Contemporary harm reduction & support service needs of male sex workers in the UK: the SohoBoyz male sex worker needs assessment and Skills Development Programme

Justin Gaffney RN

International Harm Reduction Conference
Liverpool 2010
“I really hadn’t been coerced into it, in fact had asked if I could join in – there’s never really been coercion for me...basically when you are away from home from age six and half (I was sent to boarding school), you become your own person very rapidly, you learn what makes the world tick, you learn how things go, and as far as I was concerned, sex was an easy way of collecting money, thank you! I enjoyed it so why not? I recognised that I needed sex, why not get paid for having something you enjoy? And this sort of thing, that ‘everybody’s in prostitution because they have a problem’ I don’t think so. It certainly wasn’t like that with me!”

Brian
Defining Male Sex Work

- **Outcasts**
  - whose drug addition & prostitution goes hand-in-hand
- **Part-timers**
  - for whom prostitution is an occasional means to make money
- **Insiders**
  - for whom prostitution has become a family
- **Liberationists**
  - whose prostitution helps them to actualise themselves

Dorais (2003)
• Revolution and revolt – the scaly
  Deisher et al (1969); Harris (1973)

• Retribution and revenge – the victim
  Allen (1980); Robinson (1989)

• Repressed and revived – the infected
  Bloor et al (1990); Davies & Feldman (1991)

• Reformed and re-banded – the hidden
  Lukenbill (1995); Hickson et al (1994)

• Rehabilitated and rescued – the exploited
  Cusick et al (2003); Hudson & Rivers (2002)

• Recognised & Rejuvenated – legitimate labour
  Wilcox and Christmann (2006); Parsons et al (2007)

Whowell & Gaffney 2009
• Policing & Crime Act 2009:
  – New criminal offence of ‘paying for sex with somebody subject to exploitation’ (strict liability law)
  – New civil order to allow police to close & seal brothels – similar to crack house closure orders
  – Amendments to the Sexual Offences Act 1985 to remove the requirements of persistence, from the offence of kerb-crawling
  – Defined ‘persistent soliciting’ as taking place more than twice in three months (street)
  – Lap dancing establishments – redefinition as sex encounter/entertainment establishments
  – Enforced ‘rehabilitation’ as an alternative to fine or imprisonment (3 - 1hr meetings)
• Focus similar to Swedish model
  – Criminalisation of men who buy sexual services/tackle demand
  – Rehabilitation of sex workers
• Intervention focus on:
  – prevention
  – existing
• Drives the funding agenda?
“Don’t call me a prostitute, not even a sex worker. I provide a social service - a companion to the lonely and rejected, a release to the repressed and the closeted, a reward to the ambitious and successful, and a mentor to the novice and the nervous first timer. I’m attractive, I’m courageous, I’m attentive, and I’m sensitive and sensual, I’m intelligent, and I make choices. I’m a business man and an entrepreneur. I’m a lover and a partner, a friend and son. I’m not an object or possession, I’m not a victim or an addict. I am a person…I am me.”

Quote from a young man selling sex
Male & Transgender Sex Worker Needs Assessment

- SohoBoyz Survey
- Funded by the Department of Health Short-Term Funding to Identify & Improve Health & Social Care of LGBT People
Methodology

- Survey with duration of 6 months (April – September 2009)
- Total respondents 109, with total completion n=63
- Majority of respondents completed survey on-line
- Promoted through outreach, via SohoBoyz website and through print media
Demographics

- Key locations:
  - London 36%
  - Manchester 23%
  - Brighton 23%
  - Other UK locations 18%

- Ethnicity
  - Majority were White (British 71%, Other 11%)
Sexual orientation

- Homosexual: 74%
- Bisexual: 14%
- Heterosexual: 12%
Relationship Status

- Currently in relationship with a man: 28%
- Currently in relationship with a woman: 16%
- No current partner: 56%
Gender

- Male: 97%
- Female: 1%
- Trans: 2%
Age

- Age range: 17 – 55 years
- Mean: 26 years
Immigration Status

- British citizen 85%
- EU citizen 12%
- Student visa 2%
- Tourist visa 1%
Education & Lifeskills Ambitions

- University/college graduates: 46%
- No wish to develop educational skills: 27%
- Aspirations to develop their lifeskills (e.g. money management): 27%
Entry routes into sex work

- Own initiative 41%
- Introduced by friend 18%
- Introduced by partner 4%
- Introduced by relative 1%
- Advertisement 5%
- Opportunistic 31%
Motivating factors

- Money /debt
- Flexibility
- Drug habit
- Power
- Excitement
- “Valuable commodity”
Use of sex work income

- Household expenses: 29%
- Social life/going out/luxuries: 30%
- Savings: 10%
- Support family/children: 3%
- Pay for education: 6%
- Pay for healthcare: 1%
- Drugs: 12%
- Supplement other income: 7%
- Missing: 2%
- Pay for education: 6%
- Social life/going out/luxuries: 30%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chatrooms (Gaydar, etc.)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular clients</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working flat</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massage parlour (brothel)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort agency</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet websites</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverts</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Involvement in porn industry

- Involvement in porn movies 48%
- Bare-backing in porn 28%
- Asked to produce a certificate 60%
- Feel that certificate will protect against contracting HIV on set 43%
- Production company should be responsible for safeguarding models health on set 44%
- Models have responsibility for own health 22%
Substance usage

- Drug of choice, used frequently (1-2 per week)
  Marijuana 25%
- Alcohol usage (daily) 25%
- Intravenous drug use (weekly) 3%
- Anabolic steroid use (weekly) 3%
- Crystal meth (weekly) 3%

- Smith & Seal (2008) found in other US study of agency based male sex workers that a third reported a current or past problem with substance abuse
• Newman et al (2004) US study interview 387 MSM in Long Beach, California, found sex was traded in association with:
  – Injecting crack use
  – Homelessness
  – Childhood maltreatment
  – Non-gay self-identification
Risk behaviour

• More risk behaviours with non-paying partners
• Decreased safer sex behaviour among partners who were physically and emotionally attracted to one another
• Off street male sex workers engage in lower rates of HIV risk behaviours than street-based male sex workers
• Street based male sex workers more likely to:
  – Use hard drugs
  – Have no other occupation
  – Have more clients but less steady one
  – Have a more negative working attitude
  – Have a heterosexual preference
Consequences

• Are drugs the motivation for sex work or the consequence of it?
Dependency on sex work income

- Supplement other income & can stop when I choose: 50%
- Survival sex: 18%
- Enjoy & in control/independent: 11%
- Voluntary, but main source of income, can't afford to stop: 14%
- Coerced: 7%
- 0%
Sexual acts (in last 12 months)

- Bare-backing (active) 49%
- Bare-backing (receptive) 30%
- Content with safety of sexual acts with paying partners 74%
Use of sex worker specific project  54%

Overall, of those using a sex worker specific service they were satisfied with the service, and were happy to disclose their sex worker status with project staff.

However, 59% of respondents had never had contact with outreach staff.
## Crimes experienced from clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Ever</th>
<th>Within last year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refusal to pay</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to have oral or anal sex without consent</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse/homophobia</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of physical abuse</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual physical abuse</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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Only 10% reported incident to the police
### Crimes experienced from intimate partner(s)

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>17%</td>
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Only 6% reported incident to the police
Impact on mental health

- Abuse
- Substance use
- Stigma/work history
- Physical health/safety
- Isolation
“My situation means that I currently sell sex to survive. As I have a broken employment history, I find it difficult to seek suitable other work that would satisfy me. I am intelligent & have abilities, but history, qualifications & references are lacking, so work that I can achieve is often below what I am capable of. I sell sex as I can offer a good service with this. I would like to find a way out of selling sex, but feel trapped with a lack of options of what else to do.”
Survey Conclusions

- Some male escorts are continuing to work in the sex work industry into their mid-50s.
- Contrasting with other research in the area it appears the ethnic background of male escorts less diverse than previously thought.
- The high numbers of British citizens identified suggest that the influx of economic immigrants into the male sex industry may less than previously thought.
- However, the survey was only available in English, which could have impeded uptake by immigrant sex workers.
Survey Conclusions

- The findings suggest that there is a lack of coercion present in the male sex industry and therefore supports the rational choice thesis.
- The income generated from respondents’ sex work in the main is to facilitate a more affluent lifestyle.
- Half of the respondents not dependent on their sex work income and thus stopping is under their own control.
Survey Conclusions

- The majority of respondents contact their clients via online resources
- Almost 50% are involved in the porn industry
- Documented alcohol use supports previous research
- Interesting finding that marijuana is the drug of choice
Survey Conclusions

• Accessible and good NHS service provisions
• Possible decrease in stigma suggested by the willingness to disclose their sex worker status to medical professionals
• Outreach services need to further improve awareness of the sexual health risks of barebacking
• Awareness of PEP treatment needs to be improved
Survey Conclusions

- There is a lack of engagement with outreach services. May be it is due to a lack of service provision in their area or a lack of awareness of those services which are available.

- There needs to be an increased emphasis on the importance of obtaining the payment before sexual services provided.
Survey Conclusions

- Incorporate referral service to specialist interpersonal violence services where required considering the prevalence of homophobic verbal abuse perpetrated by non-paying partners.
- Environment and autonomy play an important role.
- Specially targeted therapeutic measures may be beneficial.
- Respondents main exit strategy again suggested that their sex work was voluntary and thus under their control.
Summary - Key Issues for Male Sex Workers

- Sexuality/gender identity
- Immigration status
- Stigma of sex work involvement
- Competition
- Life skills
- Life trajectory
- High numbers of sexual partners – paying & non-paying
- Increasing market for ‘bareback’ sex
Service Provision

- Services need to respond to sex worker need if they are to achieve effective engagement.
- Acknowledge the diversity of men involved in the industry.
- There is scope for different approaches and the need to acknowledge that male sex workers will access different services for different needs at different times.
- Large need for skills development – from life skills through business skills – acceptance of legitimate “work”.
- Need to acknowledge the “choice agenda”.
- Accept the contextual reality, & provide various degrees of involvement.
- Respect difference, foster partnership.
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