

THE HEALING RELATIONSHIP FOR WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION

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Abstract

The prostitution phenomenon in Lithuania is related mainly to the issues of morality and free choice. From the existential approach, prostitution means the human existence of persons in prostitution appearing primarily as a highly narrowed realisation of the potential communication and relationship with others. A person who has experienced trauma like an act of prostitution becomes detached from his or her experiences. His or her emotions, then, become unrecognised, unacknowledged or unexpressed. Understood existentially, it is necessary for this person to search for who he or she is to fully experience his or her emotions in any life occurrence. This article is built on a study of the personal experiences of fifteen women working in prostitution, applying an existential approach through a heuristic research strategy. The study focused on obstacles the women faced growing up, on choices they made while deciding whether to disengage from prostitution or not and on the help they sought after being dehumanised and turned into objects for the sexual satisfaction of others. Our results indicate that women in prostitution do not outwardly reflect the emotions they experience and have trouble sensing themselves as they are. Further, the study showed how women in prostitution were unable to seek help without aid actively given by others. Meeting with help giver, and the quality of these meetings (establishing a trustworthy space), was crucial. In these supportive relationships, women working in prostitution developed their individuality, the key to their human existence.

Keywords: women working in prostitution, personal experiences, relationship, healing meeting, heuristic research.

Introduction

The issues regarding women working in prostitution and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation often gain significance only as a problem. Lithuanian society considers prostitution and women working in prostitution via two frameworks: morality and free choice. Therefore, reactions to prostitution or

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women working in prostitution constitute a mixed social response, including an insistence on punishment, apathy and an effort to control these women. This research is based on both practical and academic experience. The first author has six years of experience providing psychosocial services to victims of prostitution as well as victims of sexual trafficking. In 2012, she finished her doctoral dissertation at the University of Lapland, Finland, in which she gathered empirical data about prostitution in Lithuania from several sources, including fifteen open interviews with women working in prostitution.³ The second author is an expert in existential-phenomenological methodology and served as the first author's thesis supervisor.

Generally, common problem-oriented discussions on these women's individualities, their experiences and the complexity of their situations are brushed aside; a human being, in this case a woman working in prostitution, is overlooked. This means that getting to know the women and their experiences is also brushed aside. Thus, a more profound understanding and the associated more effective resolutions to their essential problems are blocked out as well.

The conventional dichotomy of thinking about how a woman becomes a prostitute and the associated dominance of negative orientation are exemplified by the much-used categorisations of being "different", of having "lower intellect", of being "second-rate", of being in prostitution by her "own choice" and of "accepting her way of life". Such labelling is disturbing, but simultaneously, it inspires and encourages careful analysis of these women's personal experiences to understand their specific life patterns and to pursue answers regarding their goals in life. In practice, help to victims of prostitution and human trafficking is insufficient and encounters various obstacles worldwide.

The purpose of this study is not to deliberate the phenomenon of prostitution, but to examine these women's, who are existentially situated or have been situated in prostitution, experiences. When any effort is made to help victimised persons, the task is to grasp from where they can be 'found'. In other words, according to Kierkegaard, whenever there is a desire to actually take someone to a pre-defined place, the person has to be found where they are and then begin the journey from that place.⁴ Therefore, to help women in prostitution, their experiences have to be discovered from the ground up by setting aside their covert personal and public masks. This gives us the chance to become familiar with their personal experiences and life actualities.

³ D. Puidokiene: *Covert Codes of Women in Prostitution: Pathways for Recording Roots After Trauma Interference*, Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis; 246. Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press 2012.

⁴ S. Kierkegaard: *Požiūrio taškas į mano autorinę veiklą*, trans. by J.Q. Pons. Vilnius: Baltos lankos 2006, 64.

Being a woman working in prostitution

The personal experiences of women in prostitution reveal their internal and external struggles in their efforts to overcome prostitution. The anxiety of loneliness causes disassociation from themselves as feeling, conscious people. Other obstacles include the consequences from the lack of self-confidence in their own abilities, experiencing violence, an inappropriate upbringing (in the women's own words), disappointments in personal relationships, hopelessness regarding future prospects, stigma about their occupation and not having anyone to talk about their difficulties.

All of these obstacles kept the women stuck right where they were. Herman notices that people who have experienced traumatic events are often independently motivated to talk about this in the hopes that opening up will give their suffering meaning and dignity.⁵ It is true that these women were inclined to talk about their lives; however, they had trouble finding sincere 'listeners' who were prepared to accept the women as they were without preconceptions or judgment. The women frequently encountered others' negative views toward them and their unwillingness to listen to them. It was when people the women were close to had these perspectives that the women felt the most hurt. Moreover, the women took the blaming, the lack of attention, the deception, or those taking advantage of their existing situations as indicators that they should continue working as prostitutes. Thus, in many cases, the women made incorrect decisions because of their subjective (mis)interpretations.

The women suffered greatly from the lack of close relationships and the related shortage of support and understanding (or simply people's harsh rejection). Some of the women cited difficult economic conditions – not having a place to live or a means of making money – as obstacles to change. Further, not having information about where to get help limited the opportunity for change. The interviews with the women about their actual personal relationships confirmed one universal human truth: everyone needs someone to stand by them. It became evident that the women were inclined to talk about these painful experiences even when they claimed they did not want to. Kast tells how important it is for a person to experience identity, to express him or herself, to be an active agent in his or her life, to feel capable, to have an impact on someone and to have the desire to imagine and make these imaginings explicit to others.⁶ All of these factors were relevant to the women's experiences.

The analysis of their childhood and adolescent life experiences revealed that what the women especially missed was the discovery and reinforcement of their own 'I' (establishing a sense of autonomy and the ability for self-expression). Consequently, the search for identity con-

⁵ J.L. Herman: *Trauma and Recovery*, New York: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group 1997, 239.

⁶ V. Kast: *Atsisveikinimas su aukos vaidmeniu: gyventi savo gyvenimą*, trans. by T.D. Šniūrevičienė, Vilnius: Dialogo kultūros institutas 2002.

tinued later into their lives, manifesting itself as an effort to have an impact on someone in order to understand themselves more clearly.

Pieper and Pieper assert that people who acquire 'inner unhappiness' in childhood may subconsciously foster an illusion in adulthood about their ability to control and govern everything. Such individuals may attach their need for inner security to various symbols as they seek inner well-being and defend their own essence.⁷ The women who participated in this research obviously felt an inner urge to talk; above all, it was critical to them to be listened to and to be heard, to be 'seen', and even more, to be understood and accepted. In these conversations, they explored their identities and seemingly confirmed their meaningfulness, which was often lacking in their other relationships both past and present.

It was this urge that caused several participants, such as Zita, to admit that for a long time, she had wanted "to put all the wrongs done to me into words to someone". Vilé's words attested to her sense of suffering: "There was nobody who could offer advice or some sort of support back then. Nobody was there. You're alone so you do the best you know how". Living through such isolation from others creates conditions of aloneness or the anxiety of loneliness. Vilé's phrases clearly showed the total absence of close 'human contact' in her life. It became obvious that Vilé's current state reflected her earlier experiences about her neglected need for a close, intimate contact offering gentleness, care, concern and security.

Odetta expressed her anxiety and loneliness as a strong disappointment in people in general by shouting, 'PEOPLE, WHERE WERE ALL OF YOU WHEN I DIDN'T WANT TO LIVE ANY LONGER? When I hit bottom, when I NEEDED YOU SO MUCH! Where, where, where, where?' Meanwhile, Milda, who grew up in a foster home, described feeling lonely or being alone by encountering a comprehensive lack of support: "Nobody helps, you've got nothing, no relatives, no parents, nothing. Nobody will bring you anything, nobody will give you anything, nobody will help, you've got to go yourself". When Milda felt unloved, unneeded and devalued, there were several strategies available for her to adjust to life: superficiality, insincerity, aggressiveness, anger and thirst for revenge. Similar harmful actions are seen in Zita's outbursts toward men as a response to her past painful experiences: 'I don't have anything more to lose, I'm already sick. And I got infected. So I'm going to get even the same way. I hate men, they're perverted creatures. And if I infect somebody, it means I'm getting even for that, what they did to me'. Perhaps Zita was hiding her feelings of alienation, hopelessness and anxiety of loneliness behind these aggressive expressions. In our view, Moustakas is right when explaining that distancing from the self and

⁷ M. Pieper Heineman, W.J. Pieper: *Smart Love*, Massachusetts, Boston: The Harvard Common Press 1999.

self-denial may initiate feelings of loneliness, which is expressed as an undefined and disconcerting anxiety.⁸

The women's past personal experiences are clearly associated with the corresponding experiences in their later lives: the absence of close contacts, searching for caring attention and relationships that did not respond to their needs. Making new appropriate choices in life is a fragile task for these women because their past experiences remind them of how people responded to them in relationships. Even now, as adults, the women react to offers of help very sensitively and carefully. As one woman said, 'It's very important how and who is giving it'.

Thus, when the women worked as prostitutes and experienced various negative and depressing feelings – fear, guilt and inner hardship – they felt the desire to tell somebody about it. Julia stated, "There were times when I so wanted to do something like shout, something like pour out everything, that's inside... Mostly I wanted to talk to someone who would understand me, understand what it is, how I feel and there was something inside that I must tell him, after all he is my brother". Nonetheless, along with their desire to tell, they also felt doubt and great fear. Julia continued, "To talk about it realistically, what there was, it was tremendous fear". The women did not know, and could not be sure, if they would be understood or listened to. In Julia's experience, "I didn't know if anyone would understand me..." and "I wanted to, but I was scared".

It was central to the women not to be condemned or judged. They were desperate to sense acceptance and understanding in place of misunderstandings or arguments. Therefore, others' opinions and their outlooks on the women were significant. Irma stated: "The opinion of someone else was important to me ... that I had not done anything bad". She wanted their opinions to refute her own self-accusations and her own negative view of herself. This was similar for Evelina, who stated, 'I felt somehow different'. To her, it seemed that every person knew everything about her, that they "see, know, that, well, they could tell a lot about me. People have a poor opinion of me: that I'm bad".

As the researchers, we found it meaningful that in several of the research participants' case (Bronè, Diana, Kotryna, Toma and Zita), even though they are "already prostitutes inside", are used to what they are and will continue to work as prostitutes, it was possible to sense their hope and yearning for different lives. The women's beliefs, like "it could be even worse", displayed their dissatisfaction with what they had to experience and what they do today. However, one woman asked, "Who can help?"; concretely indicating the ambivalence between having the courage for change and the orientation to give the responsibility to others.

It appeared that all fifteen research participants, except Algè, drank alcohol, and only three of them – Algè, Renata and Irma – did not use drugs. We interpret this as follows: alcohol and narcotics were a means of

⁸ C.E. Moustakas: *Loneliness*, N. J., Englewood Cliffs: A Spectrum Book, Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1961.

temporary relief from their traumatic experiences. Five women (Bronė, Diana, Kotryna, Toma and Zita) were dependent on alcohol, narcotics or both. Two of the five, Toma and Zita, had AIDS. Our impression was that some of them denied their substance dependency. Six women (Bronė, Milda, Odeta, Vilė, Julia and Renata) had attempted suicide. It seems that, contrary to what they believed, using drugs and alcohol had complicated their existence even more.

Meeting help givers

Koestenbaum and Block state that human relationships can have a healing effect.⁹ Meanwhile, as we perceive it, self-help generally based on interpretative presuppositions and general inauthentic know-how only helps sporadically. Kępiński claims the “best medicine from the growing wave of psychological traumas in our society is not a legal code but rather greater responsibility for our outlook on another person”.¹⁰ Obviously, these women found it equally valuable to experience help givers’ positive, supportive and strengthening views toward them with sincere and unselfish motivations to help them.

For example, Irma told one such help giver about her relationship with her brother and her work experience at the striptease club. Irma intently watched the help giver’s reactions (facial expressions and body language); Irma listened intently to the language the help giver used and the questions she asked. The help giver sensed how important her reactions were to Irma while using terms like “not normal”, ‘unacceptable’ and ‘impossible’. Her overall experience was that Irma was actively observing whether she accepted Irma with understanding or whether she judged and condemned Irma. Several times, Irma repeated how “The outlook of people always scares me”. The help giver realised that the close relationship she had formed with Irma during an earlier meeting allowed Irma to disclose details about herself. In the previous meeting, the help giver had not been judgemental regarding what had happened to Irma or Irma’s current situation; further, the help giver expressed empathy during their conversation. This provided the potential for self-confidence, because, in Irma’s words, “It’s important, the opinion of others is very important”. Thus, treating Irma with understanding and acceptance was “kind of a little push forward”. This type of positive interaction may strengthen the women’s self-confidence, which can be applied to their relationships with new people.

While discussing dialogic associations between people and the depth of the “I-You” relation, Buber notes that these are not the sole associations. He describes the phenomenon as people having respect for one another, for their mutuality; they turn to face and experience

⁹ P. Koestenbaum, P. Block: *Freedom and Accountability at Work: Applying Philosophic Insight to the Real World*, CA, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, A Wiley Company 2001.

¹⁰ A. Kępiński: *Gyvenimo ritmas*, trans. by K.A. Antanavičius, Vilnius: Vaga 2008, 207.

one another, and consequently, “a responsive and trusting echo from another manifests”¹¹

Thus, we perceived that for these women, the experience of a true relationship was “healing through meeting”, as Morgan-Williams calls it.¹² This was implied in Irma’s experience of close relationships when she received help: she felt she had discovered something that had been missing since her childhood. Irma stated: ‘Actually, there wasn’t even any desire to leave the centre. In the beginning, when I had just arrived, there was fear, now there isn’t any, now I feel that I’ve got a new family’. Milda also spoke openly about the authenticity of a person she met. Milda had not known anybody like this while she worked as a prostitute, when she was using narcotics, or even early in her life. Milda explained that ‘At first, the centre’s workers seemed strict to me, we started talking entirely like that, well, but later I noticed some sort of trueness’. Diana admitted she could learn from the way the help giver contacted her: “...I liked learning the way they interacted... I paid heed to certain words of theirs, in and of itself, what they said”.

In a meeting with help givers, an opportunity arose for the women to form human relationships that were different than those they had previously known. This offered them the chance to get to know themselves and their unique qualities in a new way. As Tyson McCrea and Bulanda conclude, matters that lay dormant and unexpressed in words, and being unclear as they are, become explainable and even obvious through dialogic relationships.¹³ The women’s experiences attested that the value of meeting others, in this case the help givers was twofold: the quality of the relationship and the increase in their personal consciousness regarding what they were doing. Irma explains this well: “Giving that, this kind of first ... step in understanding, why I’m dancing over there, was really a very great deal. It was a kind of support, so to me it was just ugh, when I left”. She continued, “After those talks I also tried more to help myself”. The meetings aimed at helping the women made them stronger, more self-confident via recognising their power and abilities, more determined to make changes and more capable of making decisions bearing personal importance.

Significant attachment

Morgan-Williams notes that a meeting between a client and an expert help provider can be challenging to both parties.¹⁴ When at-

¹¹ M. Buber: *Dialogo principas II: Dialogas. Klausimas pavieniui. Tarpžmogiškumo pradai*, trans. and intr. by T. Sodeika. Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai 2001.

¹² S. Morgan-Williams: *All Real Living Is Meeting*, in: S. du Plock, H.W. Cohn (eds) *Journal of the society for existential analysis*, 6.2: 76–96. London: The society for existential analysis 1995, 88.

¹³ K. Tyson McCrea, J.J. Bulanda: *Caregiving Heuristics: Valuable Practitioner Knowledge on the Context of Managing Residential Care*, in: *Qualitative Social Work*, 2010, 9: 343–363.

¹⁴ Morgan-Williams, op. cit.

tempting to help a client, Tyson believes that a dialogue is a necessary and irreplaceable means of sensing and examining the client's current conditions.¹⁵ A reflective dialogue between an employee and a client is one example of such a dialogue. This is especially true when the effort involves an adjustment and response to the client's expectations and goals or to other subjective states.

The experiences our participants shared illustrated how vitally significant sustainable, healing relationships were to their lives. Diana paralleled the close relationship she had with her grandmother during her childhood to the care she had received in a current healing relationship. Even now, such childhood memories were a source of joy. In Diana's words, "The most important of that, what grandmother did, was that, that she had concern. Well she used to love me. The way she knew how. She was my caregiver".

Irma discovered sincere, warm and friendly relations with the help centre employees. This type of relationship had previously been missing in her life: 'I got that, what I truly needed, which is inside, inside, it's what's inside, that was missing for me. And that is a great deal'. The relationship Diana created with her psychologist remained highly meaningful to her. Even now, Diana misses her:

"I know I got attached... With her I associated the most openly. ... She would ask a lot of things, even intimate, and generally all sorts. ... She knew how to talk well. Well, she wanted that it would be good for a person. She would pull out, well, from deep down. And it wasn't very important about what kind of things, she would pull them out. ... I miss her. It used to be about a half hour by phone. She was associated very warmly and that's it".

Obviously, it was the sincerity or authenticity that Diana felt during the healing relationship that helped her to disclose herself, have heart-felt talks and satisfy her need for close contact and for being important to someone else.

Freire considers associations between people as being true when they interrelate with fundamental human values – faith, love and hope.¹⁶ A person can begin searching for him or herself if a contact expresses these values; then, a favourable sphere is formed for comprehending the self and fostering consciousness. Evelina shared how important her brother's understanding and support were during the most difficult time in her life. This was after she was raped, felt lost, feared telling anyone about it and suffered feelings of guilt and shame. Apparently, at that time, it was enough for Evelina that one person, her brother, had noticed her changed state and realised something bad had happened. Evelina said, "Brother ... kept asking our parents, what it is with me, why am I avoiding even him. ... He returned one time and said – What is it with her? She's not eating anymore. Well our parents were quiet. ... Well he understood me". Evelina explained this to be the reason why she still

¹⁵ K. Tyson: *New Foundations for Scientific Social and Behavioral Research: The Heuristic Paradigm*, USA, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon 1995.

¹⁶ P. Freire: *Kritinės sąmonės ugdymas*, Vilnius: Tyto alba 2000.

trusts her brother, and apparently, why it is enough to know that there is a person who cares about her without preconditions.

As Shulman notes, it is evident that communities, like family members, face difficulties in recognising and accepting problems.¹⁷ Nevertheless, people who are suffering struggle in such a community or a family; they will have a hard time overcoming these problems on their own. Odeta shared her vital experience of a meaningful relationship with a social worker:

“When I thought deeply, I understood what you are to me ... you are – The beginning of my life. These are not ordinary words; here you have to feel it. When I learned to live with heart... I understood, that, words are lacking of the kind, which would pass on that, which I feel for you. That is an unearthly gratitude”.

All these experiences imply the importance of the enduring relationships the women had with other significant people. Further, these experiences illustrate what the relationships were like and what made them important. In sum, the women valued relationships in which they did not feel judged, but instead were understood and accepted for who they were. In addition, mutually valuable relationships expressing sincerity and warmth and including the help givers’ flexible behaviour regarding the women’s needs were important. In these relationships, the women were able to disclose of themselves, have more trust in others and allow themselves to heal and to become stronger.

Kierkegaard calls this a position of service rather than of ruling, i. e., of being patient. The existential orientation in meeting women in prostitution called our attention to what was seemingly passed over, unseen or doubted, i. e., to what was in hiding.¹⁸ Thus, we needed to explore and understand the personal experiences of these women from the existential life course perspective in order to stay unprejudiced. These women required sincere and caring attention, treating them as meaningful people. This attitude was the foundation for successfully helping the women become stronger, heal and regain the power that their trauma had destroyed.

Help as a source for self-control

Herman accents the most helpful feature in a help relation from an incest victim’s testimony: ‘Good therapists were those who really validated my experience and helped me to control my behaviour rather than trying to control me’.¹⁹ In our research, Julia recalled a significant meeting with one police officer who had stressed the importance of seeking help at the centre used in this study. In Julia’s words, “That was an officer, who

¹⁷ L. Shulman: *The Skills of Helping: Individuals, Families and Groups*. 3rd ed., Boston University School of Social Work, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc. 1992.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, op. cit., 65–69.

¹⁹ Herman, op. cit., 133.

directly named, that there is this centre where they can help me. He gave me the phone... Well in that sense he told me ... that I can call". His sincere, concrete advice provided the push she needed to take the first step toward changing her life. Julia explained, 'Probably what I remember, it was that single thing that he simply suggested, saying you simply stay awhile, stay awhile over there, have a talk and maybe you'll see that there is a different life, than, the one you're living'. As Julia recalled, she could no longer endure her pimp's deceit and abuse, so she phoned the same officer that asked her to go to the help centre he had mentioned. Julia remembered her unforgettable experience upon entering the centre:

"My first impressions were those surroundings... They truly left a very good impression. It was very calm, very beautiful and I truly felt well ... like I landed... I don't know ... into Heaven somewhere that, where I could truly calm down. ... The best thing was that, that on that day I was free. For me ... for me it wasn't necessary, like every day, in the sense, to engage in prostitution. I simply didn't have to do that and I was glad for that, that at least on that day I didn't have to do that, which I could rest".

In a similar manner, Loreta, who wound up in the shelter where she experienced understanding, support and care from the employees, felt safe. As she said, "For me you know heaven appeared". The shelter was the first step in regaining control over her body and in establishing her self-confidence.

However, despite the women's positive experiences at the help centre, Julia shared what had bothered her. As she put it, the meetings with the centre's employees felt constant, endless and tiring, whereas she wanted the opposite – peace and quiet, rest and a chance to get away from people. Since her wish went unheard or unheeded, this annoyed her and interfered with her recovery. Moreover, later on, Julia again experienced painful disappointments with certain employees at the centre. She still felt their behaviour toward her was insulting and wounding. According to her, it caused confusion and a feeling of being lost more than anything else. Their behaviour was a source of grievance, annoyance and anger. The way Julia told it illustrated their unsuccessful help regarding self-control, which disrupted her from regaining inner balance and made her healing difficult. What follows is Julia's valuable, detailed description of her experience:

"What was annoying was not only the employees' viewpoint of you like ... like at a prostitute, in other words, like at a second-rate person, who is somehow different, from the others. I'd understand it from the retorts and not from anyone's, from certain talks of the employees, actually even talking with me... I'd hear sometimes... Some certain words... It seemed to me, that it was about me. ... Well let's say at the time, when I was asked, don't you feel like a prostitute, in other words there... Walking around somewhere in town. ... Right then it was very painful to me. The same way, when let's say there was somebody talking about intimate things, it would be said that almost I knew best about some kind of sex or something more. Well that

used to be disgusting, because I didn't used to want actually to feel like, like I used to feel with clients, actually like some kind of doll, some kind of product, which means nothing more. Simply a thing without anything, without feelings... A piece of trash, a second-rate, filthy person. I remember there was this situation ... that simply from gratitude. ... I simply wanted to put my arms around a person and say thank you, and [the person] seemed to pull away from me, like I would have been I don't know... Well some kind of dirty, some kind of stained. It was as though they were afraid even to touch me. The feeling was as though, as though the others around were such goodie-goodies and the kind without any sins, the kind completely righteous and good... Meanwhile I'm the only one here who is filthy and disgusting”.

Julia's experience shows how help giver's attitudes and views toward a woman working in prostitution may or may not help. As van Deurzen notes, a help giver's purpose and focus must be directed at generating a non-controllable dialogic relationship for mutual interaction.²⁰ This is the only way to help a client regain her autonomy, to get back on her own feet and 'to discover her own centre of gravity' external to encouraging her "to lean on others".²¹ That is why, for instance for Evelina, it was important to simply have someone there, someone who was attentive not only to what she said but to how she felt. In Evelina's words, "She listened to me ... she really listened, to every little word going so far as to manage somehow. She watched, what was happening to me, actually followed, and watched. That kind of a reaction from her was more acceptable to me, than, what should you rush in to doing”.

For Silva, it was important to feel herself, her human 'I', which she had lost due to the long-term traumas, when entering into new relationships. In particular, being important to someone and going through those feelings knowing that someone cared about her are what permitted her to gain more power and self-confidence: "I was feeling like a person, that I am necessary to someone. Being with her I felt, that I have a close person, I felt, that I am needed, I felt, that I can go to someone for consolation, when it gets hard for me". Freire notes that people reach their meaningfulness by talking things out, and due to such self-disclosure, by verbalising everything that concerns them, including what is painful and important.²² Odeta's comments about her new relationship with a help centre employee showed how vital a close and not re-defined contact was, not only now but for the future: "I know that I matter already by now, and I mattered, and I will matter”.

Colombero reminds us that a meeting between people is incredibly complicated; it is an act that requires a great deal from everyone.²³ How-

²⁰ E. van Deurzen: *Everyday Mysteries: A handbook of existential psychotherapy*, 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2010, 186.

²¹ Ibid., 186.

²² Freire, op. cit.

²³ G. Colombero: *Nuo žodžių į dialogą: psichologiniai asmenų tarpusavio komunikacijos aspektai*, trans. R. Paleckytė, Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio lei-

ever, only this type of relationship can regenerate matters of importance that a person has lost, possibly resulting in changing the quality of a person's life. Buber considers the meaning of a meeting to be solely a direct relationship, which he names by the word pair "I-You". He argues that only by means of such a meeting is it possible to sense one's true life, which contains "selection and choosing, passivity and activity"²⁴ For Buber, "There is no I in and of itself – there is always only I and the word pair, I-You-I-Thou"²⁵

These women's personal experiences revealed what they considered to be healing relationships. They stressed that the help centre's environment was experientially safe: they could trust and disclose themselves there, could receive understanding and sympathy and did not feel any pressure or demands put on them. The help centre provided an environment that facilitated healing, giving the women the opportunity to make their own decisions about how to act. Five examples of this follow: "It's where attention is shown to me ... interact and talk to you openly and sincerely" (Diana). "She showed the kind of attention, that she understands ... she somehow tried to help me, so just for that, that was enough for me" (Evelina). "The last time, well, on the last days, when I was still with that fellow, when 'I was working', he was constantly asking me, is everything OK with me, am I not getting beaten, or am I not being harmed, because if something was bad for me, I could always call him" (Julia). "...Come, sit down we'll drink tea, that so stuck with me ... simply so, that I would live... The reason these words so stuck with me because, that ... from me nobody, no how, is demanding anything" (Irma). "If there is something lying heavy on my heart, I can say it, talk it out here with everyone" (Loreta).

Based on our study, we agree with Kierkegaard's claim that if one wants to truly lead another person to a defined place, first the person must be found where he or she is and then begin the journey from there.²⁶ This offers a starting point for any help giver working with stigmatised people. The help giver must consciously seek how, for example, women working in prostitution understand the whole course of their lives, regardless of whether it is acceptable to or corresponds with the help giver's views. It is probably not accidental that after Odeta completed her feedback, she wrote the following: 'Everything in this world has not two sides but considerably more! And there is more – only love will save the world'. Odeta was the first author's client for seven years. After Odeta read the completed doctoral dissertation, she wrote to the author in the author's capacity as a help giver:

"Your help, your being and even your remaining quiet gifted me with life, hope and some kind of light. Indeed ... it was unbelievably important to see and feel that you understand me and that you were truly concerned

diniai 2004.

²⁴ M. Buber: *Dialogo principas I: Aš ir Tu*, trans. and intr. T. Sodeika, Vilnius: Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai 1998, 80.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁶ Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, 64.

about me. Imagine, right now I feel fortunate. NOW, right at this moment, even though the circumstances of this day are really not all that great. But, everything you wrote is truly so; I cannot add anything to it nor take anything away. Everything was like that. Now I feel so happy and I remember that time. But, you know what? That day, when you came over to that psychologist, I had already decided never to attend anywhere anymore and, all in all, disappear from... Oh God, I remember how you never left me for a single second. And how we rode over on top of the hill [she called the hospital] and I thought you wanted to shut me up in the psycho house. Realistically the distrust was 100 percent”.

This quote displays the value of the type of close, healing relationship that is so needed by these women, and how the satisfaction of this need may lead to post-traumatic healing. For change to occur in a person’s life, Herman believes that “The principle of restoring human connection and agency remains central to the recovery process and no technical therapeutic advance is likely to replace it”²⁷

Our results suggest that the women can reorganise and change their lives and heal and regain the power and control they lost by being in conditions conducive to self-disclosure, mutual trust, friendship, safety and understanding from others. Colombero highlights the significance and meaning of how to be with others or to be for them when referring to dialogic relationships. There is no room for indifference, formality or casual interactions in such relationships; instead, the women exhibit happiness at being together with the help giver, express themselves to others and show devotion to their help givers by living for others.²⁸

Conclusion

The personal experiences of the women working in prostitution revealed the complexity and diversity of the difficulties they had to face. Those who had attempted to overcome prostitution, and some who were still engaged in prostitution, experienced loneliness, anxiety and a lack of self-confidence in their own abilities. These experiences were related, according to them, to the stigma they carried from the abuse they suffered earlier in their lives, which for some of them continued up to this day. Additional causes for not disengaging from prostitution were feelings of hopelessness regarding their future lives and not having close relationships that provided support or the chance to talk about their depressive feelings.

The results revealed that the consequences from their wide-ranging, early, harmful and traumatic experiences persisted to the present day. The women found it difficult to disengage from prostitution on their own, or, once disengaged, to arrange their lives autonomously. As they attempted to overcome these struggles, they lacked relationships that provided support, responsiveness and strength. They faced others’ in-

²⁷ Herman, *op. cit.*, 241.

²⁸ Colombero, *op. cit.*

ability to hear them out and understand them. Since they did not receive the help they needed from other people or their communities, and lacked information about possible help, they organised their lives on their own. The typical result was to go on living as they did the main feature of which was mixed, unresolved and pessimistic experiences. Whether still in prostitution or not, all of the women felt the need to be heard, understood and accepted. This is the same wish they reportedly had since they were young. These women repeatedly experienced judgemental or evaluative behaviour, betrayal, rejection and neglect from people they were close to throughout their lives. Due to this, they continued to distrust others and fear self-disclosure. Since they sensed their vulnerability, they reacted to offers of help very carefully and with great distrust; they were more likely to reject help than to accept it.

In fact, all fifteen women participating in our research had gone through a period in their lives when they were unprepared to accept any sort of help they were offered. The women expressed this rejection multiple ways: keeping their work in prostitution a secret, fearing that disclosure would lead to devaluation and rejection; disbelieving in the possibility of help; reconciling themselves with the existing situation; not wanting to change anything and withdrawing into themselves. Consequently, they ignored offers of help, claiming they had already reconciled with their existing situations and had no desire to change anything.

The results suggest that working in prostitution may be a way of compensating for unmet needs from earlier in their lives. By working in prostitution, a woman may confirm her own meaningfulness and power; however, every woman felt powerless and hopeless when seeking help. This was true even when they attempted to think about resisting their exploitation, fearing what would happen next. In most cases, the women's efforts to seek help and the frequent instances of facing no response ended in disappointment. Nonetheless, there were some successful life stories. Overall, women working in prostitution may use a new, helping relationship to choose a new path.

To conclude, we found that the most important interactions women working in prostitution had were based on sincere and true relationships. These relationships did not place any demands on the women, and they helped them acknowledge their painful experiences. Meetings with help centre employees fulfilled their need to be heard about what was important to them, what they lacked or where their pain lay. Disclosing themselves was possible only if there was trust. The women could realise life changes when they felt they were in control of their situations and could make their own decisions, whereas behaving well according to any external 'good hopes' did not promote change in the women's lives. The help givers' patience and sincere attention encouraged the women to seek help, regain strength and heal.