THROUGH PRAGMATISM TO POSSIBILITY

an exploration of how harm reduction principles make a difference to the lives of sex workers

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IHRA Liverpool 2010
Stonehenge festival 1984
A very beautiful van – trading at festivals
Selling other things at festivals

Two festival goers, a bus and a dog
The A46?

Crusties
A polite but firm request to leave
And so I learned that..............

Moral outrage + social opprobrium + anarchy +
class A drugs

= *******k off!
1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act

- Mass traveler site evictions
- Seizure and impounding of vehicles (people’s homes)
- Eventual cessation of traveling lifestyle for all but the most committed
“of course I understand that harm reduction is important. But what we want to avoid are services placing an emphasis on harm reduction such that they lower their own and their clients expectations of what else can be achieved”.

(an un-named source from a London based drug service December 2009)
'Oh him?

That’s me old man. We’ve been married 14 years. I know he’s a sod, but I love him. We’ve both got a habit. I go on the streets and he robs Asda. That’s how we get by'.
‘the liberal model that sees involvement in prostitution as the product of individual choice tends to lose sight of the structural and social factors that nurture and encourage this trade in sexual services and which shape the market. These structures and the dynamics that sustain them are not reducible to individual choice’

Professor Roger Mathews; ‘Prostitution, Politics and Policy. Routledge-Cavendish 2008
Abstinence and non-conformism

- Abstinence model rejects the very things we know about non-conformist human behaviour.

- Dislike that someone else knows more about your situation than you do and can tell you that you are wrong (particularly when there are moral overtones)

- Dislike that you will have to cease a non-conformist activity that you get something out of
Abstinence and Absolutes

- Absolutes put people in a situation where they feel they have to lie.

  “I’m clean, I haven’t used, I’m not sex working, I’m not having unprotected sex, I’m not with that fella anymore”

- When in fact none of this is true and as a result honest dialogue cannot be had to assist the individual in protecting themselves within the real situation that they find themselves in.
“In terms of current UK policy on prostitution, Matthews' main bugbear is the widespread acceptance of harm-reduction measures, such as health professionals visiting women in street prostitution areas to give out refreshments and condoms. "I believe that this is a deeply conservative approach," he says, "which is more about keeping women in prostitution rather than helping them out."

29th Feb 2008 – Guardian Article – Julie Bindell
Street based HR measures

- What to do if you can’t or haven’t negotiated sex with a condom
- DV, identifying triggers and people who can be contacted
- Looking out for each other on the street
- Basic self defence
- Wearing clothes suitable for speedy get away, no heels, scarves
- Treating STI’s and getting regular check ups (syphilis outbreak) acted as a gateway to increased use of GU services
- Replacing wire wool with gauze for crack pipes.
Off street HR measures

- Safety in flats, cameras, security, jewellery
- Unprotected sex
- Sex work and the law (can no longer advise more than one woman working together for safety)
- Having a plan both personal and with colleagues if flat is ever attacked
- Getting a customer to cum quicker
Fall out from the moral and criminal justice crusade

- Because the exiting and victim discourse dovetails nicely with the crime and disorder agenda they are proving to be natural allies.

- We must protect services for sex workers against the undermining of harm reduction or before we know it, the public health imperative that enshrines our work will become fall-out from the moral crusade against sex work.
Thank you