



MAP: Exploring the Lives of Male Sex Workers in Tyne and Wear

Summary Report

March 2013

It has been a long held belief in the Tyne and Wear region that there are no red light districts where the sale of sex could occur. This is in direct contrast with many other comparable areas or cities around the UK and is often seen as especially unusual for a city the size of Newcastle (population 280,000). The apparent lack of a visible sex market throughout the Tyne and Wear conurbation (North & South Tyneside, Sunderland, Gateshead and Newcastle - total population 1.1 million) does not mean that the sex industry is not well established; it has developed mainly off-street and is dominated by the many escort agencies and independent escorts who rely on the internet for custom. The current perception is that there are many more women selling sex than men.

The Male Action Project (MAP) was established and operated as part of the Cyrenians, working closely with the Girls are Proud (GAP) Project. MAP was funded equally by the Millfield

House Foundation and the Northern Rock Foundation. The project concentrates on the scope, extent and the individual profiles of those engaged in male sex work within Newcastle-upon-Tyne and those who travel within Tyne and Wear. This will in turn provide vital information necessary to present recommendations for policy change.

As a direct result of the work carried out as part of the MAP (Male Action Project), it is now clear that there has been a small scale red light district operating – the difference being that men are soliciting and not women. Kerb crawling also takes place next to the main cruising site in Newcastle, identified as a red-light district, and the same sort of behaviour probably takes place at other sites throughout the North East.

Introduction

There is very little positive intervention when dealing with the safety and welfare of the individuals involved; there are no 'wraparound' services designed specifically for these men and the majority seem to find it extremely difficult to engage with the services they clearly need. This stance may have evolved due to a number of factors:

- **Men are seen as the 'exploiters' in general terms and are seldom seen as victims or in need of assistance;**
- **Legislation and short-term initiatives have mainly concentrated on female and child exploitation; men are almost entirely ignored in regional and national policy frameworks;**
- **Stigmatised male sex workers do not share their experiences and do not ask for help and in some cases the problems are compounded by the double stigma of straight men selling sex to other men.**

There are references to two main groups of men selling sex:

- **Internet-based escorts;**
- **Street-based sex workers who frequent 'cruising sites'.**

Men selling sex or exchanging sex for favours were engaged in the MAP Project via a process of 'outreach', which was regarded as the first step to constructive contact and the establishment of trust. For the purposes of this project, one main 'cruising site' situated in Newcastle city centre was identified as the main subject of outreach and the majority of the men identified as sex workers were initially contacted at this site. Many of the men who used the site travel from all around Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and Durham. This site is close to the city centre, and is known to many as the 'Gardens'. There are numerous other cruising sites across the region; some are secluded and rarely used, whilst others attract men in large numbers and have done so for many years. A cruising site is an area where men can meet other men for casual sex, should they want to and for payment or otherwise. The project was restricted so it would not have been possible to scope every location.

Interviews have been conducted with as many men as possible (total 10) who specifically told us that they sell sex for money or favours. As reasonably expected, there were others (total 9) who also disclosed that they sold sex and agreed to be interviewed when initially spoken to, who then later declined or failed to keep appointments. A number of others who witness activity in the cruising sites were also spoken to at length.

"The Gardens are busy all the time; people are here from lunch time onwards."

"There is a black lad who comes down here; he is sleeping in the trailer next to the gates. He has no money and nowhere to go. He climbs in and has a bit of string

to pull the shutter down from the inside. He left his shoes outside the other night; they will end up getting pinched."

Sex Work

Most of those spoken to found it difficult to express how they felt when they had to sell sex, but the reasons for doing so were much more obvious. They needed to make money due to drug and alcohol addiction; homelessness and the lack of an alternative source of income, such as benefits. The term 'survival sex' applies to this group.

Interviews with male escorts advertising their services on the internet proved to be problematic. There are a number operating in the North East and in Newcastle and they were in the main reluctant to discuss their work. Women rarely pay for sex and the opportunities for straight male escorts are limited; they are more likely to obtain work as part of a 'double act' with their female partner, generally working for male clients.

"I have done some escorting for women, but not a lot, just twice I think in 3 years, if women are there, so are their husbands".

Half of the men engaging in survival sex denied offering anal sex to clients and there also seemed to be a £10 'going rate' for oral sex/hand relief. However, it would appear that not all achieved that price and much lower payments are common, sometimes as little as £1.50 or £2.00. It was also discovered that some men would take money for sexual services and then run off, safe in the knowledge that this behaviour would rarely be reported. All of the sex workers explained that they would quite often not get paid by a punter; or had difficulty obtaining a fair amount. The general attitude was that the punters also knew that they were highly unlikely to face any repercussions.

Web sites such as adultwork.com have taken over from traditional publications such as the 'Daily Sport' and the local 'Green Admag'. Around ten years ago buying a certain type of paper to arrange an appointment with an escort was still the most accepted way. With the onset of the internet and the ability to use mobile phones to access the web, advertisements in papers have declined. Furthermore, economic influences cannot be ignored; the recession and the increased competition in the market place have driven prices down. In 2002, 30 minutes with an escort in Newcastle (male or female) would have cost £70 to £80. The average is now £50, with some charging £30 as a 'special promotional offer' on certain days.



“There are lots of married and bisexual men going to cruising sites and especially down here. They can’t tell anyone what they are up to.”

Photos: **“this is where it all happens”**

Need & Identity

Of all the men who were spoken to, seven of them were spoken to on a regular basis. Six stayed in contact with MAP for six months or more.

Heroin addiction has played a significant role in driving six of the seven men to sex work. The remaining male was an alcoholic and he has managed to avoid the use of controlled drugs. Of the six who were addicted to heroin, five have entered a drug treatment programme via their GP or Addiction Services with encouragement from MAP. Some of the men drink to excess:

“I drink a bottle of vodka and me worries go away”

Only one of the seven men stated that he is gay and one other accepts that he is “probably” bisexual. The other five say they are heterosexual, with one in a long term relationship and the rest seem to have had a series of girlfriends; with the relationships lasting a few weeks or months at the most. None of the men have been married, but three of them have a child from a previous partner. None of them see their children regularly and only two of the men have had contact in the past 12 months. The other has not had any contact at all for over four years. This absence from their children’s lives does trouble them and they blame their poor parenting on their addictions.

Family life in general has not been good for any of the seven men interviewed and their current relationships with parents and siblings can only be described as strained and intermittent. Again, this is because of their addictions and general behaviour over a long period of time. All of the men addicted to heroin stole from their families when they needed money. One of the men was rejected by his family completely when it became obvious he was gay; their strict religious beliefs meant that they would not tolerate his sexuality. Three of the men suffered the death of a parent at a young age (two at 15 years and one at 16 years) and this seems to coincide with their first experiences with heroin. One of the men was evidently neglected for long periods as a child because of his mother’s heroin addiction as her habit persisted throughout his formative years. Three of the men had entered the care system at one time or another during childhood. One of them described his foster parents:

“They were good people, they looked after me and I still go and see them and they are still looking after kids like me”

Others see things differently:

“My parents just could not cope with me being gay, I did not choose to be, but they have not spoken to me for over 2 years. I have thought about getting in touch, but I don’t even get a birthday card from them. Even the neighbours stopped speaking to me just before I left.”

“If I see my Mam I will say hello and she will say hello to me, I am still her son but that is as far as it goes. I don’t really have anything to do with her”.

One of the men was seriously sexually abused as a child by a close relative and his situation was made worse when he regularly witnessed domestic violence at a young age. He can describe vividly the beatings his father inflicted on his mother and how he felt powerless to protect her. All seven of the men stated that they started sex work between the ages of 16 and 21. One male later clarified this by explaining that he did not carry through with an actual sex act with clients:

“I don’t do anything with them, once their pants are down I rob them, I got arrested for it once but nothing happened”

Homelessness

The men have all endured periods of homelessness due to their circumstances and behaviour, with one male spending over a year on the streets of Newcastle apart from short periods in hostels. The role of older men in the lives of sex workers seemed to come to the fore when accommodation was discussed. Two of them have lived with older men over four years and this provides them with a roof over their heads and financial support from time to time. Another sex worker lived with an older man for a period of several months in a bedsit.

“Older men pay the most and like to do it in the car or at their place. They feel safer away from the Gardens as they are scared of getting robbed”

“Apart from the internet, money can be earned in the bars, saunas and meeting places around the Gay area. Older men congregate in the pubs and wait for the young lads to come in. The youngsters are often drunk and look down and out. They only go there to do business and earn some cash. They can be spotted a mile off as they dress in dirty, dishevelled tracksuits and trainers. It is very sad and makes you angry.”

“There are older men who try to look after the likes of me, by offering a place to sleep. I went to one man’s place and he made me beans on toast with cheese on the top. He asked me if I would like to stay and wanted to do business. I asked

him how much he had and he said a fiver. I told him that was not enough, but I went to bed with him anyway and did a few things. He was alright I suppose and I later found out he had another young lad like me going around to see him all the time.”

Due to their lifestyle and background, all of the men have physical and mental health issues. This is often made worse by their cavalier attitude towards sexual health and the consequences of not taking adequate precautions. Their physical ailments ranged from poor dental health to more serious conditions such as hepatitis. Most of these conditions have been brought under control, now that they have begun to engage with their GPs and health providers.

“I hate going to the Doctors or anywhere else like that. You always get called names by the others in the waiting room, they know what I do and they call me ‘rent boy’. I don’t go to GUM.”

“I go to the GUM now and again, but not for a while. I know I should go but I can’t get round to it. My girlfriend won’t touch me until I have been checked out again.”

There has not been the same progress with their mental health and they all complain of feeling depressed or anxious for most, if not all, of the time. One of the men has described how he has regular suicidal thoughts and has found himself on the verge of going through with it by throwing himself off the Tyne Bridge. Three of the men are unable to articulate their feelings other than to eventually lose their temper and become aggressive. In one man this happens when he is unable to comprehend the smallest change to his circumstances or when his partner ridicules him for selling sex. They are all ashamed of their involvement in sex work and in the main do not admit it:

“I’ve done lots of things at the site that I am not proud of; I just had to do it”

Some of the men operated in other areas of Newcastle upon Tyne, mainly around the Monument, Hippy Green (Eldon Square), the Central Station and around the Pink Triangle. Due to the redevelopment of the area close to the main cruising site (the new Police Station is being built there) the activity has dispersed to other areas along the Tyne, to Byker and to Gateshead.

“The best places to do business are next to the ‘Gardens’, the Pink Triangle and on the Gateshead side, lads can make £50-60 a night.”

“One night I was so desperate for money

I gave a bloke a wank for £2.00. I would never do anal, no way; no one is ever going to do that to me . . . and I was once offered loads of money by an Asian Taxi Driver to let him piss on my face.”

“I never ask for money before doing anything, I just take what they will give me when it is all over, sometimes it is £5, sometimes £2. I do it so that I can buy my cider and my tabs. That’s all I need, I get my money [benefit] every two weeks and I need to get extra cash when I am desperate”.

Jobs & Work

Three of the men have been employed in the past, all in the construction industry. They managed to get jobs after leaving school at 16, but subsequently became long term unemployed before the age of 20 due to their heroin addiction and entry into the criminal justice system. In total four of the seven men have served custodial sentences. The others have not had any meaningful employment whatsoever and have survived on benefits and the proceeds of petty crime (all seven are known to the police). All of the men are now on benefits of some kind and it would be fair to say that they have had difficulty with the benefits system:

“It is like a game of snakes and ladders - without the ladders - all I do is end up back at the beginning.”

“All they ever do is sanction me so it takes months to get sorted out, but I did miss an appointment for a medical so that has not helped. You just get sick of it; the same thing over and over again.”

As previously stated, there were problems when trying to contact male escorts willing to be interviewed. The result was that three eventually agreed to meet and discuss their experiences and a further two were contacted over the phone. Three of the five described themselves as straight, offering sex to women or working with their partners to provide ‘double acts’. The other two stated that they were gay and only provided sexual services for men. It became clear that the escorts selling sex to women were unlikely to make money, whilst the gay escorts obtained better rates for their time (about £100 per hour). The three men who took part in double acts were also able to make more money than they would on their own. The clients for double acts were generally men on their own or occasionally accompanied by their female partners; they often made these contacts through ‘swingers’ clubs or by having their

own website. Two of the escorts (one straight, one gay) worked with an escort agency that also had female escorts on their books.

“Our first job was for a bloke in Forest Hall. He booked us to have sex in front of him. I would not let him touch me; he just sat and watched, he then had sex with my girlfriend after I had. We could easily earn £300 per day.”

“Punters ring up and describe the scenario they want us to act out when we arrive. There was one bloke who got us to go to his hotel room in Newcastle and carry out a ‘rape’ on my girlfriend. I had to throw her about a bit and act aggressive. He wanted me to grab her around her neck.”

Crime, Safety & The Police

There are problems in practical terms with male sex workers and their contact with the Police. One male stated that he will not carry condoms in case he is stopped and searched. He claims that they will suspect that he uses the condoms to conceal drugs and was prepared to take the risks involved in unprotected sex rather than have to deal with the police. The main reason for male sex workers not reporting incidents to the police is to do with the assumption of criminality and the belief they will not be taken seriously. Most sex workers (male or female) think that the sale of sex is against the law at all times; whether it is in public or private; for money, drugs, alcohol or favours.

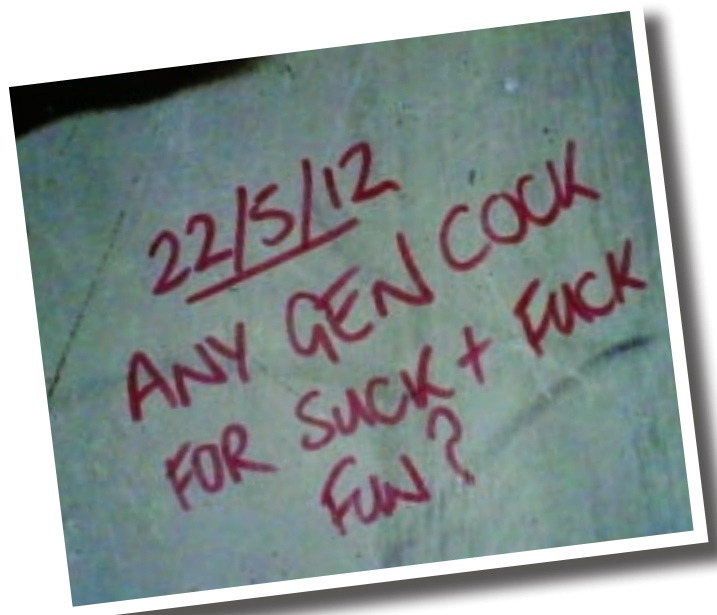
“It is dangerous in the gardens and there have been loads of people beaten up or had their cash taken. I would never think of telling the police, they would just take the piss, they don’t like me as I am always in trouble. I lost £80 one night; it was stolen as I slept.”

The collection, retention and dissemination of information related to sex work and those who are subject to sexual exploitation, is in need of significant improvement. This is a matter for all agencies and is applicable to all types of sex work. As outlined earlier, there is no routine reporting of incidents to the authorities by sex workers themselves. Most of the statutory agencies do not give priority to sex work and make very little allowance for it when offered information. Material that does not contain personal details is not being routinely shared and for example the activity of older men targeting males and females in the centre of Newcastle is not well known. One Senior Care Worker commented:

“That is gold dust to us; if we were told about things like that we would make sure our kids are warned to stay away. We would also listen out for it being mentioned”.

To counter the lack of information sharing and routine reporting of crime, the MAP Project is now a referral centre for the ARCH system (Anti Race and Hate Crime) administered by Safe Newcastle. Both MAP and GAP also report incidents to the police on behalf of clients directly or through the Worksafe Scheme (established in 2007) and both projects are members of the National Ugly Mugs Scheme (a national database for all attacks on sex workers).

The Strategic and Operational Sex Work Steering Groups (SSWSG and OSWSG) were both established in 2012, designed to bring together a number of statutory agencies and third sector groups in a working relationship to provide a strategic level of guidance, to initiate practical solutions and to improve the sharing of information in relation to sex work and sexual exploitation.



Recommendations

1. Proactive – identify, engage and assist.

Continue the process of identifying those men involved in sex work and those who find themselves at risk of sexual exploitation. Take steps to involve them with the services they need. There is still a lack of knowledge regarding male sex work and this has to be addressed.

2. Establish Prostitution Strategy.

The publication of a Prostitution Strategy for use throughout Northumberland and Tyne and Wear would provide invaluable guidance for both policy makers and practitioners.

3. Establish Information Collection and Dissemination.

There is undoubtedly a great deal of general information regarding sex work and sexual exploitation not being recorded and disseminated to the right agencies and individuals. There is also a general consensus that the flow of information is not efficient. Cooperation is the key, with the implementation of a user-friendly system worthy of urgent consideration. The Operational Sex Work Steering Group (OSWSG) has established links with various agencies and key individuals to ensure the flow of information is highlighted. It would be an enormous task to locate and transfer all of the existing information to one central collection point and from a practical perspective it would be preferable to begin from scratch and evolve in the medium to long term. The confidential reporting system in operation at Northumberland County Council is an example of a simple, user-friendly system currently in use that could be adopted to provide an easily accessible sexual exploitation database. The continued use of the ARCH System and the National Ugly Mugs Scheme must continue.

4. Consolidate the work of the OSWSG and SWSSG.

The two groups are less than one year old and are developing their roles in both practical and strategic work. Their work should continue as awareness and knowledge extends.

5. Teenage Clients - 15-20 year olds – partnership working with YP agencies.

MAP and GAP already work closely with agencies that have responsibility for young people and this cooperation should continue within a more formalised framework. It is clear from this study and many others that 15 to 20 year olds are in need of engagement and guidance, especially those who may be subject to sexual exploitation. It is essential to be in a position to identify those at most risk as early as possible.

6. Training

- Formulation of one day sex work course for delivery to agencies. The current two day course will continue for those who can commit the time to it. There is a possibility of tailored courses for certain agencies.
- Develop a course for The Cyrenians and other Third Sector agencies on how to take part in complex case conferences. In general, third sector agencies can be overlooked when discussions reach a significant phase and more use should be made of the detailed and accurate knowledge they have.
- Basic information sharing course for all concerned, at the very least for dedicated liaison officers who would be expected to pass on expertise and good practice and be responsible for the submission of information.

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