

# What drives a prostitute

March 7, 2012 - 10:41

In a survey of prostitution, the majority of prostitutes say their own sexuality, sexual curiosity and money are the main reasons they chose their line of work.

Keywords: [Anthropology](#), [Culture](#), [Sociology](#)

[Send](#) [PDF](#) [Print](#)

By: [Rasmus Karkov](#)

Half of the prostitutes in a new survey say they became prostitutes because of sexual curiosity, and 68 percent consider their line of work as part of their sexuality.



Some 85 percent of prostitutes in a Danish survey say they are sex workers because of the money. Their average earnings differ little from the national average. (Photo: Colourbox)

"While there's no doubt that money is the primary reason for the women becoming prostitutes, it is very surprising that sexual motivation ranks so highly," says Jens Kofod, who holds a PhD in anthropology and is a researcher at SFI – The Danish National Centre for Social Research.

He was responsible for the survey and the subsequent report, 'Prostitution in Denmark', which also reveals that Denmark has fewer prostitutes than expected and that most street prostitutes are foreigners.

## No child abuse

Women became prostitutes for many different reasons, but they often feel stigmatised by society as needing help to stop their work (fewer than half of the prostitutes have considered stopping), instead of society respecting their choice of work.

Child abuse is often regarded as a reason for prostitution by the media, politicians and general public, who feel the prostitutes need help to stop their work.

But the survey produced no clear conclusion on this – some prostitutes were abused as children, others were not.

## Four groups of prostitutes

The SFI researchers calculate that there are a little over 3,200 prostitutes in Denmark, which is fewer than expected, for example because some prostitutes work at several clinics.

The researchers divide the prostitutes into four groups:

- Female escort prostitutes (about 900)
- Male escort prostitutes (no figure)
- Female clinic prostitutes (about 1,600)
- Street prostitutes (less than 600 foreigners, few Danes)

A majority of female escort and female clinic prostitutes gave sexual curiosity as a reason for entering prostitution; many had great interest in sex before becoming prostitutes.

Almost half of the female escorts and just over a sixth of the clinic prostitutes started their work because they saw an opportunity to



Street prostitutes are more likely than clinic prostitutes to have drug problems. (Photo: Colourbox)

*While there's no doubt that money is the primary reason for the women becoming prostitutes, it is very surprising that sexual motivation ranks so highly*

- Jens Kofod

### Most read articles

- Feb. 18 Larger offspring when fish pick own mates
- Feb. 18 Police forced prostitutes into brothels
- Feb. 18 Healthier barley and oats
- Feb. 14 Safe landings on slippery runways
- Feb. 16 Putting pain on the map

### Jobs

**PhD Candidate in Arctic Urban Sustainable Development at The Barents Institute**  
University of Tromsø

**Professor of Education**  
BERGEN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

**Professor in Software Engineering**  
BERGEN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

**PhD Research Fellow in Social Anthropology**  
University of Oslo

### Society & Culture - partner news

**Mental health of fathers can affect foetus**  
News from [University of Bergen](#)

**Fresh juice with long shelf life must win over consumers**  
News from [Nofima The Norwegian Institute of Food, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research](#)

**Symbols in a cave**  
News from [University of Bergen](#)

**Two North Norwegian Wonders**  
News from [The University of Tromsø](#)

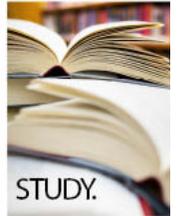
**Mountains of nurture rather than nature**  
News from [University of Bergen](#)

### Inside news

- Feb. 18 Five years of research on geopolitics in the High North has concluded
- Feb. 1 The Norwegian Biodiversity Information Centre joins EU funded project
- Jan. 24 Anders Hamsten to be installed as new president of Karolinska Institutet
- Dec. 23 Better opportunities for talented young researchers
- Dec. 22 Big-data research spurs industrial development

[All inside news](#)

NORWAY.  
A UNIQUE  
STUDENT  
EXPERIENCE



WWW.STUDYINNORWAY.NO

Høgskolen i Telemark



Telemark  
University College

is the fourth largest  
university college  
Norway (out of 12)

We offer students  
wide range of programs  
ranging from one-semester  
master to PhD programs

[www.hit.no](http://www.hit.no)

make money through sex.

Street prostitutes, however, draw another picture: they are not in the business for the sex but to deal with problems such as drug abuse.

### Working for money

Despite the sexual drive, the main reason for prostitution in all groups is money.

“Money is cited by 85% of the prostitutes,” says Kofod. “Some have to pay for housing, food and day care for their children, others must pay for their drug abuse, while others want an extra week’s holiday abroad.”

A typical story, according to the researcher, is that a man divorces a woman and takes all the money, and the woman then sees prostitution as the only way to earn a living.

### A more nuanced picture

“Our study shows that prostitution is a much more nuanced picture than we have previously believed,” he says.

“Firstly, we have halved the estimated number of prostitutes in Denmark. Secondly, the public debate about prostitution as poor wretches or happy hookers is distorted – most prostitutes are somewhere between these two extremes.

“The prostitutes have widely differing lifestyles and reasons for their work,” says the researcher.

Country [Denmark](#)

Translated by Michael de Laine

### Related content

- [Unhealthy Danes have less and poorer sex](#)
- [Male circumcision leads to a bad sex life](#)

[Like](#) Julie Grant and 42 others like this.

[Tweet](#) 13

#### Scientific literature

[Prostitution in Denmark \(abstract\)](#)

#### External links

[Jens Kofod's profile \(in Danish\)](#)

#### Points

The report is based on interviews with former and active prostitutes and with experts from the authorities and NGOs associated with the sex environment.

ICELAND

NORWAY

FINLAND

SWEDEN

DENMARK

#### Follow ScienceNordic on

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[News feed](#)

#### What others are reading



**Larger offspring when fish pick own mates**

February 18, 2013 - 06:15



**Police forced prostitutes into brothels**

February 18, 2013 - 06:37



**Healthier barley and oats**

February 18, 2013 - 06:34

### Newsletter Signup

Email Address: \*

Name:

[Sign up](#)