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Prostitution, Sex Work, Transmitted Disease and Regulation: A Global Analysis

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Introduction

Prostitution:

Prostitution, formally said to be “sex workers who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services” is often called the world’s oldest profession. However, despite this statement, the world has yet to figure out the best way to regulate the act of prostitution. For years, different countries around the world have tried different ways of regulation. Some countries, such as Amsterdam have opted for making it legal in order to tax it and better regulate it. Other countries, such as America, have chosen to criminalize the act making it illegal throughout the country. Regardless of how each country deals with prostitution, one fact is certain, prostitution is going to happen. Although experts argue on the best way to deal with prostitution, they all agree that when it is not regulated, many of the problems associated with prostitution, such as health risks and legal issues, are exacerbated.

Transmitted Diseases:

Since every country has prostitution, despite acts of regulation or non-regulation, every country must deal with the abundance of problems the job brings. The biggest problem, health wise, is the spread of infectious diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. Sex workers are extremely high risk for these diseases due to the large number of sex workers, the unsafe working conditions, the neglect of condom use, the social marginalization and often criminalized work environments and alcohol, drug use and violence in the workplace. With over 13 million people in this industry, and an estimated sex trade revenue of 186 billion worldwide, this is a serious problem. Countries have tried different ways of preventing the spreads of these diseases, and different ways of trying to make the industry safer for the workers. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the profession, its continues to be difficult to track whether certain interventions, laws, penalizations or regulations are effective at reducing the number of people who have and spread these diseases to not only people in the industry, but clients on the outside, as well.

Regulation

As said above, dealing with the issues prostitution presents as an industry is difficult to combat due to many setbacks and obstacles that must be faced. Regulation wise, this industry is very hard to track. Even with laws, and penalizations, the industry can still act in a way that is hard for law enforcement to stop. Still, to this day, it is unclear, whom to penalize, what to legalize, what to enforce and what regulations to put in place because there is no clear goal, across the countries, of what everyone want’s the prostitution market to look like. Also, the industry has been a certain way for such a long time; it’s difficult to try and go in and change the dynamics and the way the industry operates. Health speaking, it is hard to prevent these diseases from being spread; due to location, the environment and the people involved, it is hard to get resources to the sex workers. Coinciding, due the factors named above, it will be impossible to treat, screen or help every worker, making it difficult to find complete success. Lastly, new programs and health and clinical services will help the sex workers, but the people who run these industries may not be as cooperative in letting the workers gain more power as they may see it as a threat to the profitability of their businesses.

Country Overview

China:

Unlike in Thailand and other countries, sex work is only sometimes found on a street or at places such as parks. Also, when it comes to the biggest health risks associated with the sex work, STD’s are much more of the problem than HIV/AIDS. However, the HIV/AIDS rates are beginning to increase across the country as well as the sheer number of sex workers in the markets. It is believed there are over 4.5 million sex workers in China, with more every year as men and women move from rural to urban areas to live and work. The most prevalent STI’s among female sex workers in China are chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis. Although condom promotion has been tried to some degree, condom usage remains low throughout the country, leading to the continuing spread of these diseases.

Thailand:

The basis of this program was to “monopolize sex work in such a way that all sex services required condom use.” In this program, every sex establishment in this certain province of Thailand was required to follow the rule, “no condom, no sex.” This rule would strictly mean that every client would have to follow this rule. Not only did it reduce sexually transmitted diseases throughout the country, but it became rare to see a woman with a disease in a sex establishment.

India:

In India, over 76 percent of detected HIV infections are caused by heterosexual sex. For this reason, India has a large HIV/AIDS epidemic that has been shown to be largely caused by the sex work industry. Around the world and in India specifically, sex workers act as points of entry for diseases into the general population by infecting men who then pass on the disease to their wives and their other sexual partners. The sex industry is extremely large and prominent and therefore the sex workers have many clients and partners, in addition to a high prevalence of other STD’s that can increase the risk for HIV infection. In India, contrasting Thailand and China and other more developed countries, the reason behind low condom usage is due in part to men having a stronger preference against them due to culture. This is shown by the fact that only 7 percent of regular sex partners use condoms on a regular basis. However, unlike the previous countries discussed, sex workers do not use condoms for one main reason, they face losing a considerable amount of money by doing so.

Rao, Vijayendra . "Sex workers and the cost of safe sex: the compensating differential for condom use among Calcutta prostitutes ." Journal of Development Economics : n. pag. Web. 24 Apr. 2014.

Latin America

Unlike the other countries mentioned, sex work is legal in Latin America and so sex workers are monitored by law enforcement and regulation to use condoms and to stop the spread of diseases. To be a sex worker in Latin American countries, one must have a health license that requires frequent STI and HIV/AIDS tests as well as medical check ups. The police regularly enforce and check these licenses that are paid for by the sex workers themselves. The fine costs between 20-50 dollars and increases with repeat offenses. Enough repeat offenses can also lead to short jail time. Due to this, enforcement of health regulation could have the unintended consequence of encouraging sex workers to move underground where regulations are ignored which means the behavior is more risky. So, because regulation is costly to sex workers and because their clients are willing to pay more for non-condom sex, enforcement could actually cause more risky behavior, causing sex workers to work in back alley’s and underground where diseases are more rampant.

Results

China

China also saw a decrease in their STI’s, mainly gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydia. This was due to the 100 percent condom usage program, education and health services. Also, due to the way that China runs its sex work industry, more brothel based and less street based, it is easier to regulate, track and get resources to the sex workers. By helping them treat their current issues, teaching them about these diseases, and enforcing condom usage, China’s sex workers did not just see a decrease in their disease prevalence. They were more educated, much more self reliant, and continued to educate themselves and seek help even after the program was implemented.

Thailand

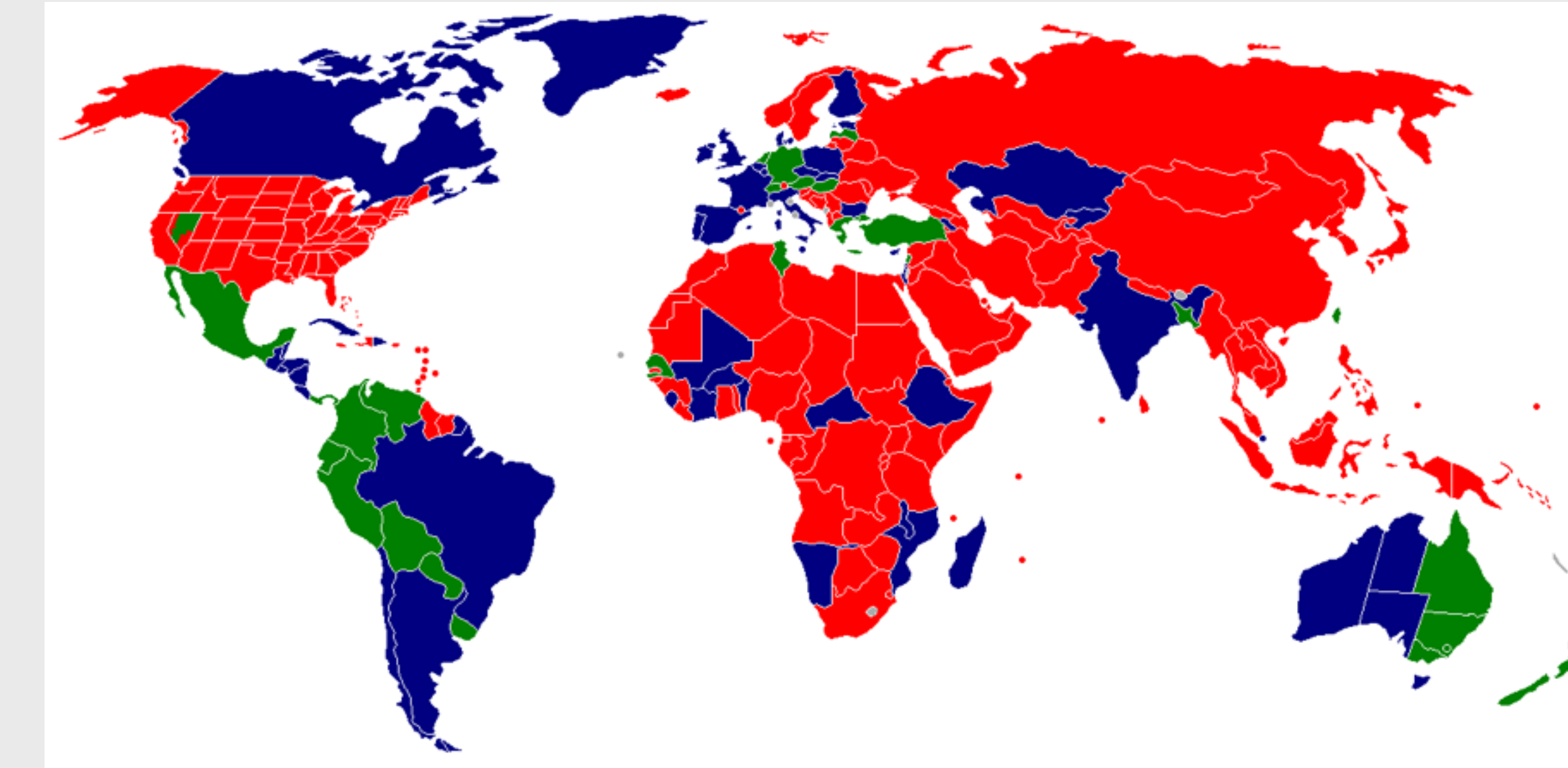
Thailand is the biggest success story and saw large decreases in their STI rates, and their HIV/AIDS rates due to the increased condom usage, which is especially important due to the epidemic present in this country. This resulted from enforcement at all levels; the authorities would threaten to shut down the establishment if they did not follow the rules. It stemmed from education to all sex workers about the transmission of these sexual diseases, what they do, and how to prevent them and how to treat them. The sex workers who already had diseases had the opportunity to seek treatment, something foreign to them as they usually could never afford it or would be scared to do.

India

India’s condom usage was the lowest out of these countries which was directly seen in the STI rates. India’s sex work industry had one main problem, the cost of safe sex. Sex workers would lose more than half their wage if they insisted on sex with condoms, money most sex workers couldn’t live without due to the way the sex industry is ran. The sex workers work in brothels and if they upset their clients or refuse, they could be put out on the street. However, when condom usage was sanctioned by the government, the sex workers and the clients were educated on the diseases and the dangers they bring, and prices for both types of sex became closer, STI rates fell.

Latin America

Latin America was different than the previous countries as they targeted their diseases mostly through regulation and enforcement; sex work is legal in these countries and therefore this is a possible approach. Based on the two types of sex work, brothel based and street based, it was found that enforcement in the street sector decreased STI rates, increased condom usage and moved more women into the brothel sector which had much less risky sexual behavior. Police visits to the brothel sector had some unwanted effects however by causing some women who were unlicensed, something required in the industry here, to move to the street sector.



Legal status of prostitution worldwide

Conclusions

Some countries that have seen success through different programs and regulations are Thailand, China, India and Latin America. All the countries in Asia started a similar program called the 100 percent condom usage program. This program entails authorities and sex establishments working together to ensure that all clients and sex workers use condoms every time a transaction occurs. A large reason the sex work industry is so disease ridden is due to the low condom usage; diseases are easily entered into the networks and then further spread around by the sex workers and by the clients. It was found that in almost every case in these countries, increased condom usage directly correlated to lower STI rates. Many clients would choose non-condom sex and would therefore pay more for it, a main reason why many sex workers are willing to have sex this way. Also, many women do not know the dangers of STI’s and HIV/AIDS because of their low knowledge on the topic and low education overall. Other reasons women will have non-condom sex range from thinking they can trust the client, thinking they can rid themselves of any disease through inadequate ways, pressure from their owner, and fear that they may be shunned, creating the image they do have a disease.