

Religiosity Conflict and Social Reality in the Practice of Prostitution: A Study on Female Sex Workers in Karang Dempel

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of religiosity among female sex workers (FSWs) in Karang Dempel and how they navigate the conflict between religious beliefs and their profession. Employing a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to understand the subjective experiences of FSWs in practicing their faith amid a socially stigmatized environment. The findings indicate that despite their profession often being perceived as contradictory to religious norms, many FSWs continue to uphold aspects of religiosity, including beliefs, private worship, and spiritual experiences that provide meaning in their lives. The moral conflict experienced by FSWs is reflected in their deep inner struggles, ultimately leading to various adaptive strategies such as rationalization, selectivity in religious practices, and the separation of professional identity from religious identity. Economic and social factors also play a crucial role in their decision to remain in this profession, with limited access to alternative employment and societal stigma serving as significant barriers to exiting prostitution. The study concludes that a more inclusive and multidimensional approach is needed to address the issues of FSWs and their religiosity, taking into account spiritual, psychosocial, and economic aspects in rehabilitation programs and social policies that are more humane and reality-based.

1. Introduction

Prostitution is a deeply rooted social phenomenon across various societies worldwide, including Indonesia. This practice is often examined through legal, moral, and economic lenses, reflecting the complexity of underlying factors. Although Indonesian law criminalizes prostitution, its presence persists in various forms, both overt and covert (Chon, 2015). One of the locations with a long history of prostitution in Indonesia is Karang Dempel in Kupang. Despite its official closure by local authorities, evidence suggests that prostitution continues to operate clandestinely in the area. The persistence of this practice indicates that formal policies do not necessarily eliminate prostitution but rather push it into less regulated spaces, making it more challenging for authorities to monitor.

From a social perspective, female sex workers (FSWs) frequently experience stigmatization deeply ingrained in society's moral constructs. Public perception often reduces them to individuals disconnected from religious values, without considering the complexities of their lived realities. However, this phenomenon requires deeper analysis, as many FSWs continue to practice religious rituals and uphold certain spiritual values. The contradiction between their religious practices and their profession demonstrates that religiosity is not always linearly aligned with one's occupation but rather shaped by the interaction of economic conditions, social pressures, and personal experiences (Jennings et al., 2021). This study aims to explore how religiosity continues to function in the lives of FSWs in Karang Dempel and how they navigate the conflict between faith and their profession.

Religiosity within the context of prostitution presents a compelling area of study, as it offers a comprehensive perspective on the social and psychological dynamics of FSWs. On one hand, they are morally and socially marginalized; on the other, religious practices remain a part of their daily lives. This raises profound questions about how they reconstruct religious teachings in their daily existence. Is their religiosity merely a ritualistic heritage, or is there a genuine effort to reconcile their role as believers within a profession deemed contradictory to religious norms? This study seeks to examine how religiosity is understood and practiced by FSWs in Karang Dempel, as well as how they cope with the psychological tensions arising from these contradictions. A deeper understanding of these aspects will enrich academic discourse on the intersection of religion and social realities within marginalized communities.

More broadly, this research contributes to academic understanding of the intersection between religion and social life among populations often overlooked in religious studies. By analyzing how FSWs in Karang Dempel maintain and express their religiosity, this study challenges the conventional notion of a strict separation between religion and prostitution. Additionally, the findings are expected to inform the development of more reality-based social policies, emphasizing how inclusive religious approaches can be integrated into social rehabilitation efforts for FSWs.

In academic research on religiosity and social reality in the practice of prostitution, various studies have explored the complex dynamics involving moral, social, economic, and legal factors that shape the experiences of female sex workers (FSWs). In general, existing research can be categorized into several key themes relevant to this study.

The first theme focuses on religious conflict and moral dilemmas in the lives of FSWs. Several studies (Hackathorn et al., 2024; Matthews, 2024; Rijal & El-Rumi, 2019; Azizul, 2024;

Mashuri & Fakhurrozi, 2014) highlight that, despite being in a profession that contradicts their religious beliefs, many FSWs continue to uphold their spiritual convictions and engage in religious practices. They experience deep internal struggles between economic necessity and their desire to remain religiously observant. Some studies reveal that the adaptation mechanisms developed by FSWs reflect a complex negotiation of religious identity, either through rationalization or through religious practices conducted in a more private manner.

The second theme examines the role of social and economic factors in shaping the persistence of prostitution and their impact on FSWs' religiosity. Studies by Benoit et al. (2019), Cao et al. (2017), Johnston (2022), Kleden (2021), Big-ALobo (2023), and Ismail (2024) emphasize that limited access to education, a lack of decent job opportunities, and economic pressures are the main reasons women enter and remain in the sex trade. Additionally, the social stigma they face often isolates them from religious and social communities. In many cases, this stigma not only affects their social interactions but also influences how they express their religiosity, both individually and collectively.

The third theme explores religion as a coping mechanism and a tool for social transformation among FSWs. Research by Sorajjakool & Benitez (2015), Setiawan (2017), Mukramin & Nawir (2018), Anggraini & Hakim (2018), Ramelan (2020), and Winter & Olivia (2024) suggests that religion continues to serve as a source of comfort and hope for many FSWs, even in highly stressful conditions. Some FSWs continue to pray and engage in religious rituals as a way of seeking meaning in life and coping with feelings of guilt. Additionally, studies on former FSWs indicate that more inclusive religious communities can play a crucial role in assisting their reintegration into society after leaving the sex trade.

The final theme relates to legal and ethical perspectives on prostitution. Some studies (Amalia (2018); Hamzah (2018); Acharya (2012); Smith (2010) highlight that prostitution laws and policies are often shaped by religious and moral norms within society. In certain cases, government policies aimed at shutting down red-light districts do not eliminate prostitution but instead push it into more clandestine and unregulated forms. These studies also indicate that legal and religious perspectives on prostitution are often normative and fail to consider the social realities and economic constraints faced by FSWs.

Based on this literature review, it can be concluded that while previous studies have explored aspects of religiosity, social stigma, and policy impacts on FSWs, there remains a gap in understanding how FSWs personally navigate religious identity conflicts in their daily lives. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by highlighting the subjective experiences of FSWs in negotiating their religiosity amid economic, social, and moral pressures. By adopting this approach, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the intersection between religion and social life within marginalized groups.

This study seeks to address this gap by highlighting the subjective experiences of FSWs in maintaining their religious lives amid the realities of prostitution. The research adopts Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, which examines how individuals present different identities depending on their social context (Scheibe & Barrett, 2017). By understanding how FSWs construct their religious identity across various social settings, this study provides new insights into how individuals manage moral conflicts in complex life circumstances.

Furthermore, this research explores the psychological dimensions of the internal struggles faced by FSWs, an aspect that remains underexplored in previous studies.

Based on this background and literature review, the study poses key research questions: How do FSWs in Karang Dempel interpret and express their religiosity? Do they experience significant moral conflict, or do they develop specific mechanisms to reconcile their religious beliefs with their profession? Additionally, this study aims to identify the factors influencing their level of religiosity and the strategies they employ to cope with social and spiritual pressures arising from their occupation. Furthermore, it seeks to explore the relationship between religious understanding and the decisions of FSWs to either remain in or exit the profession.

Overall, this research aims to provide a deeper analysis of the dynamics of religiosity among FSWs in Karang Dempel by examining their beliefs, rituals, experiences, and religious understanding. Additionally, it seeks to identify the factors contributing to religious conflict within the practice of prostitution. In doing so, this study not only offers an empirical portrayal of the social and spiritual conditions of FSWs but also enriches academic discussions on the relationship between religion and social structures within marginalized groups. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers, scholars, and social and religious institutions in developing more effective, reality-based intervention strategies to address prostitution and the religious lives of FSWs.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive method aimed at deeply examining the religiosity experiences of female sex workers (FSWs) in Karang Dempel. This approach was chosen for its ability to capture the complexity of the subjective meanings constructed by participants regarding the tension between their religious beliefs and their profession. Using a phenomenological-hermeneutic paradigm, this research seeks to explore how FSWs navigate, represent, and reconcile their religious identities within a socially stigmatized and marginalized landscape. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, all of which are combined to generate a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The participants in this study consist of FSWs who are still actively working in Karang Dempel, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in terms of age, educational background, and length of employment. The selection of informants was based on their involvement in religious practices and their willingness to reflectively articulate their experiences. To enrich perspectives and enhance the credibility of findings, source triangulation was conducted by including interviews with religious leaders, social workers, and community members who interact with the FSW community. Additionally, participatory observation was carried out over a sufficient period to understand the social dynamics, religious practices, and interactions within the localization context.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using thematic analysis with an interpretive approach, allowing for the identification of meaning patterns emerging from participants' narratives. The analysis process included data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretation based on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory and the concept of religiosity within the sociology of religion (Brown, 2003). The credibility and validity of the data were

maintained through member-checking techniques, wherein findings were reconfirmed with participants to ensure accurate interpretations. Through this approach, the study not only provides empirical contributions regarding the complexity of religiosity among FSWs but also offers a broader theoretical perspective on how individuals in marginalized groups negotiate their religious identities within socially contradictory conditions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Dimensions of Religiosity Among Female Sex Workers in Karang Dempel

This study found that despite working as female sex workers (FSWs), many of them maintain a strong attachment to religious values. Religiosity among FSWs in Karang Dempel has not disappeared entirely but is instead negotiated in both practice and understanding. Interviews with several informants revealed that they continue to engage in certain religious aspects as part of their daily lives. However, there is variation in the intensity and consistency of their religious practices, influenced by factors such as family background, personal experiences, and social pressures.

One of the most prominent dimensions of religiosity is belief in religious teachings. The majority of informants stated that they still believe in God, the afterlife, and the concepts of sin and reward. One informant, identified as S, expressed, *"I know this job is wrong in the eyes of religion, but I also believe that God is Most Forgiving. I hope that one day I can leave this life and repent."* This statement demonstrates moral awareness, even though they continue in this profession due to economic reasons.

Additionally, religious practices are still observed, though not always consistently. Interviews revealed that most FSWs attempt to perform prayers, either regularly or only at certain moments. Another informant, identified as A, stated, *"Sometimes I still pray, especially when I feel very guilty or when I am facing problems. I feel calmer after praying."* This indicates that worship for them is not only a religious obligation but also a coping mechanism to deal with life's pressures. Many informants also reported that they try to fast during Ramadan, though often not fully due to the demands of their work.

The dimension of religious experience also manifests in feelings of closeness to God in certain situations. Some informants admitted to feeling guilty after serving clients and trying to compensate by praying or doing good deeds for others. An informant, identified as R, stated, *"Sometimes after work, I cry alone, feeling dirty, and then I pray to God for forgiveness."* This feeling illustrates a significant internal conflict, highlighting that their religiosity remains alive, even if it is not fully reflected in their daily behavior.

In terms of religious knowledge, almost all informants have a basic understanding of the religious teachings they follow. They acknowledge that their profession contradicts religious norms, but they also emphasize that economic factors and limited alternatives compel them to remain in prostitution. An informant, identified as T, stated, *"I know this job is forbidden, but if I stop, I don't know how I will eat or provide for my children."* This highlights the significant role structural factors play in their continued involvement in prostitution, even though they personally aspire to lead a life more aligned with religious teachings.

Religiosity among FSWs in Karang Dempel is also reflected in their social interactions with religious communities. Some informants admitted that they still attend religious study

sessions or listen to religious sermons via social media or television. They find that such activities provide them with hope and motivation to one day leave prostitution. An informant, identified as N, mentioned, *"I enjoy listening to religious lectures on YouTube. Sometimes I feel moved and want to change, but I don't know how to leave this life."* This statement suggests that religious teachings still hold influence in their lives, even if they have not yet been able to translate them into concrete changes.

However, a small number of FSWs reported that they no longer engage in religious practices actively. They feel that their work distances them from God and that they are unworthy of practicing their faith. An informant, identified as D, stated, *"I haven't prayed in a long time. I feel like, what's the point of praying if I keep doing this job? It feels hypocritical."* This statement reveals a deep inner struggle between faith and the realities they face.

From the perspective of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, the religiosity of FSWs can be analyzed as a distinction between front stage and back stage behavior (Sarbin, 2003). In their social interactions, especially in front of clients or the general public, they may present themselves as individuals who are not particularly religious (*front stage*). However, in their private lives, particularly when alone or in more personal environments, they continue to uphold their religious identity and often feel guilty about their way of life (*back stage*). This concept helps explain how FSWs navigate their identity conflicts amid social and economic pressures.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the religiosity of FSWs in Karang Dempel has not completely disappeared but has instead undergone transformation and negotiation within their lived realities. While they recognize that their profession contradicts religious teachings, they continue to engage in various aspects of religiosity, whether through belief, worship, spiritual experiences, or participation in religious communities. Their internal struggles reflect the complexity of the relationship between personal morality and social reality, ultimately shaping a unique form of religiosity within this marginalized group.

3.2 Religious Conflict and Adaptation Strategies

The religiosity conflict experienced by female sex workers (FSWs) in Karang Dempel arises from the tension between their religious beliefs and the reality of their profession. This conflict often manifests in feelings of guilt, moral dilemmas, spiritual anxiety, and social pressure from their surroundings. Most informants interviewed in this study acknowledged that their work contradicts the religious teachings they adhere to, yet economic constraints and social pressures compel them to remain in the profession.

One of the primary dimensions of religious conflict is guilt and moral dilemmas. Many informants feel that their actions conflict with the religious values they were taught from an early age. An informant, identified as S, stated, *"Every time I finish working, I always feel guilty. I know this is wrong, but I have no other choice. I have to support my children."* This acknowledgment illustrates that while they are aware of the misalignment between their profession and religious teachings, the harsh realities of life force them to persist. This moral conflict often affects their psychological well-being, leading to ongoing stress and anxiety.

Additionally, spiritual anxiety and fear of divine punishment are significant aspects of this religious conflict. Many informants expressed their fear of divine retribution for their profession, yet at the same time, they continue to hope for forgiveness. An informant,

identified as A, stated, *"I believe that God is Most Forgiving, but I am also afraid of my sins. I don't know if I still have a chance to change."* This fear often impacts their emotional state, causing deep internal struggles.

The religious conflict is further exacerbated by social pressure and stigma from their communities. Society generally perceives FSWs as individuals detached from religious values, which adds to their psychological burden. Some informants reported experiencing discrimination and judgment from those around them, including family and close friends. An informant, identified as R, shared, *"I once tried attending a religious gathering in my village, but people started talking about me. They looked at me with judgmental eyes, as if I was not worthy of religious guidance."* Such conditions drive many FSWs to withdraw from religious communities and feel increasingly distanced from their religious values.

Despite facing deep religious conflict, many FSWs develop adaptation strategies to cope with these tensions. One of the most common strategies is rationalization, in which they seek moral justification for their profession. Some informants stated that they view their work as a last resort for survival. An informant, identified as T, said, *"I don't want to do this, but I have to. If I had another option, I would have stopped long ago."* Rationalization allows them to continue their daily lives without being overwhelmed by excessive guilt.

Beyond rationalization, enhancing religious practices also serves as an adaptation strategy for some FSWs in dealing with their religious conflict. Several informants reported continuing to pray, read the Quran, or engage in personal supplications. They believe that worship is a way to maintain their connection with God, even though they have not yet left their profession. An informant, identified as N, said, *"I know I haven't left this life yet, but I still pray and make supplications. I hope that one day I can change."* For them, religious practices are not only religious obligations but also a means of achieving inner peace amid a stressful reality.

Another adaptation strategy involves maintaining goodness in other aspects of life, such as giving charity, helping others, and striving not to harm people. Some informants expressed that despite working in prostitution, they still try to be good individuals in other ways. An informant, identified as D, stated, *"I don't want to deceive or harm others. I still try to do good as much as I can because I want there to be at least some goodness in my life."* This effort shows that for some FSWs, moral values remain a part of their lives, even within contradictory circumstances.

From the perspective of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, these adaptation strategies can be understood as a form of identity management that FSWs employ in different social contexts. In front of clients or within their work environment (*front stage*), they may present themselves as professionals in their field (G. Smith, 2013). However, in their personal lives (*back stage*), they maintain their religious and moral identity, even while grappling with internal conflicts. The distinction between front stage and back stage behavior enables them to endure a profession that contradicts their beliefs without completely losing their spiritual identity.

Overall, the religious conflict experienced by FSWs in Karang Dempel illustrates the complex relationship between religion, morality, and socioeconomic realities. Although they face significant internal struggles, they continuously seek ways to uphold their religiosity in various forms. Adaptation strategies such as rationalization, enhancing religious practices,

and maintaining moral values in other aspects of life demonstrate that their religiosity has not disappeared but is instead negotiated within the context of their lived experiences. By understanding these conflicts and adaptation strategies, this study provides deeper insights into how marginalized groups navigate their religious identity amid strong social and economic pressures.

To cope with this conflict, FSWs employ various adaptation strategies. One such strategy is rationalization, where they justify their profession as an unavoidable economic necessity. Some informants also emphasize that *"God is Most Forgiving,"* which allows them to continue religious practices with the hope of attaining divine forgiveness. Additionally, social networks and support systems play a crucial role in either alleviating or exacerbating the moral pressure they experience.

3.3 The Role of Economic and Social Factors in the Religiosity of Female Sex Workers

Economic and social factors play a crucial role in shaping and influencing the religiosity of female sex workers (FSWs) in Karang Dempel. This study found that the decision to engage in this profession is often not a matter of free choice but rather an economic necessity that leaves them with no viable alternatives. Most informants interviewed revealed that economic hardship is the primary driver forcing them to remain in prostitution, despite their strong religious beliefs. Social factors such as societal stigma, living conditions, and family pressures also contribute to shaping how they practice and maintain their religious lives.

3.3.1 Economic Factors as the Primary Driver

Many informants in this study stated that they entered prostitution due to a lack of other income sources. One informant, identified as S, explained, *"I never imagined working like this. But after my husband passed away and I had to support two children, I had no other choice."* This statement illustrates that financial struggles are often the main reason why FSWs remain in the profession, even though they are aware of its moral and social consequences. They experience a deep dilemma between fulfilling their basic needs and upholding the religious values they believe in.

Additionally, most FSWs lack the skills or education necessary to obtain better-paying jobs. An informant, identified as N, stated, *"I only finished elementary school. Who would hire me to work in an office or a store? Here, I can earn money quickly, even though I know it's wrong."* The lack of access to education and vocational training limits their opportunities to find alternative employment that aligns more closely with social and religious norms.

In terms of income, many informants stated that prostitution provides a more stable source of earnings compared to other jobs available to them. Some had attempted alternative jobs, such as domestic work or manual labor, but found that the wages were insufficient to meet their daily needs. An informant, identified as A, said, *"I tried working as a housemaid, but my salary wasn't enough to pay rent and buy food. Here, I can make more money in a single night."* This economic reality demonstrates that their involvement in prostitution is more a matter of survival than personal desire.

3.3.2 The Social Impact and Stigma on FSWs' Religiosity

Beyond economic constraints, social factors significantly impact how FSWs practice their faith. One of the biggest challenges they face is the social stigma attached to their work.

Many feel ostracized by society and even their own families. An informant, identified as R, stated, *"I can't go back to my hometown because my family won't accept me anymore. They know what I do, and they feel ashamed."* This situation isolates many FSWs from both social and religious communities, ultimately affecting their ability to practice their faith openly.

Some informants also reported experiencing discrimination when trying to participate in religious activities. An informant, identified as T, said, *"I once tried to attend a religious gathering, but I felt unwelcome. People gave me strange looks as if I didn't belong there."* This indicates that even though FSWs still hold religious beliefs, their social environment often does not provide them with the space to practice their faith comfortably. Such social pressures lead many to withdraw from religious communities and instead practice their faith privately in more secluded settings.

However, some FSWs persist in maintaining their religious practices despite societal stigma. Some stated that they continue to pray, read the Quran, and engage in personal supplication. An informant, identified as D, stated, *"I know people judge me, but I still try to pray. I believe that God sees my intentions, not just my job."* This statement highlights that despite facing significant social pressure, their religiosity remains intact in certain forms.

3.3.3 The Role of Social Support and Community in FSWs' Religiosity

Despite social pressures, some FSWs receive support from inclusive communities that understand their situation. Certain social organizations and religious institutions provide spiritual guidance and economic assistance to those seeking to leave prostitution. An informant, identified as L, stated, *"I joined a religious rehabilitation program. They helped me find another job, and I started learning new skills."* Such programs play a vital role in helping FSWs sustain and develop their religiosity amid economic and social challenges.

Support from fellow FSWs also plays an essential role in maintaining religious practices. Some informants revealed that they share spiritual experiences and remind each other to practice their faith. An informant, identified as F, mentioned, *"Among us, some still pray and read the Quran regularly. Sometimes we remind each other to keep praying, even though we know our work contradicts our faith."* This solidarity demonstrates that FSWs' religiosity has not entirely disappeared but is instead practiced in more private settings.

3.3.4 The Complexity of the Relationship Between Economy, Society, and FSWs' Religiosity

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that economic and social factors significantly influence how FSWs practice their religiosity. Financial constraints make it difficult for them to leave prostitution, while social stigma often prevents them from participating in religious communities openly. Nevertheless, many FSWs still maintain their faith and attempt to practice their religion within their means.

By understanding the intersection between economic, social, and religious factors, this study emphasizes the importance of a more inclusive approach in supporting FSWs. Faith-based economic empowerment programs, more accepting communities, and supportive social policies could provide solutions to help them transition into lives more aligned with their religious values. Ultimately, this research highlights that FSWs' religiosity is complex and cannot be understood solely from a moralistic perspective, but must also be examined through a broader structural lens.

Some FSWs attempt to find alternative employment that aligns more with religious norms, but face barriers such as limited skills and lack of access to stable jobs. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of faith-based economic empowerment programs to assist them in transitioning to professions that are more socially and religiously accepted.

3.4 Implications of the Findings for the Study of Religiosity and Society

The findings of this study have broad implications for the study of religiosity and society, particularly in understanding religious dynamics among female sex workers (FSWs). This study demonstrates that religiosity is not a static entity but rather a concept that is negotiated in response to social, economic, and cultural conditions. Although FSWs work in an environment often perceived as contradictory to religious values, they continue to maintain elements of religiosity in their lives. These findings provide new insights into the sociology of religion by highlighting how individuals on the margins of society manage their religious identity amid intense social pressure and stigma.

From an academic perspective, this study asserts that religiosity cannot be viewed in a binary framework, where individuals engaged in socially or morally controversial professions are automatically assumed to have abandoned religious values. On the contrary, religiosity among FSWs exhibits significant flexibility and resilience. This reinforces the idea that religion should not be understood solely as a rigid set of rules but also as a dynamic aspect of individual life shaped by experience and social environment. This study aligns with Erving Goffman's concept of symbolic interactionism, wherein individuals present different identities in various social contexts. In this case, FSWs navigate multiple roles between their professional and personal lives, including in the way they engage in religious practices.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of understanding religiosity from a more inclusive perspective. Many religious approaches to understanding marginalized groups have historically been normative and judgmental. However, this study reveals that religiosity can persist even under non-ideal conditions. This suggests that a more empathetic, experience-based approach to the study of religiosity can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how religion operates in the lives of individuals facing structural and social limitations.

Additionally, this study has implications for social policy and rehabilitation programs targeting FSWs. Many rehabilitation programs operate under the assumption that FSWs must completely abandon their previous way of life before being reintegrated into religious and social communities. However, this study reveals that many FSWs continue to maintain religious dimensions in their lives despite their involvement in prostitution. Therefore, rehabilitation and economic empowerment programs for FSWs must incorporate religious aspects in a more inclusive and reality-based approach that aligns with their lived experiences.

From a social perspective, these findings highlight the need for change in how society understands and responds to the presence of FSWs. The stigma they face not only exacerbates their psychological distress but also hinders their reintegration into broader social life. Recognizing that FSWs also retain elements of religiosity and morality, society can develop more inclusive and supportive approaches in addressing this issue. For instance, religious education programs that are more open to marginalized groups could serve as an alternative pathway for them to practice religious values without fear of discrimination.

More broadly, this study also contributes to academic discussions on the relationship between religion and social marginality. While many previous studies have framed religion as a tool of social control used to maintain the status quo, this research demonstrates that religion can also serve as a mechanism for individuals to navigate challenging life circumstances. In the case of FSWs, religion functions as a source of solace, a coping mechanism, and even a tool for moral negotiation in their lives.

Within the sociology of religion, this study enriches discussions on how marginalized individuals use religion as a survival strategy. One of the key contributions of this research is its demonstration that religiosity among FSWs is not merely symbolic but holds profound personal significance. Several FSWs interviewed in this study expressed that they continue to pray and observe religious rituals because it remains their only way to feel connected to God. This suggests that, although their social conditions may prevent them from fully engaging in ideal religious practices, religiosity remains a vital part of their lives.

Another important implication of this study is the need for an interdisciplinary approach in understanding religiosity among marginalized groups. This research shows that a combination of sociology of religion, social psychology, and economic studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how religiosity develops under conditions of social adversity. In this regard, interdisciplinary studies can help bridge the gap between academic theory and the lived realities faced by marginalized populations.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that religiosity cannot be understood in a rigid or monolithic manner. In the context of FSWs in Karang Dempel, religiosity remains an active force in their lives despite the social challenges and contradictions they face. The implications of these findings extend beyond academic discourse on religiosity; they also have practical consequences for social policies and rehabilitation programs. By adopting a more inclusive and socially grounded approach, more effective strategies can be developed to support FSWs in leading meaningful lives without requiring them to forfeit their religious identity.

From an academic standpoint, this study contributes to the sociology of religion by demonstrating that religiosity among marginalized groups possesses a unique and adaptive dynamic. Furthermore, these findings can serve as a foundation for policymakers and social institutions in designing more effective intervention strategies to assist FSWs in transitioning to lives that align more closely with both religious values and social norms.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the dynamics of religiosity among female sex workers (FSWs) in Karang Dempel, focusing on how they reconcile their religious beliefs with the realities of their profession. The findings indicate that although this profession is often perceived as contradictory to religious norms, many FSWs continue to uphold aspects of religiosity through spiritual beliefs, private religious practices, and transcendental experiences that provide meaning in their lives. The moral conflict they experience highlights the complex relationship between religion, ethics, and structural pressures shaping their life conditions. The persistence of religiosity in such a contradictory situation suggests that religion should not be understood merely as a set of normative rules but as a process that can be negotiated based on individual social experiences.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the primary determinants of FSWs' continued involvement in this profession are economic and social factors. Limited access to education, a lack of decent employment opportunities, and economic responsibilities – such as providing for children and family – are the main reasons they remain in prostitution. The social stigma they face exacerbates their situation, distancing them from community support and limiting their chances for reintegration into conventional social life. Some FSWs adopt coping strategies by separating their professional identity from their religious identity, which they continue to maintain. Others experience a decline in religious practices due to environmental pressures and the internalization of guilt.

The implications of this study point to the need for a more inclusive and multidimensional approach in addressing the issue of religiosity among FSWs. Rehabilitation and economic empowerment programs should not focus solely on material aspects but must also consider psychosocial and spiritual dimensions in assisting them to transition out of prostitution. Religious institutions and social communities should adopt a more humanistic approach, providing FSWs with the space to maintain their religious beliefs without experiencing social exclusion. With a deeper understanding of the interaction between religiosity and marginality, more effective, reality-based policies and intervention programs can be developed to comprehensively address this issue.

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