

“During the Rains” Offers Character-Driven Look at Japanese Sex Workers Amidst COVID-19

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***During the Rains* is an insightful, character-driven look at sex work in Japan among young women during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The film follows “Kotone,” an unemployed young woman, who enters the world of [compensated dating](#) and sex work. Though the film’s opening is a bit weak—raising some questions about Kotone’s background that it never truly answers—it eventually picks up when we see Kotone become accustomed to a lifestyle of working in a “cafe” where men can visit and pick among her or others for compensated dating.

In the meantime, Kotone befriends “Sakura,” another worker at the same “cafe.” Sakura is often perceived as an elite by the other women who work there, since she seems to be a college student and is sometimes thought to have rich parents. However, Sakura in reality aims to care for her two brothers and family.

Kotone has her own troubles too. It appears that someone else who works at the “cafe” or frequents the “cafe” has been spreading rumors about her having STDs. Much of the film, then, follows Kotone’s attempts to get to the bottom of who seems to have it out for her. Initially, Kotone suspects Kaede, who helped her initially join the “cafe” but is often critical of other workers, and whose primary motivation for working at the “cafe” is to offset her frequent spending at host bars.

However, for the most part, *During the Rains* eschews moments of high drama. Instead, the film is carried by the everyday dramas of Kotone, Sakura, Kaede, and the strange men they encounter.

Though there are no truly significant male characters to speak of, they primarily appear in the movie as agents of coercion and violence. The dynamics of the film, then, are driven by the relationship between its female characters. *During the Rains* excels in this respect, given strong writing and acting.

In the end, the movie does not provide much insight as to why its main characters have become sex workers, though certainly part of the contributing factors are economic hardship stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as the specter of the pandemic lurks in the movie’s background, for the most part, life goes on, and the viewer sometimes forgets that the pandemic is ongoing.

But in many ways, *During the Rains* does not need to remind viewers about COVID. The film centers on women who happen to be sex workers, but it does not solely depict the women as “only” sex workers. In this respect, the movie is an accomplishment.

If *During the Rains* has a weakness, it may be that its protagonists still look a bit too much like movie stars playing sex workers, as opposed to individuals who truly inhabit the world and environs

of sex work. Nevertheless, *During the Rains'* strong focus on the subjectivity of its protagonists still makes for compelling viewing.

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