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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENCE OF CLIENT-PERPETRATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MALE SEX WORKERS

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ABSTRACT. This article discusses exploratory research investigating the incidence and context of client-perpetrated sexual violence against male sex workers. Four different methods (Web-based surveys, tick-box questionnaires, telephone, and face-to-face interviews) were employed in this study of 50 male escorts. The qualitative data were analyzed using an adapted form of grounded theory. It was found that client-perpetrated sexual violence within male sex work appears to be uncommon. However, when sexual violence did occur the cause was a disagreement over barebacking. Escorts' explanations for the low level of sexual violence within this sector included (1) that gay men were non-confrontational, (2) their clients led clandestine lifestyles avoiding undue attention, and (3) comparatively, female sex workers were perceived to be more vulnerable resulting in the higher level of sexual violence within the female sex work industry.

KEYWORDS. Male sex work, sexual violence, barebacking, escorts, qualitative methods

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the less stigmatized and broader term *sex worker* is more commonly used than that of *prostitute*. Vanwesenbeeck (2001) described "sex work" as the direct exchange of sexual services for financial gain. The prevalence of male sex work in London has been considered difficult to ascertain due to many escorts engaging in the commercial male sex industry on a part-time basis (Bimbi & Parsons, 2005; Cameron, Collins, & Thew, 1999; Morrison & Whitehead, 2007b; Minnichiello, Harvey, & Mariño, 2008; Parsons, Koken, & Bimbi, 2004, 2007). Within the available literature, Australian (Browne & Minichiello, 1995, 1996; Estcourt et al., 2000; Minnichiello et al., 2008; Minnichiello et al., 2000; Scott, 2003; Scott et al., 2005) and particularly American (Calhoun & Weaver, 1996; Caukins & Coombs,

1976; Earls & David, 1989; Escoffier, 2007; Estep, Waldorf, & Marotta, 1992; Ginsburg, 1967; Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, & Halkitis, 2004; Koken, Parsons, Severino, & Bimbi, 2005; Luckenbill, 1985; McNamara, 1994; Morrison & Whitehead, 2007a, b, c; Morse, Simon, Balson, & Osofosky, 1992; Parsons, Bimbi, Koken, & Halkitis, 2005; Parsons, Koken, & Bimbi, 2004, 2007; Reiss, 1961; Shaver, 2005; Steward, 1991; Timpson, Atkinson, Williams, Klovdahl, & Ross, 2005; Weinberg, Shaver, & Williams, 1999; Weinberg, Worth, & Williams, 2001) researchers have been more prolific in their research on male sex workers. In contrast, British research is less developed particularly in relation to off-street male sex work, as the focus has historically been on street-based sex work (Connell & Hart, 2003; Davies & Feldman, 1991, 1997; Davies & Weatherburn, 1991; Gaffney & Beverley, 2001; Harris, 1973; Knox,

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1998; Robinson & Davies, 1991; Sethi et al., 2006; West & de Villiers, 1993).

The following contextualizes the current study by exploring the phenomenology of male sex work, through its location, escort's sexual orientation, and sex acts, all of which may influence the incidence of client-perpetrated sexual violence. The phenomenology of male sex work has changed extensively in recent years with the advent of the mobile telephone that facilitated the transfer of male sex work from street-based to off-street locations (Bimbi, 2007; Cameron et al., 1999; Connell & Hart, 2003; Minichiello et al., 2008), such as escorts' own apartments, the client's hotel or private residence. This transition may lower the risk of sexual violence as a result of a different type of clientele frequenting these off-street locations.

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) stated that the rigid dichotomy of homosexuality/heterosexuality was not the most appropriate of categorizations because "human sexual behaviour" exists as a "continuum" of sexual experiences (p. 639). Supporting this conceptualization, male sex workers' sexual orientation has been found to be based along a continuum, from heterosexual to bisexual to homosexual as suggested by the available research (Allen, 1980; Bimbi, 2007; Reiss, 1961; Robinson & Davies, 1991). The perceived sexual orientation of male sex workers may be sufficient to result in a client engaging in homophobic violence (McMullen, 1990). Male sex worker's sexual orientation may also dictate which sexual acts the escort will provide to clients, disagreements over which may result in physical and/or sexual violence (West & de Villiers, 1993). Heterosexual male sex workers deal with the "stigma" (Goffman, 1963) associated with their engagement in homosexual activities by non-disclosure of their involvement in escorting to those outside of this sexual community (Calhoun & Weaver, 1996; Padilla et al., 2008). In other words, their self-concept as an escort is carefully stage-managed (by restricting the time spent on the street and keeping their sex work secret). In contrast, West and De Villiers (1993) stated that the stigma of male sex work was less problematic for gay men

as they were already stigmatized by society. However, this double stigmatization may further inhibit reporting their experiences of client-perpetrated sexual violence to the police due to the perception that their case may not be taken seriously.

Nevertheless with the advent of the Internet in further facilitating escorting (e.g., Bimbi, 2007; Parsons et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2005; Weinstein, 2001), it has been suggested that this occupation has become less stigmatized in the gay community (Koken et al., 2004; Morrison & Whitehead, 2007c) and the wider community, as male escorts are more willing to reveal their identities than was previously the case (due to the likelihood of arrest, shame, and negative public reactions). Furthermore, escorts perceive they are less stigmatized than their street-based counterparts. The reasons cited are (1) escorts' work is volitional, (2) its professional status, (3) the escort is the power broker not the client, and (4) escorting is more prestigious than street-based sex work (Morrison & Whitehead, 2005).

Davies and Feldman (1991) found the most frequent sexual acts were anal intercourse with regular clients (85%) and masturbation with casual clients (62%). More recently, it has been identified that there have been more frequent requests from clients for "barebacking" (intentional unprotected anal intercourse) within the male commercial sex industry (Parsons et al., 2004). Research by Bimbi and Parsons (2005) supported this finding about clients requesting barebacking practices. Previously, there was a general consensus between researchers and barebackers about the difference in intentionality between those practicing unsafe anal intercourse and barebacking. However, in recent years this distinction has become more imprecise with men who have sex with men (MSM) more frequently defining condom-less sex as barebacking (Berg, 2008). This suggests that those MSM who are engaging in unintentional anal intercourse (e.g., through poor planning or relapse) are not mutually exclusive from those practicing barebacking, also the risk factors (alcohol use, sensation-seeking, and perceived normative behavior within this sexual context) do not differentiate between them

(Berg, 2008). It is not feasible to quantify the prevalence rates for barebacking, but further research may assist in identifying the degree to which this practice challenges public health initiatives (Berg, 2008). Halkitis and Parsons (2003) found a significant correlation between defining masculinity and sexual prowess and intentional unprotected sex. Thus, refusal to engage in intentional unprotected sex could result in the client's perpetration of sexual violence to reaffirm his masculinity as the alternative mode has been blocked.

Regarding sexual violence, the sexual victimization of male prostitutes has previously only been referred to in passing by the available literature with few researchers focusing on this phenomenon (Connell & Hart, 2003; West & de Villiers, 1993). However, the impact of rape is highlighted by Davies and Weatherburn (1991) who stated that,

The penetrator violates the body and by extension the self of the other, thus, asserting his [sic] powerfulness. It is ultimately, an assertion of self. To be penetrated is conversely a giving up of self. When this is involuntary as in rape, the harm is not merely physical, and rape is rightly regarded as among the most heinous crimes for this reason. (p. 121)

Client-perpetrated sexual violence within female sex work is considered pervasive (see Farley, 2005); however, others disagree and state this violence is not as widespread as is commonly perceived (Kinnell, 2004, 2008; Ward & Day, 2001). In addition, research (Farley & Barkan, 1998; Minnichiello et al., 2000; Weinberg et al., 1999) has found that females and transgendered individuals were more likely than males to be raped when engaging in sex work.

However, there are also conflicting research findings on client-perpetrated sexual violence within male sex work within the United Kingdom. Some researchers have highlighted its prevalence within the Scottish male sex work industry, particularly against those male sex workers who work on the streets (Connell & Hart, 2003). Conversely, London-based research has

suggested that this type of sexual violence is more unusual but when it does happen confirms that it is more likely to be perpetrated against street-based male prostitutes (West & de Villiers, 1993). Sexual violence within male sex work is underresearched within the United Kingdom. The exception being West and de Villiers' (1993) consideration of client-perpetrated sexual violence against escorts; however, they did emphasize the rarity of such acts. Thus, the evidence suggests that when sexual violence does occur it is perpetrated against street-based sex workers, but less is known about their off-street counterparts in this regard. The larger studies of male sex work (e.g., Connell & Hart, 2003) tended to have an epidemiological or clinical emphasis. One documented case of sexual violence described by a sex worker stated: "I've been raped twice, I've been battered, I've been used. I've done the business then didn't get the money" (Connell & Hart, 2003, p. 67). None of the incidents involving physical, sexual, or verbal abuse were reported to the police, citing previous negative experiences of the police service as the reason. Thus, male sex workers who were victims of sexual violence distrusted the police, believed them to be disinterested, thought they would engage in victim blaming, and perceived them to be homophobic. This highlights the problem of underreporting regarding this type of crime.

The current study addresses the conflicting findings in the limited available research on the level of sexual violence within male sex work, none of which has solely focused on examining the extent of client-perpetrated sexual violence against off-street male sex workers. Thus, the aim of the current exploratory research is to identify the incidence and context of client-perpetrated sexual violence against male sex workers.

METHOD

In the current study, the qualitative sampling method used was a relational type of "outcropping" based on a metaphor that Webb et al. (as cited in Lee, 1999) adapted from

geology (involving the exploitation of available appropriate data points). Applied to the current study, the method involved identifying a location where the difficult-to-reach group being studied congregates and using it as a base to recruit participants. Initially, it was attempted to access male sex workers through a clinic based in London (thus all research instruments had to be approved by a National Health Service [NHS] Local Research Ethics Committee and a Research and Development Committee) and also provides an outreach service to male sex workers. An organization that provides social and welfare-oriented services plus outreach to male and transgender sex workers also assisted in the recruitment of male escorts for interviews about their experiences of the commercial male sex industry. The interviews were to be conducted on a drop-in basis (having been widely advertised in advance) and last up to 45 minutes. Pilot studies appeared to be rarely used in previous research (e.g., Minichiello et al., 2000; Robinson & Davies, 1991). The interview schedule was piloted (to enhance its "credibility"; see Lincoln & Guba, 1985) among outreach workers from the above specialized clinic and organization to assess suitability of the format and content based on their knowledge of their service users. Clinic staff promoted the study and initial interest from service users was shown, but subsequently no volunteers presented for interview despite a nominal fee of £10 being offered for participating.

A Web-based survey was also devised to recruit participants who contacted their clients online, enabling a diverse sample (Hewson, Yule, Laurent, & Vogel, 2003; Riva, Teruzzi, & Anolli, 2003), while also enabling access to hard-to-reach populations (Binik, 2001; Bowen, 2005) such as members of the male sex work sexual community (Dorais, 2005; Knox, 1998) populations and reducing financial costs (Tourangeau, 2004). The use of the Internet to conduct research is also considered more appropriate when addressing sensitive topics due to the anonymity of the interaction (Hewson et al., 2003).

Respondents accessed the survey via links placed on these organizations' websites (WMP,

SW5, EscortX.net and ENMP [European Network of Male Prostitutes]), thus, purposive sampling (Robson, 2002; Smith, 2005) was employed. Ethical concerns were addressed through the use of Internet safety guidelines (so that respondents who accessed the survey via public computers could safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of the disclosed information), these were published on the questionnaire with the permission of the Support Network for Battered Wives' (SNBW) Website (www.snbw.org) based in the United States.

Tick-box questionnaires (for male sex workers whose first language was not English) were disseminated through the clinic. In addition to which telephone interviews were used to increase the geographical diversity (Thomas & Purdon, 1994) of the sample and due to the lack of inconvenience to participants as a result of their brevity (Ross, Smith, Masterson, & Wood, 2003) (and of particular relevance to escorts). Escorts were identified for telephone interviews through their advertisements (which included pictures and contact details) in a popular revered gay magazine. Thus, escorts were randomly selected and "cold called" whereby they were informed about the research aims and asked would they consent to be interviewed if it was convenient at that time or an alternative time could be arranged. This approach was used as introductory e-mails sent inviting participants to volunteer to be interviewed tended to receive a low response (Morrison & Whitehead, 2005). Telephone interviews lasted up to 35 minutes in duration depending on the escort's availability at the time.

Participants were asked to choose the relevant option regarding their age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Although, the Web-based surveys, questionnaires, and interviews focused on off-street based sex work, they also contained retrospective questions about any street-based sex work respondents may have engaged in previously. The context was provided through questions on (1) how they became involved in the male sex industry, (2) how long they had been an escort, (3) how clients are contacted, and (4) issues or concerns about

escorting work. The key questions were about participants' experiences of client-perpetrated sexual violence and the nature and frequency of these incidents. In the survey a "further comments" section was also provided to empower participants (a parallel approach was adopted in the interviews) so that escorts' voices could be heard concerning issues which they deemed relevant but were not covered by the questionnaire or interview (this adhered to the action research principles of the current study).

In total, four methods were used (1) Web-based surveys, (2) tick-box questionnaires, (3) telephone, and (4) vis-à-vis interviews (where were escorts recruited through SW5) were used to optimize the recruitment of participants from a variety of sources. To identify participants the following suffixes were used: *IT* to denote the Web-based respondents, *TB* to identify tick-box respondents, *P* for the vis-à-vis interviewees, and *T* for the telephone interviewees; for example, [MSW001IT], [MSW005TB], [MSWP1], and [MSWT6].

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was considered an appropriate form of qualitative analysis to access escorts' experiential knowledge in answering the research question and is also suitable for small sample sizes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nevertheless, the method used here is not pure grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) but is what Braun and Clarke (2006) defined as "grounded theory lite" that involves "a set of procedures for coding data very much akin to thematic analysis" (p. 81). This qualitative analysis was informed by the available literature but allowed for themes grounded in the data to emerge within this context.

Quantitative analyses using descriptive statistics were conducted on the following data: (1) the demographics of the sample, (2) the points at which male sex workers' entered "the industry," (3) the number of years they have worked in the male sex industry, (4) the variety of sex work venues used by individual escorts, and (5) crime scene data.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of four different methods employed to optimize sample recruitment (1) Web-based questionnaires ($n = 7$), (2) paper-based tick-box questionnaire ($n = 13$), (3) telephone interviews ($n = 29$) (from an available sample of 104 escorts who had advertised in that issue of the aforementioned gay publication), a random sample ($n = 44$) were contacted. Six were not interested in participating in the study (no reasons were given) and two explained they had never been a victim of client-perpetrated sexual violence. The majority advertised for mainstream clients, with only two of the sample solely catering to Bondage and Discipline, Domination and Submission, and Sadism and Masochism (BDSM) clients) and (4) face-to-face interviews ($n = 3$).

A total of 50 escorts participated in this research (this figure has been amended as one of the above escorts interviewed over the telephone also provided additional information by completing the Web-based survey). It was therefore ensured that this participant's response was only recorded once.

Participant Characteristics

Forty-nine of the escorts were identified as male (participants were not asked to state their gender due to purposive sampling being used), and one of the respondents self-identified as being transsexual. The mean age of the sample was 27.38. ($SD = 6.61$, range = 20–57). Thirteen of the escorts did not disclose their age. The demographic details of the 29 escorts who were briefly interviewed over the telephone were taken from their advertisements. The ethnicity of the escorts who completed the Web-based surveys, and those who were interviewed either over the telephone or face-to-face was diverse encompassing: White (21), Black (5), Indian (3), French West-Indian (1), Chinese (1) and Portuguese (1), the remainder of the participants did not disclose their ethnicity. The country of birth (the recategorization was to ease comprehension for those whom English was a second language) of the tick-box respondents

was also varied escorts were from Malaysia (1), New Zealand (1), Czechoslovakia (1), United States (1), Italy (1), Kuwait (1), Costa Rica (1), Brazil (2), United Kingdom (3), and unknown (1). For those participants who chose to state their sexual orientation 17 were homosexual, three self-identified as bisexual, one as heterosexual, and the remainder of the escorts were those who were contacted by telephone had not needed to state this information in their advertisements in a well-known gay publication, and it was not conducive to disclose this information at the time of the interview. Therefore, the overall missing data would be in keeping with previous research.

The quantitative analyses of the frequency data from tick-box questionnaires and the Web-based questionnaires highlighted similar findings regarding escorts' reports of their "sex work experiences" and the "venues" used, see below.

Sex Work Experience and Venues

Participants' work experience in the male commercial sex industry ranged from 1 to 6 years. From the available data it was noted that the majority (57%) of the Web-based respondents and all of the tick-box and face-to-face respondents had never been involved in street-based sex work and the exception being escorts who worked on- and off-street. This data was unknown for those escorts interviewed over the telephone. Respondents were also asked how they contacted clients: most used advertisements in gay magazines and their mobile telephones. In the main, escorts worked from their own apartment, hotel rooms, or clients' apartments, and cars to a lesser extent.

The qualitative themes identified here are those relevant to sexual violence, protective strategies, and advice regarding what action to take if subjected to sexual victimization.

Sexual Violence–Related Themes

The themes focused upon here are *sexual violence, protective strategies, drug and alcohol consumption and condom use, intoxicated*

clients, advice, resistance strategies, impact on lifestyle, young escorts at risk, perceived vulnerability of female sex workers, absence of client-perpetrated sexual violence, and sub-themes: gay clients are non-confrontational, secretive nature of clients, lucky, and no formalized warning system that are discussed below.

Sexual violence. The number of participants in the current study who had experienced client-perpetrated sexual violence during their escorting work at an indoor location was three, and one respondent was sexually victimized when he was engaged in street-based sex work. The acts perpetrated included rape, and the victim was also forced to masturbate his offenders. During the incident, he froze but used verbal resistance "I pleaded, then I tried to persuade that someone might pass by or watch what was happening and call the police (it was open parking lot surrounded by buildings)" [MSW005IT], which was not effective. These assaults took place at multiple locations (including a car and parking lot) and were perpetrated by two offenders. However, during the victim resistance phase of the attack, one offender left the scene due to the fear of being caught. The remaining offender used psychological coercion to intimidate the victim:

One of them was a cop, and even if it was a fake police i.d. (which is easy to get) male prostitution is illegal, I would get in trouble. I would get in trouble even if I wasn't a hooker. Cops in Greece usually harass fags who cruise. [MSW005IT]

Escorts who had been sexually victimized during the course of their sex work were also asked how these experiences affected them and their occupational behavior. One respondent [MSW005IT] did not perceive this particular incident (described above) as having affected him any more adversely than previous physical non-sexual assaults: "I don't know. I've been beaten before many times much worse. The rape thing didn't matter that much, I just took it waiting to finish." But, he did change his soliciting behavior to be more alert to possible dangers: "I became more careful working the streets." He

also asserted that should a similar incident occur: "Next time I attack back. Hopefully, I won't freeze again."

The above case was of a street-based sex worker's experience of client-perpetrated rape. Regarding client-perpetrated sexual violence against escorts at off-street locations, in two of the cases [MSWTB1] and [MSWTB3] it was the result of disagreements over condom use. For example, "[he] tried to fuck without condoms and held me down" [MSWTB3].

Coerced sex acts. There was a low incidence of sexual violence reported. Three respondents stated they had experienced this type of violence during the course of their work at indoor locations. Of these escorts [MSWTB1] reported that forced penile-oral penetration was the most frequent sexually coercive act, whereas coerced digital-anal and oral-anal penetration were less frequent, and forced anal penetration using a foreign object occurred on one occasion. In contrast, [MSWTB13] experienced forced penile-oral penetration, coerced oral-anal contact, and anal penetration using a foreign object equally frequently; forced anal intercourse was less frequent and coerced digital-anal penetration was rare. In addition, [MSWTB3] stated that he had been subjected to forced penile-anal penetration and coerced digital-anal penetration but did not indicate the frequency of these acts. Thus, there were conflicting findings regarding the frequency of sexually violent acts perpetrated by clients. A further incident was reported by [MSWTB3] where he was subjected to nonconsensual sex by a male with HIV, but that this was prior to becoming an escort.

Protective Strategies

It was also noted that, even when sexual violence was not experienced, escorts did use protective strategies, such as (1) analyzing the behavior of clients, (2) their tone of voice, and (3) listening to their own "gut instincts." The following male sex workers' responses illustrate these practices:

Analyze client's behavior, be aware of surroundings, listen to instincts, minimize risks, get out of threatening situations. [MSW002IT]

"I never meet people who don't sound normal on the phone, so by using this intuition I have never had any really bad experiences. If a client over stepped my boundaries I was able to control the situation." [MSW007IT]

It was recognized that there were risks involved in engaging in commercial sex work. However, it was perceived that if "done right" (as stated below) this places the escort at minimal risk:

Unlike a lot of escorts it's something I had chose to do, I fully understand the risks I have taken but if done right it does reduce the risk, after working for 2 years I haven't come across any abuse or abusive clients. I do think there is a lot of stigma within the industry that guys have been pushed into it or abused in past years, but in my case and I'm sure in a lot of other escorts cases that this is not true. [MSW001IT]

The theme of protective strategies describes the importance of the risk assessment of clients and listening to their "gut instincts" to safeguard against violent or abusive clients.

Drug and Alcohol Consumption and Condom Use

In two of the three cases of client-perpetrated sexual violence against an escort, alcohol and/or drugs had been consumed. The drugs used by these clients were cocaine, although in one case crystal methamphetamine, ketamine, and ecstasy had been ingested. In the third case, the client had taken crystal methamphetamine, steroids, and "juice" (PCP), and then forced the escort to perform sexual acts. The incidents that led to client-perpetrated sexual violence in two of these cases were disagreements over condom use: "tried to fuck without condoms and held me down" [MSWTB3]. In the third case, no additional information was provided to explain what preempted the sexual violence.

Intoxicated Clients

The level of drunkenness was a factor in the decision-making process as to whether to provide sexual services to a potential client. One of the escorts had a rule (or a risk assessment strategy) about not accepting any clients who are drunk, although he stated that “It depends which way drunk” [MSWP3]. In other words, he may accept a drunken client, but it depends on their level of intoxication.

Resistance Strategies

The resistance strategies stated by one respondent was that he froze. Nonetheless, he did use verbal strategies in the post-event period, “Then verbal strategies to get him to have a test with me. He also told me I wanted it and that I had taken off the condom which I had not!” [MSWTB3]. This particular incident of sexual violence lasted for half an hour and had a profound impact on the participant’s psychological well-being (he felt depressed and exploited). There also appeared to be some confusion as to why the client would wish to perpetrate such violence and actively transmit HIV. “Why someone would want to try hurt someone else and try to pass on HIV” [MSWTB3].

Impact on Lifestyle

Participants were also asked how these incidents of sexual violence affected their lifestyle. They said they now found it difficult to trust people. “I don’t trust anymore” [MSWTB3]. When asked whether they reported the incident to the police it was stated that: “not much would get done about it” [MSWTB3]. This statement implies a perception that the police will not take the case seriously, especially because of the context of the assault (i.e., that the offender was a client).

Thus, there were a number of additional subthemes (*coerced sex acts, drug and alcohol consumption, and condom use, resistance strategies, and impact on lifestyle*) encompassed under the theme of sexual violence *that provided the context and aftermath of the attack*.

Advice

Participants were also asked what advice they would give a friend who found himself in a similar situation of having been sexually victimized. The following responses were provided: “1st to get PEP treatment to make sure you don’t get HIV then everything else is 2nd, Health is 1st” [MSWTB3]. Thus, for this respondent, health care was the primary issue, the criminal nature of the act being secondary. Risk assessment procedures of the potential dangerousness of a client were also used, as evidenced by the following advice: “You need before to meet up with clients, hear the voice . . . before. You need [to] look when they are coming to you. After that, you decide if you want to be sexy with them or not” [MSWTB13].

The theme *advice* suggested that the health implications of the attack needed to be dealt with first, alternatively, another escort took a preventative approach by emphasizing the importance of the risk assessment of clients.

Emergent themes grounded in the data were (1) *young escorts at risk*; (2) *absence of sexual violence with sub-themes: gay men as non-confrontational, female sex workers are more vulnerable, secretive nature of clients, lucky*; and (3) *no formalized warning system identified from their experiences of male sex work*.

Emergent Themes

Young escorts at risk

One escort [MSWT1] stated that young escorts who work from brothels and take drugs with their clients are more at risk of client-perpetrated sexual violence. It was also suggested that it is the younger inexperienced escorts who are most at risk and may be targeted by violent clients.

In addition, another respondent suggested that it is more likely that “[violence is] directed at younger male escorts than older ones” [MSWP2], especially those age 18 or 19, whereas when the escorts are older “the clients are afraid of them” [MSWP2]. Thus, these responses suggest a possible inverse age/power differential in the escort–client relationship.

Perceived Vulnerability of Female Sex Workers

The escorts interviewed suggested that the higher incidence of client-perpetrated sexual violence in the female sex work industry was the result of the vulnerability of females. [MSWP3] stated that “[it is] because they [female sex workers] are more vulnerable.” The implication being that female prostitutes are more at risk because their male clients are heterosexual and thus more likely to engage in violent sexual behavior.

Absence of Client-Perpetrated Sexual Violence

The findings presented here assist in the explanation of why this might be the case. [MSWP1] stated he had never had any violent clients but some had been rude: “I have had rude clients and stuff but I’ve never had any that’ve been violent and stuff like that” [MSWP1]. Another escort [MSWP2] reported he had not experienced problems with clients not paying for his services and had not suffered from client-perpetrated sexual violence: “No, not really, I don’t think I have” [MSWP2]. Nevertheless, he did state that on the Internet, specifically the chat rooms, that you get a few clients who are “dodgy.” Furthermore, when asked whether he had heard of any escorts having experienced problems with abusive clients, he said that “about a year ago here, a Chinese escort was murdered” [MSWP2]. But this type of extreme violence was believed to be rare.

Gay Men are Non-confrontational

The reported lack of client-perpetrated sexual violence against male escorts was also explained by the assertion that gay clients were “less confrontational.”

I think with the gay, the gay kind of escort as well is that, first of all, if your client is a gay man, then a lot of gay men are a lot more mmm a lot less, I don’t know like confrontational . . . and wouldn’t so much do things like that. [MSWP1]

The Secretive Nature of Clients

It was also suggested that “straight” (heterosexual) clients wanted to keep a low profile and therefore would not do anything that may attract attention regarding their clandestine lifestyle.

and the clients that are supposedly “straight” and are obviously trying to keep it [their sexual orientation] a secret, they just pay the money, they wouldn’t try and rip you off ‘cause they wouldn’t want to risk someone finding out what they are doing, so I think it is a lot less . . . I mean it does happen, but I think it is a lot less common than [in] other escorting services. [MSWP1]

Lucky

An additional subtheme was that these escorts felt lucky that so far in their escorting work they had not experienced any sexual violence perpetrated by their clients. “No, I’ve been quite lucky” [MSWP1]. Another escort stated that he has also never experienced any aggressive clients. He said he has been quite “lucky, I think” [MSWP3].

No Formalized Warning System

[MSWP1] stated that there was no such system within the male sex work community as it is not required considering sexual violence is “quite rare” and should such an incident happen, information about potentially dangerous clients would circulate rapidly through “word of mouth” as “everyone knows everyone” in the escorting business.

In summary, the emergent theme of the absence of sexual violence resulted in numerous sub-themes: *gay men as non-confrontational, secretive nature of clients, lucky, young men more at risk, perceived vulnerability of female sex workers, and no formalized warning system.* Gender, sexuality, and age were considered as influential factors regarding vulnerability to sexual violence; otherwise they were just “lucky.” Furthermore, the use of an informal warning system via “word of mouth” was considered

sufficient by escorts to warn their peers about dangerous clients.

DISCUSSION

Now as ever, what is dubiously called “the world’s oldest profession” is still a mystery to many, especially when its practitioners are men. (Dorais, 2005, p. 100)

The breadth of the male sex work industry is still underresearched; thus, the current exploratory study investigating the incidence of client-perpetrated sexual violence against male escorts makes a valuable contribution to the available literature. To date, there have been conflicting findings regarding client-perpetrated violence against male sex workers. For example, some research (Scott et al., 2005) documented that sexual violence is a rarely experienced phenomenon compared with the prevalence experienced by female and transgender prostitutes (Farley & Barkan, 1998). There has not been any detailed study of this phenomenon with regard to male escorts who work from off-street locations in the United Kingdom or from a cross-cultural context, although previous UK-based research has referred to sexual violence being perpetrated by clients against street-based male sex workers (Connell & Hart, 2003; West & de Villiers, 1993). However, findings within a British context by the current study support Farley and Barkan’s (1998) and Weinberg et al.’s (1999) American findings. This contrasts with Scott et al.’s (2005) Australian study that found that “[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” (p. 325). Despite client-perpetrated sexual violence being considered rare according to the escorts in the current study, it is interesting that the phrase used by several of the participants was that they were “lucky” not to have been sexually victimized (suggesting that this is a recognized risk of escorting).

Previous research has indicated that incidents of sexual violence were perpetrated by the client when he had consumed alcohol (West & de Villiers, 1993). In the current study, it was found that the perpetrator had usually consumed drugs that may have amplified emotions of sexual guilt and humiliation that were then transformed into anger-motivated sexual violence. There was also conflicting evidence regarding the frequency and the nature of the coerced sex acts (penile-anal, penile-oral, digital-anal, “rimming” [oral-anal]) perpetrated by clients. The fact that clients had taken drugs may have lowered their inhibitions and augmented their sense of power resultant from the financial transaction and expectation of the sexual services to be provided.

Perceived Risk Factors for Client-Perpetrated Sexual Violence

Age was considered a risk factor in that young escorts were more vulnerable to sexual violence according to participants. Gender was another perceived risk factor as a self-identified transsexual (male-to-female) sex worker was sexually victimized by a client who discovered the sex worker’s gender incongruity during the encounter. This may have resulted in the client questioning his ability to differentiate between male and female and his perceived gender deception that may have instigated a hate-motivated sexually violent attack. Female sex workers were also perceived as being more vulnerable than their male counterparts, hence, the perceived higher level of sexual violence in female sex work. In contrast to age and gender being risk factors, it was perceived that sexual orientation could be a protective factor as gay men in their experience were nonconfrontational and the clients were less likely to use violence unlike their heterosexual counterparts.

Nonetheless, other emergent themes regarding escorts’ emphasis on the fact that they had not been the victim of a sexually violent attack as being “lucky” undermines the general consensus of members of the male sex work community that sexual violence is a rarity. The conceptualization of being “lucky”

requires further investigation as it suggests there is an expectation of escorts being sexually victimized by their clients. This begs the question as to whether this may be the influence of researchers raising the question of client-perpetrated sexual violence thus resulting in an expectation of sexual violence by escorts despite their own experience indicating the opposite.

Key factors present during client-perpetrated sexually violent encounters were that clients had consumed drugs and escorts had refused to allow his client to engage in "barebacking." The pressure by clients to engage in barebacking is ever present, and thus there is resistance when the escorts refuse and insist that condoms are used. This resistance to condom usage requires further investigation considering it is at odds with the client safeguarding their sexual health and showing a disregard for the escort's sexual well-being. Minnichello et al. (2008) taking a Foucauldian perspective stated that:

regarding attempts to regulate the relationship between sexual behaviour and identity, the focus on anal sex as a risk activity can have symbolic meaning as an act of profound intimacy and context for the expression of masculinity, power, and sex as an expression of a certain kind of interaction and the changing nature of men's relationship with each other. (p.168)

Ridge (2004) suggested that barebacking may be used to reaffirm a sense of power and masculinity or alternatively to express anger, intimacy, or instrumentality (to avoid the expression of feelings). Furthermore, the comprehension of barebacking through the dichotomy of active and passive roles is not helpful due to the complexity and fluidity of meanings dependent on the context of this practice. In addition, the anger or the instrumentality expressed through barebacking may be amplified in rape that can further increase its complexity.

The psychological impact of being raped is already traumatic due to the betrayal of trust, but this trauma may be exacerbated when a condom is not used by a client who has disclosed he is HIV+. It was also noted that sexual

health awareness also outweighed the criminality of the act perpetrated, as PEP treatment was suggested as being the priority regarding the advice a male escort would give to his peer in these circumstances.

Limitations

The methodological challenge of participant recruitment of this difficult-to-reach population was evidenced by a low response rate, but this is common, as male sex workers who work from off-street locations are challenging to access (Shaver, 2005). Furthermore, the reticence of male sex workers to engage with this research could have been due to the concerns about confidentiality and the sensitive topic, despite participants being assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Also, escorts personally may not have defined their experiences of non-consensual sexual violence as rape. However, future research could incorporate an exploration of personal conceptions of sexual violence or rape within male sex work. A nominal payment was initially offered for being formally interviewed, but no volunteers came forward despite this financial incentive. However, three respondents did attend a more informal drop-in session. The low response rate for the Web-based questionnaires is also common for self-completion of questionnaires on sensitive topics (Robson, 2002). The small samples sizes across the four methods (Web-based questionnaire, tick-box questionnaire, face-to-face interviews, and telephone interviews) employed in the current study were expected (but not to the extent realized). Nevertheless, Gobo (2007) stated that "a few cases, mirroring a pervasive phenomenon in society, may be enough if its population is quite homogenous" (p. 415). It is recognized that the sample was self-selected and, therefore, may not be representative of the wider community of male escorts who advertise their sexual services on the Internet; this limitation has been noted in previous studies (Bimbi & Parsons, 2005; Halkitis & Parsons, 2003; Morrison & Whitehead, 2005). However, this is why transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the findings to parallel contexts would be more

appropriate than generalizing to the wider male sex work community.

The length of the Web-based questionnaire may have been problematic as it has been suggested that this can negatively affect response rates (e.g., Smith, as cited in Hewson et al., 2003). However, respondents were able to skip sections by clicking on a link to take them to the next section, thus, making the questionnaire easy to navigate and reducing the time taken to complete it. The limited response rate of the telephone interviews may be due them screening their calls and numbers that were displayed as "private," "unavailable," or "unknown" were not answered. The methods' limitations were offset by their ability to increase the diversity of the sample population. The succinct telephone interviews may have reduced the quality and validity of the data obtained (Baker, 1994), but the use of the Web-based self-completion surveys and face-to-face interviews compensated for this brevity. Thus, the concerns regarding the "dependability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the data were only limited by the opportunity for these participants to complete the Web-based questionnaire and attend for interview.

Despite the limitations of the current exploratory study, it underscores the importance of studying this under-researched sexual community in the United Kingdom. Their marginalized position within academic research is evident when compared with the extensive research on female sex work. Previous research has also suggested that Internet-based escorts are understudied (Bimbi & Parsons, 2005). Thus, the findings of the current study provide a unique contribution to the very limited research available on male sex workers' experiences of client-perpetrated sexual violence within the male sex work industry.

These findings have also been disseminated to the relevant service providers who assisted with this research to enable them to be fed back to the participants where feasible.

CONCLUSION

There were few incidences of client-perpetrated sexual violence found in off-street

prostitution as identified by these participants within male sex work industry in the United Kingdom. However, the current study's finding of the low incidence of client-perpetrated sexual violence against male escorts does support earlier American research (e.g., Farley & Barkan, 1998). The suggested rarity of such violence in male sex work is interesting and is a distinct difference between male and female sex work that requires further exploration. In addition to the following factors: first because of the male gender of the escort and client, each may perceive himself as an equal within this business transaction as the inherent power structures within this context mirror those in society. Second, as emphasized by one of the escorts, the low incidence of sexual violence could be because (1) gay men are non-confrontational and thus unlikely to engage in such violence, or (2) due to some of their clients being married and engage in a clandestine lifestyle and do not wish to attract any undue attention (therefore they are unlikely to engage in any behavior that may involve the authorities). Third, the majority of male sex workers were working from off-street locations, which may reduce the likelihood of violence in comparison with street-based female sex workers. However, as male sex workers consider themselves as "lucky" to have avoided sexual victimization this contradicts the perception of the rarity of client-perpetrated sexual violence. This anomaly requires further investigation as does the persistent issue of clients' demand for barebacking despite sexual health education initiatives raising awareness of its inherent dangers. Ridge (2004) suggested that it may be the "thrill" of the fatal risk to their sexual health which heightens the excitement of this practice (akin to "Russian roulette").

The current study thus provides a base from which to stimulate further research regarding the breadth of male sex work, including escorts, rent-boys, and male actors in the pornographic film industry in the United Kingdom. The themes presented in this research may be further developed by considering (1) what type of acts perpetrated by clients may be defined as sexual violence by male escorts? (2) is

sexual violence used by clients as a method of retaliation if their demands for barebacking are not acceded to? (3) is ethnicity a risk factor? or (4) does a passive role preference of an escort place them at increased risk? (5) If the escorts present themselves in a hypermasculine role does this reduce the likelihood of their sexual victimization? and (6) the use of larger samples where feasible to investigate the aforementioned questions inspired by the findings of the current study. Also, investigate further why there is apparently such a low incidence of client-perpetrated sexual violence in male sex work compared with its perceived prevalence in female sex work, and invite responses from their female counterparts regarding this disparity. Finally, this research is exploratory, and thus these findings are transferable only to similar contexts.

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