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**SEX FOR SALE
QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MALE SEX WORKERS**

Report to Community Safety/SWEET Project
Kirklees Safer Communities Service

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HUDDERSFIELD

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SEPTEMBER 2006

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1. RESEARCH AIMS, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The Applied Criminology Centre was approached by the Phil Birch, Principal Community Safety Officer (Specialist Crime Team)/SWEET and Project Manager Community Safety/SWEET Project to investigate the nature and extent of the male sex market in the area.

1.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study set out to explore the experiences of male sex workers in Kirklees and neighbouring areas. Specifically, it aimed, through interviews with male sex workers (MSWs), to explore their reasons for engaging in sex work, to uncover the risks and dangers they face, the nature of their contact with agencies, and the help and support they required either to leave the profession or to conduct their work as safely as possible. Interviews with sex workers explored the following broad themes:

- Childhood experiences
- Education and employment history
- Family and other significant relationships
- Contact with criminal justice agencies
- Important influences and turning points
- Current living conditions
- Length of time in sex work and reasons for starting
- Sexuality of sex workers and their clients
- Attitudes to sex work
- Actual and perceived dangers of the work
- Precautions taken to reduce the risks
- Involvement with agencies
- Future plans

The second main aim of the study was to test the feasibility of asking participants to use a diary sheet to record their encounters with clients.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The male sex industry is largely hidden which makes it very difficult to estimate the size and boundaries of the population. The industry is also characterised by differentiation between those who primarily work indoors (either at home or in a sauna/brothel) and those who work on the streets. It is important, therefore, to consider the extent to which the current sample is representative of the wider population of sex workers.

As the study was funded by Kirklees Safer Community Service, our concern was to contact sex workers within this area. In our early discussions with the manager of the sex workers empowerment and education trust (SWEET), we learnt that SWEET worked with five local sex workers, and it was our intention to try to interview these five men and use a snowball technique to locate up to five further sex workers. However, when we asked SWEET to contact these men on our behalf, it turned out that the agency did not hold contact details for three of the five men, and the remaining two did not class themselves as sex workers. We therefore had to adopt a different approach to recruitment, and this is explained in the next section.

Contacting clients

Not knowing any male sex workers personally, we were somewhat at a loss where to start. Fortuitously, an article appeared on the BBC website¹ describing the murder of male sex worker, which gave the names of two magazines (Loot and Exchange and Mart) which carried adverts for male sex workers. Having located a number of interviewees through these publications, we then asked our first interviewees where they advertised, and found that the Gay Times and the Sport were also popular places to advertise. We were also directed to a number of internet sites where escorts advertised.² Advertisements in papers and magazines proved more fruitful than those on the internet. The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, adverts in the print media invariably provided a telephone number, and we were able to call MSWs directly to explain the research, whereas many internet adverts provided only an email address, and we found that people were less likely to respond to approaches by email. Secondly, although there were many more adverts on the internet,³ many of these turned out to be male escort 'hopefuls'; in other words heterosexual males who had advertised in the hope that attractive women would pay them for sex. It became apparent after contacting a number of these, that their hopes were not fulfilled, as one put it 'woman just don't pay for it [sex]'.

The first thing we discovered when trying to make contact with sex workers was that very few were based in Kirklees. None of those advertising in the print media, and only two of those from the internet sites were from Kirklees.⁴ This may be because the two main towns in Kirklees (Huddersfield and Dewsbury) are not of sufficient size to sustain their own male sex work industry. In order to reach our sample of between five and ten sex workers we agreed with the manager of SWEET to cast our net wider. It was apparent from the adverts that there were significant numbers of male sex workers in the nearby conurbations of Leeds/Bradford and Manchester, and smaller numbers in Barnsley and Doncaster. The rationale for including these cities was that residents of Kirklees wishing to use male sex workers would most likely travel to these areas, and / or that sex workers would travel to Kirklees from those areas on 'outcalls' (interviews confirmed that this was indeed the case).

In total, we identified a potential sample of 43 male sex workers. Of the 28 MSWs we were able to make contact with,⁵ nine were able to participate in the research within the timescale of the fieldwork.⁶ Seven of these we contacted through adverts in the print media; the other two from the internet. Interviews took place in August and September 2006. Three of the interviews took place in the homes of the MSWs, and the remainder were in public places such as cafes and pubs. Two researchers were present during all interviews.

Diary sheets

While the main focus of the study was on the experiences of sex workers themselves, we were also interested in the characteristics of their clients. We decided to use a diary sheet approach which had been piloted by Minichiello et al (1999) in order to collect anonymised information about the clients, including their age, ethnicity, and details of the sexual encounter itself. MSWs were asked to

¹ See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4939502.stm>.

² For example uk-escort.net and rxxx.com. Special permission was sought from the University to access these sites.

³ The site uk-escort.net, for example, listed 98 male escorts in the north east, and 120 in the North West region. By comparison, most print media carried less than 10 adverts.

⁴ In fact, both those from Kirklees declined to participate.

⁵ Almost all the numbers given in the adverts were of mobile phones, and some of these appeared to be permanently switched off.

⁶ A further three said that they would have been able to take part at a later date.

complete one sheet after each encounter for a period of one week following the interview, and we provided them with SAEs for the return of the sheets. This aspect of the research which not very successful. Only two sheets were returned by the time of writing the report (three weeks after the first interview). One reason for the low response rate was that it was difficult to maintain contact with MSWs once the interview had been conducted, as mobile phones were often switched off. Secondly, because the sheets were anonymous, we did not know who had and who had not completed them. Finally, having already received payment for the interview, MSWs had little incentive to complete the diary sheets. We think that if this methodology is to be successful, more effort needs to be put into getting alternative contact numbers for MSWs, and consideration given to providing additional payment on receipt of completed diary sheets. This would require the sheets to have some identifier on them, so that we would know who had completed them. This might, however, raise MSWs' concerns as to anonymity. As a consequence of the low response rate, only the data from the interviews is presented in this report.

Ethics

Conducting the research in a sensitive and ethical manner was a prime concern, and the research was designed accordingly. All participants were informed about the purposes of the research both verbally and in writing, and it was made clear that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were asked to sign consent forms to indicate that they understood the research, agreed to take part and were happy for us to use quotes from the research. As an incentive to take part, participants were offered £20 in cash, as well as a contribution to travel costs where appropriate.

1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research is an exploratory study of male sex workers, and it is important to acknowledge that the small size of the sample means that generalisations to the (unknown size of the) wider population cannot reliably be made. Secondly, due to the way in which participants were recruited (through advertisements for escorts/massages) all of the participants were 'indoor' sex workers. Our research, cannot therefore, shed any light on the experiences of 'outdoor' sex workers (commonly known as 'rent boys'), which other studies suggest is likely to be very different (e.g. Connell and Hart, 2003).

However, we believe that our sample is broadly representative of the indoor male sex industry in the region (although it did not include any men who worked primarily in brothels). Unlike Connell and Hart's (2003) study of male sex workers in Edinburgh, for example, our sample included those who worked mainly with couples and females as well as those who worked only with males, and also included a transvestite sex worker.

2. INTRODUCING SEX WORK

The phenomenon of female sex work has received a great deal of criminological scrutiny, however, there has been comparatively less attention paid to male sex workers (MSW's). Indeed much of our understanding of MSW has evolved through larger pieces of research primarily addressing concerns of HIV or drug related research (Bloor, McKeganey and Barnard 1990; Tomlinson, Hillman and Harris 1989). However, there is relatively little research which focuses solely upon the issue of male prostitution.

As with its female counterpart, male prostitution has generally been regarded as deeply problematic, either because of negative societal attitudes to the selling of sex or the prevalence of psychosocial and economic problems amongst those attracted to MSW and the attendant health risks and dangers encountered whilst engaged in it. The sexual risk for the worker and client has long been the subject of particular public concern due to the fear of sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV, all of which have proved influential in directing the research focus.

Aetiology of Sex Work

Sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists have taken different approaches to identifying the 'causes', or factors predictive, of men's involvement in sex work. This earlier discussion tended to view male sex work as a 'pathology' (Coombs, 1974) and identified a range of predisposing psychological factors, including: low intelligence; learning difficulties; emotional disturbance; sex role confusion; and oedipal fixation.

More recently attention has shifted away from this individual pathology approach towards those social and situational factors believed to underlie the motivation to sell sex. These studies emphasise that MSW's tend to have multiple problems including; a disrupted family life; a broken home (Harris 1973); experience of abuse and neglect by parents (Boyer 1989); poor parental role models (including approval of sex work); deprived socio-economic backgrounds, delinquent peers; poor school attendance resulting in skill deficits and unemployment (Coombs, 1974); isolation and alienation; along with problematic alcohol and drug use patterns (Morse et al 1992). More generally, any decision to sell sex also involves what Shaw et al (1996) refer to as 'a mix of coercion and comfort' factors such as; the developing an independent personality; the desire to gain adult attention and acceptance; along with the experience of negative labelling.

Clearly then, there would seem to be many predictors and risk factors concerning entry into male sex work, although it should be remembered that few authors would argue such factors are causal or indeed necessary for entry into sex work. Nevertheless, the result of this research has been to reinforce an unfavourable stereotype of the male sex worker as a deeply deficient figure, a passive victim of economic necessity or individual pathology (Minchiello et al, 1998), and one prone to later involvement in crime, especially incidents of violence perpetrated against older (usually gay) males (Coombs 1974; Visano, 1988). More recently the Streetwise project in London reported that most young MSW's had had contact with the police and criminal justice system, usually for 'obstruction' which was the police practice at the time (1991) for controlling street prostitution (Bluett et al, 2000).

The question still arises as to how a person moves from a conformist member of the public to a novice prostitute, namely, the aetiological dimensions of a career in to male prostitution. Scott and colleagues (2005) note that the stereotypical image of a

MSW remains one of a coerced psychopathological misfit who has been sexually abused as a child and is desperate for money. Their work in Australia has increasingly come to challenge such a view, arguing that the two dominant discourses of epidemiology and socio-pathology have acted to over emphasize what are 'problematic male sex populations' (often street prostitutes or samples from previously institutionalised populations) at the expense of other relatively unproblematic male sex populations (independent and escort). For instance, Minichiello and colleagues (1998) report that non-street workers tend to be better educated; report fewer financial problems; are likelier to see sex work as a long term occupation; are more prone to engage in safer sex practices; and feel comfortable with sex work than do male street workers.

Characteristics of MSW's

According to research by Aggleton, 1999 and West and de Villiers, 1993 not all MSW's can be characterised as psychologically unstable, desperate or destitute. Whilst this is not to discount the experiences of those MSW's who have suffered child abuse, homelessness or whose addiction problems drive their sex work, it is to accept that the profile of male sex workers is diverse and shifting and that contextual factors need to be taken into account when explaining involvement. Minichiello et al (1998) argue that the visibility and ease of research access has in the past tended to skew the categories of MSW used for research, the effect of which has been to exclude the context of sex work as an organised economic activity (although the same authors caution against romanticised narratives which suggest a less exploitative relationship in male sex work than female sex work).

The picture that unfolds from these studies is that the intrinsic nature of sex work is not necessarily oppressive and that there are different kinds of worker and client experiences which encapsulate varying degrees of victimisation, exploitation, agency and choice (Minichiello et al, 1998). As Scott et al argue "entering into sex work as the outcome of a dignified rational choice for financial gain provides an account of the sex worker as a worker who is subject to the same socio-economic forces as any other person and describes sex work as a job not a psychological condition" (Scott et al, 2005: 322).

The question of whether we should conceptualise male prostitutes as a meaningful core group depends upon how broadly male prostitution is defined. Narrow definitions include that of MacNamara and Sagarin (1977: 142) which define male prostitution as the 'conferring of sexual favours by one male on another for a monetary consideration – not occasionally but as a major or supplementary means of livelihood, regularly or over a span of several months or years'. Other researchers tend to favour broader definitions which do justice to the range of male sex work. For instance, Visano (1988) defines sex work as an occupation where a sex worker is hired to provide sexual services for monetary considerations, thus allowing for more transient involvements, as well as including those who sell sex to females and couples. It is this latter definition which we adopt in the current study.

Minichiello et al (1999) describe a male market that is segmented and in which MSW's operate in diverse work environments and do not form a homogeneous population, nor do the clients who use their services. Street workers primarily cater for men wanting cheap 'quickies', while escort agencies/independents cater for financially better off clients and those who have more specialised requirements.

The escort may work in association with an agency, which advertises services and establishes contact between worker and clients. The agency takes a proportion of fee and sex takes place either at a hotel or the client's residence. Negotiations about the

encounter usually take place over the phone. Alternatively, escorts may advertise on their own behalf, and encounters are arranged usually by means of the clients phoning the sex workers.

Service involvement

There is broad agreement within the literature which recommends service harmonisation for agencies working with young people and adults (male and female) involved in sex work (Barrett, 1997; Christian and Gilvarry 1999) although there is more disagreement as to the best form that service delivery should take and what should be delivered. The extent to which services meet the specific needs and requirements of MSW's and the penetration of these services to the wider population of MSW's is difficult to comment upon due to the paucity of data.

Cusick et al's (2003) study of young people's involvement of sex work (which included 33 males and 92 women) found that the main reasons given for using services designed for sex workers were: to obtain condoms; for sexual or general health needs; and for information, advice and support. Those not accessing services gave a number of reasons for avoiding specialist services including their reluctance to discuss their sex work, fears over having their details recorded or a desire to disassociate themselves from those using such services.

3. INTRODUCING THE MEN

In this section, we provide a brief vignette of each of the men interviewed. In order to preserve anonymity, their names have been changed, as have certain details of their lives, where such details might help to identify them.

3.1 VIGNETTES

Andy

A mid 40's sexually gay male with nine years as a sex worker (as an independent escort). Reports a happy childhood brought up in Ireland. Later worked in the UK and overseas in a professional capacity but became disaffected with the accompanying work routine. Made a career change to MSW whilst in the Far East due to desiring 'a change'. Whilst abroad, met and fell in love with a fellow sex worker. When this relationship ended he returned to the UK to continue as a sex worker.

Andy says that he is entirely happy with his involvement in the male sex business, indeed he finds it addictive. His income from sex work is modest in comparison with most of the other interviewees as he can only see about 2 clients per day due to the physical exertion involved. This has led him to diversify into the plastering trade which now accounts for about half of his income. Andy intends to exit sex employment only when he becomes too old for the work, probably in 5-10 years time. Part of his motivations lie in the admission that he experiences guilt when having sex for fun, but not when receiving payment for it.

Britney

A 36 year old homosexual male transvestite. His mother was a prostitute who died when Britney was eight, although he only discovered his mother's occupation when he was 15. Britney experienced a fractured family upbringing and had no contact with his biological father (who was a client of his mother) a development which led to his mother's separation from the step-father.

He disliked his earlier office job routine to the extent that he shifted into MSW, starting out as a disguised female street sex worker, with most male clients not realising. Proud to follow mother into this line of work, he is attracted by the freedom the job offers, and finds aspects of the occupation addictive. Lives in a house bought for him by a regular client and is currently happy with his involvement in sex work. Reports that he has no long term alternative plans, and is content 'treading water', and will probably keep in MSW for many more years. He is currently helping other sex workers to enter the business.

Chris

Chris is a three times married 43 year old father of five whose sexuality is bi-sexual (self defined as 'universal'). He was brought up in the care system from age 10 having been beaten and starved by his parents. It was whilst in care that he first experimented with selling sexual favours to other older boys. This practice was not coerced and he reports enjoying the experience, as he did the general experience of being in Local Authority care. Nevertheless, little formal education was received although he gained some work experience in the catering sector. A period of involvement with the criminal justice system ensued from 17 to 23 years old, including numerous prison sentences. He attempted suicide three times during his incarceration. This period of offending ended when he experienced a 'turning point' at age 23 following a favourable court judgement, whereupon he remained crime free.

He says he had always harboured thoughts about (re)entering sex work, but only started again at about age 40 with his wife's knowledge and permission. His motivation is mainly sexual – he reports a high sex drive and likes to experiment. Financial concerns are a secondary motivation. In addition to MSW, he operates a profitable gardening business year round, in part because he is not very active at escorting. This is due to his unwillingness to spend money on advertising in the print media, and lack of knowledge of internet advertising.

Dave

Dave is a 26 year old gay male who has been working as an independent escort for seven years. While at school he had been academically inclined, and intended following the traditional job route. However, his studies were disrupted when he was thrown out of home by his mother at age 17, whereupon he started out in the MSW business a year or so later.

At the age of 20 he met and fell in love with a rich business man who took him on expenses-paid trips abroad. The combination of this relationship ending violently and the experience of being a victim of robbery by five males (unconnected to sex work) have made him more cynical and money-oriented. Despite this he states that he enjoys the business, especially the freedom that it offers in contrast to the normal working routines of a 9 to 5 job. He intends to exit the sex industry at some point, if he can find a suitable occupation which offers the freedom and financial rewards he desires.

Eddie

A 42 year old Irish Catholic male who is gay. He was brought up in small Irish town, and reports an unproblematic childhood. He later joined a religious order at age 15 but after seven years he became generally disillusioned with the order and left, in part due death of his father. He then moved to northern England aged 21 whereupon he found employment in the social work sector, later to be dismissed on contentious grounds. He has been in a number of long term relationships, although all have ended due to his self admitted selfishness. He is partially disabled due to an illness received some time after he started sex work.

He had some difficulty in explaining his initial motivations for MSW, this despite working in the sector for 18 years, and suggested that human contact might be one reason. Chris has no other income apart from MSW, but owns his own home. He intends to carry on as long as he is physically able, which may not be that much longer.

Frank

A 32 year old single heterosexual male who has been working for four years as an escort. Reports an unexceptional childhood, completed school although he was a bit of a 'rebel' which lead to protracted disciplinary issues with the school. He later followed the example of his father and pursued an army career (lasting for 5 years), although he was discharged for fighting off base due to an anger management problem. This manifested itself later in a background of football hooliganism which led to several prison sentences. He later moved to the Balearics where he did a couple of seasons of bar work, having been attracted by the opportunity for casual sexual encounters, although he reports having had three 'serious' relationships in his life.

States he has a very high sex drive, has attended sexaholics anonymous, and recognises he has an unhealthy sexual obsession with women. He took up escorting

mainly as a way to satisfy his addiction to sex; like Chris the money was just a bonus. He makes a good living from escorting, although supplements this through work as a lorry driver. Stated he would consider give up MSW for the 'right woman'.

Graham

Graham is 24 year old heterosexual male. He reports an unproblematic childhood and successfully completed school with 5 GCSE's. He started a Youth Training Scheme for a local football club but was not successful in getting professional status. He later joined the army and completed a four year term of service. This was followed by 6 months' casual work. He was introduced to sex work through a mutual friend (Frank) who shared his interest in football hooliganism, and was attracted by the lifestyle Frank had. Graham enjoys the business and has no plans to exit the industry.

Harry

He is a 19 year old gay male who has been a MSW for four years. His childhood was characterised by physical abuse by his alcoholic father and a very unstable family life (his mother was a drug addict). In addition he was bullied by his siblings at home and in the final year of school, bullied and beaten by pupils hostile to his homosexuality. This resulted in an early exit from school without any qualifications and he then left home at age 16. After a brief period in hostel accommodation he moved into a shared house where like minded friends pooled their resources. The rent was funded by sex work. Some three and a half years later Harry started a stable relationship with an older MSW (Ian), with whom he now lives and works.

Ian

Ian is a 38 year old homosexual male who has been a MSW for some 19 years on and off. He reports a happy middle-class upbringing, successful navigating the education system through to degree level, and later establishing his own successful business. This trajectory was later interrupted by a realisation that the long and demanding routine of running a business was not what he wanted from life, so he 'downsized' only to encounter the same 'workaholic' lifestyle and accompanying disillusionment. He decided upon a complete career change into sex work. Money was not a primary motivation, as he had already achieved business success; rather his own sexual promiscuousness led to undertake MSW. He identified a niche in the market by providing an equipped parlour which he predominantly works from. He is broadly happy with his occupation and has no plans to exit MSW.

3.2 MALE SEX WORKER PROFILES

Age, ethnicity and sexuality

The nine male sex workers who participated in this study ranged in age from 19 to 45, with an average age of 34 (see table 1 below). All were white and in terms of sexuality six described themselves as homosexual, two as heterosexual and one as bisexual. One of the homosexual interviewees worked as a transvestite. All participants were non-vulnerable sex workers, and only one reported currently using drugs.

Employment prior to Sex Work

All but one of the MSW's had held some form of paid employment prior to entering sex work. For some, their involvement in the labour market was only sporadic or irregular, in part due to leaving total institutions (army, church, prison) and finding it hard to adjust to full time employment. Others had white collar, professional or

business occupations or had been studying. The common factor was a stated dissatisfaction and disillusionment with their working lives, one which was instrumental in leading them into the sex work industry.

Family Background and Childhood Experiences

A sharply contrasting picture emerges when examining the differing childhood and family relations among the MSW's. The majority of MSW's reported either having broadly unexceptional or happy childhoods, as one remarked:

Just a loving, caring normal happy family, believe it or not. No problems. There was nothing that kind of stood out. You'd go home, there'd always be food on the table, we'd always be clean, we were always in school, we always went to mass, we did all the normal things, there was no hidden secrets...I thought how strange that is, because every family's got a secret but my family were so boring that they don't. It was just a good time, a perfect childhood.
Eddie

However there were some notable exceptions to this. Two respondents reported regular physical abuse perpetrated by their parents, one included instances of severe neglect and violence:

I was shop lifting to feed myself because I had to [...] I mean days and days without food. Lost my front teeth when I were seven because my dad just hit me in the face when I took chocolate out the fridge, I had to put my two front teeth in my gum and by the time I woke up in the morning they had been bent right back, [...] I'd had a red hot poker shoved on me but this is all before I was ten.

Chris

Such neglect and violence had been commonplace until he later went into local authority care, an experience which he found to be enjoyable. Three MSW's reported fractured family relationships, primarily due to their families not being able to accept their sexuality. Family rejection accompanied by death of family members meant that all three had no further contact with their immediate family.

None of the MSW's reported any instances of sexual abuse and only one MSW described growing up with a drug using parent:

My mum was a drug addict and she use to be always out of her face on whatever she could get. [...] My dad was an alcoholic and he use to beat me, my mum and my brother.

Harry

Three MSW's spoke of problematic alcohol use by a parent (fathers) and whilst this was detrimental for all individuals concerned in terms of family disharmony, only in one case did this lead to physical abuse and family breakdown.

Notwithstanding the vastly differing experiences of family life and upbringing, none of the MSW's reported having close family relations. Three had no contact with their families due to earlier physical abuse and neglect, or because of their family's hostility to their sexual orientation. Whilst the other MSW's were not estranged from their families, none had told their family members of their involvement in MSW. As one remarked:

I think the idea of doing this would blow their minds

All were unanimous that their families would have great difficulty in accepting their occupations, and either used a cover story or simply did not discuss the matter. In the table below, some of the characteristics of sex workers are summarised.

Table 1. Male sex worker characteristics

| Name | Age | Sexuality | Physical abuse | Sexual abuse | Ever in care | Housing | CJS convictions | Age at involvement | Length of involvement |
|---------|-----|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Andy | 45 | Homosexual | No | No | No | Owner occupier | No | 36 | 9 years |
| Britney | 36 | Homosexual (transvestite) | No | No | Yes | Owner occupier | Yes | 24 | 12 years |
| Chris | 43 | Bi-sexual | Yes | No | Yes | Unknown | Yes | 10 (40) | 2 years |
| Dave | 26 | Homosexual | No | No | No | Private rented | Yes | 19 | 7 years |
| Eddie | 42 | Homosexual | No | No | No | Owner occupier | No | 24 | 18 years |
| Frank | 32 | Heterosexual | No | No | No | Private rented | Yes | 29 | 3 years |
| Graham | 26 | Heterosexual | No | No | No | Private rented | No | 25 | 6 months |
| Harry | 19 | Homosexual | Yes | No | No | With partner | No | 15 | 4 years |
| Ian | 38 | Homosexual | No | No | No | Owner occupier | Yes | 19 | 19 years* |

*with a nine year break from age 24-31.

As can be seen, the men we interviewed had a wide diversity of backgrounds, in terms of upbringing, experience of schooling and work and relationships. In the next section we explore in more detail the reasons why these men became involved in sex work, the nature of that work, the level of their commitment to sex work and their plans for the future.

4. MALE SEX WORK – MOTIVATIONS, INVOLVEMENT AND ATTITUDES

4.1 MOTIVATIONS

In the female sex industry, financial pressures (for example to pay for drugs, debts, accommodation or food) and coercion (exercised through pimps or boyfriends) are frequently cited as the main reasons for initial involvement in prostitution. For example, Pearce and Roache (1997) found that around 70% of female prostitutes were working against their will; being forced to sell sex either by their partners or pimps. Violence or the threat of violence was a key factor in their coercion (Pearce, 1999).

It is notable that none of the MSWs cited coercion of any form as a reason for involvement. Neither did any of the male sex workers have pimps. Although Chris, Harry and Ian had current partners, it did not appear that the partner played a coercive role in the decision to become a sex worker. In Graham's case, previous contacts with sex workers had influenced the decision. Although Graham had been introduced to sex work by his friend (also a MSW), he clearly saw this as an informed choice:

It must be about 6/7 months ago, through [Frank]. I saw [his] lifestyle and all the trappings

Q: So it was entirely your decision?

Oh yeah, definitely

Frank, in his turn, had once had a relationship with a female escort, but again there was no coercion in his decision to enter sex work, instead it merely confirmed him in a choice he had already made. When asked whether he thought he would have got into sex work had he not met her he replied:

I think it's something that I always, see her and all the money, I don't think it's something that someone can tell you to do or not to do, you're not really influenced, it has to come from the heart, because it's not an easy job to do, people think oh it'd be brilliant that, you've got to imagine you're turning up, and you're turning up to places blind, you don't know if it's going to some 30 stone, horrendous ginger haired woman that's going to want oral pleasure and all the rest, you've got to go there and just get on with your job. It's something that's got to come from your own heart, not an influence from outside I wouldn't say.

Britney, the transvestite sex worker had been brought up by his mother until the age of eight (when she died) and he found out in his mid teens that she was a prostitute. He decided to follow her into the profession, and it was apparent that there was an element of competitiveness in his motivation for sex work:

I don't want to sound like I'm blowing my own trumpet – but I was really, really good at what I did, but not because I was interested in the money, does that make sense? There is a strange law in this business, I don't know if you have heard of it before, people can smell it when you've desperation, so when you need it, really need it, you get exploited and you don't get it and business never comes, whereas when I first started it was more in tune with other things, I got a kick out of proving I was better or as good as the girls, rather

than just the money, although the money was the bottom line I was competing for lots of other things.

Britney

For many female sex workers, even when there is no use of force or threat, there are a number of factors which appear to make certain women and girls more likely to enter into prostitution. One factor is economic - researchers have demonstrated a strong link between prostitution and poverty. Economic needs, high rates of unemployment and general poor quality of life are key drivers behind the decision (Edwards, 1991; Faugier et al., 1992; Green, 1992; Maher, 1995), as is homelessness (Barrett and Beckett, 1996). While money was a motivation for some participants, for only one was it the main one:

I did it for the money; I'm doing it for the money. I needed to make some money so I could pay the rent every week. And...I actually enjoy it, I enjoy what I do.

Harry

For others, money was a secondary motivation, behind other factors such as the freedom offered by the lifestyle and the chance to escape from the perceived humdrum of 'normal' jobs:

It was mainly boredom, oh bloody hell, how long am I going to have to keep doing this. When I was working in London, travelling up and down on the train was the pits...I was commuting from Surrey to Victoria, that was the pits, I used to see the other people on the train and think I can't do this for the rest of my life, how can they, all of these people with their books, they were going to do that for all of their working lives. I was just like 'arghh, not for me!'

Andy

You know, I'm not very good at jobs really, if I know that I've got to be somewhere for a certain amount of hours, it's the last place that I want to be. ... I once had a shop job, and that was 4 hours on a Monday and 4 hours on Saturday, and it dragged and dragged and dragged, and I couldn't wait to get out, I found it really oppressive. I think if I wasn't doing this job, I'd have to be doing some kind of job where I was self employed, you know.

Dave

Evidence from the UK shows that for 74% of female prostitutes, drug use was the main reason for entering prostitution (Crosby, 1997). It is argued that there is a strong inter-relationship between drugs and prostitution (Pearce, 1999), as drug addiction can lead women into prostitution in order to fund the habit; and once they are in, women then increase their use of drugs to try to lessen some of the pressures of the work. Only one of the MSWs we interviewed said he was currently using drugs, but in Harry's case, it did not appear to be the reason for his involvement, although he did say that drugs were a way of dealing with the stresses of the job.

Family conflict and sexual or physical abuse (which is an important factor in shaping one's sexuality and self esteem) is also implicated in involvement in female prostitution. North American researchers argue that repeated trauma often leads women to enter prostitution (Bagley and Young, 1987; Belton, 1992; Silbert and Pines, 1983) and results show that as many as 70% of female prostitutes considered that their childhood sexual abuse had influenced them to become prostitutes (Silbert and Pines, 1983). In a study of female prostitution in the Netherlands, Vanwesenbeeck (1994) found that 40% of women had been sexually abused when

children and the same percentage had been forced into prostitution. None of the men in our sample said that they had been sexually abused as children (Chris did not class his sexual experiences at the age of ten as abuse), although two had experienced some form of physical abuse (in Chris' case this was severe).

For female sex workers, the possibility that their involvement in sex work is due to their high sex drive or liking of sex is not often considered. However, sexual frustration, or a high sex drive, was the main reason Chris, Ian and Frank gave for their involvement. For example, Frank, a heterosexual ex-services male, used escorting as a means of satisfying his sexual needs:

Main motivation is me sex, I'm very, very sexually minded. I've been to sexaholics anonymous, I've a very high sex drive, I masturbate a lot, everything is very, I'm like, say some woman walks in there now, the first thing that comes into my head is I wonder whether she'd be a good fuck, that is the first instinct I have, and it's bad in a way...it's like being an addict of anything isn't it. The more you're feeding the habit, the worse you get.

Frank

Not everyone found it easy to identify exactly what had decided them to turn to sex work. Eddie, who had spent several years in a Christian order, found it hard to pin down what was the turning point for him, as the following exchange demonstrates:

Q: Can I just ask, sometimes I sit at home bored of an evening. How do you make that kind of leap from, oh I'm fed up, life's not great, to I know I'm going to put an advert in the paper, where does that come from?

I don't know. I think because I needed a new challenge, I think that was probably what it was, it was getting a bit stale. I don't know. I was looking at that question and I thought I won't be able to answer that. I don't know where it came from.

Q: So you hadn't thought about it before that evening?

No. And it wasn't even the fact that the electricity bill was in and I needed 50 quid, because I was working full time, I had enough money, then I thought to myself, was it just pure loneliness, well no, because I've never really felt that I've been alone, because I can always get into the car and go somewhere. I really don't know, I just thought, let's just do it, see what happens.

Do you think if you hadn't had that experience [with the escort]⁷, was it him saying you could do this, it's easy

Probably, but I mean, if you go really deep, it was human contact, and you probably didn't care where it came from, if you go really deep.

Each of the interviewees had different experiences and motivations for their involvement in sex work. Certainly their motivations differ from those typically associated with female prostitution and what stands out is that their decisions were apparently freely made. Even when money was an influence, sex work was seen as an enjoyable activity, and there was no coercion evident in any of the men's decisions. We discuss the notion of agency in more detail later in the report. Before

⁷ He had previously visited an escort, who had suggested that he could try escorting.

that, we turn to the business of sex work: how MSWs meet their clients; what they do; and the dangers they face.

4.2 INVOLVEMENT IN SEX WORK

Length of time in sex work

For most of the sex workers, involvement in sex work began either in the late teens (two) or mid twenties (four). Andy, who was the oldest of the participants (46) was 35 when he started. However, for two of the sex workers, involvement began at an early age. Chris (42) said that he had first been given money for sex at the age of 10 while living in a care home:

It happened before then like, when I were ten at [...] which was another kind of allocated centre place, my first night in, there were three kids, 13, 14, and 15 I think they were, well a lot older than me, and they got me to suck their dicks... somebody give me 10 bob, which were a lot of money

After leaving the home, he stopped sex work, and only took it up again two years ago. The only other example of child sexual prostitution was Harry who started out escorting at the age of 15.

The length of our participant's sex work career varied considerably, from 6 months up to 19 years, although six of the sample had been involved for at least six years. All worked principally within one sector of the male sex industry, acting as escorts/masseurs, and working either from their own homes or visiting clients. This is not to suggest that MSW activities were confined exclusively to one activity as there was some fluidity across these sectors; MSW's who usually worked at home would on occasion go out to visit clients at a hotel or less usually the client's house, with the decision based upon the clients wishes and the MSW's judgement. Similarly, one of the escorts would use his partner's premises from time to time to see clients.

Location

None of the MSWs we interviewed worked in premises such as brothels or saunas.⁸ In fact, in our search of print and internet advertisements, we found very few such places, and when we did contact such establishments by telephone it was hard to convince the person who answered the telephone (usually the receptionist or owner) to let us talk to MSWs about the research. However, if the advertisements we saw are representative of the indoor sex market, the majority of MSWs are 'sole traders'. Eddie, Harry and Ian worked almost exclusively from their own home, the latter two sharing a large residence with facilities including a steam room. Most of the other MSW combined 'incalls' with visits to clients; either at the clients home or at a hotel. As noted earlier, none of the sample were based in Kirklees, however, it became apparent from our interviews that some MSWs would travel to Kirklees and other areas from surrounding towns, while others said that the 'Yorkshire crowd' would come to them:

I've been down to London, Hedben bridge, Halifax and Wakefield once. But generally the Yorkshire crowd come here.

Andy

⁸ Harry and Ian worked in their own home, which was well equipped with, for example a steam room, however, we did not class this as a sauna/brothel, as they were the only two to work there, and they lived in and owned the property themselves.

Advertising

We asked the MSWs how they met their clients and why they chose this method. All of those interviewed used advertisements in the print media (e.g. Gay Times), while a few additionally used internet sites, such as uk-escort.com. There was general agreement that the internet was less likely to generate business, or that those who did get in touch this way were less likely to be genuine clients:

I don't think it works. The [name of website] put my profile and a picture on their website when they started out, and I only got a couple of calls, and it wasn't a bad picture, and, I did have one or two visits who said they saw it on the internet. I think people who surf the internet are very voyeuristic, and this is a substitute for sex, rather than a lead up to it.

Andy

On the [websites] where they can chat to you, if they can chat to you, 90% of them are timewasters, but if it's a print advert they can't ask for any more photographs if it's a print advert...so print adverts are basically a lot more genuine, you get more genuine clients from those.

Dave

Somewhat surprisingly, two of the escorts said that they sometimes received new clients by referral from existing clients. As one put it:

You get referrals and that; it's like any line of business, word of mouth.

Q: But aren't people less likely to talk about that, than, say, I know a good plumber?

Yeah, but I also think that people who are in to this type of thing are into swinging as well, swinging you know is vast, it's a lot more vast than you think...people are more liberal now, and I say that people that do participate in encounters with escorts they'll have friends also who do.

Frank

Unlike the outdoor sex industry, the MSWs in our sample were entirely reactive, dependent on clients contacting them either through their adverts or recommendations. None of them actively sought out clients, for example, by hanging around gay bars or approaching men at hotels, although one had thought of doing so:

I have thought about doing that, going to some nice fancy hotels and hanging around, because the men I like are in those places. But I'd feel a bit awkward about telling them because of their reaction. It's different when someone phones you up because they know already, that's established already.

Dave

Sexuality and services offered

The sexuality of MSWs determined what types of clients they would see and the sexual services offered. Two of the MSWs were heterosexual, and so would not see single male clients. In fact most of their clients were couples, but they refused to have any direct sexual contact with the males (they would however participate in a 'threesome' or let the man watch the escort have sex with his wife). Of the rest, six described themselves as gay (including Britney the transvestite), and their clients were almost exclusively male, although one or two did entertain couples occasionally. Chris described his sexuality as 'universal'. He escorted males, females

and couples, and provided the widest range of sexual services.⁹ Although the adverts are carefully worded so as not to suggest that sex is involved (they are in fact typically very briefly worded, for example 'mature male, M62, offers massage'), by definition, all the MSWs offered full sex:

It makes me laugh sometimes, some of them come along and say they just want a massage and they try to beat the price down because it's only a massage, but they never only want a massage. I think in a way they say that because it helps their head, because they're not going to pay for sex, because it's probably an ego blow for them, and then they come for a massage but it's never just a massage. It really varies, you get guys who just want anal sex, other guys, they just want to arrange to meet, see where it goes, I think they're shy to ask what they really want, others just want to play around. I mean if they ask on the phone what's that for, I just say that's for my time, and what happens in that time is between consenting adults, and then I've not committed myself to this or that.

Dave

When asked about the sexuality of their clients, they were described as 'all shades of the spectrum'. The gay MSWs thought that some of their clients were either bisexual or gay, and a surprising number were said to be married or with female partners:

Eighty per cent are heterosexual, they are married with kids and grandchildren, and Harry would tell you the same as me.

Ian

A lot of them, 90% I'd say are married...there's a lot of sneaking around, it's very closed doors. A lot of them haven't come out of their shell.

Chris

The transvestite MSW said that many of her¹⁰ clients claimed not to be gay:

If I had a pound for every time someone said "well I'm not gay really", oh fuck-off no of course you're not love. What because I've got a fucking skirt or something on, you think that means that I'm a woman?

Britney

Financial rewards

There was considerable variation in the amount of income generated through sex work. Andy, who was the eldest MSW in the sample, charged £60 per session (which might last up to three hours) and saw perhaps five clients a week, generating around £300 per week. Most of the other MSWs earned more than this. Chris, for example, charged £85 for an hour, and £350 for an 'overnighter', and earned more than £400 a week, while Frank and Graham who both charged around £70 per hour for a minimum of two hours, and several hundred for an overnighter, said they made in excess of £600 a week. Harry and Ian were the most successful, claiming to make between £2500-£3000 per week between them. As none of the men worked for an agency or pimp, they kept all of the money they earned.

⁹ Chris, for example, said he would be willing to hurt people for money: 'if they wanted me to chop their hands off or anything like that, I know it sounds callous...but I don't see a problem with it, if both parties are happy about it, then fine'.

¹⁰ Although biologically male, most transvestite sex workers prefer to be called 'she'.

As noted earlier, five of the MSWs interviewed had paid jobs other than sex work. In Andy's case, his age and stamina (he could not generally see more than two clients a day) were beginning to affect his earning potential, and he was in the process of retraining as a plasterer. At the time of interview, he earned approximately half of his income from plastering. Frank, who described the sex industry as cyclical, worked as a lorry driver during the 'lean times' such as during the summer holidays or after Christmas. Both Harry and Ian ran a successful pet products business, while Chris had a sideline as a gardener. The presence of these secondary careers could be interpreted in two ways. In Andy's case, it might be seen as a way of preparing for an eventual exit from sex work, while in Frank's case, for example, it seems more to be a means of smoothing out income over the year. To explore this further, we asked MSWs what were their future plans, and whether they wished to leave sex work.

4.3 LEAVING SEX WORK

None of the MSWs said that they currently wanted to leave the profession. Even Andy who was retraining as a plasterer thought he would be doing this for years to come:

I think it will probably continue, and even if I pull the ad in the Gay Times I think I'd get people ringing me up with 'are you still working?' and I'd say 'oh yes'.

Andy

Britney, who described his involvement as 'treading water', said that he would be involved, either as an active sex worker or as a 'manager', for the foreseeable future:

One way or another probably forever to be honest. ...I have just only recently, I've always worked on my own but only recently I've been mingling a bit, taking a day off and helping others set themselves up and ... so one way or another I think that I'll probably be at it for a while. I think I'll be in it forever until I drop dead. My friend is 65 and she's still [working] she looks about 40 though!

Britney

All of the others similarly expressed their desire to remain in the profession, and when asked why, stressed the positive factors of the job such as the 'lavish lifestyle' (Harry), 'being my own boss...and obviously the money' (Graham) and the flexibility of the job 'you can choose to work two/three hours a week and get, take it easy, put your feet up' (Ian).

In order to explore more fully their commitment to sex work, we asked the MSWs specifically what their plans were for the future, and what they thought they would be doing in five to ten years. Harry, Andy, Ian, Britney and Eddie all re-emphasised that they expected still to be in sex work. Andy, who was ambivalent about his involvement, and Britney who was less so, thought that one of the reasons they would still be in sex work in five to ten years time was its addictive nature:

It's to some degree self perpetuating, as you say I might decide to give up and then the phone will ring, and then of course yeah sure I can do it – something takes over – 'come on over' you know.

Andy

It's a drug, it's addictive more than anything else because once you get into it it's so hard because even if you stop, and life is hard for everybody, and if you get a big bill for £200 its like oh god, you know you can get back into it.

Britney

Both Graham and Chris said that they did not think five to ten years ahead or have any specific plans for the future:

Don't have none [plans]. Take each day as it comes. We used to plan things, but we don't plan nothing no more, there's too many people we know who's died, you don't know what's around the corner next day.... It's happening all the time, every second of every day, people are just dying, why waste fucking time planning things, just get on with it.

Chris

Five years time is a hell of a long way away for someone who takes life day to day. It's not sort of something that I think about, the future, to be truthful. Sort of next week, the week after that, is as far as I am concerned.

Graham

Only Dave and Frank said that they would hope not to be in sex work in five to ten years time. Dave said he would like to pursue property development, or a career in the creative industries, which would offer the freedom he desired. For Frank (one of the two heterosexual MSWs) the desire to settle down and have children was creating a tension with his enjoyment of sex work:

I'm at a crossroads now, just short of 33, where if I want a family and settle down, I've got to look at the next few years. If I have a kid at 40, I feel that's too old for me, so I've only got a few years left, or in a few years time I could still want to carry on doing it, who knows?

Q: So you've got to make a choice in a few years?

I don't see it as making a choice. If the right woman comes up, if I met someone next week, I'd knock it on the head, give the relationship a go. If that progressed to marriage and kids, I wouldn't go back to [escorting]. But if it didn't work out I'd go back to this.

When prompted to state who or what would help them to leave sex work, both Dave and Eddie said they would also consider leaving if they met the right person, although for Dave the wealth of the prospective boyfriend would be of prime importance, while Eddie said he would leave only if he met someone he loved. In summary, none of the men are currently actively trying to exit sex work, and they are generally content with their current involvement. For the minority who would consider giving it up in future, only an external event, such as a new relationship, would cause them to reconsider.

5. DANGERS OF THE WORK AND INVOLVEMENT WITH AGENCIES

5.1 RISKS AND PRECAUTIONS

The extent of violence against female sex workers has been the subject of much research, and findings show high levels of violence, particularly in the 'outdoor' sex trade. Street prostitution is a competitive, individualised 'business'. This often means that women choose to work alone, and the 'illicit nature of prostitution ensures that street sex is generally sold in dark, lonely places out of public view' (Barnard et al, 2001: 3), a setting which renders the prostitute extremely vulnerable to violence. The same study reported that more than 80% of prostitutes on the street experienced violence while working (Barnard et al., 2001).

UK research into young female sex workers shows that 53% of girls consider that working on the street is highly dangerous. An average of 21% experienced violence on a daily basis, 35% admitted they had been forced into unsafe sex and almost two thirds (63%) had been raped by 'punters' or partners (Pearce and Roache, 1997). It is argued that street working prostitutes are subject to combinations of assault involving economic, sexual and physical elements (Barnard et al., 2001).

The number of cases of violence against prostitutes working indoors is believed to be lower, although because of the secrecy of this practice and the high value placed on the preservation of their anonymity, it is harder to verify. However, according to Barnard et al's study (2001) 18% of indoor prostitutes reported having experienced client violence. Furthermore, the same study suggests that at least 15% of indoor prostitutes have been held against their will and have been physically and sexually assaulted.

Whether street or indoor prostitution, it has been argued that 'sexual and other physical violence is the normative experience for women in prostitution' (Farley et al., 1998: 3). A survey undertaken in five countries shows that, on average, about 70% of prostitute women experienced physical and sexual assault (from which an average of 62% have been raped since entering prostitution, some of them up to five times) (Farley et al., 1998).

Due to the hidden nature of male sex work, sexual encounters invariably take place in locations, such as hotel rooms, or clients' or MSWs' houses, where there are no 'capable guardians', to use Cohen and Felson's (1979) term. The potential for violence against MSW therefore exists. Research into the extent of violence against male sex workers is sparse, however, such research as exists suggests that the risks are considerably lower than for female sex workers. Violence from clients among 'indoor' sex workers is rare. Although outdoor workers face a higher level of violence, this tends to be related to their drug or alcohol use, or homelessness, rather than to the selling of sex per se (UK NSWP 2004; Connell and Hart, 2003).

In order to determine the risks faced by our interviewees, we began by asking whether they had ever been sexually or physically assaulted or robbed while working. Only Ian said he had been assaulted (twice), but did not wish to elaborate. None of the other MSWs had had any experience of physical or sexual assault or robbery, although Andy and Britney felt that they had had some 'near misses'. Even though personal experience of assault was rare, most of those interviewed believed that the profession was potentially dangerous, especially where first time clients were concerned:

Fortunately, touch wood, nothing's ever come untowardly bad, I think you could end up going somewhere, the bloke ends up getting jealous and getting a knife out, anything could happen, and you're there naked. You could have someone come out the cupboard, anything could happen. And I suppose to a certain degree that's in the back of your mind when you go to a clients house, a couple, the first thing I think is I can have him, you're weighing that person up for a fight.

Frank

In the sense of the first time clients, you're going into someone's house, they could have two or three guys there you know what I mean to batter your head in, I understand all that

Chris

Despite the potential for personal danger, most MSWs believed that they were able successfully to manage the risks to themselves by taking certain precautions. Most sex workers did take such precautions, and these included letting a friend know where they would be, never turning their back on the client, scouting out the area for extra cars which might indicate there was more than one person in the house, or checking the rooms of the house on the pretext of going to the toilet. For 'incalls' MSWs would try to ensure a friend was in the house at the same time, or have access to an easy escape route. Ian and Harry, who were partners and worked together, took the most elaborate precautions, as Ian explained:

I do a tag on him – he is dropped off, the phone is on all the time...The minute his [Harry] phone goes off mine will make an alarm sound.
...For me there is a panic button in the massage area, set times he is there [Harry] I have literally to open one door and 14 dogs would come through and it is not a thought you would want to cherish and people are very aware of the fact – and they're not small dogs...We swap stories and learn who messed you about and who did this, who did that. And we do what we should not do all phone numbers are recorded. We will not entertain you if we do not have a number for you. And all the ones that are difficult, dangerous or time wasters, these numbers are passed between us [workers] and I don't think anyone else is going to own up to that.

Ian

Only Eddie, who entertains in his own home, claimed to take no special precautions, apart from being nice to clients:

I've never had an incident where I've had violence or raised voices. I know it sounds hard to believe, but I think it's down to the way you conduct yourself and the way you conduct your business. If you are argumentative or short, or you don't make people feel like it's their hour...that's when you're going to get problems

Eddie

In addition to physical or sexual violence, the main risk sex workers face is refusal to pay. Almost all the sex workers interviewed insisted on payment 'up front' so as to minimise this risk. Only Andy and Eddie let clients pay at the end, and while Eddie had never had a client refuse to pay, it did occasionally happen to Andy:

I have had some people who walk away without paying. I'd give out to them, tell them how despicable they are but I wouldn't press it, it's not worth it.

Andy

Certainly by comparison to female sex work (Farley et al, 1998), or the outdoor male sex market (Connell and Hart, 2003), the risks faced the MSWs in our sample were very low, and generally they were taking steps to reduce the risks to a level which they found acceptable.

5.2 INVOLVEMENT WITH AGENCIES

We asked the MSWs whether they had any contact with agencies, such as SWEET, designed to help sex workers. It is perhaps not surprising, given our earlier findings regarding attitudes to involvement in sex work and future plans that none had any current contact with such agencies. Britney was the only MSW to ever have visited an agency when she was a younger sex worker, and this was only for the purpose of collecting condoms and catching up on gossip. The overwhelming opinion amongst our sample was that while such agencies performed a useful function for other types of sex worker (females or 'rent boys') they had no relevance to their personal situation:

No, no I've not. If I'm really honest, I always imagine an agency like that for the guys who are on drugs, on the streets, who want to get off the drugs and into a normal job.

Dave

No, I think that's more for your rent boys or women who've been forced into prostitution, not someone like myself. I work for myself, I'm self employed to a degree. If I want out I just don't advertise. Each person is an individual, just because I don't need it doesn't mean that he might not need it. I think agencies are a good thing, if there's an agency set up to help people why take it away just because I don't need it.

Frank

When asked what they thought such agencies should provide, it was suggested that agencies should concentrate on the vulnerable members of the sex industry, and offer, for example, counselling services, sex advice, short term emergency accommodation, access to free condoms and health checks. In relation to the latter point, sex work obviously carries with it the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, and it was surprising that just five of the MSWs said that they had regular check ups at health clinics, although all claimed to practice safe sex.

We finished the interview by asking whether they had any advice for the younger generation. Although we left this open as to whether we meant young people generally, or those thinking of entering sex work, without exception interviewees assumed the latter. Among the advice offered was the importance of entering the sex trade for the right reasons (not to fund a drugs habit for example) and taking care not to be exploited either by clients or other sex workers:

Make sure you're not squeamish, make sure you're happy to do it because you want to do it, not for the money, because it's not all wham, bam, thank you mam.

Chris

Yeah, if it's something you want to do, go do it. But it's not something someone can influence you with, it's got to come from your own heart, your own head.

Frank

People who do this to sustain a drug habit that's terrible I think, that's just, and then they do become sex slaves and the masters are the drug and that's sad.

Andy

Be safe more than anything with themselves. Watch out for people, it's the people around you, your friends that you have to be cautious about.

Britney

It appears to us that determining what should be the appropriate role of agencies with this sub group of MSWs turns on whether one considers them victims of circumstance in need of help, or rational businessmen pursuing a fulfilling career. This question is explored in the next section.

6. VICTIMS OR BUSINESSMEN?

It is common when explaining involvement in crime to talk about criminogenic risk factors, that is to say, attributes of a person's character or environment which increase the likelihood of onset, frequency or persistence of offending (Farrington, 1997). Common risk factors include impulsivity, parental supervision style, socio-economic deprivation and school factors (ibid). It is argued that the existence of such factors *causes* involvement in crime.¹¹ In much of the literature on female sex work, it is assumed that involvement in sex work must be negative, and there is a bias towards helping people to exit the industry. Discussion of female sex work also tends to stress risk factors, and views involvement in sex work not as a rational choice but rather as an almost inevitable response to perceived negative influences, such as economic deprivation.

To a certain extent, the same can be said of much research into male sex workers, at least those studies which concentrate on the 'rent boy' market. Connell and Hart's (2003) study, for example, concentrates on the experiences of rent boys, and explains involvement in sex work partly in terms of coercion, or the negative influence of friends. Their study ends with a series of recommendations as to how involvement in sex work might be prevented and what steps need to be taken to help existing workers exit the industry. The participants in our study, who represent the 'sole trader' indoor male sex market, present very different issues. It is true that some of the MSWs in our sample had experienced very difficult childhoods. Chris, for example, had been in care from the age of 10, and from his first night in care was selling sex. In objective terms, this would seem to represent a clear case of victimisation, and an obvious 'risk factor'. However Chris' own views on the subject were very different. When asked if his early sexual experiences while in care were voluntary, he claimed that they were:

No, no, no, if I were forced into something I didn't want to do, if I were forced into it, I'd had got them, don't matter how many there was. And like, that weren't the first sexual experience obviously but it was in these kind of circumstances, and like the next day, the eldest of them all said he wanted to shag me arse that night and I'm only 10, so he says get a bar of soap, so I got a bar of soap, and he bent me over the bed, and he bottled it. If I knew now what I knew then, I'd have given him some fucking stick for bottling it, but he bottled it. And I never got a sore arse! [laughs]

Chris

Thus factors which normally would be seen as negative – under age paid sex and being brought up in care – were not viewed as such by Chris, and not the cause of his involvement in sex work, which he put down to his high sex drive. As noted earlier, Chris was happily married and was working as an escort with his wife's knowledge and support. Some of the other MSWs had experienced other 'risk factors' including being thrown out of home (Dave), leaving home at 14 (Eddie) and being sacked from a job (Frank and Eddie). In none of these cases, however, did these factors seem to precipitate the decision to enter sex work, and certainly none of them saw themselves as victims. Perhaps the exception to this pattern was Harry, who had started sex work at 15, and was the only of the group to be a regular user of drugs. In his case, the decision to enter sex work could be seen as more influenced

¹¹ There are, of course, other theories of crime, which place less weight on causes such as socio-economic deprivation, and which stress the interaction of decision making, opportunity and capable guardianship (e.g. Cohen and Felson, 1979).

by circumstances. However, he was also in a stable relationship (with Ian), was financially secure and content with his involvement in sex work.

In terms of the men in our sample, the 'risk factor' model appears to lack explanatory validity; indeed it is arguable whether the involvement in sex work of the men in our sample should be viewed as a problem in need of a solution. It was striking from our interviews how positive most MSWs felt about sex work. When asked directly what they thought about sex work, all were happy with their involvement, although some had concerns about female sex workers:

Me personally I love it, I like the freedom it has given me

Britney

I think it's really good. If you do it properly, don't piss people around.

Eddie

I'd do it all day mate! At the end of the day, it's like me getting paid for sex is my kick...Live and let live, I swear to God, if you're not hurting anyone what's the problem, and it won't be hurting me if I got paid!

Chris

Well I think its fine. I have reservations about a woman doing it, but as far as men are concerned it's ok.

Andy

Indeed, given such enthusiasm, in some cases it felt redundant to ask questions such as whether they wanted to leave sex work, or what would help them to leave. Given that it was seen as a rational career choice by many, it was akin to asking successful plumbers or accountants what help they needed to leave their professions. There is some support for this view of male sex work as a non-problematic commercial activity. In Van der Poel's (1992) ethnographic research into MSWs in Amsterdam, the occupation was analyzed as a commercial service-oriented business with economic and social characteristics typical of other small- and medium-sized businesses.

That the MSWs saw themselves in charge of their own destiny is reinforced in their responses to our question about the differences between male and female sex work. Partly this was seen as due to the physiological differences between males and females, in that for males to perform, they had to want to do it, as Frank pointed out:

A man, some sort of thought has to go to his penis, there has to be a link between the head and the penis, the woman doesn't have to have any link between her head and her vagina'.

Frank

It was believed that the physical passivity of female sex workers made them more vulnerable to exploitation or violence. For the MSWs in our sample, sex work was seen as a choice freely made. It could, however, be argued that the views of participants regarding the extent of their agency or freedom of choice is erroneous. If one considers the life stories of the men in our sample, with one or two exceptions, there is something in their backgrounds which serves to limit the choices open to them. In some cases, educational failure or personality characteristics meant that their 'choice' to participate in other, more legitimate, employment opportunities were limited. Chris is perhaps the clearest cut example of a 'constrained' choice, in that his lack of any formal education ruled out many professions. It might also be the case

that his early sexual experiences, even though perceived as enjoyable, may have been a factor in the development of his high libido, which in turn caused him to enter sex work. The question remains, therefore, whether Chris (and the others) would they have made the same decision had circumstances been different. This was not a question we were able confidently to answer. We do not believe that certain aspects of their backgrounds propelled these men inevitably into sex work, as may be the experience of certain female or younger male sex workers, but neither was the choice entirely free. In trying to understand the nature of their decision making, it is useful to borrow from the criminological theory of rational choice theory, as refined by Clarke (1987). Although sex work is not a criminal activity, the model of decision making has wider applicability. In this, it is held that the decision to commit crime (in this case to enter sex work) is a more or less rational response to attempts to maximise self interest. It is recognised however, that dispositional factors and situational factors serve to constrain decision making by closing off certain options or opening others (Bennett, 1986). In terms of sex work, then, dispositional factors such as sex drive and situational ones such as level of income or the availability of alternative employment options might be expected to influence decision making. From what the men in our sample have told us, we cannot locate them either as purely victims or as calculating businessmen. Instead, it would be more accurate to locate them somewhere in between according to a 'constrained' rational choice decision making.

In the final section, we summarise the conclusions of this research, and draw out the implications for agencies such as SWEET, as well as for criminological research into the sex industry.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AGENCIES

This exploratory study of male sex workers revealed a number of surprising (to us) findings. Firstly, the male sex industry in Kirklees appears to be small – only two MSWs were located through our search strategy, and neither of these wished to take part. Much larger numbers of MSWs were found in surrounding cities, especially Leeds and Manchester, and MSWs in those cities would either travel to Kirklees to meet clients, or clients from Kirklees would travel to them. This means that projects like SWEET may wish to consider how they define their clientele. If they do so by area of residence of MSWs (as currently is the case), they are likely to miss many sex workers who travel into the region to meet clients. If SWEET does wish to work with such MSWs, then this would call for a change in the way MSWs are contacted. A proactive approach to contacting MSWs would be needed, and this might include phoning telephone numbers given in advertisements in the print media, or emailing escorts advertising on the internet. The fact that none of the MSWs in the sample had any current contact with (and in most cases no awareness of) such agencies suggests that the agencies remain almost as hidden to these MSWs as MSWs do the general public.

Our second main finding is that the indoor sex market represented by our sample is relatively stable, self-contained and unproblematic. MSWs were unconcerned about their involvement in sex work, did not experience violence (with one exception) and practised safe sex. The decision to participate in sex work was seen by all to be one freely made, and motivations for involvement were not primarily financial. For some, sex work was seen as a career like any other, but with the advantages of flexibility of working practices and variety. Whilst some could imagine situations in which they would wish to leave the profession, the reasons they gave (for example, falling in love) were not factors that could or should be addressed by a sex worker agency. However, the fact that only five of the sex workers undertook medical check ups is a cause for concern. Even where MSWs have no other needs for help, sex work projects should perhaps try to raise awareness of the importance of testing, and improve access to this where necessary.

It is important to recognise that the current study is exploratory and descriptive. Our sample of nine MSWs is not representative of the male sex industry as a whole. In fact, it clearly excludes the younger, outdoor workers, or 'rent boys'. It is unlikely that the young 'rent boy' is so secure in his position as the men we interviewed. However, the study does provide new insights into the experiences of the majority of MSWs, that is to say, men who work on their own and for themselves. However, we have more to learn, in particular about the characteristics and motivations of these men and in particular, the degree to which their choices are constrained by background and personal characteristics. Equally importantly, we know very little about the motivations and experiences of the clients of these men. It was unfortunate that the diary sheets relating to sexual encounters was not a successful methodology, at least within the time and resources constraints we faced. If further research into this hidden population is to be conducted, more thought will need to be given to how these data can be captured. Future research would also benefit from a study of the experiences of indoor and outdoor male sex workers in order to compare these two groups both with each other and with the more thoroughly researched female sex industry.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. If you only had five minutes to tell me your life story - what would you say?
2. Do any aspects of your childhood stand out?
3. Do any aspects of your early work experiences stand out?
4. What about your experience of important relationships (e.g. marriage and/or personal relationships)? Do any particular stories stand out?
5. What has been the high point of your life (why – tell me what happened)? How about the lowest point (why – tell me the story)?
6. Do you feel you have experienced any major turning points for good or bad? What were they? How did they affect you?
7. Have you had any contact with the criminal justice system? Do any events stand out as significant? Was this related to your sex work?
8. What is an average day like for you now?
9. What's the best thing in your life at the moment? What's the worst thing?
10. Looking back, who or what had the most positive influence on you? How?
11. Looking back, who or what has had a negative influence on you? How?
12. Do you have any other paid work at the moment?
13. Are you in a relationship? [If YES] What effect has sex work had on this?
14. Where do you live at the moment? (house/hostel/etc). How long have you been there?
15. Could you tell me about your family? Do they know you're involved in paid sex work?
16. When did you first get involved in paid sex work?
17. Why did you get involved? (money/ excitement/ other). Was it your decision?
18. What do you think about sex work? (Are you happy to be involved?)
19. How do you meet your clients? (on street/at home/hotel/parlour). Why do you use this method?

20. How much do you usually charge your clients? In an average week, how much do you make from sex work?
21. Could you tell me what clients usually ask for? What do you provide?
22. Are all your clients male, female or both?
23. How would you describe the sexuality of your typical clients?
24. How would you describe your sexuality?
25. In what way do you think male sex work is different from female sex work?
26. Do you want to get out of sex work?
[If YES] When? Do you want any help to do so? What are the main things stopping you?
[If NO] What are the main advantages of your work?
27. Have you ever been physically or sexually assaulted when working? Has a client ever robbed you?
28. How dangerous do you think the job is? What do you think the main risks are?
29. [If dangerous] Do you take any precautions to reduce the danger?
30. Has a client ever refused to pay? What did you do?
31. Have you ever assaulted a client? What were the circumstances?
32. Have you had any involvement with agencies such as social services, health workers, SWEET?
33. How helpful did you find these services?
34. Do you think there is any help these agencies could provide which they don't at the moment? What else would you like from these agencies?
35. What or who would most help you to leave sex work?
36. What are your plans for the future? Where do you see yourself say in 5-10 years in the future?
37. Do you have any advice for the younger generation?
37. Is there anything you'd like to add or ask me about?

APPENDIX 2 DIARY OF CLIENT ENCOUNTERS

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Time of day | |
| Place (e.g. hotel, home) | |
| Amount charged? | £..... |
| How did they pay? (e.g. cash, cheque, did not pay) | |
| What sexual services did you provide? | |
| Did you use a condom? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How long did the encounter last? | |

How rich would you say the client was?

- Rich
 Middle income
 Poor
 Don't know

What sex were they?

- Male
 Female

How old would you say the client was?

- Under 20
 20-30
 31-40
 41-50
 51-60
 61 or over
 Don't know

Would you say the client was?

- White
 Black
 Asian
 Mixed
 Other
 Don't know

Do you think the client was?

- Homosexual
 Heterosexual
 Bisexual
 Other
 Don't know

How did you meet your client?

- On the street
 Internet contact
 Referred from other client
 In a massage parlour
 Other (please say what.....)

How well do you know your client?

- Never met before
 Met once or twice before
 Know quite well
 Know very well/ a regular
 Other (please say what.....)

How safe did you feel during the encounter?

- Very safe
 Fairly safe
 Neither safe nor unsafe
 Fairly unsafe
 Very unsafe

Were you were physically attracted to the client?

- Yes No

Did the client turn violent at any time?

- Yes No

During the encounter did you or the client use alcohol or drugs?

- | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Alcohol only | Drugs only | Alcohol and drugs | Neither |
| You | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The client | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Did the client request anything you thought was unsafe sex?

- Yes No

If yes, please say what they requested.....