



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

International Journal of Current Research

Vol. 16, Issue, 04, pp.27866-27871, April, 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.47017.04.2024>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDY OF THE MIGRATION OF FOREIGN PROSTITUTES TO THE ZIGUINCHOR REGION

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 20th January, 2024

Received in revised form

19th February, 2024

Accepted 15th March, 2024

Published online 25th April, 2024

Key words:

Migration, Prostitution, Border Countries,
Ziguinchor.

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Citation: **Abdoulaye NGOM**. 2024. "Study of the migration of foreign prostitutes to the ziguinchor region". *International Journal of Current Research*, 16, (04), 27866-27871.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the link between migration and prostitution in Ziguinchor, a region in southern Senegal. The aim is to shift the focus from migration to prostitution, by making the link between migration and prostitution at the level of the Ziguinchor region and, more generally, of Senegal. More precisely, the aim is to report on the phenomenon of prostitution and its various forms in the Ziguinchor region. Through the exploration and analysis of various empirical cases, the article also sets out to take stock of the main countries from which these sex workers come. The analyses are based on a multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork approach, involving 50 interviews and life stories with foreign prostitutes based in the Ziguinchor region. The article shows how, in the space of a few years, the Ziguinchor region has become a preferred destination for foreign prostitutes.

INTRODUCTION

For several years now, research has shed light on the reasons that push individuals to leave their country and emigrate to another country or another continent. Reasons that could be summarized by the search for a job, the hope of higher salary, the discovery of other horizons, the desire to travel, the pursuit of higher studies, the flight from a war, a conflict or a persecution, the defense of political or religious ideals, family reunification... We therefore see the protean nature of the factors underlying the migration of an individual, that this migration is carried out by regular route or by irregular route. However, an analysis of the numerous works on migratory dynamics in Senegal reveals, implicitly, that few works refer to and are interested in the link between migration(s) and prostitution. Emigrating to sell one's body by offering sexual services in exchange for financial or material remuneration attracts little attention from researchers and specialists in migration issues and therefore constitutes an interesting research project in several respects because it provides added value in the understanding of contemporary migratory dynamics in Ziguinchor and more generally in Senegal. This article starts from the hypothesis according to which foreign prostitutes emigrate to Senegal more particularly to the region of Ziguinchor because they can carry out prostitution activity there in total anonymity since they are not known by the populations local.

This prostitution activity allows them to earn money without their families remaining in their country of origin knowing exactly the nature of the work carried out in the host country. Which constitutes for these prostitutes a means of having a stable source of income through the sale of their bodies without having to suffer the weight of moral judgment linked to prostitution. The article is divided into three parts. The first part covers methodological details as well as a brief presentation of the study area. As for the second part, it examines the phenomenon of prostitution and the different forms it takes in the Ziguinchor region and Senegal in general. This is how we will examine overt and declared prostitution, overt and undeclared prostitution, and latent and undeclared prostitution. Each of these types of prostitution has a particular character which must be examined in detail. Finally, in the third of the article, it is a question of studying the main countries from which these foreign prostitutes come. This is how we have on the one hand, prostitutes coming from border or neighboring countries and on the other hand, those coming from other African countries.

METHODOLOGY

Presentation of the study area: The administrative reforms of July 1, 1984, and February 2, 2008 led to the division of natural Casamance into three distinct administrative entities which are the region of Ziguinchor, Sédhiou and Kolda.

The Baïnounck ethnic group is the oldest population of lower Casamance, and the region is rich in great ethnic and cultural diversity. Thus, we do not say that "Casamance is the most Senegalese region of the country" despite the independence movement which is developing there. The Ziguinchor region is located at 12°33' North Latitude and 16°16' West Longitude, magnetic declination 13°05. Its altitude is 19.30m in the southwestern part of Senegal. It is limited to the north by the Republic of the Gambia, to the south by the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, to the east by the Kolda region and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean. It covers an area of 7,352 km², which represents approximately 3.74% of the Senegalese national territory. In 2023, the population of the Ziguinchor region is estimated at 612,343 inhabitants. Three departments (Bignona, Oussouye and Ziguinchor), eight districts, twenty-five rural communities and five hundred and two villages make up the region. (ANSD, 2023). The Ziguinchor region is characterized by beautiful greenery and relative humidity due to abundant rainfall each year. The region is home to the famous seaside resort of Cap Skiring as well as numerous camps, sites and tourist villages including Kafountine, Elinkine, Abéné, Carabane Island. In Ziguinchor commune we find luxury hotels like Kadiandoumagne, Néma Kadior, Aubert and Flamboyant. This therefore means that tourism plays an important role in the region, particularly in the economic field with a significant influx of foreign currency.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Research work on the link between prostitution and migration raises a certain number of difficulties: access to certain resource people, in this case foreign prostitutes, and the absence of an efficient sampling frame making it possible to accurately quantify the number of prostitutes on a regional scale (Ziguinchor) and on a national scale (Senegal). Therefore, we have favored, within the framework of this research, a socio-anthropological approach (De Sardan, 2008) combined with a multi-sited ethnography approach (Marcus 1995). The methodology is essentially qualitative and combines semi-structured interviews, life stories (Bertaux, 2016), observations and informal discussions. The identification of sex workers was possible thanks to the "snowball" and "word of mouth" method, but also through the bonds of trust that we were able to establish with the first sex workers encountered in the hostels, hotels, bars, and nightlife environments in which we had been immersed for a long time (around 2 months) before the start of the research. From the moment we made contact, we had to establish a relationship of trust with these sex workers and negotiate with them the importance and usefulness of the research that we were going to undertake. We then spoke at length with sex workers to convince them to participate in our research. We had made the bet of giving the floor to various foreign prostitutes from various countries in our sample. Not having a proper sampling frame as mentioned previously, we favored network sampling commonly called snowball. Network or snowball sampling is based on the principles of personal or professional contacts making it possible to trace the subjects sought. The technique consists of starting from one individual in the population to be studied to obtain enough people who can be part of the sample. Our strategy consisted of approaching certain foreign prostitutes, who put us in contact with other prostitutes and so on until enough resource people could be met.

The research took place from May 2023 to January 2024, in Senegal, particularly in the Ziguinchor region. The surveys were carried out over time (Delcroix 2013) at regular intervals, with fifty (50) foreign prostitutes coming mainly from Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Gambia, Mali, Ivory Coast and Niger. This sample of fifty (50) sex workers, however, is not representative of the mother population insofar as we note a significant gap concerning these foreign prostitutes: the absence of quantified data or precise statistics on the number of foreign prostitutes installed in the Ziguinchor region. We also carried out a series of observations in hotels, hostels, bars, and nightclubs frequented by these sex workers looking for clients. The interviews and life stories were, most often, carried out in French, English and Creole and then translated into French.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prostitution in Senegal: We often hear about prostitution as being "one of the oldest professions in the world" which shows that it has existed since time immemorial. In almost all countries in the world, prostitution is carried out by women or men who have made it a partial or full-time activity. In some countries, prostitution is legalized and regulated while in other countries it is prohibited. In Senegal, prostitution is regulated, through a law dating from February 1, 1966.¹ Any person who plans to practice prostitution is required to register on the health and social file and must be in possession of a health record in which medical visits carried out every two weeks with the doctor are recorded. The law also sets the legal age for prostitution at 21. Sex workers, whether Senegalese or foreign, are required to have this health record and to respect the legal age (21 years) to carry out prostitution activity.

Manifest and declared prostitution: Poorly perceived in Senegalese society, prostitution activity has a negative resonance among the Senegalese populations. Practicing prostitution, whatever the reasons, is prohibited by the social codes of Senegalese society. Therefore, the practice of prostitution in an obvious and declared manner constitutes a sort of burden for the sex worker. Overt and declared prostitution being understood as offering sexual services in exchange for a sum of money or materials. Declared because as mentioned previously, in Senegalese legislation, anyone who intends to work in the world of prostitution must hold a health record and make regular visits to a doctor. Prostitutes thus holding a health certificate can rightly be considered to fall into this category. Generally, it is these sex workers that we see on the roadways at night, in neighborhood corners, in bars and nightclubs, in hotels and hostels. As they are in order from the point of view of the law relating to prostitution in Senegal, that is to say that they have the required age and the book allowing them to exercise the activity in the greatest tranquility prostitution; They have no reason to hide the prostitution activity they carry out in this way. This is also evidenced by their clothing which reveals their generous shapes and all the forms of highlighting their bodies accompanied by gestures to attract customers.

¹ Law n° 66-21 of February 1, 1966 relating to the fight against venereal diseases and prostitution.

Furthermore, when there are cases of raids carried out by police services and those carried out at night, the agents very often ask them, beyond verifying their age, for the famous health record with visits to the doctor registered in good and due form. Failure to hold this health record is very often the cause of a referral to the police station, a referral which will be followed by a fine and a summons to regularize one's situation. It is important, however, to emphasize that our observations carried out in bars, nightclubs, hostels, and guest houses as well as the cross-checks with interviews carried out with prostitutes show the existence of cases of corruption of certain agent's police by prostitutes. Holding a health record is one of the key documents required for practicing prostitution. His non-detention is therefore reprimanded by the police even if there are cases of corruption in the absence of the notebook.

Overt and undeclared prostitution: Overt and undeclared prostitution refers to the fact of a woman offering sexual exchanges for remuneration without having a health record. Sex workers who find themselves in this category are required not to hang out in bars and other places where prostitution is practiced. If they end up there and there are surprise raids by the police, they are ipso facto sent to the checkpoint. This is one of the reasons why, even if some sex workers who work and who do not have a notebook are obliged to hide incognito or simply flee in the event of a surprise raid by the police. The observations we made at certain times of the night in bars, nightclubs and hostels confirm this situation. In this form of overt and undeclared prostitution we find women who occasionally practice prostitution and who, in parallel, have other jobs as cleaners, shopkeepers, waitresses in bars or restaurants, pupils and students. The income they earn from prostitution simply allows them to meet certain occasional needs that their employment does not allow them to cover.

Undeclared latent prostitution: In Senegal, there is a category of young or mature women who carry out undeclared latent prostitution activity. It is, more precisely, a form of clandestine prostitution carried out by women who live alone or with other women and who receive men in their rooms and apartments. It is true that they receive their customers day and night, they do so with the greatest discretion so as not to arouse suspicion in the neighborhood. Some of these women also travel to meet their clients. This scenario is, however, conditioned by the fact that it is the client who covers the prostitute's travel costs and the latter can even require the client to double the price of *the pass*.² What makes undeclared latent prostitution special is the fact that the prostitute does not want the activity she carries out to be known, particularly to family and neighborhood circles. This form of prostitution is widespread in all regions of Senegal, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas. By examining more closely this population of foreign prostitutes scattered on both sides in the urban and peri-urban centers of the country, we find mainly, but not only, those coming from neighboring countries such as Mali, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, and Mauritania. Other sex workers come from countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Niger, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast to name just a few.

Prostitutes coming from border or neighboring countries

Prostitutes coming from border or neighboring countries to Senegal are those who originate from Mali, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, and Mauritania. Once in Senegal, these prostitutes favor urban and peri-urban centers with a high human concentration where they think they can find clients and earn a lot of money. Other sex workers, on the other hand, prefer to settle in border regions, tourist sites and mining sites and carry out their prostitution activity there. Another category of foreign prostitutes favors Dakar, the capital where there is a high human concentration and a heterogeneous population. Whatever the region of installation, these prostitutes rent, for some, rooms and for other apartments which they occupy alone or in groups of 2, 3 or even 4.

However, they prefer group rentals due to the problems of insecurity in certain urban and peri-urban cities. Sex workers coming from border or neighboring countries in Senegal carry out prostitution activity between Senegal and their country. In fact, most of them work for a few weeks or even a few months in Senegal and return to their country. They travel back and forth between their country and Senegal. This is the case, for example, of Kadia,³ a Gambian prostitute who told us this during one of our interviews.

"I go back and forth between Gambia and Senegal and now I make a good living. Sometimes I go to Cap Skirring for a few weeks, sometimes I go to Ziguinchor city to work. I also diversify the destinations to the extent that sometimes I go to Kaolack or Mbour for a few months to earn a lot of money. One of the biggest advantages I have in not settling in Senegal is that people don't know me, and I don't even think there are people who might recognize me. In any case, I only work at night in bars and around hotels. It's true that I happened to have daytime clients, but it was with the greatest discretion."

These words from Kadia illustrate very well how the geographical proximity of border or neighboring countries to Senegal allows dozens or even hundreds of sex workers to carry out prostitution activity between here and there. Regarding their accommodation, they very often stay in hostels and rarely in hotels. The choice of hostels can be explained for several reasons. The first and main reason is that the hostels allow these foreign prostitutes to receive their clients in complete peace and with the greatest discretion. In the hostels, these sex workers also have the possibility of finding accommodation allowing them to rest for a few days or even a few weeks, because they are most generally traveling from one city to another to diversify the clientele and earn a lot more money. Some of the foreign prostitutes who stay in these hostels do not even make the effort to go looking for clients since clients are found for them by the hostel manager or an intermediary on site. This seems to be corroborated by the words of Amara, a sex worker from Guinea-Conakry who has been practicing prostitution for more than four (4) years now.

"I come to Senegal very often to work. As I have contact with two hostel managers with whom I am in contact almost all the time even if I return to Guinea-Conakry. Every time I tell

² *The pass* corresponds to the time that the sex worker spends with her client to satisfy him.

³ To strictly respect the anonymity of the people with whom we spoke, we will use assumed names throughout this article.

them my coming date, they themselves are the ones looking for customers. As soon as I arrive, I start receiving clients in my room and I can even go days without leaving my room to pick up clients. And I must say that the work I do pays well in Senegal, because every time I come here, I end up with a lot of money at the end of my stay. However, I must point out that I never stay more than two months here without returning to Guinea-Conakry”.

Beyond finding in inns a suitable place allowing them to stay and develop their prostitution activity in complete peace, certain foreign prostitutes implement a strategy with certain inn managers who facilitate their clientele and offers a favorable environment for receiving customers. This collaboration is, however, not free since these prostitutes enter a form of contract with these hostel managers. Contract, which, even if it is not materialized by documents obliges these prostitutes to pay a sort of fee to the hostel managers with whom they are in collaboration. As this fee is not fixed, it can be remitted to the manager on a daily or weekly basis. It should also be emphasized that the choice made by certain prostitutes to stay in hostels is also part of a strategy of approaching customers due to the fact that next to certain hostels, there are bars or nightclubs that welcome everyone in the world, ideal places to meet client's day and night. Finally, we observe that another category of foreign prostitutes opts, within the framework of their repeated stay in Senegal, not for hostels and hotels, but prefers to squat with one of their friends or acquaintances who is in the world of prostitution. This allows them to not have to pay housing costs in many cases even if the friend or person who hosts them asks for a financial contribution to pay for the accommodation. If geographical proximity is a no less negligible parameter favoring the arrival of prostitutes from border countries, the fact remains that other sex workers leave hundreds of kilometers to emigrate to Senegal and engage in prostitution.

Prostitutes from other African countries: Among the population of foreign prostitutes present throughout the Senegalese national territory are a large number who come from countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Niger, Ivory Coast and Cape Town. Green. Having spread to almost all regions, these sex workers develop their prostitution activity in bars, hotels, hostels, guest houses, the rooms, and apartments in which they stay once they arrive in Senegal. The choice of the Senegal destination is not trivial and fortuitous, these prostitutes coming from other non-border countries opt for a long installation ranging from one (1) to four (4) years or even more.

Indeed, geographical distance forces prostitutes from other African countries to settle down to quietly develop their prostitution activity. Prostitutes coming from non-border or neighboring countries of Senegal have geographical, not to say distance, constraints which mean that they are obliged to stay longer in Senegal if they want to earn more money. And this is one of the main reasons why they rent apartments allowing them to develop their prostitution activity. Having an apartment gives the prostitute greater room for maneuver coupled with more freedom, for two reasons. On the one hand, she has the possibility, if the non-immersion in her intimacy hardly bothers her, of being able to receive clients at her home and in fact not having to pay in inns or hotels for her economic-sexual exchanges with customers.

On the other hand, she can accommodate other prostitutes in her apartment who, in certain cases, can contribute to paying for the accommodation.

Ziguinchor: one of the main destinations for foreign prostitutes

Prostitution is strongly anchored in the practice of certain women in the city of Ziguinchor. Whether this prostitution is manifest and declared, whether it is manifest and undeclared, whether it is latent and undeclared, it concerns a significant proportion of foreign prostitutes coming from Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry and Mali. These sex workers workday and night in bars, hostels, hotels, and popular areas of the city. The long-term immersion that we had to carry out during this research, in nocturnal environments, in this case the bars, inns and other places of debauchery of the city, allowed us to see that there are few local prostitutes in the city of Ziguinchor and that prostitution activity is mainly practiced by young women coming from other African countries. Most of the young girls who live in Ziguinchor and who practice prostitution engage in a form of latent and undeclared prostitution. Unlike local prostitutes, foreign prostitutes engage in open and declared prostitution and therefore do not hesitate to exhibit and showcase their bodies on the sidewalks near the city's bars and hostels. It is appropriate to emphasize here the important role of Jakarta motorcycle taxis in organizing the prostitution activity of foreign prostitutes. Indeed, some drivers in Jakarta serve as intermediaries for these foreign prostitutes. Intermediaries, because some Jakarta motorcycle taxi drivers look for customers and in many cases are responsible for transporting customers to where the prostitute has taken up residence. These Jakarta motorcycle taxi drivers work with these foreign prostitutes in the greatest discretion, as Maeva, a Nigerian prostitute established in a working-class district of the city of Ziguinchor, points out.

“[...] I work with two motorcycle taxi drivers here. They are the ones responsible for dropping off customers day and night at my place. This allows me not to move around too much and to receive customers quietly. As soon as the customer is finished, they come and pick them up if they don't mind. Other customers, however, prefer to go out and find their own means of transport to bring them back. When I have customers who don't want to travel, it's one of these motorcycle taxi drivers that I call and who drops me off there. As soon as I finish my performance, I call him, and he comes to take me back. Most of my friends who work in the prostitution sector have numbers for motorcycle taxi drivers that they call if they must travel to visit a client. In addition, the advantage is that at night, for example, they can go to the most remote areas of the city, which some taxi drivers refuse. So, with these motorcycle taxi drivers, we really manage to work in peace, and we have no transport problems day or night, whatever the time.”

As this interview extract shows, the role of Jakarta motorcycle taxi drivers in the prostitution activity of sex workers of foreign origin in the city of Ziguinchor no longer needs to be demonstrated. And to see it more closely, just walk through the city's bars, hostels, and nightclubs where you can see motorcycle taxis parked at any hour of the night and which provide transportation prostitutes and clients.

In the space of a few years, the city of Ziguinchor has become a hub of prostitution where many prostitutes from other African countries have taken up residence. Other foreign prostitutes, on the other hand, favor tourist places where they think they can find more customers, to carry out their activity.

Prostitution in tourist places in the Ziguinchor region:

Senegal is full of several tourist sites which are frequented all year round by tourists from the four corners of the globe. Although Saly on the small coast of Mbour, the island of Gorée and the seaside resort of Cap Skirring are the best known, we will highlight the existence of other tourist sites such as the pink lake, Nianing, the Saloum islands, the Magdalen Islands, Carabane Island, Djogué Island, Toubab Dialaw, Somone, Diembéring, Kafountine, Kabrousse, Abéné to name just a few. Our surveys were carried out in the tourist places of Cap Skirring, Diembéring, Abéné, Karabane Island, located in the Ziguinchor region and Saly in the Thiès region. Tourist places refer to places that are frequented by tourists throughout the year. There are many hotels, hostels, restaurants, and relaxation areas in these tourist places. Foreigners from various countries stay in these hotels and inns which constitute a favorable place for prostitutes who see it as an opportunity to find a high-end clientele without having to walk the streets at night in places of debauchery (clubs, night and others). Jennifer, a Nigerian prostitute who has lived for more than six years in Senegal, particularly in the seaside resort of Cap Skirring, told us this during one of our interviews.

“Most of the time I don’t need to go to bars and nightclubs at night. I’m just walking from one hotel to another looking for a possible client. I try not to arouse suspicion. I have a strategy in terms of clothing, the way I hold my cigarette and my glass of alcohol, the look I give to customers are all things that very often allow them to know that I offer sexual services. Even if they are not convinced, all it takes is for one of the customers to approach me so that I can tell them in the right words that I am a girl of joy. Most of my sexual encounters with tourist clients take place in their hotel or hostel rooms where they are staying during their stay. However, it happens that I have sexual relations with clients either in the ladies’ toilets or in corners of the beach, but in this case, it is mainly at night. Ah, I forgot, I sometimes had sexual relations with some of my clients in their cars. I have a room here, but I rarely receive my clients there. There are hotels that are more conducive to my activity. In any case, the clientele is not the same. Sometimes I have 3 to 4 customers in a single morning, especially during the tourist season”.

However, it should be emphasized, and our field observations have highlighted this, that sex workers who seek their clients in hotels and inns do not engage in solicitation or conduct in ways that would mislead the manager of the hotel to put them back in order. Most often, these prostitutes respect the rules laid down in these hotels and hostels. They seek customers but do so according to the rules of the art and without disturbing the peace and quiet of the tourists staying in these hotels. We can push the reflection by going even further and use the term soft and gentle prostitution. Interviews carried out in parallel with hotel or hostel managers show that they are aware of this prostitution which takes place in their hotels. An unprecedented fact that we were able to discover during our investigation is that foreign

prostitutes pay a small amount either every two days, every weekend, or every ten (10) days to the hotel manager as Jessica, a sex worker of Ghanaian origin living in Cap Skirring, tells us.

“I sometimes give 10000FCFA (16\$) or 15000FCFA (24\$) to the manager of the hotels where I spend a lot of time and where I find a lot of customers. We give this money just as compensation, but it is not an obligation. In any case, since I have been here, no hotel or hostel manager has asked me for money because I am looking for customers in their hotels.”

CONCLUSION

The immigration of foreign prostitutes in the Ziguinchor region is an integral part and a reality of contemporary migratory dynamics in Senegal. Migration dynamics characterized by enormous changes in recent years. It is clear, therefore, that in this work we could not address all the facets of this migration of these prostitutes coming from other African countries and who practice prostitution in the country of *teranga*.⁴ This article was able to show several facets of the immigration of prostitutes to Senegal by revealing and highlighting the countries where these sex workers mainly come from and the places where this prostitution activity is carried out. The reflection on the immigration of prostitutes in the Ziguinchor region highlights the places that these foreign prostitutes favor, in particular bars, hostels, popular neighborhoods, and tourist places because they can earn a lot of money there.

The research was able to highlight that among the foreign prostitutes present in the Ziguinchor region, those coming from Nigeria and Guinea-Bissau are more numerous. Finally, it should be noted that even if prostitution is regulated in the Ziguinchor region as in other regions of Senegal, foreign prostitutes operate clandestinely and carry sexually transmitted infections with them. Some foreign prostitutes therefore contribute to the spread of sexually transmitted infections, which constitutes a major health problem in the Ziguinchor region and even beyond since they also travel from time to time to other regions of the country where they work prostitution.

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⁴ The name *teranga* is a Wolof word which means hospitality in French. It is attributed to Senegal because of the sense of hospitality that characterizes the inhabitants of this country.

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