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Understanding the New Context of the Male Sex Work Industry

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Abstract

The paper reviews past and recent research on male sex work to offer a context to understand violence in the industry. It provides a critical review of research to show firstly, the assumptions made about male sex workers and violence and secondly, how such discourses have shaped thinking on the topic. The paper presents a case study and findings from recent studies to discuss the incidence of violence in the male sex industry. Finally, the paper reviews legislative reforms in Australia, Sweden and The Netherlands to show how the sex industry is being regulated.

Introduction

Male sex work is a growing enterprise and the male body is increasingly seen as a commodified product. For example, male-to-male pornography constitutes a sizeable segment of the US pornography market, about one-third to one half of the \$2.5 billion adult industry (Thomas 2000). In recent years, masculinity and male bodies have been openly represented in eroticised cultural terms within the context of art, fashion and film (Kay, Naggle & Gould 2000; Watson 2000). The 1990s has also seen the publication of mainstream magazines and newspapers, including sexually oriented commercial and classified advertisements selling the male body. These developments confront and challenge 'straight' culture head-on and validate male-to-male sex by seeing it played out in public forums. It also expands popular thinking about male sexuality.

Not surprisingly, there has been a shift in the discourse about male sex work. The discourses of criminology, deviance, and social control have been used as conceptual frameworks to explain male prostitution. Within this framework both prostitution and homosexuality are perceived as deviant, requiring social control. Earlier accounts conceptualised male prostitution as universally deviant, and prostitutes were considered 'abnormal'. Within this broad literature, researchers have reported that male sex workers tend to have multiple problems. These include running away from home and early school leaving, which results in a lack of educational, social, and employable skills (Coombs 1974). The role of alcohol and drugs has been portrayed as occupying an inordinate importance in their lives (Morse et al. 1992). Attendance in retention centres, criminal records, and violence perpetrated against older (usually gay) males have been cited as common among some male sex workers (Coombs 1974; Visano 1988). These foci have led to stereotyping of the male sex worker as either a psycho-pathological social misfit, who has been sexually abused in childhood (Boyer 1989), a teenage

runaway (Harris, 1973), or a heterosexual who only prostitutes because he is desperate for money (Chappell 1986).

Recent work, however, shows that the intrinsic nature of sex work is not all oppressive and that there are different kinds of worker and client experiences and varying degrees of victimisation, exploitation, agency and choice (Minichiello et al 2001). Research has revealed male sex workers as workers who are neither psychologically unstable, desperate, nor destitute and engage in sex work as an occupational choice and the outcome of a rational economic decision (Mariño et al. 2003; Minichiello et al. 2001). Clients come from a diverse background in terms of age, social class, ethnicity and sexual identification (Minichiello et al 1999).

Although male sex workers fitting the popular negative stereotypes do exist, these descriptions do not recognize the diversity of lifestyles and experience that constitute the wider male sex worker population. Furthermore, such representations ignore broader structural understandings of the sex industry and portray male sex workers as oppressed victims who are incapable of rational choice. 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, rather than a psychological condition. Studies also show that while all sex workers sell sex in some fashion, there are differences between street, escort and brothel sex workers. Recently, we have gained more knowledge about the so called 'indoor sex work'. Cyber-space has extended sex work beyond the streets and the last decade has witnessed a growth in the number of men who sell sexual services on the internet. There is evidence to suggest that men are entering sex work (Minichiello et al 1998) and taking advantage of the sexual appeal of the

male body to sell to both women and male clients (see the following web sites – www.rentboy.com, www.executivemaleescorts.com, www.menzroom.com, and an entire site devoted to client reviews of the escorts, see for example, www.male4malescorts.com).

This paper will provide a discussion of some of the contextual issues surrounding male sex work and violence. For the purpose of this paper, sex work is an occupation where a sex worker is hired to provide sexual services for monetary considerations (Visano 1988). A male sex worker (MSW) has been defined as any male who engages repeatedly in sexual activities with persons with whom he would not otherwise stand in any special relationship and for which he receives currency and/or the provision of one or more of the necessities of living (food, clothing, and protection) (Coleman 1989), and other items of monetary value (Morse et al. 1991). The paper will also present a case study to highlight violence issues that male sex workers can face in their work and reports on the findings of two recent studies on the incidence of violence in the male sex industry. Finally, it will examine the influence of legislation on the sex industry to highlight the important role ‘macro’ level factors play.

Male sex work and interpersonal violence: some context issues

In understanding sexual or gendered violence, Mason (2002) has argued that the term ‘violence’ can be used to describe a broad range of activities in addition to physical force, including discrimination, social marginalisation, financial exploitation and institutional exclusion. While sex workers suffer from and practice various forms of violence, it is useful to distinguish between specific practices of violence. In discussing homophobic violence, Mason adopts a legalistic definition of violence to emphasise the exclusive use of physical force by an individual(s) upon the body of another. Such physical force may produce emotional and psychological harm, in addition to physical harm. For example,

violence may be acted out in terms of abusive language or direct physical assault through the use of weapons. Violence can be planned or disorganised. Mason adopts the term *interpersonal violence* to distinguish this variety of violence from forms of violence that may be mobilised by formal institutions. She also observes that the issue of consent is important in understanding violence, arguing that sado-masochistic sex acts that are consensual should not be considered violent. Following this definition, a significant body of research has indicated that male sex workers and their clients are likely to suffer from various forms of interpersonal violence, including verbal and physical harassment, physical assault, sexual assault and rape.

Male sex work has gained public visibility through media reports of sex workers or their clients being victims of bizarre and violent crimes, such as homicide and serial killings. While incidents of violence are likely to make for good news copy, these are rare events and provide a skewed impression of the everyday life of the majority of sex workers (West & de Villiers 1993). While all sex workers are likely to encounter violence in various guises, including physical assault and rape, the most common form of violence is verbal abuse.

Both male and female sex workers are subject to various forms of interpersonal violence, yet the way in which violence is acted and legitimated varies. While violence towards female sex workers might be understood as having a misogynistic basis, violence towards male sex workers is best understood as having a homophobic or heterosexist basis. Female sex workers are stigmatised because they are women, yet male sex workers are stigmatised because they are 'homosexual', or are assumed such by their attackers. Interestingly, it is not only sex workers who suffer from such violence, but also the clients of male sex workers, who occupy a similar deviant status to the sex worker (Perkins & Bennett 1985). While there has been an increasing tendency in the literature on

prostitution to regard the clients of female sex workers as deviant, they have not been viewed as a threat to social order, and as such are rarely subjected to formal or informal policing practices, including interpersonal violence. In contrast, the clients of male sex workers have been considered dangerous and threatening to social order (Scott 2003).

Dominant narratives of both male and female sex work tend to present prostitution as a product of economic necessity or individual pathology. The pervasiveness of these narratives lends support to a representation of sex workers as passive and disempowered victims, exploited and coerced into the situation in which they find themselves. However, there is an alternate romanticised narrative which suggests male sex work is inherently less exploitative than female sex work because interactions between two men makes for a certain mutual equality which is missing in the interactions between a male client and female seller (Altman 1999; Davies & Simpson 1990). There is yet another view of the male sex worker as predator or juvenile delinquent seeking easy financial gain, although this role is often assumed by the (homosexual) client of the male sex worker who supposedly takes advantage of the immaturity and innocence of the sex worker. While these various views are grounded in some understanding of power differentials, they tend to individualise power dynamics, failing to provide a socio-cultural basis for specific strategies of power.

In terms of understanding violence towards male sex workers it is important to remember that such violence cannot be reduced to simple causal factors and that male sex workers cannot be constructed as a homogeneous population. There is no typical prostitute. As such, generalised causes of abuse are to be regarded cautiously. A single variable, such as economic exploitation, cannot be emphasised at the exclusion of others in understanding sex work. In attempting to comprehend violence associated with male sex work, it is important to

recognise that male sex work is organised and represented according to the sexual identification, sex role (masculine or feminine) and sexual services offered by the sex worker (Luckenbill 1986). If we accept that violence towards male sex workers is related to socio-cultural representations and understandings of gender and sexuality, the aetiological dimensions of violence cannot be reduced to the effects of trading sex for financial reward. That is, prostitution itself is not a cause of violence. Nor is it possible to individualise the aetiological dimensions of violence, isolating violent behaviour from a socio-cultural framework.

Rather much inter-personal violence directed at male sex workers and their clients might be regarded as a form of public policing which promotes and maintains specific gendered and sexual regimes. Violence acts as a form of socio-political management, operating to exclude behaviour that is viewed as conflicting with particular gendered or sexual normative regimes and promoting or enforcing a particular vision of social order. According to Perkins and Bennett (1985), violence towards sex workers operates to enforce certain social norms, which perpetrators believe are sanctioned by society or their immediate environment. Sex workers subjected to interpersonal violence tend to be regarded as having a bad reputation or spoiled identity, their behaviour placing them outside the protection of the law. Indeed, a factor precipitating interpersonal violence is the belief that it is sanctioned and will not be reacted against. While women sex workers are subject to violence because they are regarded as having no right to resist men and/or because they are perceived to be behaving in an unfeminine manner, male sex workers are attacked because they present an affront to masculinity, either through their appearance or behaviour. Indeed, the social stigmatisation and legal status of sex work has influenced social and legal responses to inter-personal violence. Both clients and sex workers are reluctant to report violence because they fear public identification or because they anticipate or have experienced poor treatment by authorities (West & de Villers

1993). As such, much violence towards male sex workers and their clients is likely to have gone under-reported or unrecorded in official criminal justice records.

Official attitudes towards sex work take on the legal notion that it presents a problem of public order. The public are to be protected from prostitution. There appears to be little acknowledgement that sex workers might be endangered by public attitudes which present in terms of homophobic or misogynistic behaviour (Lazarus 1994). Law enforcement officers lack training, resources and willingness to prosecute the perpetrators of violence towards sex workers. Liguori and Aggleton (1999) claim that most attacks on 'transvistos' in Mexico have gone unpunished, with organised police responses to violence being rare. They also note that reported incidents of violence were likely to present a small proportion of the overall violence towards this population. Instead, sex workers themselves tend to be prosecuted. They also observed that police often were perpetrators of violence towards sex workers. In many parts of the world police will extort money from sex workers in exchange for legal protection.

Cross culturally a common distinction is made between masculine and effeminate sex workers (Boushaba et al. 1999; Liguori & Aggleton 1999; Schifter & Aggleton 1999). This distinction is often translated in terms of 'macho' and 'transvestite' or 'transsexual' sex workers. Recent research has shown this distinction to be made in countries such as France, Mexico and Peru. For example, da Silva (1999) notes the distinction between 'transvistos' and 'garçons'. 'Garçons' are regarded as more masculine and have a self-image as gigolo. 'Garçons' claimed they played an insertive role in sexual encounters and refused to be penetrated. Liguori and Aggleton (1999) found that 'transvistos' in Mexico were more likely to be victims of group violence and the attacks they were subjected to were often more brutal than those carried out on other sex workers.

They cited two serial killing cases involving 'transvistos' during the early 1990s. 'Transvistos' posing as women were likely to be subject to violence when and if their identity were discovered by clients. Similarly, Australian transsexual or transvestite sex workers have been identified as being subject to a high rate of abuse from clients. This has been explained as a result of their stigmatisation, as both transsexuals and prostitutes (Prestage 1995).

While the basis for violence may be understood with reference to gender and sexuality, the degree to which male sex workers are at risk of violence will be tempered by specifics such as class, age and ethnicity. These factors are also likely to influence where and how male sex work is conducted. For example, numerous studies of sex work have found that men and women working in public spaces are more at-risk of violence than those working in private spaces (Minichiello et al. 1999). However, the notion that there might be fixed populations of sex workers, such as street prostitutes and brothel workers, is to be discouraged (Scott 2003). In understanding sex work it is important to focus not on who sex workers are, but what they do. As Altman (1999) notes, it is useful to consider sex work in terms of a continuum, ranging from organised forms of sex work through to unmediated transactions and chance encounters.

Research discourses

Discourses of sexuality and gender have strongly influenced the way in which research into sex work has been conducted. There have been two directions for research into male sex work. The first, which may be called 'sociological', has been largely concerned with deviant subcultures, be they delinquent youth (Harris 1973) or homosexuals (Hauser 1962). The second direction of research into male sex work predominantly followed clinical approaches which understood male prostitution in terms of socio-pathology (Allen 1980; Freyan 1947; MacNamara 1965; Russell 1971). Both traditions of research have informed

a particular representation of the male sex worker. He has been characterised as youthful; poorly educated with a low to average intelligence; immature and lazy; isolated and alienated; possessing a poor work history and few vocational skills; raised in a poor socio-economic circumstances, characterised by a disorganised familial environment; heterosexual with a hyper-masculine appearance or traits; alcohol or drug dependent; hostile and aggressive to himself, family and society; incapable of forming stable relations with others; highly transient, sexually promiscuous and virile, having been initiated into sexual activity at an early age.

More recent studies challenge such descriptions, however. The literature reveals that the profile of the male sex workers is diverse and changing from past stereotypes. The trend of such studies is to report that street MSWs are less educated, higher drug users, more likely to report financial problems and incidences of violent interactions with clients, less likely to be tested for HIV and sexually transmissible infections (STI), and hold less positive attitudes towards being a sex worker. Non-street workers (independent and escort sex workers) tend to be more educated, reported less financial problems, were more likely to see sex work as a long term occupation, mostly engage in safe-sex practices and feel more comfortable with sex work (Minichiello et al. 2001).

Early studies of male prostitution constructed representations of the male prostitute as a deficit figure. Methodologically, these studies confined their samples to clinically or criminally institutionalised populations of delinquent youth or public displays of prostitution in urbanised areas, subjects appearing to have been selected on the basis of their visibility and accessibility (Butts 1947; Craft 1966; Ginsburg 1967). This early research was reluctant to identify the male prostitute as homosexual (Butts 1947). The notion of the heterosexual forced into sex with older men corresponded with medical and criminological discourses of homosexuality, and their themes of child-adult sexual exploitation.

Not surprisingly, this early research drew clear links with male prostitution and delinquent behaviour. Interestingly, an early link was made between male prostitution and violence. For example, Jersild (1956) observed that clients of male prostitutes were subject to robbery, blackmail and, even, murder. Despite this observation, little research followed which investigated the reasons for violence and how it might be prevented. Instead, research has tended to be concerned with the aetiological dimensions for entry into a career in prostitution and the sexual identity of the male sex worker. When violence has been noted, it has been presented from a psychosocial perspective. Moreover, research had tended to be voyeuristic and moralising. Violence was explained in terms of the relationship itself, the product of deviant or pathological personalities, rather than broader social regimes of gender and sexuality. For example, Caukins and Coombs (1976) noted that the relationship between hustler and client was one of mutual dependence that often transgressed into antagonism and mutual hostility because both client and prostitute were stigmatised by their relationship. Any semblance of satisfaction or reciprocity between client and prostitute was held to be an illusion. The client of male prostitution was marked as deviant, together with the prostitute, and stigmatised. Clients were depicted as middle-aged and physically unattractive men seeking bizarre sexual activities (Scott 2003).

Despite this, more recent research has indicated that clients rarely attack sex workers. However, when such attacks do occur they are likely associated with alcohol consumption and are linked to the experiencing of sexual guilt and anxiety (Perkins & Bennett 1985; West & de Villiers 1993). Abuse by clients can include robbery and forcing prostitutes to perform sexual acts against their will. Some assaults are predicated by a sex worker's robbery of a customer or the refusal of a sex worker to perform a specific sexual activity. Money from clients is unlikely to be extracted through blackmail, as this requires time, experience

and an ability to communicate on the part of the sex worker. Rather, clients are likely to be assaulted or robbed. West and de Villiers (1993) found that most sex workers would resort to violence if a client refused to pay them. It was unusual for clients to attempt to rob sex workers. Schifter (1998) notes, the danger associated with sex work has been an attraction for many clients, who might regard encounters with possible assailants exciting and addictive. Despite the risks involved and an acknowledgment of these risks, clients are likely to frequent dangerous places such as parks in search of sex workers.

Recent studies have found a similar aversion among male sex workers to what they regard to be a passive or receptive role. Certain sexual practices are highly stigmatised and are to be avoided as they are regarded as indicative of a homosexual orientation. For example, anally receptive men are stigmatised by derogatory and negative labels that place them at a stigmatised and inferior status. Such clients are often characterised as feminine by sex workers (de Moya & Garcia 1999). Homosexual practices are not viewed as designating a gay identity so long as sexual desire is expressed publicly to the opposite sex and a macho public persona is adopted. Sex workers differentiate themselves from clients so not to be seen as homosexual or bisexual. If a client transgresses a code of conduct the sex worker may feel insulted (being interpreted as 'gay') and react aggressively. In Cost Rica 'cachero's' are regarded as masculine, dominant, heterosexual and youthful while clients are characterised as passive, aged, and homosexual. This distinction will often be played out in terms of humiliation and cruelty of clients (Schifter & Aggleton 1999). Schifter's (1998) study of male brothel in Costa Rica shows that most of the workers were men who had sex with other men but who regarded themselves as heterosexual in all other respects. Salamon (1989) found that labelling clients allowed for escorts to create a positive self-image that deflected from their own disreputable

behaviour. Moreover, if a client was positioned as a 'second class' citizen, they could be legitimately demeaned and exploited.

Early research into prostitution tended to blame male sex workers for any problems they experienced or blamed the 'homosexual' clients of male prostitutes, failing to identify environmental or structural factors in the commission of violence. Personal pathology explanations deflected attention from the broader social, political and economic forces that influence the way in which sex work is organised and practiced. Because of their location, street workers are typically subjected to high level of verbal abuse (Perkins & Bennett 1985). Off-street work is safer because it takes place in comfortable, well lit, self contained environment, which the worker is familiar with. Clients are more likely to be known to workers and are subject to surveillance when entering and leaving a private venue (Hubbard 1999). However, the environment is not the only factor influencing violence, but also the organization of the work. It has been found that sex workers who work in groups are less likely to suffer victimisation as compared to those who work alone or in isolated settings. That is, those who work alone are at higher risk, be they street workers, hotel workers, or escorts (Perkins & Bennet 1985). This indicates that the physical location of sex work is likely to affect exposure to various forms of violence (Hubbard 1999). While some experience of violence is not uncommon to all varieties of sex work, being regarded as an occupational hazard, a casual acceptance of violence is a common theme in street work narratives. Accounts of rape, sexual assault, homophobic violence and police harassment are not uncommon to the experience of street workers (see, for example, Liguori & Aggleton 1999). Sexual assault has been cited as the most common form of violence associated with street work (West & de Villiers 1993). Yet, Australian and US research has found that street workers are likely to account for only 10% of the total sex work population (Minichiello et al 1998).

Often efforts to prevent violence toward street workers are hampered by the legal status of street work. It has been argued that decriminalisation of street prostitution would aid the reporting and prevention of sexual assaults, as well as address related problems such as drug abuse and homelessness. Indeed, legislation strongly influences the organization of sex work influencing where and when sex workers operate. Regular police 'crackdowns' on street prostitution have forced sex workers into isolated and poorly lit settings (Perkins & Bennet 1985).

The greater incidence of violence towards street workers has been explained with reference to the youth of this group, a chaotic and disorganised lifestyle, a tendency to work and live in areas which have high crime rates, work hours (many will work late into the night) and an isolated work setting. Furthermore, a proportion of this group are socially isolated, often living alone without support of a partner, peers or family (Simon et al. 1992; Perkins & Bennett 1985). With street work, sex is likely to take place in a car or isolated location, such as park. As such, it is preferable to identify situations and contexts in which violence is likely to occur, rather than identify specific categories of sex workers as being at-risk of violence.

The relative risk associated with working in a public setting can be better understood when it is considered that homophobic violence is typically enacted as a random street assault. Most acts of homophobic violence are perpetrated by groups of men who are unfamiliar to the victim. The victim is often alone or in an isolated setting at night (street, car park, beat) when such violence occurs. These characteristics of homophobic violence are evident cross culturally (Mason 2002). Indeed, victimology has suggested: crimes are likely to occur in public spaces, such as parks, streets, fields, or commercial establishments, such as

hotels; those who live alone or are isolated are more likely to suffer as victims of crime; and, persons from lower socio-economic strata are likely to be victims of crime because they are more likely to live (and work) in crime-prone areas, such as inner city neighbourhoods.

Routine activities theory, which has its basis in the Chicago School of Ecological Criminology, is a particularly useful approach for explaining the types of direct and predatory crimes associated with male sex work. This theory defines crime as an event that occurs when motivated offenders and suitable targets converge in space and time in the absence of capable guardians (Clarke & Felson 1993; Felson 1998). It has suggested that predatory crime is linked to the availability of suitable targets, the absence of motivated guardians such as peers, police, family and friends, and the presence of motivated offenders. Guardianship includes formal social controls, such as police and informal controls such as community members protecting people from victimisation through surveillance and target hardening activities, such as increased lighting. The approach assumes that weak guardianship leads to increased opportunities for criminal behaviour. Weak guardianship is more likely to occur in public spaces and spaces where acquaintanceship among individuals who occupy territory is low. Social, cultural, political and economic changes can also increase opportunities for crime.

As such, certain groups or individuals are likely to present as attractive targets for crime because they lack guardianship, their status renders them appropriate victims, they live in high risk neighbourhoods, go out late at night, carry valuables, or engage in risky behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse. For this reason, some male sex workers are likely present as convenient targets for assailants because of how their work is organised and because their attackers

rationalise assaulting them on grounds of their perceived gendered or sexual identity, regarded as spoiled and deviant.

Case study

A case study is presented to highlight how violence is described by a worker to highlight his experiences. The case study is derived from a study that is examining how hyper-masculine men who work in the sex industry describe their experiences and interactions with clients and their sexual identity (Minichiello & Harvey 2003).

Bruce is an escort in his late 20s who has been working in the industry for over ten years. It is his primary source of income and he reports feeling little stress being a sex worker. He makes it a point to stress that he offers a 'professional service' and articulates clear ideas about the ethical standards and practices of his work. He describes himself as hyper-masculine, non-gay identifying, weighing over 200 pounds and over six foot tall. He has a muscular body and provides his escort services to both male and female clients, although males form the majority of his clientele. His clients are recruited through advertisements placed in the Yellow Pages and newspapers and, over the years, he has developed a steady number of regular clients. This portrait is not all that dissimilar from that of many male escorts who advertise on the web (see www.rentboy.com).

In talking about violence, Bruce was able to identify three specific examples where he experienced some form of violence during his career. He pointed out, however, that these were the exemptions. One situation Bruce described was a client pulling out a knife at him once he had undressed. Bruce attributed this behaviour to either the sexual 'hang-up' of the client or to some form of homophobia reaction. He quickly handled this situation by overpowering the

client and leaving the scene. Looking back Bruce felt that he should have reported the incident to the police to avoid this client repeating this behaviour with other sex workers who may not be able to physically defend themselves.

The other two incidences did not involve physical violence but some form of harassment or abuse. One situation involved a female client who after having received her services from Bruce refused to pay him. The client called the hotel management to complain that Bruce was harassing her. Bruce handled this situation by explaining to management that he was an escort. As he was a regular visitor to the hotel and known to management, the situation resolved itself by Bruce leaving the premises. The other situation involved a teenager boy calling Bruce and making an appointment for him to provide escort services at the client's home. When Bruce arrived he found two teenagers verbally abusing him using such terms as 'queer', 'faggot' and such language. Bruce handled this situation by quickly leaving the premises without engaging in any verbal dialogue. As Bruce had the address details of the house he was able to trace the telephone number of that household. He called the client the following day and indicated that he would inform his parents of the situation unless the client paid for the escort services requested from Bruce. Bruce negotiated with the agreement of the client that he would donate the money to a charity.

Bruce also spoke about situations where he had to use or threaten physical force when the client refused to pay or became verbally abusive when Bruce asked for money in exchange of the service provided. Over the years he has reached the view that violence is conditionally dependent and decreases with the experience gained by the worker. Part of work experience involves recognising or being able to read contexts where the potential for violence or 'trouble' could occur. For example, he identified the following as situations where violence or 'trouble' had a higher chance of occurring: people who display sexual hang-ups, often

nervous 'first-timers', women who have 'an attitude' and get upset that the male escort would charge a fee given the enjoyable experience (as measured by the erection of the escort), getting calls to go to certain neighbourhoods or part of town, the escort withdrawing his services because of a request to have unprotected sex, or providing a service to a straight couple where the male partner becomes jealous and aggressive. He uses the technique of talking to people during the enquiry to solicit further information to ascertain the risk associated with the job. He also cited strategies he uses to minimise violent situation. For example, by hiring a car driver and informing the client that the driver is outside waiting or writing down the details of the client (eg., address and telephone number as well as full name) creates a context of tracing and protection for the worker. He also records the full detail of all encounters where violence or harassment occurred in case he needs to report this to the police. For Bruce harassment usually takes the form of the client using derogatory name calling, phone harassment or making public scene with the intention of embarrassing him. For example, he recalled a situation where a female client was unhappy that she had to pay him for escort services and followed him out of the home to his car calling him a 'gigolo', 'user' and 'prostitute' with neighbours coming out to listen.

Some recent findings on violence and related issues

In the case study, Bruce spoke about the low occurrence of violence in sex work. What do recent studies report on this topic? Two recent studies conducted in Australia and Argentina support Bruce's experiences. These two studies asked male sex workers to record the details of the interaction of their encounter with their clients at the end of the session using a diary format. The Australian study recorded information on over 2000 commercial sex encounters (for a more detailed discussion of the design of the study see Minichiello et al. 2000) and the study conducted in Cordoba, Argentina on 238 commercial sex encounters and

included a broad range of sex work situations, including street work (see Mariño et al. 2003).

Violence during a commercial sex encounter (CSE) was a rare event. Of all the encounters reported in Australia (n = 2074), only in 81 (3.9%) MSWs reported violence. For the CSE reported in Argentina (n=238), this proportion was even lower (1.7%). Interestingly, in the Cordoba study 11.8% of the male sex workers indicated some form of physical violence committed against them by the police, and 5.9% reported that police asked them for money. A stepwise logistic regression analyses (LRA) was performed using eight variables in the analysis: client's sexual orientation as perceived by the sex worker; place of the job; use of alcohol or substance by the client or the MSW before and during the encounter; use of alcohol or substance by the MSW before and during the encounter; type of client (new vs regular customer) and age of the client to predict a violent CSE. The combination of these variables came out as significant predictors for a violent CSE [$\chi^2(6) = 36.03; p < 0.001$]. According to place of the job, when the encounter took place at a public place such as an agency or in a car, there were higher chances of having a violent encounter than when the encounter occurred in other places, such as the home of the escort or client or hotel (OR = 2.68; 95% CI: 2.63 - 2.72 and OR = 2.48; 95% CI: 2.42 - 2.54, respectively). In those CSE where the client consumed alcohol or substances before the encounter, there was a slight increase in the likelihood of having a violent encounter (OR = 1.09; 95% CI: 1.08 - 1.09). In the opposite direction, when the MSW consumed alcohol or substances during the encounter there was less chances to have a non-violent outcome than when he did not (OR = 0.37; 95% CI: 0.37 - 0.38). When the client was in his 40s, the encounter was more likely to be violent (OR = 1.15; 95% CI: 1.14 - 1.15). By client's sexual orientation, the LRA indicated that when the client was assessed by the sex worker to be straight there was twice the chance of

having a violent encounter than when the encounter occurred with a gay or bisexual client (OR = 2.15; 95% CI: 2.12 - 2.20).

Interestingly, most Australian participants reported sex work as a “little stressful” (60.9%) followed by “not at all stressful” (22.3%) and only 16.8% found sex work either stressful or very stressful. By modality of work, those working in more than one modality or as street workers, tended to find sex work usually stressful (29.3 and 22.6%, respectively). A similar pattern was found in Cordoba, Argentina, where the majority of the Argentinean participants (54.8%) reported sex work as “a little stressful,” with the next largest group saying it was “very stressful” or “stressful” (29.1%). Only about 16.1% characterized the sex work as “not at all stressful.” Although the difference was not statistically significant, there was a trend among street MSWs to report feeling more stressed about sex work than independent MSWs did (29.4% vs. 14.3%, respectively).

To obtain a better picture of the predictors of finding sex work stressful, a logistic regression analysis (LRA) was run using MSW self-assessed of stress. Stress was divided into those that reported findings sex work stressful or very stressful and those that found sex work never or a little stressful. Several interactions remained independently associated with finding sex work to be stressful in the final multivariate model. The LRA indicated that after controlling for other variables present in the model, MSW who reported finding sex work as stressful were more likely to be just managing to get by economically (OR = 10.28; 95% CI: 9.61 - 10.99). Additionally, participants who worked in the Australian city of Sydney attached to an escort agency were less likely to report stress at work (OR = 0.16; 95% CI: 0.15 - 0.17). However, MSW who reported rarely or never feeling good of being a sex work were ten times more likely to find sex work stressful (OR = 10.42; 95% CI: 10.05 - 10.80). Sample size limitations in the Argentinean data precluded a multivariate analysis of those results.

Some legislative consideration

The commercial sex encounter cannot be analysed without consideration being given to the wider societal forces and the cultural environment in which sex occurs and the sex industry operates. The structural contexts contain many different levels such as laws, policies, regulations, health policy, and cultural norms and values. We have space to briefly discuss only the legislative influence here, and will focus on Australia, Sweden and The Netherlands where recent legislative initiatives have been introduced that focus on the decriminalisation of the sex industry and introduce public health and work regulation reforms.

Legislation informs the structural and organisational aspects of sex work. The position of male sex workers has rarely been considered in reform proposals, despite male sex workers having been considered a public health threat in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Traditionally, prostitution in some Western countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States and Europe, has been regulated according to a policy of toleration and containment. For example, until recently, all Australian jurisdictions have had penalties regulating activities associated with soliciting, brothel keeping and living on the earnings of prostitutes. Since the 1970s there has been a gradual retreat from the position that 'problems' associated with prostitution are resolved by creating new offences and imposing harsher penalties. This shift has been informed by liberal criticism, which questioned the effects of legislation in policing sexual morality, while acknowledging that criminal law could neither eradicate or reduce the extent of prostitution. Regulatory priorities became concerned with good management. Some feminists redefined prostitution as an 'industry' involving workers, managers and clientele (Neave 1994; Sullivan 1998).

These above changes are reflected in efforts to decriminalise prostitution. Decriminalisation has favoured a surveillance and control strategy, premised on the notion that draconian legislation criminalizing prostitution has failed to eradicate the most problematic aspects of the industry. There have been significant differences in jurisdictions as to an appropriate and effective decriminalisation regime. Some jurisdictions have chosen to license escort agencies and maintain criminal penalties for brothels, while others have moved to license, or decriminalise brothel prostitution. Some states in Australia allow only single operators, working alone. The law has been used protectively to discourage certain prostitution practices. In all jurisdictions there has been an effort to minimise street prostitution through increased penalties (Sullivan 1997). This has reflected the overriding aim of legislation to limit the nuisance aspects of prostitution, particularly its public visibility. Indeed, criticisms of reform have argued that it has operated in the interest of the managers and clients, rather than sex workers, who have not been protected by oppression, exploitation and discrimination (Neave 1994). However, some initiatives, such as state governments funding prostitutes collectives, have clearly benefited workers and clients, with programs promoting safer sex practices, educating workers about a code of professional conduct and improving their self-esteem and promoting a professional image of the industry to the public.

There has been considerable recent debate about sex work in Europe that reflects concerns about employment and human rights. Sex work as a form of violence against women and men is counterpoised to a view of sex work as legitimate work. In Europe State policies towards sex work have tended towards abolitionism in the latter part of the twentieth century, considering the industry unacceptable. The term abolitionism evokes a comparison with slavery, whence the term derived, and associates the sex worker with the slave. The sex worker was generally considered a victim, rather than a voluntary worker. International

consensus was reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Sex Work of Others (1949). In the former, for example, it is stated that '...sex work and . . . trafficking in persons are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person . . .'. Within this broad international consensus, differences between nation states are seen in the levels of toleration (usually within strictly demarcated zones and limits) and repression.

In recent decades, two developments have shaped policy. First, the rise of social movements and identity politics has led to a concern for gender equity, which has affected the implementation of abolitionist approaches to the 'problem' of sex work. For example, clients as well as sex workers have been policed in some countries (such as in the UK) and there has been a greater emphasis on rescuing and subsequently viewing sex workers as victims rather than punishing the sex workers as criminals.

In addition to legislative reform, the sex industry is clearly affected by changes in the social and economic situation locally and internationally. Increased mobility into and within Western Europe, partly as a result of greater freedom of movement within the European Union and with migration from poorer Southern and now Eastern European countries, has created a large and transient sector within the sex industry. Travel for work and pleasure, along with consumerism in general, has increased opportunities for clients to purchase sex. These factors have altered the structure of the sex industry and have created the context in which changes in policy must be viewed.

Legislation relating to sex workers and their clients varies between countries within Europe and has often been shaped by the long held societal views towards sex work. This is exemplified by the current legislation in two of the

most liberal countries in Europe, The Netherlands and Sweden. In the Netherlands, normalization of aspects of the sex industry is seen as a way of placing harm minimization and employment rights at the centre of national policy. Whilst in Sweden, the recent criminalization of the purchase of sexual services provides an example of a broad attempt to tackle violence, through strengthening and extending abolitionist policies that view sex work as a social problem.

In the Netherlands a law (passed in 2000) legalized brothels as long as they do not interfere with or disrupt public life. By regulating the commercial operation of sex work in the same way as other businesses, it is hoped that the stigma of sex work can also be addressed and gradually removed. Sex work will come to be seen like any other business. The law has two main aims: first, to legalize the organization of voluntary sex work, and second, to increase the penalties against those involved in the organization of involuntary sex work (through violence, force or coercion and fraud), particularly those involved in the exploitation of minors where the sentence is to be raised from one year to six years' imprisonment.

In Sweden regulation was abolished in 1918 and there are relatively few laws relating to sex work. For the last twenty years the Swedish approach has concentrated on addressing sex work as a social issue. A series of measures have been introduced to provide a support system that included permanent governmental funding of municipal sex worker projects, which included counseling and retraining possibilities. In the Netherlands policies distinguish between voluntary and forced sex work. The Dutch government recognizes the purchase of sexual services as a valid part of the entertainment industry. National laws and policies are normalizing the industry through legalization and regulation, using a number of measures such as the legalization of brothels,

decriminalization of street sex work in certain areas and the recognition of sex work as legitimate work. Increased penalties have been approved for traffickers of migrant and underage sex workers. The reforms are intended to dissolve a flourishing black market, with exploited workers who lack rights, and wealthy managers whose revenue is invisible to the state.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a framework for understanding the context of violence in the male sex industry. The notion that male sex work is a clandestine and violent activity that occurs on the streets is not supported by empirical studies conducted since the 1990s. Male sex work increasingly is becoming a legalised and professional business operating through escort agencies and advertisements. In many ways this context makes it easier for sex workers to be held accountable for their behaviour, in terms of being identified and traced for providing services that are in line with maintaining public health safety in the community. Increasingly, men are entering the business with more positive and professional attitudes in terms of how they perceive their work. This is supported by the following facts. First, many continue to work in this industry over a long period of time and do not find the work stressful (Minichiello et al. 2002), and second, low levels of unsafe sex practices, alcohol and drug use and reported acts of violence occur in the male sex-work industry in countries such as Australia, Canada, United States and Western European nations (Minichiello et al. 1998).

There is a changing context that needs to be acknowledged. This includes shifts in public attitudes towards sexuality (including male-to-male sex), and a sex industry that is moving away from the streets and into mainstream service environments such as the internet, the media, and agencies. That escorts publicly reveal their identity clearly signals a change from the old days of remaining anonymous for fear of arrest, shame or public ridicule. As this paper has argued

sex workers often move between type of work depending on factors such as age, sexual orientation and education. Male clients of the different types of sex work are also likely to differ in their socio-demographic profile (Minichiello et al 1999). The escort works in association with an agency, which advertises the services and establishes contact between the worker and clients. Agencies take a proportion of the worker's earnings and the sex transaction usually takes place either at the client's residence or a hotel. According to Davies and Simpson (1990) most clients of the escort MSW are single visits, although some report maintaining 'regular' customers. The independent workers are self-employed and they manage their own business (eg., advertising). Independent workers provide their services at either the clients or their own home and at hotels. Negotiations about the encounter usually take place over the phone.

Street workers offer their services in a public setting (i.e., street, parks, bars, etc.), are more likely to view this work as a casual occupation, and this work does not require advertisement, contact phones or premises to contact clients. The public setting is more likely to expose these workers to certain dangers, such as police detention and physical violence, which are more easily avoided in the other two forms of sex work.

In understanding violence towards sex workers, it is important to move beyond pathologizing discourses that have produced an understanding of male sex workers and their clients as deficit figures, be they delinquents or deviants. A structural understanding of male sex workers is required that could highlight the ways in which shifting social, political and economic factors influence the organization and social control of sex work. In particular, it is important to highlight how specific cultural understandings of sexuality and gender may influence the experience of sex work. It is ironic that legislation that purports to protect sex workers may actually be influential in precipitating violence against

certain 'types' of sex worker. Legislation involving sex work has largely been concerned with the normalisation of sex workers as opposed to protecting the rights of sex workers to work in a healthy and safe environment. Legislation, which remains rooted in moral politics, has sought to abolish sex work or render it less visible to the 'general public'.

Law reform, decriminalization of the sex worker and finding alternative forms of regulation of the sex industry has been discussed at length in the past few years. Some countries are taking the step to introduce new legislations and regulations that directly address the existence of the sex industry (rather than its visibility), and are attempting to improve the work conditions for sex workers by promoting and producing a self-regulating industry that results in positive public health and social outcomes for both clients and workers. Whether such measures will positively impact on the level of violence reported in the industry is a question that requires further investigation, however anecdotal evidence suggests that its impact can be positive. This is an important question because male sex work is an integral part of the fabric of human society and will not go away. Legislation needs to create a legal and social environment that promotes positive, safer, respectful and non-violent interactions between workers and clients within a legitimate and professional commercial context.

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