's faith and belief in the organization's objectives, as well as their feelings for it (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Research has shown that people are more likely to psychologically attach to an organization before they acquire affectionate views toward their work, and that employees typically experience job satisfaction that is inversely correlated with the degree of organizational commitment (Romzek, 1990).

#### ***Relationships between coworkers and managers***

Both coworkers and managers can have an impact on a person's job satisfaction inside a workplace, especially when jobs done by employees grow more linked. It is anticipated that having positive, supportive relationships with coworkers and managers will increase one's feeling of job satisfaction. Studies show that people are more likely to be content with their occupations if their coworkers and managers encourage and collaborate with them in completing their tasks (Nachmias, 1988; Emmert & Taher, 1992).

### **Individual Characteristics**

Numerous job and organizational characteristics researchers contend that individual variations are inconsequential in determining job satisfaction and have therefore neglected these variables in their studies of job satisfaction (Gerhart, 1987). But according to Hackman and his associates, people commonly "interpret" their workplaces and organizations in light of their own ideas and values, which can also have an impact on job satisfaction (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Thus, to account for any potential effects on job satisfaction, individual variables are included in this model.

#### ***The People's Spirit***

According to a long-held theory of organizational behavior research (O'Reilly et al., 1991), people are drawn to firms that share their values and select occupations that support those values. This point of view asserts that a lot of people are pulled to public service in order to achieve their ideals and aspirations to help the community. They give less weight to factors that increase self-interest, such money and promotion. Instead, they place more emphasis on inspiring the public than inspiring individual employees (Steven Kelman, 1987; Khojasteh, 1993). It is obvious that the public service offers people many opportunity to gratify their aspirations (Perry & Wise, 1990). Additionally, people might concentrate on these qualities in order to enjoy them more and thereby feel happier. Older workers are more likely than younger workers to build a better fit between personal requirements and workplace organizations, according to organizational behavior researchers (Lewis, 1991). Older workers are more likely to rationally defend their continued employment inside the company (J. Meyer & N. Allen, 1984). They have fewer options and higher prices than younger workers if they leave their current companies (Mathieu & Zajac,

1990). Additionally, they are more likely to have conventional values and a strong work ethic (Dewar & Werbel, 1979). Older employees are consequently more prone to adopt positive views toward their workplaces, such as job satisfaction and organizational dedication.

### ***Education***

According to some academics, employees with higher education can increase job satisfaction by "rationalizing" their options for leaving their employers or changing employment (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1981). However, according to other academics, people with higher levels of education have more work possibilities and are therefore less likely to get stuck in a position or organization. They are consequently less prone to form deep bonds with their work or organizations (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). This makes sense when we take into account the fact that employees with greater education usually have higher expectations than what may be provided by their employers or organizations. As a result, people's views toward their employment and organizations will deteriorate (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982).

### **2.1.3. The role of job satisfaction**

#### **a) Job Satisfaction and Job Engagement**

Job satisfaction is one of the most often measured organizational variables in both research and practice settings, as well as one of the most thoroughly investigated in terms of organizational behavior and organizational psychology (Spector, 1997). Because job satisfaction is a significant measure of how employees feel about their jobs and a predictor of their work actions. Job satisfaction relates to how much people like or detest their jobs, as judged by themselves (Spector, 1997). On the other side, organizational commitment is frequently described as an emotional attachment to an organization resulting from an individual who shares the organization's ideals, desires to remain in the organization, and is willing to exert effort. They stand for the organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Affective commitment is an employee's emotional attachment, identity, and involvement with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Irving et al. (1997) investigated the connection between empathy, continuity, normative commitment, and fluidity in the workplace. Their findings indicate a favorable and significant correlation between job satisfaction and both commitment and emotional standards. Numerous studies have also examined work flexibility as a prerequisite for organizational loyalty (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992). In contrast, research have demonstrated a favorable, but not necessarily robust, association between employee job unhappiness and organizational disengagement as absenteeism behavior in the organization (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2005). There is evidence that disgruntled employees have higher absenteeism and tardiness rates than satisfied employees (Smith et al., 1969). In stool research, its synthesis is studied. Hellman (1997) in his research also discovered a strong and constant inverse link between job satisfaction and intention to resign in his studies. Shan (1998) confirms that, in the context of lecturers, job satisfaction is a key determinant in lecturers' organizational commitment. Through a research of 220 teachers, Akoolafe and Olatomide (2013) investigated the predictability of organizational commitment to fluidity at work. The results indicate that not only does job satisfaction have a significant effect on teachers' organizational commitment, but it also serves as a predictor of their level of organizational commitment. This association, according to Akoolafe and Olatomide (2013),

implies that the more teachers' job satisfaction, the greater their commitment to the organization. Other research have reached the same conclusion: job satisfaction is a significant predictor of organizational loyalty (Camilleri, 2002; Oyewobi et al. events, 2012).

### **b) Job Satisfaction and Employee Morale**

Morale is an ethereal wave that represents how an optimistic and supportive group feels about the organization to which it belongs (Haddock 2010). Kanter (1977) defines morale as an attitude and relative reaction of individuals to job satisfaction (Haddock 2010). It indicates a sense of confidence, self-respect, significance, and pride in one's commitment to the organization. According to Finger (2005), morale stems from the top down rather than the bottom up. It consists of numerous variables. Millet (2010) provided six reasons for the significance of morale, with greater productivity, enhanced performance, and innovation among the most significant. Other benefits of strong morale include a decrease in the number of absences, an increase in efficiency, and a workforce that is more productive. The benefits of good morale, according to Mazin (2010), are enhanced communication, minimal turnover, high retention, and innovative organization. In addition to fostering a positive work environment, morale enhances the productivity per employee ratio. Numerous academics have analyzed and defined job satisfaction based on psychological considerations. From there, analyze the beneficial association between job satisfaction and employee morale. According to them, job happiness is one of the most extensively researched components of work attitudes. There are many different meanings of job satisfaction. Green (2010) defines job satisfaction as a favorable emotional reaction to the position. It is a state of happiness that one experiences while working. Kreitner (2006) defined job satisfaction as a constellation of many job-related factors. McNamara (1999) describes job satisfaction as a mental state influenced by a variety of elements, including welfare measurements, autonomy, communication, equity, etc. Partlow (1993) established a relationship between employee work satisfaction and total quality management. Thus, it may be expected that job satisfaction and morale are significantly correlated. In addition to enhancing the work performance of employees, a positive work ethic motivates them to spend more time and effort on their tasks. When a business cultivates a team with a strong work ethic, its business efficiency and profits will increase dramatically. Consequently, morale enhancement can also be viewed as a moderating factor in the relationship between work satisfaction, employee engagement, and business performance.

### **c) Job Satisfaction, Employee Performance and Business Performance**

Employee job satisfaction positively affects the bottom line of the company through the intermediary factor of work attachment. This idea has been mentioned and supported by numerous past investigations. Gallup claims that highly engaged workers provide superior levels of customer service, retention, productivity, and profitability (Luthans & Peterson, 2002). The poll also revealed that, in comparison to the top 25% of employees, who received far better and more positive assessments, the worst 25% of employees had lower sales, more customer complaints, and higher staff turnover (The Gallup Organization, 2004). Employees with a reasonable commitment are less likely to be great performers. Employers should want to have as many "true believers" as they can (Buchanan, 2004). These people often give more to the

company than those whose involvement is small and who might cause a loss. The Gallup Organization performed a survey in 2004 to compare the effects of engaged and disengaged workers. Employers in the UK incur a \$64.8 billion annual loss due to unemployment. Japan lost \$232 billion in productivity as a result of a 9% engagement score. An engaged employee or employees can be a great resource for a company's competitiveness (Joo & Mclean, 2006). Participation among employees boosts both retention and productivity. The Society for Human Resource Management conducted a groundbreaking global research on employee engagement in 2006 with 664,000 employees (SHRM). According to the report, the difference in operational income growth between companies with low staff engagement and those with strong employee engagement is 52%. A more contented and engaged workforce linked to higher customer satisfaction, profitability, lower staff turnover, and fewer workplace accidents, according to a survey of 7939 business units across 38 nations (Norwack, 2006). High achievers that are dedicated to the company are often those who are engaged and satisfied with their work (Woodruffe, 2006; Lockwood, 2007). Employees that are more engaged deliver better customer service and make greater contributions to the long-term success of the company.

## **2.2. Former Sex Workers**

### **2.2.1. Sex Workers and Former Sex Workers**

Activist for sex workers Carol Leigh first used the phrase "sex worker" in 1978. After the anthology *Sex Work: Writings By Women In The Sex Industry*, edited by Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, was published in 1987, its use gained popularity. Since then, the phrase "sex worker" has gained widespread usage in academic journals, by NGOs, labor unions, and by governmental and international organizations like the World Health Organization. Sex workers are "adults and young people (18 years of age and older) who accept money or goods in return for sexual services, either frequently or sometimes," according to the WHO. It is crucial to remember that sex work is adult consenting sex, which can occur in a variety of ways and differs between and within nations and cultures. The degree to which sex employment is more "formal" or organized might vary. According to the Open Society Foundation (OSF), sex workers are individuals who accept cash or goods in return for performing erotic acts or providing consenting sexual services on a regular or irregular basis. The voluntary character and the relationship of exchange between the practitioner and the client are stressed in the conceptions of sex workers. Sex workers of any gender may trade sexual favors or services for cash or other rewards (Eichert & David, 2022). The reasons why people engage in sex work can range greatly and include debt, coercion, survival, or just the desire to make a livelihood (Harcourt and et al, 2005).

The majority of sex workers engage in these activities when they are still quite young. According to a study by Priscilla & Benjamin (1996), female sex workers start their careers in the sex industry on average at the age of 23, and they stay in it for an average of 3.6 years. As a result, these women live long lives after leaving the sex profession. But the lives of women engaged in sex trade can involve trauma and significant difficulties (Dalla, 2006). Alcohol and drug abuse develop become potent forms of negative coping (Gerassi, 2015). Psychological traumas, drug addiction, mental disease, and financial difficulties are all obstacles to exiting the sex industry. Since leaving sex work is challenging, women frequently go back to it (Cimino, 2012). It was



challenging to leave the sex business, but once they did, former sex workers experienced other difficulties, such as psychological barriers to reintegration and self-doubt when starting a new profession.

### **2.2.2. Risks of sex workers**

Lena Edlund and Evelyn Korn, two trailblazing female professors who have studied sex work, state the following: "Sex work is a multi-billion dollar sector that employs millions of women worldwide on a daily basis. According to recent study by the International Labor Office, between 0.25 and 1.5% of women in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand are engaged in sex work, which accounts for between 2-14% of total domestic income (GDP)". Additionally, Edlund and Korn (2002) provided evidence that certain women will always work as sex workers in society. The law of supply and demand dictates that if there are fewer people engaged in this industry, sex work's salary will increase and become more attractive to some individuals. Additionally, Edlund and Korn (2002) show that the proportion of sex workers declines, albeit not entirely, when the income level of non-sex workers rises. Guista, Tommaso, and Strom (2004) also showed that prostitution is more prevalent the more unequal the distribution of wealth in society is, and that prostitution is less prevalent the more possibilities there are for making a livelihood other than through prostitution. The ability to be married and lead a regular life must be given up by people who engage in the sex industry, claim Edlund and Korn (2002). Customers who buy sex seek out sex providers for sexual fulfillment rather than for marriage and procreation, and once employed in this field, sex providers have almost no chance of getting married. According to three female professors, Guista, Tommaso, and Strom (2004), both consumers and sellers lose social standing when buying and selling sex. Due to the harm to their reputation, sex workers require a high wage in order to work in the industry. Numerous empirical investigations have proven that these women must assume a very significant safety risk in exchange for a salary that is roughly four times higher than the median income. Sex labor has been and continues to be a significant global industry.

The number of sex workers worldwide was estimated to be between 40 and 42 million in 2012. The nations having the most sex workers are China, India, and the United States. Austria, Singapore, and Switzerland are frequently the nations that allow prostitution and related activities. Statistics from 2014 show that there are roughly 20,000 female sex workers in Switzerland. In addition to the risk of being tortured, assaulted, and kidnapped by traffickers, sex workers in Switzerland sometimes struggle to find clients, which makes it difficult for them to stay in business. Safe houses in a central location away from the center were the solution the Swiss authorities had to find for protecting sex workers. While sex work is permitted in several countries, including Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary, the UK, and the US state of Nevada, third-party actions are prohibited. The Netherlands as a whole has more than 40,000 sex workers, according to figures from 2014. In the report on human trafficking, the Netherlands came out on top. Every year, between 1,000 and 7,000 women are trafficked as sex workers to the Netherlands from countries including Thailand, China, Nigeria, and Ukraine. Some nations, like Sweden, Thailand, and Vietnam, forbid all forms of sex trade and related activities. Sentinel Surveillance figures show that each Thai sex worker typically has at least 2.6 clients per night and earns up to 10,000–15,000 USD per month. However, this nation has the highest rate of rape

in Asia, with 7-8 instances per 100,000 people, more than twice as many as the Philippines, three times as many as Singapore, and five times as many as Vietnam. According to ILO estimates from 2018, there are around 100,000 sex workers in Vietnam, the majority of whom are women. Call girls, sex tourists, foreigners who sell sex, male prostitutes, homosexual prostitutes, transgender persons who sell sex, and sex brokers are still the principal prostitution-related objects and forms. Infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and numerous crime issues are caused by this environment.

Sex workers endure several risks, as can be observed from the global state of sex work now and measurement findings from earlier research. Compared to many other occupational groups, sex workers are more likely to face poor health, poverty, and social marginalization (Costello, 2003). According to Elmore-Meegan et al. (2004) and Harcourt and Donovan (2005), their employment frequently serves as a complement to menial jobs and is stigmatized heavily. Even when individuals stop working in the sex industry, these consequences may endure. Therefore, sexual workers confront a number of hazards, the most frequent of which are risks to their bodily and mental health and to their exposure to socially harmful issues, whether they remain in the profession or leave it.

+ **Physically:** People who engage in sexual activity face a number of related health risks (Rekart ML 2015; Shannon K et al., 2015). Syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and *Mycoplasma genitalium* are bacterial STIs, while HIV, hepatitis A, B, and C, herpes simplex virus (HSV), and human papillomavirus are viral STIs. Unprotected sexual activity is the main way that both STIs are spread. Due to variables like many sexual partners, unprotected intercourse, and hazardous working conditions, female sex workers (FSWs) are a group at high risk of contracting HIV and STIs, and they bear a disproportionately larger burden of HIV in many epidemics (Boily MC et al., 2002; Vickerman P et al., 2010). A pooled odds ratio of HIV infection among FSWs compared to women in the general population is 14, with HIV prevalence among FSWs ranging from 1.7% in the Middle East and North Africa to 36.9% in Sub-Saharan Africa (Vickerman P et al., 2010). FSWs remain a crucial population for HIV prevention efforts as a result. High rates of ART uptake, adherence, and retention among FSWs will benefit HIV-positive FSWs individually and reduce HIV transmission in the population as a whole (Delva W et al., 2012; Alary M et al., 2013). Most sex workers opt for abortion in such circumstances since sex work occasionally results in unwanted pregnancy. If the child is born, he or she will have serious problems with their living circumstances, finances, and health. In addition to the high rate of STDs, sex workers typically misuse addictive drugs and opiates (Elwood WN et al., 1997). The risk of dying from drug shock, HIV, sepsis, and addiction rises as a result. For sex workers, physical abuse is a serious problem as well. Sex workers are commonly the targets of client-inflicted violence, according to Church S et al. (2001). Meanwhile, Norton-Hawk M (2004) shows that street pimps, brokers, and security personnel all abuse sex workers.

+ **Mentally:** Contrary to the growing body of research on HIV in sex work, assessments of the mental health of women in sex work are still rare and are confined to a small number of urban studies from Europe, North America, Australia, and Asia. Previous studies have shown that mental illnesses, including mood disorders, suicidal thoughts, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), may be more common in women who work in the sex industry (Ulibarri MD et al., 2013; Su S et al., 2014). Despite the fact that many studies have looked at associations between mental health and a personal history of trauma, ongoing client or partner violence, and comorbid physical

illnesses like HIV and STIs, few studies have looked at the relationships between structural factors and mental health among sex workers (Stuber J et al., 2008 ; Rossler W et al., 2010). These statistics are nevertheless necessary because improving population-health outcomes, especially for underrepresented groups like sex workers, requires interventions that focus on more than just a person's individual risk behaviors (Shannon K et al.,2015). Studies involving sex workers in China suggest that individual and partner level traits such as sexualcoercion, age, and self-stigmatization may be related to results in terms of mental health. Studies from Australia, Mexico, and other American cities (such as New York, Miami, and San Francisco) as well as mental health (Gu J et al., 2014) show a connection between past trauma and symptoms of sadness and anxiety (Weiser SD et al., 2006).

+ **Social:** On a social level, robbery, human trafficking, and money laundering are particularly closely related to sex work, drug trafficking, and other crimes. Around 8,000,000 women and children are reportedly trafficked across international borders every year, according to the US Department of State's 2007 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report; 80% of trafficked people end up doing forced sex work (George et al., 2010). The financial violence may also include physical assault and robbery of sex workers. According to Tyler (2014), instances when money was withheld as extortion or coercion were caused by "aggressive customer behavior." Robberies can happen to both male and female sex workers, including transgender women (Weinberg, Shaver & Williams 1999). Due to their precarious social, legal, and financial situations, street and off-street sex workers experience varying levels of theft, ranging from 37% to 9%, respectively (Church et al., 2001; Weitzer, 2005). The problem of sex workers' access to social services including housing and healthcare is also present (Steven P. Kurtz et al., 2005).

## 2.3. Background

### 2.3.1. Sex work situation in Vietnam

In the past time in Vietnam, due to the impact of many different objective and subjective factors, sex work has increased rapidly in quantity, complicated in nature and scale, diversified in forms of expression, has been causing particularly serious consequences in many aspects of social life. Regarding the overall level, according to the statistics of the Supreme People's Court, in the 10-year period from 2001 to 2010, the People's Courts at all levels in the provinces throughout the country tried 4711 cases of crimes against humanity on sex work with 6125 offenders. From 2011 to 2020, the People's Courts at all levels in localities throughout the country have heard 7116 cases of sex work with 9095 offenders. It can be seen that, on average, each year in the period 2011-2020, there are about 712 cases of prostitution with about 910 offenders. This number continues to grow because prostitution has now expanded with many new forms including soliciting and brokering customers to buy sex via the internet, zalo, facebook. According to the government portal, in 2021, the authorities discovered and arrested 2,378 subjects, of which, there were 904 sex workers, 919 people buying sex; 537 people are owners and brokers; 18 sex workers under the age of 18 and other related subjects. According to Dang Thi Phuong Linh (2022), from the study of 423 sentences on prostitution crimes, it shows that sex work crimes are carried out mainly in the form of single crimes (337/423 cases) accounted for 79.6%. Prostitution crimes were committed as accomplices in 86/423 cases, accounting for a smaller proportion of 30.4%.

However, in addition to the popular types of taking advantage of services: eating, resting, discotheque, karaoke, coffee, lathering, massage, etc. to act as brokers or contain sex work, has appeared and tended to develop professional prostitution organizations and lines operate more sophisticatedly, such as using the Internet, mobile phones and other means to operate on a large scale in many localities nationwide from the North to the South and beyond overseas such as Hong Kong, Macau, China, Singapore... and some other Eastern European countries such as France, Germany... Besides, the form of "calling girl" is more and more developed with the formation of girl groups sex workers (at least from 3 to 5 people, many can be up to dozens of people) together to work in prostitution. There is a connection between them. When anyone has a relationship to buy sex, call each other, who stands out. Referrals will be "cut" back a part of the money paid by the sex buyers according to the agreement, that is, everyone is a sex worker and anyone can be a sex broker.

Despite being illegal in Vietnam, sex work can still be found all over the country's biggest cities, and the rackets controlling them have come up with countless ways to dodge the law with authorities seemingly helpless to stop the industry's unchecked development. There may be differences in data, but estimates from the International Labor Organization (ILO) point to a total of about 72,000 women and roughly 101,300 sex workers in Vietnam. According to a 2016 ILO survey, sex workers in Vietnam are among the most vulnerable individuals due to frequent police raids and a pervasive fear of theft and violence. The typical workday for a full-time employee is between 10 and 12 hours, and women often serve six to ten clients per day, but this number can reach 30 on occasion. Male employees serve three to ten clients daily, a workload that ILO interviewees deemed "heavy."

As mentioned in the argument about sex workers, most people engage in sex work at a young age due to main reasons including financial and social barriers such as poverty, unemployment, burden of raising a family, lack of access to education, etc. And factors that are thought to help sex workers successfully quit sex work include educational access to formal support services such as permanent housing, legal advocacy, and job training; personal factors such as positive life skills and personal self-determination (Hammond & McGlone, 2014; Hickle, 2017). Due to lack of knowledge and lack of access to education, job opportunities for girls working as sex workers after leaving this industry are not many and relatively difficult. They can only accept manual jobs, which do not require degrees or qualifications in concentrated industrial zones, even though many people accept to work undercover jobs that are not guaranteed. The nature of manual jobs is often very hard while the benefits and remuneration such as salary and bonus are not high. Besides, these jobs are often concentrated in zones and clusters in industrial parks with a huge number of workers from all over the country. This leads to difficult control and many social evils in the community of workers. In addition, the guilt, psychological damage, and physical health decline also make it difficult for sex workers to integrate and have a stable job. Although they are supported by the government and non-profit organizations to reintegrate into the community and find a job, the legal factors related to documents proving that they have worked as prostitutes make them feel self-conscious and not want to access these policies. Many people, unable to get rid of psychological obsessions and meet their living needs, have chosen to return to prostitution (Cinimo, 2012).

### 2.3.2. Industrial zones in Bac Ninh, Bac Giang and Vinh Phuc

The industrial park is the place where many production and business organizations/enterprises gather, especially foreign-invested units. Industrial parks play a big role in creating jobs for millions of unskilled workers nationwide. Currently, Vietnam has a large number of industrial parks, attracting abundant foreign investment capital. In the northern region, industrial parks in Bac Giang, Bac Ninh and Vinh Phuc have large scale, creating jobs for millions of workers in the area and neighboring localities. After that, the study would like to give an overview of these three industrial zones.

Bac Giang: Located on the economic corridor Nanning (China) - Lang Son - Hanoi - Hai Phong, adjacent to the northern key economic region, Bac Giang is very convenient in economic development and cultural exchange with other countries. water in the area. Besides the abundant land fund and investment attraction policy of the local government, Bac Giang has 5 large industrial parks with an area of over 100 hectares. These industrial clusters have attracted 186 investment projects; in which 176 projects have been put into operation, 10 projects are under implementation (2021). In the first 6 months of 2022, according to the Management Board of Industrial Parks of Bac Giang province, up to this point in the industrial zones of the province there are more than 174,000 employees working, an increase of more than 27,000 people compared to July last year. Industrial projects in Bac Giang province mainly produce and process electronic components; construction material production projects (mainly the production of baked bricks; garment manufacturing and processing projects; manufacturing and mechanical processing projects; the rest are projects in the manufacturing fields) , wood processing, agricultural product processing, clean water production, mineral processing, etc. Up to now, there have been 12 countries and territories having direct investment projects in Bac Giang province, of which the most are Korean investors, followed by China, Japan, the rest are other countries

Bac Ninh has an extremely favorable geographical position, located on two economic corridors Kunming - Lao Cai - Hanoi - Hai Phong - Quang Ninh and Nanning - Lang Son - Hanoi - Hai Phong - Quang Ninh. Currently, in Bac Ninh province, there are 15 concentrated industrial parks, 1 information technology park and more than 30 industrial clusters. Industrial parks in Bac Ninh are invested with complete infrastructure, road systems in the industrial park, clean water supply and wastewater treatment are invested in synchronous, modern, up to standard, telecommunications services. , banking, insurance... are also included in the industrial park. The main groups of manufacturing industries in Bac Ninh include: electronics and telecommunications, information technology, mechanics, machine manufacturing, ....In which, there are production branches of the world's leading large enterprises. such as: Samsung, Canon, etc. According to statistics from the Management Board of Bac Ninh Industrial Parks, by the end of the third quarter of 2022, Bac Ninh industrial zones employed a total of 314,644 workers. The number of female employees alone accounted for 55.5% (174,649 people).

Vinh Phuc is currently a hot industrial spot attracting a lot of domestic and foreign investment capital. As of 2021, Vinh Phuc has 14 IPs that have been decided on investment policies or granted investment registration certificates and established with a total planning area of 2,773 ha. By the end of 2021, the total FDI investment in industrial parks of the province will reach 559.51 million USD, up 127%; newly granted and adjusted to increase capital for 19 DDI projects, total investment capital of VND 7,775.9 billion, an increase of 467% compared to 2020. New

investment projects come from Korea, Japan, China, and Thailand. , India, Taiwan, British Virgin Islands and mainly in the field of electronic manufacturing, electronic components. Regarding the number of employees, according to data announced by the management board of Vinh Phuc industrial parks, in the first 6 months of 2022, industrial zones in Vinh Phuc province had 359 projects in production and business (308 FDI projects and 51 DDI projects). Enterprises in the IZ have created jobs for 125,225 workers.

In these cities, sex work has long been one of the common refugees inside industrial zones. According to Dan Sinh newspaper, for many years, although the authorities have repeatedly searched, sanctioned and oriented sex buyers and sellers, this action still cannot completely stop. Because industrial zones are gathering places for a large number of unskilled workers at a relatively young age, living far from home and lacking social knowledge, many people have fallen far away into sex work. Other common reasons include hard work and low income that prompt girls to volunteer to become sex workers. As such, the industrial park itself is an easy location for social evils, including prostitution. While this is one of the main job sites for sex workers after retirement. Therefore, it is difficult for former sex workers to work for a long time and be satisfied with their work in industrial parks.

### 3. Methods

To compile a list of interviewees and their contact information, the study asked for the help of the Departments of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs of the three provinces of Bac Giang, Bac Ninh and Vinh Phuc. After that, 120 subjects who were workers in industrial zones who used to work as prostitutes were invited to interview by phone contact. The number of people who agreed to participate in the interview was 56 people, the rate was 46.7%.

Because the research topic is private, if using group interviews can create communication barriers because of shame and unwillingness to reveal information to many people, the study conducted deep interviews with 56 attendees. A total of 56 interviews were conducted, averaging about 70 minutes per interview. Each session was attended by only one interviewee, and the researcher and 1 facilitator took on the task of recording and taking notes.

Before the interview, the research was conducted to explain the research topic, objectives, risks and benefits of the study. At the same time, the study conducted a confidential record of all personal information of the attendees, committing to analyze it in an anonymous form to create more trust and psychological comfort for the attendees. Participants are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. The individuals participating in the interview are then supported with a small fee.

**Table 1. Descriptions of research's sample**

Features	Number	Ratio
<i>Age</i>		

< 25	15	26%
[25,30)	18	32%
[30; 35)	13	24%
[35;40)	6	11%
> 40	4	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b><i>Working Location</i></b>		
<i>Bac Giang</i>	17	31%
<i>Bac Ninh</i>	18	32%
<i>Vinh Phuc</i>	21	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b><i>Experiences in present job (year)</i></b>		
≤ 2	21	38%
<i>From 2 to 5</i>	19	34%
≥ 5	16	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>

Most of the interviewees were under 35 years old (accounting for 82%). This is a valuable age group to operate in the sex industry. The number of interviewees was collected in 3 industrial zones of Bac Giang, Bac Ninh and Vinh Phuc provinces. In terms of work experience, most of the research selects subjects with 2 years or less working experience in industrial parks because this is a new participant in industrial parks, possibly unresolved. problems during work. At the same time, the number of people with working experience from 2 to 5 years also accounts for a high proportion (34%), those with 5 years of experience or more also have a proportion that is not too different from the other two groups.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Former Sex Workers' View of Sex Work

The majority of former sex workers have various perspectives on their jobs. Prostitution-related negative views are typically significantly stronger than favorable ones. There are no benefits to prostitution, 9 respondents (16%) said in response to the question concerning its advantages and disadvantages. Many women showed a strong dislike for the industry, were sick of prostitution,

and thought the labor was degrading. One woman shared her sentiments:

*“I do not like this kind of work, I can not accept it. I have cried every night since my first.”* – a 21-year-old woman.

Many also complain of poor working conditions, working at night, rarely sleeping, skipping meals and having to pay for clothing and cosmetics. Some other subjects complained that they had been forced, not having the right to choose their clients, forced to sleep with old men, drunk or abused.

Positive opinions about prostitution are tied to its economic benefits. Fifty-four out of fifty-six workers surveyed said they entered the sex industry voluntarily due to financial pressures. Especially for women who are responsible for children, parents as well as husbands and siblings who are unemployed. Some have chosen to sell sex to cover the cost of the family health crisis. Others engage in prostitution to support their own and/or their loved ones' recreational drug use. A few see prostitution as a way to enjoy their lives, to earn money and to mingle with people and experience a lifestyle they will never have.

The most mentioned benefits of this profession are the ability to “*make easy money*”. Many women consider prostitution easy and not as physically demanding as other jobs such as farming, domestic help or street vendors. Women describe being able to earn two to ten times more from prostitution than they could earn in other jobs. Some say they have been immersed in the sense of luxury that the income of this profession brings. They can buy whatever they want.

*“You can compare this, you're a worker, working in the sun and getting paid \$4 (converted from VND) a day. Then you go home and have housework to do. But for this job [prostitution], you can only work for a short time and get 20 to 50 dollars. You can eat whatever you want.”* – a 24-year-old woman.

For some, prostitution is not nefarious work. This job helps them take care of their families and fulfill their obligations to their parents.

*“I think it's honest work. I do not steal anything from anyone. I am able to support myself and I am somewhat proud of being able to support my family.”* – a 31-year-old woman.

While the economic benefits of prostitution are positive for women, some commented on how they can use strong will to separate themselves from the lavish lifestyles that prostitution can have. A lady who frequently worked as a sex worker before quitting her job returned because she was “*young then*” and “*did not comprehend the world,*” but as time went on, she gained a deeper understanding of it. What is required if someone wants to stop being a prostitute:

*“If we can accept a lower financial situation, if we are debt-free, and if we can endure a little more hardship, then giving up will be easy. It all depends on our mind. If we think we are more tired, work harder and earn less, we will come back to this job.”* – a 28-year-old woman.



Four things mostly affect whether someone decides to stop doing sex work: their financial situation, their partner's stability, their fear of getting HIV, and their relationship with that person. Their age and desire to keep their prostitution a secret from their children are additional characteristics with less of an impact. The decision of women to stop or resume sex work is most influenced by economic factors out of all of these. Additionally, a lot of other issues have an economic component, particularly how women view prostitution and their connection with a steady spouse.

The primary justification almost universally given by women for beginning, continuing, or resuming sex work is financially. Numerous factors are connected, including *"family responsibilities," "the necessity to pay off debt," "the desire to purchase more material goods,"* and *"the goal to save money for a new job."*

The majority of these women are responsible for providing the majority of the family's financial assistance for necessities like housing, televisions or refrigerators, college costs for siblings and their offspring, personal debts, and medical costs. Some women find it challenging to stop prostitution due to a sense of family obligation. One lady answered when asked what happens once she stops prostitution: *"My son cannot go to school. My parents would not have money. It was a disaster then because I had no income."* – a 38-year-old woman.

For some women, securing a family is the goal when they enter prostitution. Achieving this goal allows them to quit the profession. Indeed, the responsibilities of a mother or child play an important role in their decision to leave prostitution. Women's desire to fulfill their motherhood/childhood responsibilities and ability to provide for the material needs of the family have been seen as a symbol of success. This has resulted in some women not being able to leave the sex work even if they wanted to, as one former sex worker described:

*"I do not want to continue doing this job. I wanted to give up after two years but I could not. My parents are in debt. My child needs to go to school. My family needed a refrigerator, a TV. I had to keep doing this for a long time."* – a 42-year-old woman.

*"My neighbors were envious of me when they saw me lugging so much stuff when I went home. So giving up is difficult."* – a 29-year-old woman.

Some women mentioned that the family's understanding and understanding of their responsibilities towards the family facilitated them to gradually quit this job, by reducing anxiety about not being able to do so. In contrast, three women described how a lack of parental support after she quit her job led to her return to the profession in the past:

*"I assumed that if everyone in my family helped one another, everything would be good, but things did not go as planned. My mother began griping that because I didn't go to work, my family didn't have enough money. I so made the decision to go back to Vinh Phuc and keep working there."* – a 38-year-old woman.

*"They can only depend on me out of the entire family. I need to put money away so that my son*

*can attend school. I returned home to look for another chance, but there wasn't much to do. I therefore worked for an additional year before I decided to retire.*" – a 32-year-old woman.

Most women view debt as a significant financial barrier that keeps them from quitting sex work. Many women end up in significant debt. Twelve women reported that they had at least once considered leaving their jobs but were unable to do so due to debt. In order to pay off their debt, women who work as prostitutes frequently take advance withdrawals from their parents' paychecks.

Debts and financial commitments incurred by women are not always necessary for survival. One of the main reasons many women start and remain in the sex industry is the strong desire to become financially successful. The possession of a home, automobile, electrical device, or jewelry is used to determine if someone is deemed to be materially successful. Prostitution, despite its numerous drawbacks, offers a way of life where "*women may eat anything they want*," according to former and current sex workers.

Some women commented that prostitution helps them to know what it's like to live a luxurious lifestyle and buy expensive goods that they can only afford as a prostitute. These women earn between \$750 and \$1000 per month. Some say that they once went back to prostitution for "*money*", "*comfort*", "*enjoy life*", etc.

*"When I started, I made \$50 a day. It was the largest amount I had back then. I freely spend, buy gifts, live a luxurious lifestyle, and show off to friends. I give up my hair and country style. When you have earned a decent amount. I quit my job. But, you know, I might have some money to spend at first but it's going to be scarce later on. After that, I could not bear to live as poor and frugal as before. I could not get a job and thought why suffer this branch of poverty. And I went back to being a prostitute."* – a 31-year-old woman.

Some other women said they were also burdened financially by their family circumstances and wanted to return to their profession, but their relatives prevented them. Some women said they exited the sex industry because the husband was able to financially support the family or he asked them to leave or not return to prostitution. One woman recounted how she tried to convince her husband to let her go back to work to help the family through the economic hardship.

*"But he would not let me, and said if we can not live at home and raise our children, die together."* – a 27-year-old woman.

For another group (about 15 people), the fear of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (primarily HIV) was the main reason they gave up working as sex workers. Most of these individuals have witnessed cases of other sex workers with incurable HIV infection. Since then, they realized the risks of this job, worried about their future and their lives, so they gave up the sex industry to find another job. Others are aware of the problem from family or other audiences (friends, media, etc.). Others are motivated by the teaching and advice of government officials about reducing the risk of HIV infection. Some claimed their motivations included peer pressure, the humiliation or stigmatization they and their families felt, the challenges they faced as sex

workers, and worries about their children.

Most of the women interviewed did not deny that prostitution brought some benefit to their lives. It must be emphasized that these are objective opinions about prostitution when standing from their point of view, the perspective has not compared to the negative sides of prostitution. Because most of these individuals have exited this job and returned to the life of a worker in industrial zones. All believe that a woman can quit prostitution if she has a strong will, no matter how attractive the financial or lifestyle benefits of prostitution. One woman said of other women who could not let go: *"They're not serious about it. If they think their life is too difficult, they do not have enough to live, then they will not have enough; they will not know how to be thrifty and buy more things."* – a 39-year-old woman.

#### **4.2. Psychological barriers of Former Sex Workers in the current working environment**

The interview results show that all the interviewees have or are experiencing pressure and anxiety at the new workplace. The issue discussed here is that their ability to integrate into the community at work is limited. 49 (out of 56) interviewees said they felt lost and had difficulty connecting with current colleagues. In which, more than 30% (15 people) said that they hide their past for fear of being stigmatized and discussed. This stems from self-doubt and the perception that prostitution is a shameful and socially rejected job. Most of them feel ashamed, worthless or overwhelmed with anguish. Regarded as 'prostitutes', they consider themselves inferior to others. When asked to think about himself, one worker replied:

*"I feel so bad, I am so tired, and I am always full of emotions."* – a 24-year-old woman.

Self-imposed psychological barriers (or internalizing stigma) was common to most of the interviewees. They are afraid of meeting strangers, meeting colleagues. Therefore, they limit their presence as much as possible, separating themselves from the community. Some people think that no one will want to be friends with them or interact with them. They do not even try to bond or make a relationship at work.

*"When I go out, even while working at the factory, I wear a face covering. I do not want people to see and remember my face. I just want to finish work quickly and leave."* – a 26-year-old woman.

*"People would not want to be friends with a former prostitute. If they take the initiative to start a conversation, it is because they are curious and want to know about our past."* – a 22-year-old woman.

Several other individuals said they were talked about behind their backs when their past as a prostitute was revealed. A few others said that the people around them discriminated against them and saw them as an inferior part of society. Stigma and discriminatory acts are mentioned at a level from vague to heavy, or due to the subject's sensitive psychology and low self-esteem, they should be pushed to a more serious level. *"When my past work as a prostitute was discovered by my colleagues, I felt like all eyes were on me. And the whispers of conversation went straight to*

*my brain. There may be only a few words in and out, but I'm really scared."* – a 24-year-old woman.

Some said they encountered some negative attitudes and some mild violence because of their involvement in the sex industry. *"A man came up to me and asked me 'how much a night' and I felt really humiliated."* – a 23-year-old woman.

Others said they were judged as playing women, disobeying stereotypes, destroying families and other people's happiness. Some people even said they were shunned because of suspicions related to the use of banned substances such as drugs, HIV infection and being considered a dangerous criminal.

*"They see me as a spoiled, mediocre materialistic girl who likes to enjoy. Even though I spent a year in the re-education camp, some people still consider me to have 'dirty' blood in me, which cannot be recovered."* – a 29-year-old woman.

*"A woman, who shared a room with me in a dormitory for female workers, told me to rent out accommodation to ensure everyone's safety, because people like me have a high chance of contracting HIV. I have no right to object, even though I have transparent medical examination papers, it makes me really desperate. There is no place to accept us."* – a 37-year-old woman.

In short, women who have worked as prostitutes are always worried about society's judgment and view of them. They feel that stigma has affected their lives, especially their mental health and life chances. Due to stigma and discrimination, most of these subjects accept the condemnation of society, leading to self-isolation, surrender, not participating in collective activities, refusal to use social services, have barriers in accessing intervention services or support from the government. The common point of these subjects is that they are afraid and timid. They believe that people always have a stigma about prostitutes and think that this past is their own weakness. The isolation from the community and the working environment makes them feel lonely and lost. Some individuals had intended to return to their previous profession but were dissuaded by their families. Some women say they feel guilty all the time, but also feel hopeless and increasingly needy. Although not using banned substances, 18 out of 56 interviewees said that they are still using stimulants on a regular basis (alcohol, beer and tobacco) every day to relieve pressure and think about people around, about the purpose of life. The inferiority complex makes it difficult for them to integrate, not have the opportunity to express and develop themselves.

*"I am often silent in conversations, even when I am mistakenly blamed by my boss, I do not dare to speak up. Just quietly work, finish the day and go home, that's all."* – a 28-year-old woman.

Because of the guilt of stigma and the tendency to minimize and downplay their own importance, most people who have worked as prostitutes do not dare to seek help when they are treated unfairly. From their own jobs is a barrier that prevents them from using their right to protection from the law and the right to mental health care when necessary.

*"I was robbed in my boarding house once, but I never told anyone about it. Will anyone help me*

*or will they assume that I staged everything to make a profit.” – a 31-year-old woman.*

*“There was a time when I was under tremendous pressure. I can not sleep, I'm afraid to go out and be seen by others. I was startled by whispers that were not about me. But I do not want to seek psychological counseling services. I'm afraid they'll say 'we do not have time for people like you'.” – a 28-year-old woman.*

In summary, the interview results show that almost every former sex worker has difficulty in integrating in the current workplace. These difficulties stem from the prejudice and stigma that society (workers, factory owners at work) is applying to them. Although they have returned their salary, choosing to leave the sex industry, many people do not accept and trust them. Former sex workers face difficulties in self-expression, a feeling of being left out and not having the opportunity to express themselves. Psychological obstacles can also be rooted in themselves, possibly due to family rejection or a history of unjust treatment that causes them to acknowledge social stigma, disregard themselves and others, do not dare to claim their rights. Insecurity, low self-esteem and fear of communication cause many people to have health and psychological problems, but they do not accept treatment as punishment for past sins. They, former sex workers, married or unmarried, have decided to leave the sex industry to rebuild their lives but they still can not let go of the past because of prejudices.

#### **4.3. Former Sex Workers' wishes in their current job**

Talking about the current job, many people express their luck and gratitude to receive a job that helps them earn an income, not having to go around every night to sell themselves for a living. “Even though my current income is not as good as before, I feel that my mind is much more peaceful.”

*“I met a man who accepted his past. He sympathized with me, did not put money pressure on me. So in general, I am quite satisfied with my current life.” – a 28-year-old woman.*

Although the current job is one of the proofs of return, most of the interviewees said that they find it very difficult, both financially and in the ability to integrate and access common services. Some individuals (mostly young women, under 30 years old) feel lost, disconnected from their current job and have thoughts of changing jobs. One case said that they needed more dedicated guidance and better direction for their life, or at least in their current job instead of coming to work like a machine and leaving. With these individuals, due to their young age, when they leave the sex industry, they are still confused and do not have a strong determination to live their present life. They are people who have had thoughts of returning to the old way because they feel lonely and uncertain about the future.

*“I need a guide. When I was still in that job, I met a mentor. I was ignorant of values and ethics before. You know, she taught me and slowly took me out of that place. But now I feel lost in this place (industrial area) with no friends or sisters or anyone who can tell me how to move on. Every day works like a machine and the salary is not enough to support the family.” – a 32-year-old woman.*

Others said they want to get more promotion opportunities in the future but have limited qualifications. Despite knowing that there were still open possibilities for unskilled work, study participants claimed that their lack of education hampered their employment opportunities.

*“I want to study design. I have a lot of ideas in my head because in the past I met a lot of people with many luxurious and unique outfits. I feel passionate about it. But here I can only do chores like thread trimming or chalking.”* – a 34-year-old woman.

Talking about credit support packages sponsored by the state for former sex workers who have been repaid, more than 60% of the participants said that they did not think about applying for consideration. They feel that applying for a credit under this category is a way to reveal their past to others, or because they are inconvenient with the attitude of the procedure staff, they do not actively apply. In this regard, some people think that authorities should consider a more discreet option for former prostitutes because they want to keep their past hidden from as many people as possible.

*“I know there are government support packages that give us business loans with special incentives. But because of embarrassment to the neighbors and did not dare to go to the ward to declare to the person who did the procedures, they were all villagers anyway, so I did not sign up.”* – a 27-year-old woman.

Others emphasized the prejudices that current society is placing on those who have returned from prostitution. They find it difficult to integrate in the current environment. They want to be more understanding and able to integrate with the current group. This is the voice of the hearts of almost all the interviewees.

*“Does anyone think we are also human beings with feelings, with grief, with self-respect, with yearning and receiving love and protection? We need to be protected by the fairness of the law and human love. Deep in our hearts we are women who want to give their strength to take care of their parents and children. In my dreams, I longed for respect. Do not extinguish the dream of returning to a peaceful home, living in a social community full of love. Please give us a chance to return!”* – a 25-year-old woman.

*“I want to remake my life. I want to be a mother who does not embarrass her children when talking to their friends. I want to join groups and work together, talk and laugh with colleagues without being talked about. I fell before difficulties and then fell on a bad path. But now that I have awakened, I want a normal life.”* – a 43-year-old woman.

In summary, the workers who worked as prostitutes in the interviews all had a desire to rebuild their lives, to live and have the opportunity to express themselves, to integrate into society and the working environment. Their desires are largely the desire of society to remove the stigma about those who have failed to enter the sex industry. Next is the desire to improve my labor skills to have more opportunities at work and have better financial ability. Others said they need better direction in their lives, want a mentor or understanding and guidance in the working environment. Others aspire to have more discreet access to state support policies, to be more

receptive to social services such as health and education, or to learn how to communicate and handle problems.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1. Discussion**

Based on the survey results obtained, most women who have worked as prostitutes feel ashamed about their past. Although there is still a part that sees the positive side including economic benefits and thinks that prostitution is a genuine job. However, concerns about health and related social problems including: HIV, drugs, narcotics, human trafficking, abuse and intimate partner violence lead to early retirement of sex workers. However, the low level of education makes it difficult for former sex workers to find new jobs. Although they have access to common jobs, they often want to be trained to have a stable and long-term job instead of being exhausted from working in industrial zones with low wages. Besides, psychological barriers always cling to former sex workers even when they have new jobs. This makes the integration with the working environment as well as the attachment to the work of these former sex workers become loose. Social stereotypes about gender and ethical standards, especially in the traditional Asian society in Vietnam, make the guilt of former sex workers increase. They fear the judgment and stigma from society about their past as a prostitute. If their past as a prostitute is revealed, former sex workers may even face the risk of losing their job or having to endure pressure from their superiors and colleagues. This makes the guilt and lostness in the working environment deeper and deeper. It's time for society to take a more open look and help prostitutes get their money back. In Vietnam prostitution is illegal, the government always tries to propagate and minimize this behavior because of the serious consequences it brings such as: social evils, the risk of becoming a victim of trafficking people, violence and moral decadence. To eliminate this behavior, policies to support former sex workers to reintegrate into the community, have stable jobs and receive certain sympathy from society are extremely necessary. Thereby helping former sex workers improve their determination to leave the prostitution industry and minimize the possibility of returning to their old profession. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs has set a phased goal to eliminate prostitution, including job support and training for former sex workers after they retire. However, the number of former sex workers who can access these policies is still very limited due to cumbersome administrative procedures and the low self-esteem of the girls who used to work as sex workers.

### **5.2. Solutions**

#### **The group of solutions to reduce the stigma of former sex workers**

- Strengthen communication to raise awareness, reduce stigma for all levels, sectors, families and communities
- Capacity building for officials in charge of state management of sex work, especially in accessing different experiences in supporting groups of former sex workers.

- Implement harm prevention and reduction activities, reduce discrimination, support the development of other livelihood activities for former sex workers.
- To help former sex workers develop other livelihood activities effectively, the government should strengthen helping them learn vocational skills and improve their ability to access capital and reintegrate into the community.
- To create conditions for former sex workers to have easy access to services for prevention of transmission and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Provide a number of social services for former sex workers, such as providing information, improving understanding to reduce harm, and improving knowledge of law and health care.
- Strengthening skills to deal with the community's stigma against former sex workers.

### **The group of solutions to help former sex workers reintegrate into the community**

- Develop policies to support vocational training and job creation: From 2016 up to now, the Vietnamese government has set an orientation in the prevention of prostitution towards ensuring the human rights of former sex workers, ensuring equal rights in accessing and using social services by former sex workers and encouraging the participation of social partners. To meet that goal, social centers need to organize vocational training in combination with production workers suitable to the abilities of sex workers, helping them to improve their daily life and improve their capacity to reproduce. community integration. As a result, sex workers who need assistance in vocational training or job placement are supported according to general policies. In fact, some non-profit organizations, NGOs and some other organizations also have a number of programs to support vocational training and job placement for sex workers, but on a small scale and only concentrated in women. some big cities such as Ho Chi Minh (supporting hair training of Lo'real Company). There needs to be a connection and mutual support between these units and local government agencies to be able to replicate these vocational training programs to more localities and more subjects.

- **Improve the health care support policy:** Former sex workers have suffered from severe physical and psychological trauma, and they are also susceptible to dangerous sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV. Therefore, a policy framework supports former sex workers to have access to health programs for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, reducing injuries during sex work as well as Psychological counseling, comfort and encouragement for former sex workers to rebuild their lives after leaving prostitution. Some specific solutions such as: Communication on HIV/AIDS prevention and control; Distributing harm reduction items such as condoms and syringes; Sending former sex workers to use sexually transmitted disease treatment services, HIV testing counseling services and free ARV treatment, etc. It can be said that this is one of the important policies , received the attention of not only the Government to intervene, prevent and reduce harm, but also received much attention from the former sex workers themselves to protect their own health as well as that of others.



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