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An Exploratory Study of the Growth of Online Male Sex Work in Manchester

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Executive Summary

The current research project was carried out on behalf of the Men's Room, a charity supporting disempowered men, to investigate the growth of online- sex work in Manchester. An audit of websites was conducted to establish the number of sex workers in the Manchester area who have an online profile. 356 individual profiles were reviewed from 15 key 'free to view' websites used by sex workers. A focus group interview was then conducted with current and former sex workers who had a range of online and street experience. When comparing street work with online work, these themes emerged from the data:

- There is a noticeable growth in online male sex work in Manchester. The accessibility and ease of use of the internet and mobile devices has facilitated this growth for both workers and clients.
- A perception exists that online work is less risky than street based work, however research suggests that this is not the case. The risks to sex workers who work online include the potential for harassment and exposure, workers' private information being used against them by clients, and an increase in social isolation.
- Undertaking in-calls or out-calls increases the vulnerability of sex working. In-calls (working from home) gives the client the sex worker's address, which can leave them extremely exposed to harassment. Out-calls (meeting in a location decided by the client) means that the sex worker does not have control of the environment which potentially exposes them to exploitative behaviour.
- The individuals who took part in this study, due to personal and observed negative experiences, expressed a lack of trust between sex workers and statutory bodies. The vulnerability of sex workers is increased due to fear of disclosure of the sex worker's profession to their families by statutory agencies; a concern over not being taken seriously when reporting a crime or call for help; and a perceived lack of concern for sex workers from statutory agencies.
- Working online increases the social isolation of sex workers due to the nature of working online and mobile technology. This can result in a lack of awareness and knowledge of the support services and networks that exist within the Manchester area and make the worker harder to reach.

With the technological advancements that have seen the internet change the way that commerce is undertaken across the world, it is unsurprising that sex working has gone down the same pathway and moved online. The reasons for this growth include the potential to earn more money, to have better options in terms of client selection, and to have a reduced risk of personal violence towards them. It also seems likely that the sex worker has followed the lead of the client in that it is also more convenient for them to acquire the services of an escort/sex worker.

It is important to note that although research into street-based male sex work highlights risks such as physical violence and non-payment for services, this research illustrates that online male sex work carries substantial risk. It is however, a new set of risks including harassment and invasion of privacy arising from having their material freely available online.

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1. Introduction

This research report explores the growth of online male sex work in Manchester. It has been undertaken on behalf of the Men's Room, an arts and social charity based in Manchester city centre. A main focus of this organisation is to work with disempowered men aged 18-30 who have experienced multiple disadvantages and identify as male sex workers (Men's Room, 2016). The male sex work industry, either street based or online, is a relatively hidden world with its workers sometimes being regarded as an unknown entity. Research tends to focus on street based sex work, despite the noticeable growth of online generated interactions (Gaffney, 2003). The report will explore the reasons behind this growth of online sex work within the context of those who work in Manchester. Based on academic literature and empirical research, the report will highlight possible reasons for this change and the associated risks of working online.

2. Literature Review

Research into male sex work tends to neglect the importance of the internet as a method of engagement between worker and client (Castle and Lee, 2008), however with the advancement of mobile technology, access to a range of services and products, related or unrelated to sex, is available instantly. The internet is suggested as a suitable way of providing access to services for the selling and purchase of sex through a range of programs and applications that are readily available 24/7. The use of the internet as a means of advertising and purchasing sex has unearthed a new avenue connected to male sex work that requires further research (Bimbi, 2007). Research suggests that over the last decade there has been a noticeable move towards online work and a decline in street based interactions (Gaffney, 2003 and McLean, 2015). Although not exclusively based online, male sex workers are suggested as having 'embraced the technological landscape in their sex working lives' (McLean, 2015:888). When looking more specifically at a geographical location, namely Manchester, research proposes that the increase in internet cruising (men looking for sex) and the change to the specific 'gay areas' in terms of regulation and commercial development, have seen less men selling sex on the street, but not a complete withdrawal from the physical environment (Atkins, 2014).

Men who are paid to have sex with other men is not a new subject or indeed a new concept. Part of the 'the world's oldest industry' male sex work can be historically traced to early Roman bath houses up to current day 'saunas'. A number of issues have been highlighted as a result of research into street based male sex work, including a concern for workers who have a set of complex needs and sometimes chaotic lifestyles (Bimbi, 2007, Scott *et al*, 2005 and Parsons *et al*, 2004). In an industry that is largely hidden to the unsuspecting world (Wilcox and Christian, 2008), street based male sex workers are largely an unknown entity. Despite this it must be acknowledged that in order to look at the move to offering sex online a brief context of the men who work in this profession needs to be discussed.

Uy *et al*, (2004) suggest that when looking at the male sex worker a number of points should be noted. In comparing street workers to those that work online, attention should be paid to the individual person, the type of client he is hoping to attract, the particular sexual acts that will take place, the relationship between the sex worker and the client and the method that has been used to attract the client in the first place. In terms of street based work, sex workers tend to frequent or 'walk' in areas that facilitate or enable encounters to occur (Atkins and Laing, 2012). This process tends to lend itself to what is suggested as 'survival sex' or the exchange of sexual services in return for payments, either in monetary terms, drugs, shelter or possibly food (Parsons *et al*, 2004). In looking further at the 'typical' male sex worker it becomes evident that this is not a homogenous group. Research has identified that men who work on the streets not only have a different set of needs and life history than those that work online but also have differing reasons for entering and remaining in the profession (Minichiello

et al, 2015). Therefore it is difficult to generalise around the men who sell sex on the street and those that do it from the comfort of their own home (Bimbi, 2007 and Parsons *et al*, 2004).

More appropriately it is important to address the issues that exist for men who work on the streets, including the risk of violence, having sex with 'undesirables' and a chance that a worker may not end up getting paid for the service they provide (McLean, 2015). When looking towards the reasons for the declining street trade it is argued that prospects of low remuneration for services alongside the geographical environment, the regulation of 'deviance', changes to demand and the constantly changing physical boundaries of the environment and urban landscape (Laing and Cook, 2014), create a less appealing 'work place'. Combined with the advances in technology many male sex workers can now be found online.

'Male sex workers have been less likely to engage with traditional sites associated with sex work (e.g. street, brothel, agency and print based media work) and more likely to be found using the internet as a working tool' (McLean, 2015:887). A shift on the back of technological advances has led to changes in the sexual services industry. Sex can be argued as a recreational activity that is readily available for sale on the back of a new economy of sexual services (Smith, 2012). As a medium, the internet offers or 'facilitates' sex work or escorting by providing anonymity, promoting ease and convenience and enhancing economic gain (Bimbi, 2007 and McLean, 2015). In what is argued as the contemporary 'normalisation' of male sex work, workers can now be viewed in terms of consumption and less deviant than previously portrayed (MacPhail *et al*, 2014). It is here that the ease, convenience and accessibility of internet work will be considered alongside anonymity, safety and economic gain.

Research conducted in Melbourne, Australia highlights the issue of 'ease and convenience' as being an important decision for choosing to work online. The options of having clients come to the sex worker at the home address or a suitable location was found to be appealing to many of the research participants. The creation of a safer and more relaxed environment in comparison to street based locations or saunas was suggested as a key deciding factor in the use of online activity (McLean, 2015). In terms of normalisation, commodification and accessibility, the use of online platforms places the male sex worker in a more prosperous position by allowing them to control who they offer a service to. The growth and development of the internet and the associated technologies has meant that male sex workers are able to reach a much wider audience that covers a range of socio-demographic populations. As suggested by Minichiello *et al*, (2015) the internet has provided a means for workers to access men who they may not normally target during street based work or may see less frequently. This includes men who have sex with men who do not identify as gay or bisexual, who otherwise may be hesitant about visiting street based locations. A further dimension to ease, convenience and accessibility comes in the form of changing and innovative technologies. Although not covered within this research the rise and growth of new types of services that may be offered by male sex workers such as web shows or online sex shows allows for male sex workers to provide a different kind of service to a range of different clients (Minichiello *et al*, 2015).

The most commonly cited reason for the move to online working in a recent study is that of economic gain. Workers suggest that working online creates a greater opportunity to earn

more money than working on the street (McLean, 2015). Profile analysis as part of this research has suggested that workers can generate a significantly larger amount of remuneration for their services. With money being one of the main reasons why men engage in male sex work (Uy et al, 2004), be it extra cash to supplement an income or as a means of survival, online work allows workers to make more money (Parsons et al, 2004). When considered against street based work, online interactions appear significantly more lucrative and reliable. Atkins and Laing (2012) highlight this point by suggesting that male sex workers who work on the street not only have to know who would be willing to pay them money, but also face changing demand levels and risk of non-payment.

Arguably one of the significant reasons for the growth in online male sex work is the increase in safety and attempt to reduce the risk of violence (McLean, 2015, Minichiello *et al*, 2015). Workers are able to not only select and reject their potential clients (Parsons *et al*, 2004 and Minichiello *et al* 2015) but they also reduce the risk of personal violence. Violence against male sex workers be it physical, verbal, emotional or sexual is a common theme throughout the research literature. However what must also be addressed is the different types of violence that may be experienced by a worker. Despite an opportunity to reduce physical violence by a move online, the opportunity for harassment, emotional and psychological violence can increase. Issues connected to during and after the transaction when looking at online work present a discourse full of risk, harassment and emotional issues (MacPhail *et al*, 2014).

Considering the importance of safety towards male sex workers, having the opportunity to protect themselves by 'selecting or screening' clients, whilst providing some 'traceability' through the medium of technology goes some way to reducing this risk (McLean, 2015). National and local projects tailored to supporting online workers, such as 'Ugly Mugs', warn workers of dangerous clients via mobile phone text messages with the aim of reducing violence, improving personal safety and increasing crime reporting (Laing et al, 2013). Despite the perceived benefits of online work, a significant issue with internet based work is the privacy and protection implication of placing images and information about themselves (Cunningham *et al*, 2010). Once information is placed online it may be used against workers as a form of harassment or sent to the relations of the sex worker, ultimately disclosing their profession.

The individual wellbeing of the workers is also worthy of note. Social isolation from working away from the street with fellow workers, becoming disconnected from networks of support and working alone can place strain on the worker. MacPhail et al, (2014) notes the harms that can be experienced by sex workers and in essence acknowledges that the selling of sex through the internet not only comes with stigma but also distances the worker from support networks. Lal and Dwivedi, (2009) further argue that working from home or 'remotely' can result in a loss of relationship building communication that maybe found in more 'traditional environments'. The result being that the worker may experience feelings of social isolation.

3. Project Rationale and Methodology

3.1 Project Rationale

The purpose of this report is to identify the factors that are influencing the growth of online male sex work. As part of this process, the research will look at online male sex work in Manchester. The aims are to identify links between street and online work and highlight potential risks that exist for workers, whilst providing the Men's Room with a platform to develop further support services and interventions for male sex workers in the Manchester area.

3.2 Ethics

Ethical considerations have been paramount to the design and conduct of the research. Full ethical approval was granted from the Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee before this research took place. The Men's Room have acted as Gate Keeper for all contact with research participants. All data for this project will be stored in line with Manchester Metropolitan University data collection regulations. Participants who took part in the focus group were recruited through the Men's Room and provided details about their current and past working conditions and habits. Each worker provided their consent to engage with the process and was signposted to support services at the end of the focus group should they feel the need to engage with them. All profiles that were reviewed as part of this research were web based sites that have no restrictions or passwords to require access. No research profiles were created in order to access web based profiles.

3.3 Approach

A mixed methods approach was used to collect data (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This comprised of an audit of online sex worker profiles and a focus group interview with male sex workers. A Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) was adopted to develop the analysis whereby the initial analysis was conducted by researchers with no prior knowledge of the research area. In doing this it allowed the narrative of sex working to emerge from the data which would then be developed by a separate researcher who had also conducted the literature review.

3.4 Data Collection

The online audit of male sex worker profiles took place on the 17th March 2016 for one week where key demographic information was noted about each sex worker / escort. 15 websites that had unrestricted access (no password required to log on) and are 'free to view' were used in the online audit. A total of 387 profiles were found. 31 of the profiles were found to be duplicates where the information that was contained in the profiles was included.

Websites and applications (apps) that allow workers to offer services by placing an advertisement or being in a certain geographical location, for example Craigslist and Grinder, have not been included as part of this research project. The opportunistic nature of these sites, which are influenced by location, time of day and day of the week, presented issues with access for the research team.

Table 1 – websites and profiles viewed for the profile analysis.

| Website | No of Profiles |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| GPScort | 50 |
| Manchester Lads | 25 |
| Manchester Packpage | 15 |
| Midlandslads | 30 |
| Haloboy | 85 |
| Sleepyboy | 60 |
| Gayescortclub | 50 |
| Rent.com | 1 |
| Boys2rent / Men4rentnow / Men4sexnow | 10 |
| Menoftheuk | 35 |
| Adultguidetomanchester | 20 |
| PTMU | 4 |
| Escort-England | 2 |

Only those profiles located in the geographical area of Greater Manchester were used to collate the material with those outside the area being excluded. The vast majority of sex workers / escorts were located in Manchester (93% n=331). Some workers used various online sites, when aggregating the numbers, this was taken into account where possible.

Table 2 – locations of sex workers

| Location | % of location | n |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Bolton | 2% | 6 |
| Manchester | 93% | 331 |
| Not stated | 0% | 1 |
| Oldham | 0% | 1 |
| Rochdale | 1% | 4 |
| Salford | 2% | 7 |
| Stockport | 0% | 1 |
| Tameside | 0% | 1 |
| Trafford | 0% | 1 |
| Wigan | 1% | 3 |
| Grand Total | 100% | 356 |

The mean average age of the sex workers was 26 years old with the median standing at one year younger at 25 years old. The youngest person was 18 years old and the oldest 52 making a range of 35 years. Three participants did not put down their age and one provided an age range of 30-39. These are not included in the above measures of central tendencies.

A focus group was carried out with two male sex workers who work or have worked within the city centre area. This was held in a private room at the LGBT Foundation, centrally located within the city. Informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the process and clarified at

the end. A list of support services was also provided to participants. A series of semi-structured questions were posed to the participants with their responses being recorded by audio recording equipment. The recording for the focus group was later transcribed verbatim by the researcher onto an electronic document. Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained with all personal details being removed and names being changed for the transcription.

3.5 Analysis

Interview data

Taking a Grounded Theory approach to data analysis allowed us to explore the data with little or no prior theory, allowing for the participants data to develop the themes as opposed to the literature. In the first instance, two researchers carried out an initial analysis of the interview data and developed ideas about the data. Following this, a third researcher developed the analysis adding in experience gained through prior knowledge and through developing the literature review. Close reading and re-reading of the data was coded and thematically analysed. Key themes were then developed and then built upon before being considered against the existing literature to construct a narrative of the experience of online and street working.

Descriptive statistics

The online audit allowed for the production of descriptive statistics relating to the key demographic information found on the online sites. It was not possible to carry out inferential statistics.

4. Analysis and Discussion: Key Themes

A significant reason for the change to online-based work is the opportunity it offers for earning more money. Academic literature and empirical data obtained as part of this research have highlighted that sex workers can earn more money through advertising online (Castle and Lee, 2008). The accounts from participants show that online work tends to generate more income than just working on the street.

4.1 Working on the Street

Recent empirical research confirms that street based work still exists around established male 'cruising' locations (Atkins, 2014 and Atkins and Laing, 2012), but it is more widely argued that street based transactions are in decline (Gaffney, 2003 and McLean, 2015) or seem to be being combined with work online. Accounts from participants suggest that certain areas of Manchester city centre are still active with workers and clients. However a commonly cited change to street work is the potential for higher earnings through online work. Mark discusses the main difference of street and online work being the clients and the chance to earn more money:

They pay slightly different online, you get more money. (Mark)

Accounts from participants show that compared to the street, online generated work tends to be more financially rewarding:

Online you get more. It's like on Grindr once when I put down that I was selling, on the street you get £20, but on Grindr when I put I was selling someone straight away said 'I'll give you £75'. (Mark)

Street work can also be limited by factors such as relying on passers-by for work, seasonality and fluctuations relating to the different times of the day or day of the week, all of which affect demand. When working on the street it can be a waiting game where workers have to simply wait within known areas for potential clients to come along:

I used to go out about half eight at night and wouldn't come home till about four o'clock in the morning (Mark)

Mark had to work long hours on the street with little or no guarantee of reward. There is also the risk of not being paid or not being paid the full amount if a client became abusive after the transaction had taken place.

4.2 The growth of online work

The online audit of male sex work yielded 356 individual profiles from fifteen separate websites (see methodology section). The number of online profiles and the number of times the same sex worker used different websites suggests a high level of supply and demand is present throughout the Manchester area. Data provided from the Men's Room suggests that the number of street based sex workers who engage with the organisation tends to be upwards of

40 men at any one time (Men’s Room, 2016). This figure, compared to the 356 online profiles yielded from a selection of male sex work sites, highlights a significant increase in demand within Manchester, which is facilitated by the internet.

Evaluating the profiles reveals that there was greater opportunity to earn money when compared to what is known about street working. The first thing of note is the wide variation of costs per hour. The lowest fee for services was £30 (stated by two participants – one 21 year-old white gay man who always practices safer sex and adapted the bottom role; and a 35 year-old white gay man who did not declare if he practices safer sex and was versatile). The highest amount advertised was £200 (or £150/200). Table 3 below shows the spread of costs and percentages of men charging such costs.

Table 3: advertised cost per hour of male sex workers online

| Cost per hour | % cost | n |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| under £70 | 6% | 23 |
| £70-£100 | 16% | 78 |
| £80-£120 | 1% | 3 |
| £100-150 | 22% | 56 |
| £150-200 | 1% | 5 |
| Not Stated | 54% | 191 |
| Grand Total | 100% | 356 |

Interestingly, at 54 percentage (n=191) the majority did not declare their fees. The most quoted fee was £100-£150, given by 22 percent (n=56) of the men. Compare this to the above narrative from Mark who suggests a typical fee of £20. Indeed, the reason Mark offers for his transition to online work was not simply a matter of the ability to earn more money, but also how his earning from working on the street started to substantially decline.

Online profiles also offer a greater opportunity to state exactly what services are on offer, the possible roles (top/bottom/versatile) and where the transaction can take place, which is not possible when working on the street. Transactions may be ‘in-calls’, where the client goes to the sex workers home, or ‘out-calls’ where the sex worker meets in a location decided by the client, such as home/hotel. For instance, Mark provides an account of how this is negotiated on the street:

You follow the car, approach them and ask them what they’re interested in and he’ll tell you exactly what he’s interested in. Then you’ll either do the agreement or you don’t (Mark).

Using online profiles allows the sex worker to advertise a range of services that importantly exclude activities that he will not engage in. Table 4 below shows the percentages of those willing to make in or out calls. The majority of sex workers would do both in and out calls (45% n=160) with just 4% (n=14) stating they would only do in calls. 20% (n=71) would only make out calls with 31% (n=111) not stating.

Table 4: percentages of workers willing to make in/out calls

| In/Out calls | % of in/out2 | n |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| Both | 45% | 160 |
| In only | 4% | 14 |
| Out only | 20% | 71 |
| Not stated | 31% | 111 |
| Grand Total | 100% | 356 |

The majority of sex workers declared their preferred role on their profile with 24% (n86) leaving this blank (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: preferred sexual role

| Role | % role | n |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| No Anal | 1% | 3 |
| Bottom | 14% | 49 |
| Bottom/Versatile | 4% | 16 |
| Versatile | 39% | 140 |
| Versatile/Top | 3% | 11 |
| Top | 14% | 51 |
| Not Stated | 24% | 86 |
| Grand Total | 100% | 356 |

The majority of participants stated they were versatile (39% n=140) although a further 7% (n=27) stated they were either top or bottom versatile. 14% (n=49) stated they were exclusively bottom and 14% (n=51) exclusively top. 24% (n=86) did not disclose their preferred role.

There is a negative discourse towards those who do not practice safer sex, and as such do not use condoms. The 'ability to negotiate' is facilitated through online work with the majority of participants 'not stating' whether or not they practiced safer sex. Not selecting an option rather than 'always' or 'never' provides the sex worker and client room to negotiate and discuss their options.

Table 6 : practicing safe sex

| Safer sex | % safer sex | n |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| Always | 26% | 92 |
| Needs Discussion | 4% | 13 |
| Never | 1% | 3 |
| Not Stated | 68% | 242 |
| Sometimes | 1% | 5 |
| Grand Total | 100% | 356 |

The majority who declared a preference stated that they 'always' practiced safer sex (26% n= 93) 68% (n=242) did not state whether they did or did not. 6% (n=9) clearly stated that they

either did not use condoms or suggested this was open to negotiation. One participant stated he would do bareback sex and that he was HIV negative via PrEP.

Exploring the increased ability to earn along with the ability to specify services on offer, it is easy to see why we are seeing a rise in online sex work and a decline in street working. This is not necessarily simply about increased earning potential but also, a decline in what has been traditional settings for sex work as clients also move towards the convenience of using online profiles.

4.3 Safety and support

One possible driver for the growth to online work is the perceived increased safety and comfort of not working on the street (McLean, 2015). The accounts from the participants highlighted a discourse of danger with them stating that street work has the potential to be more risky with a greater uncertainty than online work. Violence and poor treatment both before and after the transaction was common. For instance, Mark discusses how some 'dodgy punters' refuse to pay him while others become abusive after the encounter has finished:

I've had dodgy punters where they've refused to pay ya, I've had punters that become physical with ya after you've done the deed, rather than pay you they'd rather hit ya, or one punter actually decided that after I'd done the service he decided it'd be a nice idea to throw me in the canal (Mark).

The threat of violence or actual violence was littered throughout the participants' accounts of street work; something which has been evidenced in previous research (for instance, see McLean 2015). In some respects, there was a tacit expectation of potential violence when working on the street with it being viewed as almost part of the service being purchased:

I've known lads actually come out with like black eyes and stuff, but the way they see it is the way I see it; you're paid to do a job, so if they want to treat you like crap you get tret like crap. (Mark)

Experiencing such treatment, in addition to the potential for increased earnings, is an important driver for male sex workers to move their business online where these specific risks are reportedly reduced. There are also less tangible reasons related to this growth; notably, the increased ability to vet potential clients prior to meeting. As such, the participants offer a discourse of a 'nicer' client online than when compared to street work:

You get a lot more nicer people online, whereas occasionally you'll just have someone pull up to you on the street and then they'll be like 'Do you want the money or not, just get in' and then it's a case of you've gotta get in and do what they say. Sometimes that isn't always easy on the streets. (Mark)

The ability to vet the client beforehand was declared as preferable to the often rushed decision associated with meeting a client on the street where the transaction needed to be negotiated in a public setting. In essence, participants felt that online sex work empowers the sex worker: it allows him more choice of who he engages with, more time to get to know the client before making the decision, and whether or not the encounter would even take place:

You get to know them, you get to look at a profile picture and you get time to think about it... You get the odd one that just treats you nice online but when you're on the street you get the ones that are a bit weird but you put up with it sort of thing. (Mark)

While superficially these decisions seem to be based on somewhat spurious assumptions such as someone looking nice in a picture, the important element here is the ability to take time when making that decision and if necessary, backing out of the transaction if the worker felt uneasy or unsure:

I ended up speaking to some people online [and] making an arrangement but then I had this thing in the back of my head that I really can't be dealing with like what happened last time so I ended up just chickening out of it (Luke).

Compare this to street sex working where conditions might necessitate the need to be somewhat covert and rushed, with little or no time to fully evaluate the client and situation, or as Mark stated 'the click of a finger to make [up] your mind':

On the street you've got literally the click of a finger to make your mind, if you take longer the punter thinks like sod 'em I'll get another lad. [or] You'll stand there and there'll be the odd car drive past and flash their lights, turn round the corner or go into the car park. Then you follow the car, approach them and ask them what they're interested in and he'll tell you exactly what he's interested in. Then you'll either do the agreement or you don't, sort of thing (Mark)

It is clear that online work offers a safer and more comfortable working environment yet a deeper evaluation of the data reveals some surprising discourses.

4.4 Reconstituting risk

To assume that street working is without benefit and online work without risk lacks a nuanced understanding of either working environments. There are still risks to working online although these risks are different to those experienced when working the street.

For instance, Mark stated how he preferred to work on the street as it got him 'out and about', giving him time to do other things while working. Importantly, it provides important socially supportive networks, camaraderie and friendships that might not be available when working online. Having such social networks provide a further degree of protection by the ability to share information with others about potentially 'dodgy punters'. They are also more accessible to support organisations such as the Men's Room. For instance, Mark highlights how he and the Men's Room first made contact:

The Men's Room first made contact with me cos I was on the street actually selling sex. It was more it took time for the Men's Room to interact with me. Every time I saw them I ran off, because I always thought they were undercover coppers or something. You have to be careful with them down there (Mark).

Importantly, for this group of young men there was little, if any, trust of authority figures, including the police, due to personal and observed negative experiences. This was based on a number of factors, including fears over the police contacting their family members and

disclosing their line of work; concerns over not being taken seriously; and a perceived lack of concern for sex workers:

In my experience they [the police] don't really give too much of a crap (Luke)

This lack of trust can lead to the increased vulnerability of sex workers; something which may in fact be enhanced by working online, due to the individual often working in isolation, maybe not having knowledge of sources of support, and possibly not being in communication with other individuals who are involved in the same line of work. As such, there is the potential that online sex work runs the risk of social isolation, which has been associated with other forms of home working (for example, see Lal and Dwivdi, 2009; MacPhail et al, 2014).

Further risks associated with online work emerge through the need to have an online profile that provided clients with the necessary information for them to make their decision. This often included a face picture, email address and mobile telephone number. Table 7 below shows the percentage of those who showed a clear photograph of their face on their online profile.

Table 7: number of workers showing clear face pictures

| Show clear face pictures | Percent of clear pictures | n |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| No | 27% | 97 |
| Yes | 73% | 259 |
| Grand Total | 100% | 356 |

In some instances, the online profile also included sexually explicit photographs of the sex worker, again increasing the potential risks associated with uploading to the internet personal data (see Table 8 below).

Table 8: number of workers showing sexually explicit pictures

| If sexually explicit picture on profile | Percent of those who showed sexually explicit picture | n |
|---|---|------------|
| No | 67% | 237 |
| Yes | 33% | 119 |
| Grand Total | 100% | 356 |

The risk of uploading private information arises from the lack of control over how the content is then used, stored and shared. There is also the inability to never remove material that has been placed online (for example see Cunningham *et al*, 2010). A sex worker's picture has the potential to still be circulating long after he has finished with the escort business. There is also the issue of including the email and phone number which can be used to find more information by simply putting either of them into a search engine.

The thing that lets most lads down is that you give a punter your number, but say that number is linked to your Facebook account. Someone puts that number in Facebook and presses search, Facebook shows them your profile, everything. Facebook tells them where you are, where you mainly are, everything is on there. Most of the lads, you don't realise it when you're giving out that number that little

business card, then next minute they've got your number they're typing it into Facebook, they can access all your friends, all your family. (Mark)

So while on the one hand, online work empowers the sex worker in that he has more time and information to make his decision, it also disempowers him through the loss of control about personal information, a point made by Luke:

I used my name and stuff like that, I didn't put pictures of my face or anything like that. But still, when you kinda think like you know someone like a client or whatever and you think that they're alright, then you let your guard down and then they can use it against ya. (Luke)

Working online can therefore expose sex workers to manipulation and abuse by clients, with personal information being used in a menacing way.

4.5 In and Out Calls

There is also the associated risks that arise from 'in-calls' (where the client goes to the sex workers home) or 'out-calls' where the sex worker meets in a location decided by the client (home/hotel). In-calls present risk in that the client knows where the worker lives. This leaves him extremely exposed. For instance:

I had like threats and stuff. Erm, I had one that just like manipulated me all the time. He'd send a photo of me in the post and stuff like that, it said like 'Rent Boy' and things on it, weird stuff like that. (Luke)

Exploring 'out-calls' reveals other risks whereby the sex worker does not have control of the environment. One example where this was abused was when a client had secretly filmed the encounter:

We didn't realise at the time that we were being recorded inside the property, so we got video clips, DVDs and all sorts sent to us, telling us that we were dirty, we were a disgrace, that our families would find out, this that and the other. (Mark)

Mark discusses the risks of working away from home and not being fully aware of his environment. Unaware that his client was filming his boyfriend and himself, which was then used against him. Comparing street work with online work reveals that the risks associated with the latter still exist but there are also increased risks. In both environments the sex worker is open to threats of violence and actual violence. However, when considering online work there appears to be an increased danger of emotional and psychological violence that arise from the necessity to provide personal information.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The growth in sex work from street-based sex work to online is still in its infancy and while a good deal is already known, in this fast changing landscape, it is important that research and policy keep up to date so that men involved in this line of work are supported and informed of the key risks. As there is an overall distrust of statutory bodies by these men, we recommend that this support is delivered by the third sector. That should not detract from attempts to improve relationships between both parties. In the interim, there is also a need for the third sector to liaise with the statutory sector on behalf of this group. Our specific recommendations are:

- To abandon the assumption that online work is safer and presents less risk. Male sex workers who work online can have complex needs and require appropriate support from a range of agencies
- A better understanding of the risks associated with online sex work is required so that this can be communicated to those involved
- Ongoing, regular training needs to be developed, and then offered to online sex workers, which spells out the potential dangers of providing personal information in their profiles
- Organisations that work or come into contact with male sex workers (including voluntary and statutory agencies) are advised to explore ways of how to increase their online presence and outreach activity to develop support services appropriate for online sex workers
- Investigate ways to improve the relationship between male sex workers and statutory and voluntary agencies
- There is a good deal of evidence, which documents the risk of social isolation for those who work predominantly from home. Research is needed to explore the extent that this is experienced by sex workers who work online
- To further explore the growth of online male sex work in Manchester so that appropriate support services may be provided.

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