



Original Article

Men's revealed preferences regarding women's ages: evidence from prostitution



Kitae Sohn*

Konkuk University, Department of Economics, 120 Neungdong-ro, Gwangjin-gu, Seoul, 05029, South Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Initial receipt 23 April 2015

Final revision received 13 January 2016

Keywords:

Preference

Age

Reproduction

Sex

Prostitution

Indonesia

Evolution

ABSTRACT

Across time and space, men, both young and old, usually report to be sexually interested in women in their late teens to late 20s. We investigated whether this self-reported preference was supported by behavior in a situation where true preferences are most likely to be revealed: prostitution. Using data from Indonesian prostitutes, we found that in general, the prostitute's age and the price of sex were negatively related. Upon close scrutiny, the relationship exhibited a flat–decreasing–flat pattern. For prostitutes in the late teens to early 20s, the price of sex was similar; for prostitutes in the early 20s to early 30s, the price of sex rapidly decreased and then stabilized. The value of peak age was substantial: the price attached to sex with prostitutes of peak age was more than twice that for prostitutes in their late 30s. The revealed preferences regarding women's ages are consistent with the self-reported preferences. Furthermore, this study added precision to existing literature.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Men of all backgrounds, generations, and cultures typically report that they are sexually attracted to women in their late teens to late 20s (Antfolk et al., 2015; Buss, 1989; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992; Kenrick, Keefe, Gabrielidis, & Cornelius, 1996), and this preference remains the same regardless of the level of relationship involvement (Buunk, Dijkstra, Kenrick, & Warntjes, 2001). It is important to note that the age range coincides with high reproductive capacity. Women's reproductive capacities can be measured based on two concepts (Buss, 1989). Reproductive value is actuarially defined in units of expected future reproduction. It concerns the age of maximum remaining reproductive capacity, covering the reproductive lifetime of a woman. The value generally peaks in the mid-teens (i.e., at menarche) and decreases with age. By contrast, fertility is defined as the probability of present reproduction. It concerns the likelihood of conception following a single copulation, focusing only one point in time. Peak fertility is generally reached in the early 20s and decreases with age. Neither reproductive value nor fertility has rigidly defined peak ages, but both are heavily dependent on age. This is particularly the case because women's reproductive capacity rapidly (relative to men's) decreases once peak age is reached. Specifically, after the maternal age 35, fertility plunges, while fetuses and neonates experience a steep increase in the likelihood of adverse birth outcomes (Carolan & Frankowska, 2011; Heffner, 2004).

We investigated whether this self-reported preference was supported by behaviors in a situation where true preferences are most likely to be revealed, that is, an anonymous one-time encounter with no required commitment—prostitution. The concept of revealed preference is important because people sometimes lie. Anonymity is another important feature because people are more honest when their identities are concealed. The one-time nature is worth incorporating because people tend to more closely follow their true preferences when they do not expect future interactions. For the same reason, the condition of no commitment adds further rigor to this investigation. On the other hand, by construction, studies based on hypothetical questions cannot capture revealed preferences (Buunk et al., 2001; Antfolk et al., 2015). Studies based on marriage do capture revealed preferences (Otta, da Silva Queiroz, de Sousa Campos, da Silva, & Silveira, 1999). By definition, however, marriage is a long-term relationship with serious commitment, and the groom's and the bride's identities are publicly announced. Studies based on speed dating are closest to the spirit of this study because participants in speed dating act upon their preferences, and speed dating does not necessarily require commitment; participants' identities are concealed to a large extent (Kurzman & Weeden, 2005). By convention, however, participants in speed dating buy the service to have future interactions with other participants that they choose. We thus considered a situation wherein the male preference is very likely to be truthfully revealed.

Prostitution offers an interesting twist because not knowing the prostitute's age, the client must infer her reproductive capacity by observing age-related cues, such as full lips, soft hair, smooth skin, colorful

* Tel.: +82 2 450 3558.

E-mail address: ksohn@konkuk.ac.kr.

cheeks, good muscle tone, and firm breasts and buttocks. He can ask her about her age, but there is no reason to believe that her reported age is true when she probably knows from experience that men pay more to prostitutes of a certain age. Literature has rarely discussed whether men can correctly infer women's reproductive capacities when women lie about their ages. Clients in our study correctly inferred prostitutes' reproductive capacities and placed high values on sex with prostitutes of high reproductive capacity.

We used the price of sex to measure men's preference for women of a certain age. A merit of this measure is that people tend to acquire goods and services of the same quality at the lowest possible price. Therefore, if a client pays more to a young prostitute than to an old prostitute, one may conclude that he prefers the young prostitute. Another merit is that it enables us to quantify the value of a prostitute. If the client pays twice the amount of money to the young prostitute than to the old prostitute, one may conclude that he prefers the young prostitute twice as much as the old prostitute. Qualitative statements, such as "important" or "unimportant," lack such precision.

The country of interest, Indonesia, magnifies the effectiveness of this measure. Prevailing poverty in Indonesia reinforces the tendency to pay the least. If commercial sex in Indonesia were cheap, clients would hardly care about the price that they pay, thereby weakening the relationship between the price of sex and the preference. On the contrary, commercial sex in Indonesia is never cheap. According to our data, the mean price of sex was 44 times greater than the mean hourly wage for young working women in Indonesia.

Because prostitution in Indonesia is quasi-legal (Hull, Sulistyarningsih, & Jones, 1998; Pisani, 2008), the price of sex in Indonesia is "just right" in the sense that it is determined in the competitive prostitution market. Prostitution as such is not prohibited, although criminal law prohibits facilitating illegal sexual activities. Prohibited or not, however, all participants in prostitution – prostitutes, pimps, clients, and law enforcement agents – largely ignore the law. There are occasional police crackdowns, but they are more symbolic than real and are conducted in response to complaints from the public. Closures are immediately followed by the resumption of normal operations and operators who know powerful clients are little affected by such crackdowns. This situation is inevitable because local governments themselves (in collaboration with military authorities) effectively serve as pimps. They operate official red-light districts called *lokalisasi*, which are clusters of brothels along one or a few streets. Furthermore, violence in prostitution in Indonesia is almost non-existent. Of 11,504 prostitutes under 45 years of age in Pisani's (2008) study, only 399 prostitutes (3.5%) said that they had been forced to have sex even though they did not want to and were not paid by clients in the previous year. Further, Indonesian prostitutes are mobile: 42.6% of our sample worked outside their province of origin. Considering the voluntary nature of their work, their high mobility, and prostitution's low barrier to entry (e.g., little capital is needed, and standing on the street is enough), prostitution in Indonesia operates as a competitive market. These features are important for this study because the prices observed in our data were close to the equilibrium price. In other words, there is little room for negotiating prices: prostitutes demanding prices higher than the equilibrium price are outbid by other qualitatively identical prostitutes; the same idea applies to clients.

Some studies have estimated the relationship between the prostitute's age and the price of sex, but only tangentially; such studies have simply regarded the prostitute's age as a covariate for estimating the relationship between other variables of interest and the price of sex. For example, Rao, Gupta, Lokshin, and Jana (2003) found a negative relationship between the prostitute's age and the average price charged per act in Sonagachi, the oldest and best-established red-light area in Calcutta; however, they focused on the relationship between condom use and the price of sex. Gertler, Shah, and Bertozzi (2005) also found a negative relationship between the prostitute's age and the price per act in the Mexican states of Morelos and Michoacán, but they were also mainly interested in the relationship

between condom use and the price of sex. Using the same data, Arunachalam and Shah (2008), too, estimated a negative relationship between the prostitute's age and weekly earnings among prostitutes from Ecuador and Mexico, but they aimed to estimate the earnings premium of prostitutes relative to non-prostitutes and to determine whether prostitution and marriage could co-exist. Cunningham and Kendall (2011) entered prostitutes' ages in the specification to determine weekly and calculated hourly wages for US online prostitutes, but did not even list the coefficient on age.

Given the ample evidence that men are attracted to women of high reproductive capacity, it is not surprising to find a negative relationship between the prostitute's age and the price of sex. Some facts, however, suggest that this relationship is more complicated than this. Women are fertile for a short period of time, and their fertility rapidly declines once they reach peak age. Thus we hypothesized that the shape of this relationship is more likely to exhibit a flat-decreasing-flat pattern. The first flat part reflects a mixture of the peak ages for reproductive value and fertility; the second flat part reflects the fact that once women are sufficiently far from peak age, an additional increase in age does not make much difference. This would be the case if men, whether consciously or unconsciously, value sex in relation to reproduction. In addition, since the decrease in fertility is pronounced after the age 35, we expected that the start of the second flat part would coincide with this age.

We went beyond understanding the shape of the relationship. Researchers still debate whether the male preference for mates is related to reproductive value (therefore, the mid-teens), fertility (therefore, in the early 20s), or somewhere between these (Bergen, Antfolk, Jern, Alanko, & Santtila, 2013; Buss, 1989). While determining the shape of the relationship between the prostitute's age and the price of sex, we identified ages with the peak and trough values.

2. Data

We primarily analyzed the Behavioral and Drug-Taking Risk Behavior among Female Sex Workers and Men in Mobile Occupations in Indonesia, 2002–2004; henceforth, this dataset is referred to as Pisani's dataset since it is available under her name. The dataset and explanations on it are publically available at <http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/pisani>. This dataset provides information on prostitutes. To extract comparable female workers outside of prostitution, we drew on two additional datasets: the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS) and the IFLS East—these datasets and explanations on them are publically available at <http://www.rand.org/labor/FLS/IFLS.html>. Since the IFLS and IFLS East are auxiliary datasets, we briefly described them in the Appendix.

In 2002, the Indonesian Ministry of Health took over a program for monitoring the behaviors of people in groups at high risk of HIV infection. Surveys were performed by the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics with the help of NGOs, with technical support from Family Health International and with funding from USAID. Two rounds of surveillance were performed. In 2002–2003, 10 cities were covered, and in 2004, 15 cities were covered. Sample locations were first identified, and respondents at the sampling locations were selected as randomly as possible. Importantly, interviews were conducted after a number of local approaches, including rapport-building, were undertaken. This effort increased the possibility that prostitutes correctly reported their ages. As its title suggests, the survey mainly concerned epidemiology; thus, we were forced to draw on a small number of socio-economic variables.

The dependent variable was the amount of money received by the prostitute during the last act of commercial sex. By referring to the last act, the survey attempted to reduce recall bias and measurement error in the price of sex since the prostitute could more accurately recall the last transaction rather than all transactions for a certain period. It is unclear whether the price of sex included the pimp's share. Even if the share was included, the price is unlikely to be exaggerated because prostitutes managed by pimps typically receive free accommodations,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/943120>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/943120>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)