

ATTRactions AND AVERSIONS: EXPLORING ATTITUDES AND
PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUALLY PROCURED YOUTH IN THE DOWNTOWN
EASTSIDE

by

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ABSTRACT

The entrenchment of children and youth in the sex trade is a pervasive and troubling social issue. Youth procured for sexual purposes are a highly vulnerable and at-risk population. These youth continue to be victimized, exploited, and abused by adults in the community. Listening to the voices and life experiences of youth involved in the sex trade offers valuable insight into what keeps youth entrenched, the risks that place them in danger, and programs and services that may assist them in exiting this lifestyle.

This exploratory study was designed to elicit personal appraisals of the attractions and aversions of sexually procured youth. The sample consisted of 15 youth (N=15), 1 male, 2 transgendered, and 12 female youth, aged 16-24 who self-identified as having worked in the sex trade within the past year. Participants for this study were recruited from the Youth Action Centre (Y.A.C), a drop-in for street entrenched youth in Vancouver, British Columbia.

A single, semi-structured interview was conducted which asked youth about their attitudes and perceptions of the attractions and aversions of working in the sex trade. The qualitative data was coded utilizing content analysis and descriptive statistics were subsequently calculated.

Results indicated that while 'Money for Clothing' was the most prevalent early benefit (64%), the overwhelming current benefit for youth in the study was 'Money for Drugs' (100%). 'Physical Assault' was identified by over half of the sample as the most common early risk (57%) and all participants recognized 'Physical Assault' (100%) as a current risk. The categories of 'STD/HIV' and 'Being Murdered' saw dramatic shifts from early to current risks with increases from 29% to 71% and 7% to 64% respectively.

Participants identified 'Drugs' (100%) as the most prevalent reason for most youth being involved in prostitution, while they said that 'Money' (92%) was the main reason for their own involvement. Participants in the study also indicated that they believed most youth in the sex trade wanted to leave due to 'Physical Assault' (40%) and being 'Bored/Tired of It' (40%). When asked why they, personally wanted to leave, the majority gave their reasons as 'Wanting a Different Lifestyle' (73%) and 'Getting Off Drugs' (73%). Youth in the study were asked about interest and involvement in recreational activities and identified their preferences in this area. The study also explored participants' awareness, willingness, and ability to participate in these recreational activities.

Finally, the limitations and implications of the study are explored and the connections between the research findings and theoretical framework are considered.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore youth's attitudes and perceptions of their involvement in the sex trade. The research was conducted within the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, British Columbia. The study examined youth's perceptions about the benefits and risks of their involvement in the sex trade, both when they first started and currently. Also discussed were youth's reasoning for involvement in and wanting to leave the sex trade, and personal interest in recreational activities. This research examining youth perceptions, experiences, and views was designed to explore the realities of their life circumstances and contrast this with myths and stereotypes perpetuated about youth who are entrenched in the sex trade.

The value that underlies this project is that all children and youth are worthy of protection whether they are sexually abused, sexually exploited, or sexually procured. Youth in the sex trade, those being sexually procured, are often referred to as society's "throw-aways" and are accused of 'choosing' their life on the streets. This accusation neglects the extensive dysfunctional family and situational factors that preceded life on the street for these youth. Youth in the sex trade do not deserve to be labeled and treated as "throw-away" children by society. Treating them as discards merely entrenches them further on the streets.

Addressing this social problem is difficult and there are no quick or easy solutions. In the past decade, the number of youth working on the streets has increased dramatically. This problem demands a multi-faceted approach, involving social, economic, legal, and political contributions. Ensuring that the voices of youth are a part of the process is an important component in facilitating understanding and awareness about the issue. Eliciting the voices of youth and asking about perceptions of involvement in the sex trade provides much needed knowledge for the development of policies and programs aimed at protecting children and youth.

The remainder of Chapter One will examine the background information about youth in the sex trade including defining relevant terms, the nature and scope of the problem, the Downtown Eastside, and the street drug scene. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature and includes information on recent provincial research, past global research, and findings in relation to male, female, and transgender youth in the sex trade. The Theoretical Framework is found in Chapter Three. Feminist and Social Learning Theories are utilized to explore the problem of youth in the sex trade. Chapter Four explores the Methodology employed during the research process, and Chapter Five presents the results. Finally, the Discussion section is located in Chapter Six. In this section, recommendations are put forth and findings in relation to the theoretical framework are explored. The limitations of the study are addressed, as are the implications for social work practice.

Background Information

Definition of Terms. Throughout this paper a number of terms will be referred to regularly including youth, procure, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, prostitution, and

sex trade. Defining these terms is critical to provide clear parameters of the discussion and to avoid misrepresentation of the subject matter.

This paper takes the position that youth involved in prostitution are a vulnerable and oppressed population that are sexually exploited by the adult men who procure them. To procure is “to obtain by effort or to acquire”, and a procurer is defined as “one who obtains women for prostitution” (Allen, 1989, p. 588). This definition of procuring will be extended to include female, transgender, and male children and youth. The BC Handbook For Action on Child Abuse and Neglect recognizes that sexual exploitation includes “permitting, encouraging, or requiring a child to engage in: a) conduct of a sexual nature for the stimulation, gratification, profit or self-interest of another person who is in a position of trust or authority, or with whom the child is in a relationship of dependency, b) **prostitution**, or c) production of material of a pornographic nature” (Government of British Columbia, 1998, p. H-8). Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse in which children and youth are used by adults for sexual purposes without any regard for the emotional, physical, or psychological damages they inflict.

The Criminal Code of Canada recognizes that anyone engaging in sexual activities with a child under the age of 14 has committed an indictable offense. Children under the age of 14 are deemed unable to consent to any sexual activity as outlined in section 150.1 of the Canadian Criminal Code (Greenspan and Rosenberg, 1998). The only exception to this is consensual sex with a peer. Knowing this fact, the term child prostitution serves as an oxymoron since children under the age of 14 can not consent legally to any sexual acts with adults (The Downtown / Eastside / Strathcona Child and Youth Protection and Care Strategy, 1997).

The law implemented section 212(4) in the Canadian Criminal Code in January 1988 in an attempt to curtail the problem of men purchasing sexual services from children and youths.

The law reads:

“Every person who, in any place, obtains or attempts to obtain, for consideration, the sexual services of a person who is under the age of eighteen years (or who that person believes is under eighteen) is guilty of an indictable offense and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years” (Greenspan and Rosenberg, 1998, p. 371)

Despite this existing legal statute, from 1988-1994 only 6 men in Vancouver were charged for buying sex from a juvenile while 356 juveniles were charged for selling it (Loman, 1995 as cited in Daum, 1996).

The participants in this study ranged from 16 to 24 years of age and comprise the definition of the term ‘youth’ for the purpose of this paper. A child includes anyone 15 years of age or younger.

The terms “prostitution” and “sex trade” will be used interchangeably. As noted previously, it is the expressed belief that procured youth are sexually exploited human beings. The use of the term sex trade is somewhat misleading in this respect as it minimizes the power imbalance between youth on the streets and the “johns” who procure them. The notion of ‘trade’ conjures up the image of an even exchange, which, in effect, ignores the abusive nature of this oppressive relationship. This notion is explored further within the feminist theory section of this paper.

Prostitution is defined as the “act of offering oneself for sexual contact with another in exchange for money or other benefits” (Barker, 1991, p. 185). This definition extends to many forms of sex work including those in massage parlors, escort services, pornography and streetwalkers. These activities take place in a variety of locations such as hotels, bars, call-girl services, and street corners or ‘strolls’. There is a hierarchy and class distinction among and between these various factions, with streetwalkers generally occupying the lowest rung on the economic and social ladder (Schaffer & DeBlaise,

1984). This paper focuses on youth who are involved in street level prostitution and/or engage in what is termed 'survival sex', "the exchange of sexual acts for necessities such as shelter, food, drugs, and companionship' (Deisher et al., 1991, p. 528).

Nature and Scope of the Problem. The involvement of, and demand for children and youth in the sex trade is a widespread and troubling social issue. Estimates of 'juvenile prostitution' in the United States propose that 90,000 to 900,000 youth are involved in the sex trade (Yates et al., 1991). Canadian estimates suggest that close to 40,000 youth are sexually procured nationally with 1,500 of these youth thought to be in Vancouver (City of Burnaby, 1997). This number has risen considerably since 1989 when social service agencies estimated that 1,000 street kids were involved in drugs and prostitution (Department of Justice, 1989). The numbers of youth regularly working on the street or along 'strolls' in Vancouver have been crudely estimated at 300 females, 150 males, and 27 transgendered youth (Province of British Columbia, 1996). These figures suggest an escalating problem where youths become entrenched in a continuum of abuse. While the number of youth involved continues to increase, the age of those procured is decreasing, compounding an already complex social issue (Michaud, 1988).

Various research studies have tried to identify the characteristics of sexually exploited and procured youth. One estimate suggests that 75% of youth involved in the sex trade are runaway/homeless (Yates et al., 1991). Other studies have yielded mixed results, suggesting that youth who are sexually procured come from all socioeconomic backgrounds and that close to one third are from sexual orientation or ethnic minorities (Wurzbacher et al., 1991). Though traditionally thought to be a 'female occupation', transgendered and male youth also make up a visible segment of the street sex trade. However, in Canada it is estimated that females outnumber male and transgendered workers by a combined ratio of three or four to one (Loman, 1993 as cited in Fraser Committee 1985, p. 371 and Crook 1984, p. 86).

Explanations of youth involvement in the sex trade have included broad contributing factors such as lack of opportunities, running away, marginalization, neglect, exposure to previous verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, and substance abuse (Silbert and Pines, 1983; Schaffer and DeBlaisie, 1984; Coleman, 1989; Jesson, 1993; and Savin-Williams, 1994). Motivations related to youth involvement have been reported as including financial or economic considerations, survival strategies, adventure, glamour, and drug abuse (Silbert and Pines, 1982; Schaffer and DeBlaisie, 1984).

Myths about youth involvement in the sex trade continue to persist despite recent research. One controversial position asserts that youth actively 'choose' to become involved in the sex trade. This narrow view ignores the detrimental effects of precipitating abuse factors and the immediate survival needs of youth on the street. The notion that sexually procured youth are experiencing fun, glamour, and making large amounts of money are examples of existing myths (City of Victoria, 1997b). The physical, social, emotional, and psychological costs of sexually procured children and youth are incalculable.

Sexually procured youth are a highly vulnerable and at risk population. Many of these youth remain dependent members of society but are on the streets with limited access to supports or services. Multiple barriers including discrimination based on their race, sexual orientation, gender, and social class confronts these youth. Listening to the voices and life experience of youth provides valuable insight to social workers about the perceived benefits that keep youth involved, the risks that place them in danger, and services or programs that may assist youth in exiting the sex trade.

The Downtown Eastside (DTES). This research study took place within the Downtown Eastside, a neighborhood located in the Strathcona district in Vancouver,

British Columbia. Strathcona is Vancouver's oldest residential neighborhood and extends from Main Street to Clarke Drive, the Great Northern Way to the Burrard Inlet waterfront (City of Vancouver Planning, 1993). The Downtown Eastside population is estimated at 15,934 residents with an average household income of \$10,586, well below the City of Vancouver's average of \$34,174. In fact, the 1991 incidence of low income in the Downtown Eastside was 73.4% (City of Vancouver, 1997).

In recent years, the Downtown Eastside has received national attention, most notably for the profound economic, drug, and social issues it faces. The 1991 Canadian Census data identified the Downtown Eastside as the poorest community in the entire nation (Daum, 1997a). These factors have led some to the conclusion that the Downtown Eastside is riddled with problems that at the very least are equivalent to those experienced in major American inner cities. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside has obtained the unfortunate label of 'skid row', reinforcing negative attitudes and pessimism about the neighborhood and its residents.

John Turvey, Executive Director of the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (D.E.Y.A.S.), noted several critical and distinct characteristics unique to the sex trade in the Downtown Eastside. He indicated that:

"1) we are the poorest community in all of Canada. 2) We are home to one of the largest and most violent 'kiddie' prostitution strolls in Vancouver, perhaps in the country. 3) We are located in Vancouver which accounts for almost half (26 out of 60) the murders of known prostitutes in Canada. 4) Vancouver accounts for over half (55%) of the 1994-95 increase in prostitution incidents in the country.

5) Over 40% of our street trade results from generational facilitators – women who have family members or know someone involved in prostitution prior to their entry into it.

6) We have a high representation of Aboriginal women involved in the sex trade" (Daum, 1997a).

A 1995 study conducted in the Downtown Eastside/Strathcona area involving 85 street-involved women found that almost 70% were aboriginal (Currie et al., 1995).

The Downtown Eastside is also currently faced with an HIV/AIDS epidemic that is believed to be spreading most rapidly among individuals who are both street-involved and injection drug users within the area. Vancouver was reported to have the highest HIV incidence rate in all of North America. The following three considerations combined are thought to have contributed to this problem and include: an overwhelming concentration of homeless people within single room dwellings in the Downtown Eastside; a shift from heroin to cocaine (where intravenous use is more frequent); and the lack of service integration that ultimately affects service impact (Vancouver-Richmond Health Board, 1997).

The Street Drug Scene. The negative reputation afflicting the Downtown Eastside is in part due to the street drug scene in the area. This drug scene has exploded within the past decade, resulting in the number of deaths due to illicit drug overdoses in the province rising from 39 in 1988 to 331 in 1993 (Cain, 1994). Of the 331 known deaths, 216 of these occurred in metro Vancouver. Sue Currie's 1995 field study mentioned earlier noted 94% of women working in the sex trade had used drugs in the past six months with 75% utilizing heroin and 68% cocaine. For many women in the Downtown Eastside, the sex trade serves as a means to earn drug money and results in a vicious cycle described by one woman as "I have to fix to go to work to deal with it, and I have to work because I am addicted to heroin" (Currie, 1995). The Badgley Committee reported that one in four juvenile prostitutes consumed heavy amounts of alcohol, and one in three was a heavy drug user (Badgley Committee, 1984). The last study conducted on drug habits among those working in the sex trade in the Downtown Eastside was in

1984. Eleven years later, it appeared that drug use increased by 43% for women in the Downtown Eastside sex trade (Davies, 1997).

Due to the high number of illicit drug overdose deaths in 1993, the coroner's office determined that a provincial epidemic had surfaced, most notably within metro Vancouver. The underlying reason thought to be responsible for this epidemic was the availability of extremely pure heroin which led to users overdosing inadvertently (Cain, 1994). Since 1993, there have been more than 1,200 deaths from drug overdoses in the Province of British Columbia (Vancouver-Richmond Health Board, 1997). Overdose deaths in Vancouver have remained at a relatively high rate. While 1993 had an overwhelming 216 deaths from illicit drug overdoses in Vancouver, these numbers have dropped slightly in subsequent years to 160 in 1994, 116 in 1995, and 150 overdose deaths in 1996 (McLaren, 1998).

Heroin is a powerful depressant known as 'down or smack' on the streets. Heroin is most commonly injected or smoked, but on occasion is snorted or inhaled. It produces a euphoric state of being in which sensations such as pain and hunger are relatively non-existent. Heroin is a highly addictive substance and users develop both a tolerance to and dependence on the drug (McLaren, 1996b). It is this tolerance that leads to greater levels of heroin being required to attain the desired state of gratification or high. There is a very fine line between the euphoric high desired from heroin and a potential overdose of the drug. This fact is frightening when you take into consideration that purity levels of heroin being sold on the streets of Vancouver have been identified as high as 90% (McLaren 1998). Heroin is readily available and is relatively inexpensive at roughly \$20 for .05 grams. All of these factors likely contribute to the high numbers of overdose deaths in the city of Vancouver that continue to be seen.

Cocaine is also rampant on the streets of Vancouver. As a powerful narcotic stimulant or 'up' as it's known on the streets, cocaine use results in the sensation of

alertness, high energy, accelerated euphoria, and omnipotence (McLaren, 1996a).

Traditionally, cocaine is snorted or injected intravenously. However, a significant change occurred on the streets of Vancouver in late 1996 when crack cocaine entered the street drug scene on a large scale. Crack cocaine was identified as a new drug epidemic in the United States in 1986 (Nadeau et al., 1996). Though impervious to crack's street infiltration in the past with the exception of small pockets of users, crack cocaine is said to have swarmed the Vancouver street drug scene within six to eight months in 1996-1997 (McLaren, 1998).

Crack, apparently named for the sound it makes when heated, is a smokable form of cocaine that produces an enhanced form of euphoria. Factors contributing to crack's appeal are the elimination of intravenous injection, the immediate high it produces usually in less than 30 seconds, and its availability, ready to use form, and low cost on the streets (Hicks and Wilson, 1993). Crack cocaine rock, also called rock, sells on Vancouver streets for \$10-\$20 for roughly .10-.20gm of the drug. The rush it produces is very short lived and can pass after twenty to forty minutes. This limited duration can lead to 'binging' where addicts repeatedly use and go on 'runs', sometimes for days at a time. The onslaught of crack cocaine in the United States has contributed to a shift in gender relations on the street. Female street prostitutes were found to be adversely affected by the accompanying social contexts that crack cocaine produced including further dependence, disempowerment, and degradation at the hands of pimps, johns, and drug dealers (Miller, 1995).

Specifically, Miller argued that the crack era had resulted in marked differences on the street such as increased violence, continued sexual degradation of women, and increased independence of the women involved in the sex trade. Gender inequality on the streets persisted, however, as women continued to occupy inferior and vulnerable positions in the street culture compared to the men. Though women were found to have

exerted more independence on the streets, the power distinction between men and women was viewed as unchanged. Women in the sex trade, especially those actively utilizing crack, possessed the lowest status and power within 'rigid gendered drug hierarchies' (Miller, 1995, p. 448).

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature pertaining to youth involved in prostitution has attempted to explore some of the causes and correlates of this social problem. Explanations of youth involvement have included individual pathology, dysfunctional family dynamics, social systems, and environmental factors as potential correlates (Jesson, 1993). Research has focused on exploring common childhood experiences thought to increase the risk for youth becoming involved in the sex trade. These include previous sexual abuse, running away from home, and homelessness (Silbert & Pines, 1983; Schaffer & DeBlassie, 1984; Coleman, 1989, Yates et al., 1991; Jesson, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1994; City of Victoria, 1997).

Running Away and Sexual Abuse

It is estimated that runaway and homeless youth make up nearly 75% of youth in the sex trade (Yates et al., 1991). A 1984 study by Janus et al. concluded that half of adolescent prostitutes were runaways or homeless when they got involved in the sex trade (Price, 1989). Once on the street, youth adapt and conform to social roles and strategies conducive to personal survival (Luna, 1991). This study does not intend to explore the issue of early childhood abuse but recognizes the extensive literature available. This literature suggests that at least 60% of youth involved in prostitution have been sexually abused as children (Silbert & Pines, 1983; Schaffer & DeBlassie, 1984; Edney, 1990; Jesson, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1994, City of Victoria, 1997). In 1995, Sue Currie interviewed 85 women in the sex trade in the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, British Columbia and discovered 73% had experienced childhood sexual abuse. A 1977 study conducted by James and Meyerding sampled male youth in the sex trade and found that 86% had sexual abuse histories as children (Yates et al., 1991). Due to the volume of literature on early childhood experiences as correlates of sex trade involvement, this

current study will not directly address this issue. However, the study does recognize childhood sexual abuse as a key predisposing factor in sex trade involvement.

Social Learning Theory

Theoretically, social learning and behavioral theories provide a useful framework through which to view the problem of youth in the sex trade. Both provide the opportunity to enhance understanding of the problem and assist in guiding practice with sexually procured youth. Social learning theory suggests that learned behavior is transmitted through observational learning and reinforcement in social situations and contexts.

Parents who are physically, emotionally, or sexually abusive to children reinforce non-compliant and deviant behaviors by failing to provide appropriate models of prosocial behavior. Living in an area where prostitution is common place, or having a family member involved in the sex trade is an example of how modeling can exert a powerful influence. Frequent exposure to the sex trade through social or situational factors has the potential to normalize the behavior. This is especially true if the model is a close family member or friend. The qualitative nature of interviews for this study provides youth the opportunity to share information about intergenerational facilitators if this is a salient, self-identified reason for involvement in the sex trade.

Within behaviourism, the concept of reinforcement is a critical factor in maintaining behavior. This study was designed to explore the attitudes and perceptions of specific factors that serve as reinforcers for remaining in the sex trade. Ultimately, this study sought to construct a balance sheet identifying the attractions and aversions of working in the sex trade formulated from a youth perspective. From a behavioral standpoint, the 'benefits' function to keep youth involved, while the risks are presumed to deter or inhibit this involvement. These 'push' and 'pull' factors result in youths leaving

home prematurely, lead them to the street, and eventually connect them with a negative chain of events entrenching them on the streets (Lowman, 1993).

Benefits and Risks

Previous literature has identified benefits that include glamour, adventure, power, and the need for money (Silbert and Pines, 1982; Currie, 1995, Lowman & Fraser, 1995, City of Victoria, 1997). Risks are frequently mentioned and have included physical and sexual assault, STD & HIV, arrest or incarceration, lowered self-esteem, and being murdered (Silbert and Pines, 1982; Lowman, 1987; Price, 1989; Currie, 1995, Miller, 1995; Daum, 1997a; City of Victoria, 1997; Vancouver-Richmond Health Board, 1997). With the exception of Currie's 1995 study, research on this topic has not examined youth's perceptions of risk directly. Exploring youth perceptions is critical to assist in recognizing salient aspects of the social problem and for identifying interventive strategies or avenues of change.

Much of the literature concerning youth in the sex trade has revolved around background characteristics and contributing risk factors of involvement. Weisberg (1985) utilized a retrospective analysis looking at these background characteristics. The study combined family explanations and psychological factors to determine that youth in the sex trade were likely to have experienced: an unstable home environment; a broken home in which they experienced some form of abuse; early sexual behavior, often due to sexual abuse; limited or poor school attendance; and being in government care or running away from home (Jesson, 1993). These factors serve to identify and define the central aspects of youth involved in the sex trade. The semi-structured format of interviews within this study provided youth the opportunity to disclose information with respect to these background characteristics. However, the purpose of the current study is to expand on these descriptive characteristics by exploring youth's perceptions of their involvement in the sex trade specific to the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver.

Recent Provincial Research

Recent research compiled in the province of British Columbia has included a National Summary based on the testimony of 70 sexually procured and exploited youth in Canada. This summary highlights nine recurring themes in the lives of Canadian children and youth before entering the street sex trade. These nine themes included: a history of previous abuse (physical, emotional, and/or sexual); a stable, non-abusive home life interrupted by severe trauma (such as sexual abuse by someone outside of the family); that the child is unable to disclose; running away from home; continual rejection based on race, appearance, and sexual orientation; drug addiction; low self-esteem; single and/or teen parenting; "double-lives" where youth live at home, work at night, and go to school in the day; and lack of awareness of human rights (Halldorson-Jackson, 1998). This study is significant as it was designed and facilitated by former youth sex trade workers in Canada. It also reflects on personal stories of these youth to expose myths in society and current gaps and needs for service. This National Summary emphasized the crucial role that the youth perspective plays in understanding and addressing this complex social issue. Similar to the National Summary, the current study strives to maintain a youth focus with participant's attitudes and perceptions being the focal point of the project. The semi-structured nature of the study was selected in order to facilitate this objective.

In October 1997, the Capital Regional District (CRD) of British Columbia completed a report regarding 75 sexually exploited youth. This study included a variety of information such as demographics, type of sex trade work, violence, housing needs, drug and/or alcohol usage, health care, involvement with the criminal justice system, education, and exiting and prevention (City of Victoria, 1997). This study is significant to the current research project in that it attempted to identify unique experiences of youth within a specified regional district in the province of British Columbia. The current exploratory study will address many of these same issues, but will utilize an alternate

methodology designed to minimize the time of the interview. Consultations with youth in the CRD report took an average of one hour and thirty minutes each to complete. Taking into consideration that the street entrenched population at the Youth Action Centre derives the majority of their economic, emotional, and social needs from the street, this lengthy process presented as unfeasible and problematic.

Results from the CRD report would serve as an important comparative tool on a number of measures. For example, the CRD report developed a questionnaire to facilitate consultations with youth on a number of measures. One of these included a section exploring what was received in the exchange for sexual favors. Results showed that the findings included money (83%), drugs (45%), shelter (31%), alcohol (21%), food (17%), clothing (13%), friendship (11%), and transportation (9%). On the section exploring violence, crisis and safety with youth, results revealed that 64% experienced 'emotional/verbal abuse', 58% were 'dropped off/away', 43% were 'sexually assaulted', 42% were 'physically assaulted', 42% had property stolen, 20% mentioned 'other', and 16% had been 'robbed' (City of Victoria, 1997a). It was expected that these categories would emerge during the interview when youth are asked about perceptions of benefit and risk. In the current study, all categories are generated by the youths themselves, however, and preconceived categories are not presented. Comparing the qualitative responses of the current study with responses on the questionnaire serves to reinforce the validity of the current study along with potentially highlighting unique and specific circumstances for youth in the Downtown Eastside.

In 1995, Sue Currie conducted a study with 85 women actively working in the sex trade in the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, British Columbia. This was the first major study of its kind within the demographic area since 1984. Results revealed that participants ranged from 16-55 years of age with 70% identifying as Aboriginal and 27% as Caucasian. The majority (88%) lived in the Downtown Eastside with 18% being

homeless. Only 18% of the women grew up in Vancouver. Age of entry for the sample showed that 73% began before their 18th birthday with 74% citing economic reasons for involvement. Close to one third knew a family member or close friend who was involved in the sex trade.

Many of the descriptive and demographic characteristics described in the Currie study were explored in the current study. The larger sample and recent compilation of results in the Currie study was useful in discovering how closely the current sample compares. The Currie study also had sections on violence and drug use, both of which were explored by youth in the current study. Specifically, results found that 75% of the women used heroin and 68% used cocaine with 94% using drugs within the past 6 months. Again, these findings can be useful when comparing the smaller, youth sample to that of the Currie study.

The AIDS epidemic has created a renewed interest in youth and individuals involved in the sex trade (Weiner, 1996). In a recent report compiled by the Vancouver-Richmond Health Board, it is suggested that the disease is spreading most rapidly among individuals who are both street involved and injection drug users living within the Downtown Eastside. Statistically, women in the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver are at high risk, as 80% of women injection drug users identified as being active in the sex trade (Vancouver-Richmond Health Board, 1997). This current study served to highlight if, and to what degree, youth identified AIDS/ HIV as a risk of working in the sex trade. It also provided the opportunity to determine if youth identified a difference between early and current perceptions of AIDS/HIV as a risk factor.

Miller Study (1995)

Jody Miller (1995) conducted an interesting study with sixteen prostitutes incarcerated at a county jail in Columbus, Ohio between December 1990 and January 1991. The research was based on semi-structured interviews that collected demographics,

involvement in prostitution, perceptions of prostitution, and their commitment to the work. Perceptions of violence, danger on the streets, and personal experiences with violence were a critical part of the research as well. Of her institutionalized sample, 14 of 16 were battling crack addictions. This resulted in drug use being identified as a significant theme emerging out of the interviews. Crack was identified as a salient feature connected with violence in the lives of these women.

Miller's results showed that 8 women indicated that their drug addiction led them into prostitution, while 8 began using drugs while prostituting. The current study also explored this dynamic by asking youth about perceptions of early and current benefit. The comparative and qualitative component of the study provided the opportunity to explore whether drug use is a significant theme in the lives of youth in the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. By examining the early and current perceptions, the extent and role of drug involvement for these youth is expected to surface. The additional benefit of the current study's methodology is that the sample and interview are within the participant's natural environment as opposed to an institutional or foreign setting.

Silbert and Pines Study (1982)

Previous research has attempted to determine what factors lead to involvement in the sex trade, but few have examined what factors maintain this involvement. Silbert and Pines (1982) investigated causes of entrance into prostitution. Their study involved 200 youth and adult women in the San Francisco Bay Area and covered demographic variables, home background, social support systems, and prostitution history. Results indicated that basic financial survival was the primary motivating factor by 75% of all subjects, 80% of current prostitutes, and close to 90% of juveniles in the study.

The current study was designed to expand on this finding by comparing early and current perceptions of involvement of both benefits and risks of working in the sex trade. As well, examining youth perceptions of involvement and reasons for wanting to exit

provided further support and information about existing needs and gaps in service to this population. The comparison of participant's early and current perspectives was expected to illuminate any shift in attitudes and/or perceptions that have occurred over time with regard to the attractions and aversions of involvement in the sex trade.

Male and Transgendered Youth

Recent research on male youth in the sex trade is limited, and has tended to focus on their problems and psychosocial characteristics (Snell, 1995). Literature on male youth has also closely focused on sexual orientation as a primary issue in entrenchment on the street. A study by Martin and Hetrick in 1988 found that as a result of their homosexual orientation, 40% of a client population experienced violence and 49% of this violence was inflicted by family members (Dempsey, 1994).

Literature on transgender youth in the sex trade is also relatively sparse, being virtually non-existent prior to the 1990's. 'Transgender' is viewed as an umbrella term that encompasses individuals who live/dress in the opposite gender. Cross-dressers, drag queens, heterosexual and homosexual transvestites, and transsexuals all fit within the definition of transgender (Namaste et al., 1996). As noted on the High Risk Project website:

"Those who most frequently end up on the streets, are excluded from existing social services, and need a safe place of refuge are those who have dual diagnosis, a history of sexual abuse, and who are primary male to female transsexuals" (Vancouver High Risk Project, 1998a).

The Vancouver High-risk project, established in 1994, reports having met with 133 transvestites and transsexuals in the Vancouver area. Of the core group that outreach workers have met with, it is estimated that 53% are involved in prostitution (Vancouver High Risk Project, 1998b). It is important to note that these numbers reflect findings about both youth and adults. Estimates of youth involvement are difficult to project, but a

it has been suggested there were approximately 27 transgendered youth in the sex trade in Vancouver (Province of British Columbia, 1996).

Both male and transgendered youth in the sex trade are identified as high-risk populations. They experience continuous emotional, verbal, and physical abuse based on homophobic attitudes within society. Isolation, lack of statistical research, and social stigma contribute to a lack of information, appropriate services, and programs for male and transgendered youth in the sex trade. More than half of the runaways on the street are male, though they have tended to be less visible than the females (Snell, 1995). The current study seeks to explore the attitudes and perceptions of female, male, and transgendered youth so as to contribute to the awareness and information available on these specific populations frequenting the Youth Action Centre.

Recreational Activity

One of the recent additions to the programming at the Youth Action Centre was the hiring of a recreational out trip activities worker. Recreational participation among street entrenched and/or drug addicted youth is minimal to non-existent in the literature. However, it has been recognized that involvement in recreational activities among other populations can enhance and contribute to increases in self-esteem, happiness, and personal satisfaction (Grossman, 1987; MacNeil, 1988).

The Youth Action Centre acknowledges that there appear to be substantial barriers for youth involved in the sex trade, particularly the women, when it comes to participating in recreational activities. Female youth in the sex trade are observed coming to the centre for food, then quickly retreating to the streets once they have eaten. The centre has had difficulty addressing the specific needs of this population since women in the sex trade appear either unwilling or uninterested in participating in recreational activities. For this reason, it was determined that while exploring youth perceptions of involvement in the sex trade, the study would also discuss the recreational needs and

interests of this population. It was expected that eliciting direct feedback about available activities and interests of these youth would provide valuable information for service provision to one of the least serviced groups within the community of the Downtown Eastside.

Summary

This section reviewed the current literature available regarding sexually procured youth. Specifically, causes and correlates of involvement in the sex trade were explored with a focus on child sexual abuse, running away, and homelessness. A brief discussion of behavioural theory outlined why reinforcers and risks are important areas to study. Background characteristics of youth were discussed and current Canadian research was included. Finally, reasons for and importance of including all three genders as part of the sample was examined.

Talking to youth and determining motivational factors and perceived benefits and risks of involvement in the sex trade could serve to highlight several areas of potential intervention. Within social work, such information can affect the development and implementation of policies and programs for clients. This study provided insight about the experiences of sexually procured youth that could enrich social work practice and interaction with such youth. Lack of understanding and ignorance are barriers to effective interaction when working with youth in the sex trade. Social workers whose clients are youth need to be better informed and aware of information regarding the procurement of children and youth. This study touches on a question often asked by social workers, 'what keeps youth out there?'. Having the voices of youth identify the attractions and aversions of their personal involvement provides social workers with much needed knowledge about this vulnerable population. For these reasons, the attitudes and perceptions of sexually procured youth are central in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A variety of theoretical frameworks have been proposed in an attempt to explain the social problem of the sex trade. Generally, six broad based theories have been identified in Canadian literature including sociobiological, functionalist, regressive sexuality, biological positivism, social disorganization, and feminist theories (Lowman, 1988). Though each of these theories is applicable to some dimension of this problem, feminist and social learning theory provide the most comprehensive analysis.

One of the pervasive arguments surrounding youth procured for sexual purposes is that they 'choose' to work the streets. This perception ignores the contextualization of the problem in which precipitating factors such as sexual abuse occur. Abuse and neglect is inflicted on, not chosen by vulnerable and dependent children and youth. Youth who are exposed to abuse and run away from home as a adaptational strategy, generally possess a realistic cognitive appraisal of their life circumstances (Denoff, 1987). This appraisal is indicative of the fact that without external forms of intervention, their negative circumstances would persist. The results suggest this problem be explored within the parameters of 'push' factors resulting in youth leaving home early, 'pull' factors that serve as lures to the streets, and social/gender dynamics that have created an overwhelming demand for sexual services from children and youth (Loman, 1993).

Feminist Theory

There are four main tenants within the broader definition of feminist theory. These include: seeking to understand the relation of gender in all social and institutional domains; gender relations are problematic and interrelated with other types of inequalities; gender relations are sociocultural and historical and are subject to deconstruction; and feminist theorists are political in their advocacy for social changes (Mandell, 1995). Three distinct feminist views have been proposed to offer an explanation of the social issue of youth in the sex trade. These three frameworks include liberal, socialist, and radical feminist views. For the purpose of this paper, radical feminism is viewed as providing the most comprehensive explanation of the social problem of youth in the sex trade.

Radical Feminism. Radical feminism believes that the oppression of women is the most prevalent form of human oppression. They point to specific differences between men and women in areas of social, emotional, economic, and political domains. Radical feminists advocate the elimination of male control which includes the concepts of sexual status, role, and temperament, all thought to be devised under patriarchy (Tong, 1989). Radical feminism sees oppression as stemming from women's work in the family and economy. As well, men's dominance over women, their sexuality, and their bodies are identified as a principal means to control women. As a main goal, radical feminists seek to eradicate violence against women.

Feminist Theory and the Youth in the Sex Trade. Radical feminists propose that the sex trade is a product of a patriarchal society designed to place invisible chains on

women in order to control their sexuality. All women, children, and youth are potentially harmed by prostitution, existing as a form of violence against women and young people (McGinnis, 1994). Male power, dominance, competition, and hierarchical structures characterize patriarchy.

Marginalization. The sex trade is a classist, ageist, racist, and sexist industry where disadvantaged youth are procured by men who are more privileged (Overall, 1992). These power differentials play themselves out in a variety of ways that serve to marginalize youth on the street who are already doubly disadvantaged by poverty, sexism, racism, and heterosexism.

The sex trade is classist in that poor and disadvantaged youth sell their services to meet basic daily survival needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. The sex trade is ageist in that it recruits and preys upon young children who are vulnerable and dependent members of society. There is a 'demand' for sexual services from younger and younger children. An inherent power differential exists between youth working the streets and the adult men who choose to procure these children for sexual purposes. In theory, Canadian law exists to protect these youth but in reality, such protection has been non-existent. In fact, Vancouver youth were charged by law enforcement almost 60 times more often (for selling sex) than the adult johns were for buying it (Daum, 1997a). Law enforcement has neglected to provide any protection to these exploited, abused, and victimized youth. Instead the directive has been one of criminalizing sexually procured youth. The powerful message being given in society is that children and youth on the streets are

deviant, while the adult men who pay to have sex with them are not held accountable for their exploitive actions.

There is an over-representation of minority youth in the sex trade that perpetuates further marginalization. Many youth on the streets come from a visible minority racial background (City of Victoria, 1997). Male youth in the sex trade may be ostracized from their family based on their sexual orientation alone. Of male youth on the street, estimates indicate that close to two thirds self-identify as being gay (Savin-Williams, 1994). It is suggested that the effects of homophobia is one of the main reasons for gay youth being over represented on the streets (Kruks, 1991). Transgendered individuals may experience continual conflict between who they want to be and who society expects them to be (Namaste et. al, 1996).

Gender roles dictate that men be assertive, dominant, and powerful. Societal norms exert pressure on youth that do not adhere to these prescribed roles causing feelings of fear, confusion, and anxiety. Though sex roles remain contradictory, it appears that men who violate such roles are subject to greater social disapproval (Taubman, 1986). Within a patriarchal society, individuals who do not conform to the status quo are relegated to an inferior status. Feminism provides an important window through which to explore the problem of male youth in the sex trade by recognizing heterosexism as an extension of sexism.

Examining the notion of sexism and youth in the sex trade is interesting since youth are not exclusively female. In spite of this fact, prostitution has been deemed an asymmetrical gendered service industry (Shaver, 1994). For the most part, young women

sell services and men consume them. Overwhelmingly the majority of johns who procure youth for sexual services are men who are more socially privileged by class, race, and age.

Male youth in the sex trade are estimated to make up approximately 10-25% of those procured for sexual services on the street (Shaver, 1994). In contrast to what socialist feminism would presume, young women on the street earn more money than do young men. In fact, this is one of the very few areas where women are apt to make more money than men are. Though the women make more money, they are also subject to greater numbers of physical assaults by men. When gay youth in the sex trade are assaulted, it can often be directly related to their sexual orientation (Shrage, 1994). Male, female, and transgendered youth procured for sexual services are exposed to further abuse and victimization related to sexism.

Objectification and Control. Prostitution serves as a blatant example of men's desire to shape women as sexual objects for their personal control (Plumridge et al., 1997). As a cultural principle within patriarchy, men are encouraged to dominate in relations with others. Sex role stereotypes perpetuate men as dominant and women as submissive. Youth in the sex trade are constructed as 'things' or instruments for men to meet their sexual needs. The youth are depersonalized, degraded, and objectified for the benefit of adult men. This objectification is extended to both male and female sexually procured youth.

The sex trade is dependent on cultural construction of gender roles with respect to dominance and submission. Women are taught to sell themselves in the sex trade while

men are encouraged to expect such services in direct relation to being male (Overall, 1992). The sex act has come to represent an oppressive and exploitative act. Youth in the sex trade are appropriated by men for personal pleasure (Malette & Chalouh, 1991). Radical feminists argue a woman's personal identity is directly related to her sexuality. Those who exchange sex for a fee are therefore selling themselves in a very real sense of the word. Prostitution is identified as a key institution in the oppression of women where it is bodies, not services being sold (Shaver, 1994).

Objectification and control of women occurs within every race and social class. Prostitution is a glaring example within this framework, as men seek to assure sexual access to women. The paradigm of women being responsible for their own victimization leads to acceptance of other forms of enslavement where the woman supposedly has "chosen" her fate (Rich, 1980). Pimps who control 'their girls' are physically and sexually abusive. They coerce and manipulate children and youth for personal and economic gain. Traditionally male youth in the sex trade are not regulated by pimps suggesting a strong argument that pimps represent men's desire to actively dominate and control women.

Capitalism and Patriarchy. Patriarchy is the male domination and control of public and private worlds. The state is a means to ensure this domination. As a result it is argued that "as long as the state is male, meaning that it's meaning systems in society, it's mode of operation, and underlying assumptions are based in masculine power, women are unable to overcome their subordination through state actions" (Mandell, 1995).

Prostitution has continually been referred to as 'the oldest profession'. Feminists would suggest that it is the pimping and control of women that is the oldest profession. From a capitalist framework, women have become involved in order to sell labor power as a means of survival. Runaway and homeless youth are estimated to make up 75% of youth involved in the sex trade (Yates et al., 1991). Youth who have runaway or been thrown out have no other means to support themselves. In many cases they are without experience or job skills and their involvement begins as a way to get by.

Prostitution is a commercial enterprise designed for economic gain (Overall, 1992). In this light, prostitution can be viewed not as a choice, but as an institution that uses sexual exchange as a road toward individual freedom. Socialist feminists believe prostitution can be explained as a class phenomenon. In impoverished communities, there are high rates of intergenerational involvement in the sex trade. Socialist feminism believes that to fight capitalism is to fight prostitution (Tong, 1989).

Ideologies normalize violence against those in the sex trade and serve to minimize and legitimize the violence directed at youth procured for sexual purposes (Miller, 1995). Society accepts the 'blame-the-victim' mentality that holds youth responsible for whatever happens to them while on the street. With regard to regulation, police have continued to hide behind patriarchal lines by criminalizing youth in the sex trade instead of the men procuring them. Laws against the exploiters are the one's least often enforced by those in power (Shaver, 1994). Negative social stigma surrounds youth in the sex trade while little attention is paid to the perpetrator - men who exploit and victimize

youth. The lack of response from those in power, particularly politicians and law enforcement, has served to further marginalize sexually procured youth.

Strengths and Gaps in Application. Feminist theory provides an important framework for understanding this social problem. Many youth in the sex trade are minority women from impoverished families and have been sexually abused as children. Feminist analysis explored the systemic oppression that underlies each of these complex social circumstances. Inequality within society has resulted in power imbalances that serve to perpetuate the problem.

Feminism provides an important examination of the marginalization of male youth in the sex trade based on sexual orientation. Rigid gender roles and stereotypes oppress gay youth, leading to confusion around sexuality. However, this account still fails to provide understanding of heterosexual male youth involved in prostitution. At the very least, feminism's response to this is that patriarchy is damaging to all members of society.

Feminist theory is confident that radical restructuring of society would remedy many social ills, including the problem of sexually exploited and procured youth. Feminist theory is focused and committed to the concept of social change. An important starting point is addressing sexually procured youth as a community issue. Raising awareness is critical when advocating changes at both micro and macro levels of social work practice.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is concerned with how people cognitively interpret their social experiences. The way in which these cognitive operations influence further behaviour and development is an important aspect of social learning theory (Grusec, 1992). The theory proposes that learned behaviour is transmitted through observational learning and reinforcement in social situations and contexts.

Observational Learning. Observational learning, also called vicarious learning, is a type of learning in which children and adults acquire new skills and information by watching others. This type of learning also affects old patterns of behaviour. Albert Bandura claimed that most learning is from observing, listening to instructions, and remembering as opposed to trial and error methods (Miller, 1983).

Observational learning is an important concept when attempting to explain how complex behaviours are acquired during a child's development. This type of learning indicates that new behaviours can be, and are acquired simply by watching a model. The punishment or reinforcement of a model's behaviour has the same effect on the observer as it does for the model herself. Social learning theory emphasizes reciprocal relationships among and between individuals where new responses are learned through observing others.

In observational learning a number of components are important if they are to guide an individual's behaviour. This includes the observer paying attention to the modeled events, retaining the observed event within a verbal or imaginal system, converting the symbolic representation of the event(s) into actions similar to the model's,

and presence of motivation or incentive to perform modeled actions such as self-reinforcement, vicarious reinforcement, or external reinforcement (Grusec, 1992). It is important to note that learning can occur even if the child has never overtly performed or been rewarded for the behaviour.

Reciprocal Determinism. Cognitive components are important in determining the environment that an individual seeks out. Social learning theory is not unidirectional and recognizes the significant relationship between an individual, the environment, and behaviour. Reciprocal determinism helps explain why youths in the sex trade may continually search for relationships that yield negative outcomes. Youth who come from dysfunctional home environments have learned to structure their behaviour and environment accordingly. Each interacts with the other in a reciprocal manner. Children and youths who have low self-esteem due to parental rejection or neglect for example, lack prosocial models and reinforcement to engage in conventional behaviour. Participation in conventional roles such as attending school may have led to continual failure in the past. This failure affects their self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy. Other non-conventional activities may be sought in order to elicit feelings of competency or control. These activities may well be deviant, destructive, or self-harming. Self-regulated incentives alter an individual's behaviour through their motivational function (Bandura, 1978). Expectations, self-perceptions, and goals can all direct behaviour. Events such as modeling and instruction affect the person as well as the environmental responses they may receive. Developmental psychopathology theories emphasize that

individual vulnerabilities, pre-existing conditions, and environmental factors interact and contribute to the potential for negative outcomes (Leadbeater, 1995).

Intergenerational Facilitators. Intergenerational facilitators are factors that expose a child directly to a behaviour or event by a close family member. A child who witnesses domestic violence learns early that violence and dominance is an acceptable form of behaviour. A child who has observed violent behaviour between two people who 'love' one another may learn to accept violent acts as normal within relationships. To the child, these coercive and damaging acts occur within a relationship that should function with care and concern.

Within the family, children witness coercive domination very early and learn to accept it. This domination can occur between the parents, between parent and child, or between male and female (hooks, 1989). Sexually procured youth are exposed to various forms of violence and abuse. Formative social learning experiences such as witnessing family violence helps to explain why violence can be legitimized and/or normalized by both male and female youth in the sex trade.

Living in an area where prostitution is common place, or having a family member involved in the sex trade is an example of how modeling can exert a powerful force. If social conditions are conducive to prostitution, youth are more vulnerable to involvement (Jesson, 1993). Frequent exposure to the sex trade has the potential to normalize the behaviour, especially if a close family member or friend is the model. Intergenerational facilitators can effect both male and female youth. Local social and situational factors exert influence within the community. In Vancouver, 40% of the street sex trade in the

Downtown Eastside has been attributed to such generational facilitators (Daum, 1997a).

Intimate association with those involved in prostitution provides the opportunity to learn directly about the sex trade.

Modeling. An important aspect of social learning is the concept of modeling. A model has the ability to introduce new behaviours into the repertoire of a child. This suggests that children will learn behaviour from a parental example. A child simply observing a model does not necessarily ensure that behaviour will be exhibited in the future. Failure to imitate a model's behaviour is due to one or more of the following: lack of attention to the event; inadequate encoding of the event; inability to perform the event; or low motivation (Miller, 1983).

Children symbolically construct behaviour they observe. Reinforcement of the behaviour does not necessarily facilitate learning, but is helpful in self-regulating the child's behaviour. Observing reinforcement, punishment, or combinations of the two help in formulating the child's self-regulatory system that establishes abstract rules, sets goals, and decides when to utilize a particular behaviour or not (Bandura, 1963).

Many youth involved in prostitution indicate their home lives were characterized by abuse, violence, and dysfunction and that they did not get along with their parent(s). Parental rejection is characterized by an absence of warmth, affection, and love by parents toward their children. Children who are denied a nurturing and loving relationship with caregivers lack a model who can demonstrate the importance of sharing, giving, and caring within that relationship. The parent-child relationship serves as the primary model for future close relations with others (Simons & Robertson, 1989).

The parent's rejection or lack of affection toward a child can affect levels of self-esteem and self-worth. It is presumed that children will be loved and nurtured by their families. Children who sense that they are not even worthy of their parent's love are given a damaging and powerful message that they are not lovable. Children with these experiences are prone to seek inappropriate forms of affection, which includes being procured for sexual purposes in order to feel loved and desired.

Parents who are rejecting toward their children often use inappropriate discipline, and fail to provide appropriate models of acceptable behaviour (Simons & Robertson, 1989). It is presumptuous to assert that all youth in the sex trade were rejected by their parents. However, a lack of nurturance, inconsistent parenting, and neglect can also lead to negative self-perceptions. Negative views of the self may place a child at risk of insecure attachment with a parent. This troubled attachment can also interfere with future positive reciprocal exchange with the caregiver. Children in foster care who are frequently moved from placement to placement are at risk of attachment difficulties. Many sexually procured youth identify as having grown up in government care. Not only are they away from their family of origin, they also lack stability to form healthy and nurturing bonds with caregivers.

Parents who are physically, emotionally, or sexually abusive toward children reinforce non-compliant and deviant behaviour by failing to provide appropriate models of prosocial behaviour. The literature suggests that between 60% to 85% of youth procured in the sex trade have been sexually abused as children (Silbert & Pines, 1982; Silbert & Pines, 1983; Wurzbacher, 1991; Yates et al., 1991; Daum, 1997b). Being

sexually abused blurs the boundaries between adults and children. The adult model holds an incredible position of power from the child's perspective. Social learning theory indicates that models holding high status, competence, and power are more likely to be imitated especially if they are rewarded or not punished (Miller, 1983). One of the implicit rules our culture teaches at an early age is that children are subordinate to adults.

Both male and female youth in the sex trade indicate high rates of sexual abuse as children. The experience of child sexual abuse can affect personality development and place abused youth at risk for future psychological problems. Childhood sexual abuse can be an initial link in a long chain of negative life experiences (McMillen & Rideout, 1996). Repeated exposure to abuse and an inability to avoid these adverse conditions can lead to feelings of learned helplessness and powerlessness. Youth in the sex trade who have been victimized, assaulted, and abused in the past may perceive their current situation as hopeless and inescapable based on what they have learned.

Children who are sexually abused are given a multitude of mixed messages and sustain a variety of social, emotional, and cognitive difficulties in the process. They experience traumatic sexualization where their sexuality is influenced through an inappropriate and dysfunctional means (Schram and Giovengo, 1991). This occurs when children are rewarded for inappropriate sexual behaviours. Not only is the child being taught sexual behaviours, she is also learning about personal value and inherent worth. Sexually abused children are given the message that sex and sexual acts are a primary asset.

As the child is exposed to other situations, these new experiences continue to shape how she understands her past and present experiences. The essence of reinforcement in these circumstances provides the child with information about the effect that she has in her environment. Sexually abused children may learn to sell the one and only aspect of themselves they have been taught is of value (Overall, 1992). The child's self-efficacy and/or self-regulation process is directly and indirectly affected by these mixed messages. These effects are coded by children and used to regulate future conduct. Youth in the sex trade may justify their involvement by asserting they are in control of the 'exchange' and are profiting from it. The ability to profit or gain something from this behaviour and not have to "give it away for free" at home may serve as a powerful motivator once entrenched in the streets.

Sex Role Stereotyping. Feminist theory explored the powerful influence that sex role stereotypes hold in shaping behaviour. Social learning theory provides a framework for how these stereotypes are learned and perpetuated. As children begin to acquire behaviours by watching various models, they also are being inundated with messages about sex roles and sex role stereotypes. Generalizations or stereotypes ensue after children integrate specific behaviours performed by the same gender under a symbolic representation. This is not merely imitation but a complex manipulation of cognitive representations (Miller, 1983).

Women who exhibit sexuality and beauty are popular and desired. In North American culture being 'pretty' is held in the highest esteem (Mandrell, 1995). By being regarded as beautiful, a young woman is approved of and rewarded. The more she can fit

into the stereotype of what beauty is, the more she will be reinforced and liked.

Appearance quickly becomes equated with personal value. The concept of being beautiful and desired infiltrates mainstream heterosexual society through different media sources including television, movies, and magazines on a regular basis.

The media perpetuates stereotypical sex roles ensuring that Caucasian, heterosexual, young, able-bodied, and beautiful women are represented as the 'norm'. The media is a symbolic model that asserts power. Children are given the message from a variety of sources that sexuality is a valued commodity. Some feminists like Ellen Strong have argued that "from the time a girl is old enough to go to school, she begins her education in the basic principles of hustling" (Overall, 1992, p. 723). Popular media romanticizes the street life, portraying it as exciting and glamorous. Social learning theory's concept of symbolic modeling represents an important source of response acquisition. Symbolic modeling also contributes to an individual's generalized, adopted role that integrates these salient examples into behaviours (Dutton, 1995).

Sex role development for males in patriarchal culture can lead to feelings of powerlessness. The psychosocial perspective suggests that sex role acquisition for males can be:

"a process that creates a lingering sense of shame, powerlessness, self-alienation, isolation from others, and retaliatory rage, which inhibits the adult male's capacity for intimacy and mutuality" (Taubman, 1986, p.13).

These factors likely contribute to the excessive amount of violence and exploitation women experience at the hands of men.

For youth identifying as gay or lesbian, the effects of homophobia result in extensive anguish and pain. Seeing or hearing others victimized as a result of their sexual orientation is a source of devastation to gay and lesbian youth. Negative stereotyping and homophobic jokes compound the damage caused to adolescent self-esteem. It is precisely homophobia, prejudice, and discrimination that are cited as primary reasons for a substantial number of youth leaving home prematurely (Kruks, 1991).

Reinforcement on the Street. Without an education, job skills, or resources, youth that runaway from home are at high risk for ending up on the streets. Running away from home can become yet another deleterious link in the chain of adverse life events (McMillen & Rideout, 1996). Once there, youth are likely to be without money, food, or shelter. Interacting with other street youth introduces new opportunities and dangers such as drug use, but affords the positive experience of "fitting in" to a group. Gay males who were thrust out of their home environment due to their sexual orientation may find this peer group highly rewarding (Savin-Williams, 1994). Finding comfort in a peer group can serve as a strong reinforcer to both male and female youth, especially to someone who has been ostracized from the one source that is meant to provide unconditional love and acceptance. A study conducted with 120 homosexual youth self-declaring as gay and lesbian in the United States discovered that only 20% of gay males, and 16% of lesbian females reported having some form of support in their lives. This support was most often cited to be from a support group and/or friends (Telljohann & Price, 1993).

Once on the street, young women are coerced and sometimes forced by pimps to participate in the sex trade. In this light, pimps are instructional instigators who use authority to turn girls and women to the streets. Involvement in the sex trade is a normative part of the street subculture and therefore is reinforced and rewarded. Once entrenched, leaving the sex trade is extremely difficult.

Opportunity Costs. Working in the sex trade for youth is a means to some other end and almost always begins as a way of getting by (Shrage, 1994). Youth who are in the sex trade are surrounded by social stigma being referred to as whores, sluts, and dregs of the earth (Shameem, 1993). To be a 'prostitute' in North American society is to belong to one of the lowest rungs on the social ladder. Once involved in the sex trade, the availability of alternate options for survival are minimal to nonexistent. Learning theory refers to these as opportunity costs. Youth who are involved in the sex trade are likely to have diminished opportunities within other broad labor domains based on the mere nature of their trade. Working in prostitution is likely to expose youth to other forms of negative activities or outcomes such as violence, arrest, incarceration, and drug use. These factors combined with the stigma of being prostituted make it extremely difficult to return to more legitimate lifestyles (Weiner, 1996).

Strengths and Gaps in Application. One of the criticisms of social learning theory is that the connection between cognitive processes and observational learning are blurred. There is no definitive way to deconstruct how various individuals process and develop the abstract rules, which influence future behaviour. The same risk factors that describe youth in the sex trade - dysfunctional family background, sexual abuse, running

away, and stereotypical sex role socialization – can explain why some youths utilize drugs. Social learning theory is unable to directly account for the way information is processed such that some youth end up being sexually procured while others do not. Social learning theory struggles to explain intergenerational discontinuities as well.

Social learning theory is however, able to provide important links to understanding how children's behaviour is affected by vicarious learning. Social learning theory provides insight about why children's behaviour can vary from one situation to another. One of the strengths of social learning theory is the importance it places on social contexts. The theory explores not just the individual's behaviour but the reciprocal nature of relationships within the environment.

Social learning theory is potentially the most testable theory in psychology. Rigorous testability has resulted in parsimony which is highly valued (Miller, 1983). A parsimonious theory is one which offers convincing theoretical ideas of minimal complexity. A powerful parsimonious theory is one that can explain a lot about the social world with fewer concepts (Neuman, 1994). Other strengths include social learning theory's flexibility and applicability within diverse cultural contexts. The theory originates with the individual, develops theoretical constructs from their environment, and is grounded within that social context.

CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY

This chapter will present the methodological procedures utilized in this study. Included within this chapter are sections on the sample population, participants, setting, measures, procedures, and data analysis. This research project was an exploratory study designed to examine youth perceptions of the attractions and aversions of the sex trade. The personal appraisals and views of youth were paramount in this study to identify perceived benefits and risks of the sex trade, perceptions of involvement, and reasoning for wanting to leave the sex trade.

Sample Population

Working in the sex trade was defined as having provided sexual services in exchange for money, food, shelter, drugs, or other tangible items. The sample population was originally identified as male, female, and transgendered youth aged 16-24 who self identified as having worked in the sex trade within the past year. Youth determined by the researcher to be unable to engage in a thirty- minute interview due to drug/alcohol intoxication were excluded from the study sample.

Prior to conducting interviews with youth, written research approval was obtained from both the Youth Action Centre (Y.A.C) and the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (see Appendixes A and B respectively). Data for the study was gathered during a single, semi-structured, face to face interview with youth. Interviews were tape-recorded and 13 of 15 interviews took place in an office at the Youth Action Centre. The two other interviews took place outside on the street and in a park at the specific request of the youth. Interview length varied from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. All participants received a cash honorarium of \$10.00 at the end of the completed interview.

Participants

Research participants consisted of 15 youth that self-identified as having worked in the sex trade within the past year. The sample (N=15) consisted of 1 male, 2 transgender, and 12 female youth. Participants in the study ranged from 16-24 years of age.

To obtain the sample, the non-probability strategy of convenience sampling was enlisted. The purpose of utilizing this strategy was based upon the availability of the sample. Youth in the sex trade are highly transient making them a difficult population to engage in the research process. There was also the consideration that the nature and scope of this research study was highly personal and emotion laden. For these reasons, having a stranger approach youth would be viewed as insensitive, problematic, and likely unsuccessful.

One way to minimize these limitations was electing to do a practicum placement at the Youth Action Centre. From January, 1998 to mid May, 1998 I was at the centre at least 20 hours per week. Initially, my capacity was not as a researcher but as a practicum student who participated in all aspects of the centre's functioning including recreational activities, coalition meetings, and meal preparation to name a few. Establishing relationships with youth was seen as the first step in my practice approach at Y.A.C.. In order to develop these relationships, I utilized communication and purposive interaction. The inability to develop relationships with youth would result in negative implications for both the practicum placement and the research study. No one at the centre, including staff, would want someone participating if youth did not, or could not trust them. An overriding philosophy at Y.A.C. is that the centre is a safe place for youth. Trust of staff and students plays a big role in this process. Building relationships was one way to establish trust while maintaining a safe environment for youth.

As the researcher I was still coming in as an outsider, but had the good fortune to become a team member with agency staff. This arrangement was undoubtedly an asset in approaching prospective research participants for the study. Of the 15 youth in the sample, almost all had observed me participating in various programs and services even though they personally may not have been involved. I worked twenty-two shifts at the centre before approaching any youth about participating in the study. This worked out to be almost 165 hours, close to one third of the entire practicum. These hours were considered a critical component in obtaining preliminary knowledge about youth frequenting the centre, the environment, and even the hierarchy of the street culture in the Downtown Eastside. In many ways this became participatory observation, learning significant pieces about a community by being around some group members (Grinnell, 1993). Convenience sampling within the Youth Action Centre enabled the researcher to approach youth within their natural environment, but without the safety concerns of doing so directly on the street.

Setting

All participants were recruited for the study from the Youth Action Centre, a drop in located at 342 East Hastings Street in Vancouver, British Columbia. The Youth Action Centre service youth between 13-24 years of age within the Downtown Eastside that are said to derive the majority of their economic, social, emotional, and psychological needs from interactions on the street. This may include youth that are street involved and/or entrenched, drug dependent, and/or labeled as 'service-resistant' by other agencies. The Youth Action Centre is operated under the auspices of the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (D.E.Y.A.S.). The Youth Action Centre originated in 1995 stemming out of the Vancouver Action Plan, a project focusing on high-risk youth. Funding for the centre is received from the Ministry for Children and

Families, Ministry for Human Resources – Community Skills, Vancouver Richmond Health Board, the Vancouver Foundation and private donations.

The Youth Action Centre is considered a transitional program that is designed to provide: immediate needs for street involved youth; transitional services for youth attempting to exit the street lifestyle; and a safe, youth centred atmosphere where other service providers are accessible. Crisis intervention is often required to address basic issues of daily survival.

Hours of operation at Y.A.C. were Sunday through Thursday, 9:00a.m. - 4:00p.m.. The centre provides a number of basic services including laundry facilities, showers, and three meals a day. Anywhere from 40-120 youths accesses these services daily. It is estimated that males over 19 constituted 57% of those utilizing the service with 33% being women over 19, 10% youth under age 19, and 0.1% being transgender youth (Aram, 1996). However, these statistics are derived from those youth that actually sign in upon arrival at the centre. Many youth have the need for anonymity, and do not sign in for this very reason. This factor may also greatly affect the actual number of youth under 19 who frequent the centre.

An extremely important service at Y.A.C. is the three meals per day that are provided for youth. Food for the centre is obtained entirely on donation from sources such as the Vancouver food bank, Food Runners, and the Quest Society. From the 1996 statistics, it is estimated that almost 30,100 meals were provided to youth at the centre.

One of the critical aspects of the drop in centre is that it is considered a safe environment for youth in the Downtown Eastside regardless of intoxication or substance usage. This means that Y.A.C. is open to any youth that is actively utilizing drugs or is intoxicated as long as they are not a danger to themselves or others while at the centre. The Youth Action Centre is staffed by paid employees including line workers, a

recreational worker, a life-skills worker, and a transition worker. A minimum of two staff is available within the centre at any given time.

Measures

A semi-structured format was utilized to interview participants in this research study. Each interview began with close-ended questions regarding demographics and descriptive characteristics. Open-ended questions were utilized to inquire about the perceived early and current benefits and risks of their involvement. Sample questions included; "Think back to when you had just started working on the street. What did you 'get' or 'gain' from working? What were the risks when you first started? What about now? What are the differences from when you first started to now?". It is important to note that the wording of these questions varied for each individual and the structured format pertained only to the general categories of benefit, risk, involvement in the trade, reasons for wanting to leave, and recreational information.

Other open ended questions included "why do you think most youth are involved in working on the street, what keeps you involved on the street, why do you think most youth want to leave the sex trade, what makes you want to leave working the streets the most?". Youth were only asked about wanting to leave the street life if they indicated a personal desire to exit. This avoided the trap of assuming anything about the youth's attitudes and perceptions of their own life.

Minimal probing was used to elicit information from youth. For example, several youth mentioned 'money' as one of the benefits of working in the sex trade. When given this response, the researcher asked youth "what was the money used for?" in order to determine if money was for basic survival or other needs.

Procedures

Interview dates were predetermined and randomly selected on February 17 and 24, March 2, 10 and 31, April 26, and May 10, 1998 by the researcher. Utilizing the

strategy of convenience sampling, the researcher approached individuals within the Youth Action Centre on these predetermined interview dates. Youth were provided with information about the exploratory study, its purpose, estimated length of time required, the interview format, amount of the honorarium provided, and the researcher. Once it was established that youth were part of the sample population and had an interest in participating, youth were provided the opportunity to ask specific questions regarding the process prior to signing the consent form (see Appendix C). Youth were not asked for identification during the interview process and were referred to by the name they had given on the consent form.

After signing the consent form, the tape recorder was turned on and the interview commenced. Thirteen of the 15 interviews took place in a staff office in the Youth Action Centre. The office had windows that faced the main area of the centre but were not equipped with blinds or curtains. Youth were asked if they wanted the windows covered with paper. Of the interviews that took place in the centre, no one requested the windows be covered. In fact, youth advised that they were either not comfortable with this option as it would direct attention (since it was out of the norm), or that they had no problem with the uncovered windows. The tape recorder was hidden in a binder so passers by would not be able to see it.

Two of the 15 interviews were held outside of the centre, each for different reasons. For one of the youth, there was a great degree of concern around issues of confidentiality. This particular individual had requested the interview take place in a local park to insure anonymity. The second youth began the interview at the centre but determined this was not a comfortable environment and requested the interview continue outside. Both of these requests were acknowledged and took place in the location deemed most comfortable for the respective youths.

The semi-structured interview began by asking about demographics including gender, current age, and living arrangements. Descriptive characteristics were gathered on current involvement in the sex trade, age of entry into the sex trade, length of time involved in the sex trade, the average number of days per week spent working in the sex trade and the youth's thoughts on leaving the sex trade. Youth were also asked about the benefits and risks, perceptions of involvement, reasoning for wanting to leave, and recreational interests. In one case, a participant provided personal demographic information and descriptive characteristics, as well as perceptions of benefits and risks of involvement in the sex trade. However, after that point in the interview, the youth decided that an alternate interview format would be preferable. As a result, this individual chose to tell a 'life-story' of involvement in the sex trade as opposed to following the semi-structured format.

Upon completion of the interviews, youth were given a \$10.00 cash honorarium and a copy of the Vancouver Youth Services Directory: Survival Manual. In a number of these interviews, various referrals and options were explored with youth directly including personal counselling, detoxification services, legal services, and support groups.

Data Analysis

Data regarding demographic and descriptive characteristics of the sample were entered into a Microsoft SPSS computer database. This program generated statistics on the frequency distribution, central tendency measures and dispersion.

The research design in this project was an exploratory study that utilized statistical and content analysis to interpret qualitative interviews. All of the tape-recorded interviews were reviewed and transcribed by the researcher. Content analysis was utilized and resulted in the formulation of ten separate response categories for perceptions of benefits and risks (see Tables 1 and 2). Reasoning for involvement in the sex trade

yielded nine distinct categories, and reasoning for leaving the sex trade saw eight different categories generated (see Tables 3 and 4). These categories were established through conceptualizing and interpreting the content of each interview. Due to concerns for confidentiality, this study did not establish an inter-rater reliability quotient by having an alternate person code youth responses into categories. The decision to have an additional researcher coding categories was not initiated at the beginning of the project and as such, participants were not informed of this possibility. Failure to properly inform youth that another person was privy to their recorded interview would serve as a breach of confidentiality. For future research with similar methodology, having two researchers code categories would be preferable. Identifying this aspect of the design is required early in the project, with consent of all participants.

Each transcript was reviewed separately, listing all of the responses mentioned on separate lists. Once these exhaustive lists were compiled, each was examined closely to identify common categories or themes. For example, one youth mentioned the 'Kiddie Car (car 278 with the police) as a risk, another mentioned jail time, and a third said arrest by police. These three separate 'risk' responses were combined together and placed under the category of 'Police'. This process was utilized for all four main areas of research, namely benefits, risks, reasons for involvement, and reasons for wanting to exit.

This study is based on rational judgement about the validity of categories identified by youth in the study. Face validity is the extent to which a measure holds self-evident meaning and measures only what it appears to measure (Grinnell, 1993). Within this research project, the measurement was perceived as valid. The use of content analysis was relevant to what was being studied and appeared to measure what it had originally set out to.

Ethical Considerations

This study met the ethical requirements established to ensure the rights of participants as outlined by the British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (see Appendix B). Voluntary, informed consent was received from all 15 participants in the study. Information obtained during interviews with participants remains confidential, and no names or identifying information will appear in this report.

This study involved highly personal information that could possibly lead to emotional difficulty for participants. Avenues to minimize discomfort for participants were considered a priority. As noted in the 'Procedures' section of the methodology, a Vancouver Street Survival Manual was offered to each participant. This manual contains listings of a multitude of services within the Vancouver area. The traumatic nature of participant's lives was acknowledged and considered when designing this project. Care and time was taken prior to each interview with youth to emphasize their right to decline answering any questions posed and the right to refuse to participate at any point in the process.

CHAPTER FIVE RESULTS

This section is divided into several subsections including the demographic and descriptive characteristics of the sample, the perceptions of benefit and risk, the reasons the respondent believes they and most youth are involved in the sex trade, the reasons the respondent believes they and most youth want to exit the sex trade, and recreation involvement and interest on the part of participants in the study.

Demographic Characteristics

The sample consisted of 15 youth that self-identified as having worked in the sex trade within the past year. Of the sample, 1 of the respondents was male, 2 were transgender, and 12 were female.

Youth participating ranged from 16 to 24 years of age with 7 of the 15 respondents currently age 24. Of the youth in the sample, only 4 (27%) indicated that they had grown up in the Greater Vancouver area. The remaining youth grew up in a variety of locations including those within the lower mainland, cities within British Columbia, other provinces, as well as the United States. The majority of the respondents indicated that they currently live in the Downtown Eastside (93%), with only 1 (7%) respondent living outside of the Downtown Eastside community.

The length of time lived in the Downtown Eastside had an enormous range of 18 years. Youth responses revealed that the length of time lived in the Downtown Eastside spanned from 2 months to 18 years with an average of 4 years spent there. These results indicate that 11 (73%) out of the total of 14 respondents have lived in the Downtown Eastside area for 5 years or less.

One of the intentions within this study was to inquire about the living accommodations of youth. However, definitions of homelessness vary and it was decided to keep this task simple by asking youth did they have a place to sleep (not including outdoors, in a park, or on the street) when the centre closed at the end of the day. Of a total of 14 responses, 10 (71%) stated they did have a place to sleep at the end of the interview day, while 4 (28%) stated they had no accommodations.

Descriptive Characteristics

The descriptive characteristics provide further information about the sample, specifically regarding youth involvement in the sex trade. Only 1 (7%) individual in the sample had successfully exited the sex trade, indicating that the remaining 14 (93%) were actively working on the streets. Of those currently involved, 7 (47%) stated that they worked on the streets every single day of the week. Of the total sample, 10 (67%) indicated working a minimum of five days a week on the street.

Youth were asked about their age of entry in the sex trade. Youth responses revealed that 9 (60%) of these youth became involved when they were under the age of 19. Of these 9 youth, 1 was 18 upon entry, 2 youth identified as being in each of the age groups of 13, 15, and 16 years of age, 1 youth was 14, and 1 individual identified becoming involved at age 11.

The length of time these youth have been involved in the sex trade varied greatly from 2 months to 11 years. Findings indicate that 4 (27%) youth have been involved less than two years, while 6 (40%) of the sample have worked the streets for 8 years or more. The remaining 5 (33%) youth in the sample indicated working between 2 to 5 years in the sex trade.

Benefits and Risks

Utilization of content analysis resulted in the creation of ten distinct categories identified by the participants as notable benefits and risks of involvement in the sex trade. Tables 1 and 2 present these categories with the corresponding response frequencies and percentages. The categories were not considered exclusive and participants were able to give multiple responses. For this reason, the frequencies do not total the number of participants. Some youth did provide multiple responses while others indicated there weren't any risks. For example, when asked about the early risks one youth said:

“I didn't see any risks back then. Like, I mean I came from Abbotsford, that's like a bible-thumping town. There's no working girls openly out on the street. I was one of the first one's there”.

Another youth said:

“there were none, I didn't know any better then”....”There were no risks (when I first started). I would go down to the corner, I would be picked up in 5 minutes, dropped off with a bill. That was it. Good money, fast cash, no risk”.

Benefits. Ten distinct categories of benefit were identified by youth in the study. All of these categories were included on the chart for exhaustive purposes, though some received few to no responses. Of the early benefits listed by youth, the most common response was ‘Money for Clothes’ with 9 (64%) naming it an initial benefit. Both ‘Money for Drugs’ and ‘Money for Food’ had 8 (57%) responses as an early benefit. ‘Money for Shelter’ was named by 5 (36%) youth as an early benefit with 3 (21%) mentioning ‘Independence’, and 2 (14%) suggesting ‘Meeting Friends’ was an initial benefit. The other four categories “Sense of Power/Control’, ‘Meet Famous People’, ‘Glamour/Excitement’, and ‘Minimal Effort Required’ each had 1 (7%) response naming them as early benefits.

In contrast to the early benefits, 'Money for Drugs' was the overwhelming current benefit with all 14 (100%) participants mentioning it. Youth continually highlighted the critical role that drugs play in their lives including comments such as:

"its all about the drugs for me"

"I didn't start smokin' rock till I came here"

"all my money goes to mostly drugs"

"I don't make as much money now cause I spend over half of it on drugs"

"110%, every girl I know (working on the streets) does dope, every single one of 'em", ...

"I started getting involved for heroin. Money is pretty much for drugs... I'm nothin but a junkie on Hastings. Alls I got on my mind is drugs, always... You don't have true friends on Hastings. The only friend you have down here is your pipe and your money for drugs. That's all there is... I have to get up and fight to make money for drugs. I wake up sick..."

"There was these two guys who fixed me when I was 9. It was right fuckin there (points to location on the arm). I fuckin remember. They fixed me and fixed me...by the time I was 11, I was really addicted".

When asked what had caused a shift in the early to current perceptions of risk one youth shared:

"Let's see, media attention, disparity, a lot of the prostitutes are pretty messed up on the drugs so its like, you don't know if they're actually there or somewhere else. So a lot of times when one gets picked up they can take advantage of them. They might not actually be there, they might not comprehend. Some of the drugs they do can paralyze them.

So drugs. That's what I think did it, drugs, cause now they'll just jump in any car".

'Money for Food' increased slightly with 9 (64%) youth indicating it as a current benefit. The category 'Money for Shelter' saw an increase with 7 (50%) of the youth naming it as presently beneficial, while 'Money for Clothes' decreased slightly to 6 (43%) youth citing it. Slight increases were seen among the 'Meet Friends' and 'Sense of Power/Control' categories with both receiving 3 (21%) responses. Examples of comments regarding 'Sense of Power' include:

"...scaring the john. I know how to do that real good – make them nervous. Now when I have a bad date I turn on them. You have to be 10 times worse than them, it's a power trip. I say to them, how does it feel to have a girl turn on you? I say hey, welcome to my world..".

The other categories of 'Meet Famous People' remained the same at 1 (7%) response, while 'Independence' decreased to 1 (7%) current benefit response, and 'Glamour/Excitement' and 'Minimal Effort Required' did not receive any mention as a current benefit.

Table 1
Benefits

DESCRIPTION BENEFIT	<u>EARLY BENEFIT</u>		<u>CURRENT BENEFIT</u>	
	FREQUENCY* (N=14)	PERCENT (%)	FREQUENCY* (N=14)	PERCENT (%)
Money for Clothes	9	64.3	6	42.9
Money for Drugs	8	57.1	14	100.0
Money for Food	8	57.1	9	64.3
Money for Shelter	5	35.7	7	50.0
Independence	3	21.4	1	7.1
Meet Friends	2	14.3	3	21.4
Sense of Power/Control	1	7.1	3	21.4
Meet Famous People	1	7.1	1	7.1
Glamour/Excitement	1	7.1	0	0
Minimal Effort Required	1	7.1	0	0

* Categories were not exclusive and participants were able to provide multiple responses. For this reason, frequencies do not total the number of participants.

Risks. Analysis of the data revealed that perception of risk resulted in ten distinct categories as shown in Table 2. Youth in the study rated physical assault as a high risk, for both entrance in the sex trade and currently. Physical assault was identified by 8 (57%) youth as an early risk, while all 14 (100%) named it as a current risk. Physical assault included a range of behaviours but it became evident that the aggression directed toward these youth was excessively violent and in many cases life threatening. Interviews with youth further explain these results:

"I've had three bad dates since I started working. I've got knife wounds from workin...(proceeds to show the scars), another shared "one time I got my head smashed through a windshield....but I got away".

The comments generally pointed to the johns as responsible for these vicious attacks but pimps were also guilty of violence as well. One youth recounted:

“if she found me she would beat the shit out of me cause that’s what they used to do. I slept in a closet and they’d rape me. If I tried to leave she would send her boyfriend out after me (researcher asked ‘were there times you tried to leave?’)...yes, and she cut my finger off, it was just hangin’ from here (shows the wound)”.

In discussing the differences with youth of when they first started and now, one youth said:

“..when you first start it’s different. I can’t say how, it’s just a lot different though. I wasn’t scared to go out back then. Now, I get scared just to put on clothes to think about doin it”.

Four (29%) participants named the category of ‘STD/HIV’ as an early risk while 10 (71%) youth stated it was a current risk. The number of youth identifying and perceiving ‘STD/HIV’ as a risk more than doubled. When discussing this shift, one youth said:

“there’s more diseases and it’s like haywire. I’ve always used protection and stuff like that but a long time ago no one had a problem with puttin’ a condom on and now they do. The chances of getting diseases are far more and you tell them this and they don’t care. I tell them take it or leave it. Sometimes they’ll offer more money if you don’t use protection and stuff. Ten dollars more ain’t gonna cut it. I say fuck the ten dollars, keep it....”.

Another said:

I have guys say, ‘oh you can’t get anything without a condom from a blow job common’, ya know. It’s like sorry man, are ya stupid. Half these girls are junkies and their teeth are fallin’ out in the back like who knows if it’s bleedin’ and they got AIDS and they can give it to you.

Most got rotten teeth and stuff. It's true, most junkies do. Every junkie's teeth are rotting somewhere or they're corroded from dope, mostly cocaine".

These sentiments were reinforced by yet another youth who shared:

"sex without condoms is worth more. A lot of girls go for it. You couldn't pay me enough to have sex without a condom".

The category of 'Sexual Assault' saw a small shift with 3 (21%) participants naming it as an early risk while 5 (36%) youth indicated it was a current risk in their lives. Some youth shared that they had been sexually assaulted numerous times. One participant shared:

"I've had lots of experiences with guys trying to rape me...I've been lured many times. Maybe you get into a van but there'll be a guy hiding in the back or go for a walk with a guy and go down to a dark spot with bushes or something and he'll try to get you on the ground and take the condom off and try to rape you. Sometimes they get away with it too..."

These responses raise the question of whether sexual assaults are actually as common as physical assaults but under-reported by youth. Society's pervasive myth that those in the sex trade are 'unrapeable' may have exerted a significant influence here. Interviews with youth revealed attitudes that blame those in the sex trade for some of the violence directed towards them. For example, one youth was discussing a situation and said:

"There's all sorts of nuts out there, but if you didn't have bad hookers you wouldn't have bad dates a lot of the times. It's these guys that get ripped off (by the sex trade worker). They get drunk or whatever and they get in with their buddies 'let's go find the bitch' right. And then they can't find her but they find someone who looks like her or doesn't even look like her..."

Having the 'Police' involved appeared to be more of concern upon entry as 3 (21%) youth identified this as a risk. However, only 1 (7%) individual recognized the 'Police' as a current risk. Being 'Robbed', by johns or others on the street was mentioned by 2 (14%) participants as an early risk though 5 (36%) saw it as a current risk. The category 'Family/Friends Finding out' got 2 (14%) early risk responses with only 1 (7%) youth naming it as a current risk.

One category that saw a dramatic shift from early to current risk was that of 'Being Murdered'. Only 1 (7%) youth indicated that they perceived being murdered as an early risk while 9 (64%) mentioned it as a current risk. On the risk of Being Murdered participants shared:

"I'm scared I'm going to get killed...a couple of girls I worked with got killed"

"you don't know if buddy's got a gun, a stick, or a knife. You take a chance with your life every time you jump in a car, ya know"

"you must have heard about that girl who got burnt up with gasoline and stuff....".

One of the youth summed up the risk this way:

"...it's a reality. Every time you step on a corner, every time you turn a trick, you're risking your life, and I know that. It's almost subconscious suicide. It is subconscious suicide. Every time you step on that fuckin corner you could die".

The remaining categories of 'Decreased Self-Esteem/Self-Worth', 'Verbal Abuse', and 'Verbal Threats' were only mentioned occasionally by youth. As an early risk, "Decreased Self-Esteem/Self-Worth" was named by 1 (7%) youth, though 2 (14%) indicated it as a current risk. "Verbal Abuse" was mentioned by 1 (7%) participant in

both the early and current risk measures, and no one in the sample of 14 mentioned 'Verbal Threat' as an early risk although 2 (14%) youths did name it as a current risk.

Table 2
Risks

DESCRIPTION OF RISK	EARLY RISK		CURRENT RISK	
	FREQUENCY* (N=14)	PERCENT (%)	FREQUENCY* (N=14)	PERCENT (%)
Physical Assault	8	57.1	14	100.0
STD/HIV	4	28.6	10	71.4
Sexual Assault	3	21.4	5	35.7
Police	3	21.4	1	7.1
Robbed	2	14.3	5	35.7
Family/Friends Finding Out	2	14.3	1	14.3
Being Murdered	1	7.1	9	64.3
Decreased Self-Esteem				
Self-Worth	1	7.1	2	14.3
Verbal Abuse	1	7.1	1	7.1
Verbal Threats	0	0	2	14.3

* Categories were not exclusive and participants were able to provide multiple responses. For this reason, frequencies do not total the number of participants.

Reasons For Involvement and Wanting to Exit

In the section of Reasons for Involvement, youth were asked 'what do youth think keeps most youth out on the streets working'. They were then asked 'what about you, what keeps you out there?'. Youth in the study were asked if they currently had thoughts about leaving the sex trade. Of the sample, 11 youth indicated that they did have current thoughts about leaving. To determine 'Reasons for Wanting to Leave', these 11 youth were asked 'in your view, what makes most youth want to leave the sex trade' and 'what about you, what makes you want to leave the most?'. This segment of

questioning was asked to specifically target the 'pull and push' factors of exiting the sex trade. Determining what is keeping youth out on the streets from their perspective is an important part in exploring ways to assist youth in exiting the streets. This section is somewhat similar to the benefits section, but the question was designed to elicit responses that were unlikely to be mentioned earlier. For example, 'Pimps' may be keeping them out there and are a reason for their involvement, but youth more than likely would not have named them as a 'benefit'. In addition, the category of 'Money' in this case was not broken down into specific subcategories as this had already been done in the benefits section.

Reason for Involvement. The same procedure used to obtain categories in the benefit and risk section was utilized here as well. A total of 9 distinct categories of 'Involvement' surfaced during this process. Results showed that when asked what keeps most youth involved, participants overwhelmingly believed it was 'Drugs' with all 14 (100%) youth making mention of it. 'Money' was close behind with 11 (79%) respondents indicating it as a reason for involvement. These results changed somewhat when youth were asked for their perceptions of what has kept them involved. When it came to the respondents themselves, 12 of 13 (92%) youth mentioned 'Money' as the main reason for involvement in the sex trade. There were 11 (85%) youth that identified 'Drugs' as a reason for involvement. One youth emphatically shared:

"I'm in it for the drugs and money but definitely not the sex. Sometimes you have to shut yourself off completely. Sometimes I feel I'm not a slut, like I'm not like that, but I am and I can't stand it. I'm doin this for drugs and I can't stand it. But you have to go along with it, you have to pretend.....".

Other categories mentioned by youth were having 'No Other Option' in which 4 (29%) respondents identified as keeping most youth involved with only 1 (8%) sighting

this as a personal reason for involvement. 'Low Self-Esteem/Self-Confidence' was mentioned by 3 (21%) participants as a reason why most youth stay involved while 2 (15%) respondents cited this category as a personal reason. One youth described a combination of reasons for most youth's involvement by saying:

"a lot of different reasons. Probably a major one is drugs. They're doin drugs cause they don't have self-confidence. It all comes back to self-confidence and self-respect. They're scared, they're trying to run from their own problems, they're trying to run from themselves and from the potential that they have inside of them. They're scared of the change of what they can become. So they're out there doin drugs and for the easy money and this is like, pretty much the quickest way.....The women out there, they're thinkin' they're gonna get ahead and they're not. They're totally giving away their power and their bodies. They're not going to get anywhere".

'Night Life/Action' was cited by 2 (14%) participants as a reason most youth remain involved. For this same category, 3 (21%) indicated it as a personal reason for involvement. On this subject one youth stated:

"that's sort of the way it is. Meetin' different people all the time. In a way it's kind of like, I wouldn't say glamorous but it's adventurous. It's like weird but...after you don't think about it, after you meet other people who do it too. I don't know why they glamorize it, I wouldn't say it's a positive thing to do, I like, but the nightlife ya know".

The category of 'Pimps' received 2 (14%) responses as a reason most youth remain involved in the sex trade while none of the participants sighted it as a personal reason for involvement. One youth shared:

"there's the pimps too. Once you get hooked in with pimps you don't...that would be the worst thing. They say

they're offering protection but I think they're scaring you into staying so they can make their money".

Table 3
Reasons for Involvement

DESCRIPTION OF INVOLVEMENT	MOST YOUTH		PARTICIPANT RESPONSE	
	FREQUENCY* (N=14)	PERCENT (%)	FREQUENCY* (N=13)	PERCENT (%)
Drugs	14	100.0	11	84.6
Money	11	78.6	12	92.3
No Other Option	4	28.6	1	7.7
Low Self-Esteem/ Self-Confidence	3	21.4	2	15.4
Night Life/Action	2	14.3	3	21.4
Pimps	2	14.3	0	0
Limited Education	1	7.1	0	0
Loneliness	1	7.1	1	7.7
Relieves Boredom	0	0	1	7.7

*Categories were not exclusive and participants were able to give multiple responses. For this reason, frequencies do not total the number of participants.

Reasons For Wanting to Exit. During the semi-structured interviews, youth were asked their thoughts on leaving the sex trade. Some youth indicated that they did not think about it at all or that they had no interest in leaving it at this point in time. These youth were not included in the following section. As well, one youth had elected to 'tell a story' about her life instead of participating in the semi-structured format. For these reasons, the frequencies in this category differ from previous measures.

Participants were asked, in their opinion, why most youth wanted to leave the sex trade. One youth shrugged when the question 'why do most youth want to leave' was asked and said: "I don't know, I don't see people leaving it. There's more hookers every

day". Responses revealed that the most common reasons for other youth wanting to leave were being "Bored/Tired Of It" and 'Physical Assault'. In both cases, 4 (40%) out of 10 respondents mentioned these two categories. Other reasons given by 2 (20%) participants were the categories of 'Wanting a Different Lifestyle', 'Dislike It', and 'Not Making Any Money'. The categories of 'Getting Off Drugs' and 'Nothing To Show For Involvement' each had 1 (10%) youth mention it.

These results shifted when youth were asked why they, personally, wanted to leave the sex trade. The majority of respondents, 8 (73%) of 11 youth, highlighted they 'Wanted A Different Lifestyle' and 'Getting off Drugs' as the reasons for wanting to leave the most. Some participants recognized that for themselves, exiting the sex trade and getting off drugs were intricately connected. This is explained by one youth as:

"Getting off the drugs, that would be the biggest thing. The rest I'd be able to put into place. Goal assessing ya know, what different steps to meet each goal. The biggest step would be to quit the drugs".

This connection was cited by another youth who shared:

"Most people are wired to heroin so they have to work every single day. I'm not wired to heroin right now but I have been before. I go on runs for cocaine where ..I'll go for like 6 or 7 days. I can stay awake for 6 days. (Researcher asked 'so for you, it's when you use that you work?') Oh yeah. I'm dually addicted to the streets and money....When I was wired to heroin I worked every single day. I never had a day off. These girls that are addicted, that are wired, it's a sorry thing. They have to make sure that they have their dope to wake up to, then they get sick every 8 hours – like really sick. You're gonna die if you don't have a fix every 4 hours as far as they're concerned. No one purposely wakes up and says I want to be a heroin addict. Its sad because they just didn't know what they were getting into and now they're stuck with it".

Six (55%) of 11 respondents mentioned they 'Dislike It' while 2 (18%) youth named 'Physical Assault'. On the category of 'Dislike It', one participant said:

"I don't even want to be workin, I hate it. Standin' out there, being raped twice, having to sleep and do everythin' with these men. I never thought I was gonna be a hooker. I hate it, I hate it".

Another youth said:

"it's gross, it's really sick. It's just a dirty old guy...old dirty fuckin bastards, it makes me sick. I hate them 50 year old perverts. To them it's just another bitch. You know how some men are and they just use women for sex and that's that".

The categories of 'Bored/Tired of It', 'Nothing To Show For Involvement' and 'Emotionally Harmful' received 1 (9%) response each.

Talking about exiting was difficult for many youth, for a variety of reasons. Some had tried to leave unsuccessfully in the past, while others wondered what would happen if they actually did try to leave. One youth was asked 'Do you think about getting out yourself?' and the youth replied:

"yeah, all the time, all the time. I think about just what's all out there besides that (working the streets). I've never seen anything else besides this. I've never seen nothin, nothin. Except the street life, how to survive for drugs and for food. I don't think I can get out. It's not easy for me, not at all. I don't know any other way of survival, right. I'd need a whole new start. I always thought death would be a way out. I'm not even suicidal, but that's what I think. So I don't care if someone...I don't care. I've been through too much it just doesn't matter to me".

Table 4
Reasons For Wanting To Exit

DESCRIPTION OF REASON FOR EXIT	MOST YOUTH		PARTICIPANT RESPONSE	
	FREQUENCY* (N=10)	PERCENT (%)	FREQUENCY* (N=11)	PERCENT (%)
Physical Assault	4	40.0	2	18.2
Bored/Tired Of It	4	40.0	1	9.1
Want A Different Lifestyle	2	20.0	8	72.7
Dislike It	2	20.0	6	54.5
Not Making Any Money	2	20.0	0	0
Get Off Drugs	1	10.0	8	72.7
Nothing to Show For				
Involvement	1	10.0	1	9.1
Emotionally Harmful	0	0	1	9.1

*Categories were not exclusive and participants were able to give multiple responses. For this reason, frequencies do not total the number of participants.

Recreational Involvement and Interest

One of the new positions at the Youth Action Centre is a full time High Impact Out trip Activities Worker who was hired in March 1998. This position is designed to target youth in the Downtown Eastside as part of the harm reduction philosophy of the centre. The position is designed to work co-operatively with the DEYAS Youth Project HIV/AIDS Outreach Workers and the DEYAS Youth Detox HIV/AIDS Counsellor/Educator to provide a continuum of services and support to high risk youth. The program consists of three main components that include out trips, stabilization, and education. Out trips include recreational activities such as camping, skiing etc., or any other alternative identified by youth as a safe activity. The purpose is to enhance self-esteem

and quality of life for youth. The co-existence of a harm reduction program and recreational opportunities is to link recovery and life change with positive activities.

One of the groups that appears to be difficult to engage in these activities has been youth in the sex trade, most notably, female youth. In order to elicit feedback and gauge interest levels of these youth, a recreational component was included as part of the interview. The recreational aspect was placed at the end of the interview. This provided the youths time to talk about personal interests and allowed the interview to conclude on a positive note.

There were two basic questions youth were asked about recreational involvement. The first was 'have you been involved in any kind of recreational activity'. In the second question respondents were asked 'are you interested in participating in recreational activities at the Youth Action Centre?'. If participants answered yes, they were asked to name specific activities of interest. Finally, youth were provided with a list of 34 recreational activities and asked to identify, if any, they would be willing to participate in.

Of the total sample of 15 youth, 14 participants completed this section. Results indicated that of the 14 respondents, 10 (71%) youth are at the centre a minimum of 3 days a week. During the time of this study, the centre was in operation 5 days a week. This suggested that the majority of the sample were regular service consumers at the centre.

When asked if they had previously been involved in recreational activities, 12 (86%) stated that they had been at some point in their lives. When asked if they were interested in participating in some form of recreational activity through the Youth Action Centre, 13 (93%) stated that they would be. Youth listed a number of activities that they would personally be interested in, including camping, movies, horseback riding, hiking, hockey, basketball, skiing, football, baseball, laser tag, the PNE, bowling, candle making, Stanley Park, English Bay, and go-carting.

Some youth stated they had an interest, but did not feel they had the capacity to participate due to their drug issues. One youth said :

“When I’m here I stop and think about that there is a life away from the streets. Places like this, to be able to help people move away from here. If I were cleaned up yeah.. but I can’t, not now though, I can’t”.

Another youth said:

“No, I can’t. Cause I’d have to have my dope to bring so I don’t get sick and smoke it...at least every 4 hours”. When looking at the list of activities, this youth said “I’d be interested in all of them if I had...if I wasn’t sick”.

From the interviews asking about recreational involvement, there seemed to be three important components to explore when trying to engage sexually procured youth in recreational activities: ability, awareness, and willingness. Youth in the sample expressed an interest in a variety of activities, but a few participants indicated that their physical health and ability would prevent them from participating. Time limited and simple motor task activities would be one avenue to explore with youth that acknowledge these barriers to participation. Secondly, a consideration brought up by another youth was that they were unaware that there were opportunities for recreational involvement. Staff at the centre need to actively target and engage youth in activities by first, apprising them of the opportunity. This may require an active effort by staff to inform, encourage, and even directly invite youth to participate. Youth in the study exhibited a high level of interest in participating in recreational activities, suggesting that active outreach and the availability of time limited activities may garner a favorable response.

Another consideration brought up by youth were the specific and unique needs of those who would be participating. One youth was concerned about these unique needs and the response they might receive while in ‘upstanding public’. This youth said:

“Realistically, how would you like to take a bunch of these kids...this one’s over here say, kind of thin, greasy hair, coughing, lung infection, dope sick, needs heroin, obviously some of them are kind of rough. Where are we going to take them in upstanding public? We ain’t gonna take em to Castledowns Mall. We gotta keep em on a short leash cause one of em might need dope in the next hour or two so they might be prone to grab something if they go in public. All these people are freaked out by 10 or 15 street kids who are all thinned out and pale and tracks up and down their arms and legs and maybe a few in their jugular vein and some have a crack pipe stickin’ out of their pocket and some obviously look like hookers. People are going to be a little floored by it”.

In spite of these considerations, the implementation of a recreation component was welcomed by many youth and some suggested that these activities served as ‘more than just something to do’. One youth shared:

“Like horsebackriding in the bush...Some of us have never ridden a horse. Some of us have never been off a street corner. How are we going to relate? We have to create a whole new emotion, a whole new idea”.

On the same subject another said:

“..more outings. Outings is a big thing. We need outings. We need to get out of this fuckin city. Being inside and looking outside...if we could just get a taste of the outside world maybe some people would drop off the corner. They’d get a taste of what it’s like to be outside downtown Vancouver, even for a day will make a difference. It’s the outings that are going to change us. Getting people out of the city, getting people out is going to change their frame of mind. That’s a big thing, getting people out of here.... I go to the movies on Sunday (with Y.A.C.) just because I want to get out of Vancouver. It’s only 30 blocks away but it’s

not where I work...I usually don't work after that cause I'm in such a good frame of mind, I just don't".

Youth in the study were given a list of thirty-four recreational activities and were asked to check each activity that they, personally, would be willing to participate in. The results were compiled from the 14 youth who completed this task. The most popular activities are presented here in order of interest. Only activities that received 70% or more of youth interest are included here. A complete list of results is shown in table 5. The most popular activities were: playland (14, 100%), wavepool (14, 100%), Omni-max (13, 93%), go-cart racing (13, 93%), movies (12, 86%), laser-tag (12, 86%), swimming (12, 86%), barbecue (12, 86%), Stanley Park (12, 86%), billiards (12, 86%), paintball (11, 79%), science world (11, 79%), camping (11, 79%), skiing (10, 71%), Grouse Mountain (10, 71%), Capillano Suspension Bridge (10, 71%), and bike riding (10, 71%).

The most popular outings included playland, the wavepool, go-cart racing, and the Omni-Max. This 'wish list' highlights the youth's desire to participate in fun activities generally enjoyed by children and adolescents. Many of these activities were absent from the lives of these youth, likely due to financial barriers and their street involved lifestyles. This list also constitutes some of the response costs of drug addiction; activities that are mutually exclusive with drug usage.

Table 5
Level of Interest in Specified Recreational Activities

ACTIVITY	FREQUENCY (N=14)	PERCENT (%)
Playland	14	100.0
Wavepool	14	100.0
Omni-Max	13	92.9
Go-Cart Racing	13	92.9
Movies	12	85.7
Laser Tag	12	85.7
Swimming	12	85.7
Barbecue	12	85.7
Stanley Park	12	85.7
Billiards	12	85.7
Paintball	11	78.6
Science World	11	78.6
Camping	11	78.6
Skiing	10	71.4
Grouse Mountain	10	71.4
Capillano Suspension Bridge	10	71.4
Bike Riding	10	71.4
Planetarium	9	64.3
Indoor Rock Climbing	9	64.3
Mini-Golf	9	64.3
Hiking	9	64.3
Snowboarding	8	57.1
Baseball	8	57.1
Rollerblading	8	57.1
Ice Skating	8	57.1
Basketball	8	57.1
Drum Making	8	57.1
Driving Range	7	50.0
Badminton	6	42.9
Floor Hockey	5	35.7
Tag Football	5	35.7
Soccer	5	35.7
Ping Pong	4	28.6
Hacky-Sack	2	14.3

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, the major findings of the study were presented. The demographics and descriptive characteristics of the sample were discussed, along with the five areas of focus: perceptions of benefit; perceptions of risk; reasons for involvement; reasons for wanting to exit; and recreational involvement and interest. Results showed shifts in perception from early to current street involvement, both in relation to self and with other youth.

Results showed that 'Money for Clothing' was the most popular early benefit (64%) while 'Money for Drugs' was mentioned as the most prevalent current benefit (100%). 'Physical Assault' was named by over half of the respondents (57%) as an early risk and everyone (100%) stated it was a current risk. 'STD/HIV' and 'Being Murdered' saw a dramatic shift to a current risk with 71% and 64% of respondents recognizing it as a current risk respectively.

Participants identified 'Drugs' (100%) as the most prevalent reason that most youth are involved in the sex trade while they said 'Money' (92%) was the reason for their own involvement. Participants said they believed most youth wanted to leave the sex trade due to 'Physical Assault' (40%) and 'Being Bored/Tired Of It' (40%). Personal reasons for wanting to exit the sex trade were 'Wanting a Different Lifestyle' (73%) and 'Getting Off Drugs' (73%).

The results of qualitative interviews with youth indicated that drug use interfered with involvement in recreational activities. Some youth suggested that participation was hampered by drug addictions that required maintenance every four hours, sometimes even less if using crack. Others reported that the opportunity and availability of recreational activities served as a motivating factor for abstinence or at least drug management. These results have direct implications for harm reduction programming with youth.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an overview of the findings from the research study. This overview includes an exploration of the study's limitations and the direct implications for social work practice. Recommendations are included with the intent of highlighting areas of service need and current gaps in service provision with regard to sexually procured youth. The results are explored and discussed as they relate to the theoretical framework as well.

Overview

The results presented in the previous chapter reflect the qualitative and quantitative exploration of youth perceptions of involvement in the sex trade. Of great interest were the comparative perceptions of involvement for others versus themselves, and from the onset of involvement in the sex trade to the present. One major attitude shift was observed on the subject of obtaining money for drugs through the sex trade. While 8 (57%) youth mentioned drugs as an early inducement, all 14 (100%) named it as a current factor. This finding provides useful information about youth upon entry into the sex trade. Some researchers perceive utilizing drugs as a precursor to working in the sex trade, while others argue that it is precisely the lifestyle of working on the street that leads to drug usage. This study suggests that just over half of the sample were already involved with drugs upon their entry. However, what this study did not do was break down the kind of drug being used in the early and current stages of involvement. This process would be extremely beneficial as type and frequency of drug use is a salient factor. For example, it is possible that those who mentioned money for drugs as an early benefit may have been referring to alcohol and marijuana, whereas they may now use heroin or

cocaine. Such findings would provide further useful information about youth and their involvement.

Youth in this study were not directly asked about type or frequency of drug usage. However, many youths did share information about current usage. There were only two hard core substances mentioned, heroin and cocaine. Heavy use of heroin and cocaine were identified as making sex trade workers more vulnerable to bad dates (Lowman and Fraser, 1995 and Miller, 1996). Utilization of these substances also greatly affects the youth's ability to exit the sex trade as their addiction requires continual maintenance of the drug.

Another attitude shift was found in relation to perceived risks of involvement in the sex trade. Physical assault was mentioned by over half the sample (57%) as an early risk and all 14 (100%) youth named it as a current risk. Violence is a pervasive part of working on the streets and the results suggest that youth are well aware of this fact. It is possible that upon entry, some youth were oblivious to any risk to themselves whatsoever. Four youth in the sample said that they did not perceive any risks when they first started in the sex trade. This attitude may be due, in part, to their level of cognitive development at the time. Results showed that 53% of participants were under age 18 when they entered the sex trade and 40% were under age 16. Two participants were 13 when they started and one individual began at age 11.

Two other risk categories saw a significant increase. The category of 'STD/HIV' had 4 (29%) youth mention it as an early risk and 10 (71%) recognized it as a current risk. This increase may be due to ongoing public education efforts or perhaps direct experience. One woman said that one of the scary/frightening aspects of working was: "being 100% clean and having a date and finding out after that he's HIV positive".

As noted in the introduction of this paper, the Downtown Eastside is experiencing an HIV/AIDS epidemic. Results in this study indicate that over three-quarters of the

youth in the study actively recognized the serious ramifications of this disease by identifying it as a risk factor. This is significant as all responses were identified and explored by the youths themselves. There was not a selection of categories or a questionnaire identifying potential risks for this study. Youth clearly identified HIV/AIDS as a risk category in their current life circumstances.

The second category that exposed an attitude shift was 'Being Murdered'. Only 1 (7%) mentioned being killed as an early risk while 9 (64%) stated it was a current risk. This is significant considering 26 out of 60 murdered Canadian prostitutes were killed in Vancouver (Daum, 1997a). Youth in the study were aware of this danger and many knew someone who had been killed. One participant recounted:

"It's worse than ever. The hookers are getting...I'd say once a month a hooker is found dead from the Eastside. At least one every two months. (Says woman's name)...Boom she's gone. Another one a couple weeks before that too".

This finding suggests that youth involved in the sex trade do not give credence to the serious risk of being murdered upon entry in the sex trade. However, at some point youth attitudes shift and recognize being murdered as a very real possibility on the streets of Vancouver. It is unclear whether this shift in perception is related to cognitive and/or developmental stage, personal negative experience on the street, hearing of or knowing someone who has actually been murdered, or a combination of all of the above factors.

Reasons for involvement centred on two main categories, 'Money' and 'Drugs'. Attitudes and perceptions of youth in these two categories were reversed. Participants themselves indicated money (92%) was the most important factor of involvement while they indicated that most other youth were likely in it for the drugs (100%). This is consistent with the literature that indicates that many youth are on the streets for survival sex, working to obtain basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. This fact was

highlighted in the discussion of perceived benefits. The perception of clothing, food, money, and drugs as benefits indicate that basic survival needs and addictions are what is counterbalancing the risks of physical/sexual assault, HIV/AIDS, and being murdered.

An interesting result was found on the subject of reasons for wanting to leave the sex trade. Here, participants indicated that most youth likely wanted to leave due to 'Physical Abuse' (40%) and being 'Bored/Tired Of It' (40%). For themselves, however, youth said reasons for wanting to exit related to 'Wanting a Different Lifestyle' (73%) and 'Getting Off Drugs' (73%). It is also significant to note was that 55% of participants indicated wanting to leave because they 'Dislike It'.

Drugs were recognized as an overwhelming 'benefit' or inducement for youth in this study. Youth also noted that 'Getting Off Drugs' was one of the prevalent reasons for wanting to exit the sex trade. It is a very interesting fact that drugs is located on both sides of the balance sheet of involvement in the sex trade. The results from this study reflect how closely intertwined drug use and the sex trade are for youth in the Downtown Eastside. Drugs potentially serve as a maladaptive coping mechanism for working on the streets. Some youth state that they need drugs to work, to be able to cope with the nature of the work, and to deal with what the men expect from them. Others suggest that they work to get the drugs:

"See, the thing is that these young kids are pullin' \$10, \$20 dollar dates. Half these guys don't want to use condoms and they'll agree to do it. Their judgement is more...they're jones'n, they're hurtin' and they want another fix or food or whatever. They'll be like okay, they don't want to do it but they'll be like, okay. Because they've been standin' out there for two hours and nobody's picked them up and finally someone picked them up and are offered a \$20 blow with no condom. So they get somethin'..."

Another youth shared:

“And then you got these girls who go for \$10 dates. These guys get blow jobs for \$10 or whatever, cause the girls go with the price of dope right, it always goes like that. A lot of guys go ‘lift up your sleeves’ cause they want to see if you use dope”.

When talking about witnessing very young kids working the street one participant said:

“These older guys are drivin' around lookin' for girls, you don't see a 16 year old lookin' for a girl. I think its gross. I think it's pathetic and gross. They're all usually workin for drugs and they go for like \$5 or \$10”.

This study did not answer the question of what comes first, the involvement in drugs or the involvement in the sex trade. The results did suggest that half were utilizing some form of drugs prior to involvement in the sex trade, and half were not. All youth currently in the sex trade indicated they were actively using illicit substances. What was evident in this study from the qualitative interviews was a strong desire to exit the street drug scene, and establish an alternate lifestyle free of substance addiction. Without question, the results indicated an overwhelming need for detoxification services, substance abuse programs, and treatment facilities to assist youth in this process.

These sentiments have been echoed in many recent provincial reports including: Assessing the Violence Against Street Involved Women in the Downtown Eastside/Strathcona Community (1995), Family Services of Greater Vancouver (1995), Community Consultation on Prostitution in British Columbia (1996), Symposia On Prostitution and the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth: Overview of Community

Ideas (1996/1997), HIV/AIDS and Injection Drug Use in the DTES (1997), You Have Heard This Before: Street-Involved Youth and the Service Gaps (1997) and Voices From the Shadows: Canadian Children and Youth Speak Out About Their Lives as Street Sex Trade Workers (1998). The current research suggests that sufficient and adequate detox and addiction resources for sexually procured youth are considered mandatory to exit this lifestyle.

Finally, youth discussed their interest and involvement in recreational activities and programs. Generally, youth indicated that negative public attention, substance addiction, lack of information about activities, and physical inability all served as barriers to participation. However, youth indicated that these barriers did not preclude their involvement completely and interest in participating remained high.

Many youth shared the positive experiences and service received at the Youth Action Centre. For the most part comments about Y.A.C services were positive, but youth identified persistent service gaps in the community. On the needs and service gaps partially met by Y.A.C., youth stated:

"I think they should provide more work opportunities. Odd jobs. You know, like that would give people work experience. Something they can actually put on their resume".

"Night-time shelter. Just like 5 bunk beds. There wouldn't be all these people freezin' in doorways and stuff".

"Offer them counselling or getting them a support group. Maybe everyday after breakfast (at Y.A.C.) or lunch a 15-20 minute thing where everyone sits together and talks. Everyone says something, introduces themselves and says one positive for today, and what's one positive thing you

can do, other than drugs, and go around the room. Then maybe everyone can leave thinking positive. Something to bring everyone together. Something to get everyone familiar with each other, a habit-forming thing and no one would take offence to it and maybe it would grow. Maybe some people would get closer, ya know. Cause it would get closer on the street”.

“I think it’s good (Y.A.C. services), but I wish they would have it open longer for the sleeping. I wish it was open 7 days a week. Cause that’s Saturday and Sunday and sometimes I stay up and work those days cause I have nowhere to go”.

Participants identified the Youth Action Centre as an important community resource

where a number of basic survival needs are met. For example:

“Excellent. The food is better than it was. If YAC wasn’t here, it would be a big dent in the community. It’s a good service, they do as much as they can with the money they have. But it’s still not enough. This is what they had in mind in the beginning. People to support us when we actually want to do something with our lives, not push us. Survival and support. A lot of these community centres don’t want you unless they’re doing somethin’ (participating in a program), but YAC doesn’t do that”.

Another shared:

“There’s always someone to talk to here. They hang out with people and let people get comfortable with them on their own time. They have knowledge of the majority of resources in Vancouver. They don’t push anything, they let you come up to them. If they don’t know they’ll always recommend you to someone who does. This place is really important because it’s in a great location and in the youth’s face”.

The Youth Action Centre was seen as a place to obtain support and survival needs. To some youth, the centre provided much more than that. One participant was talking about what would happen if Y.A.C. was not around and commented:

“That would piss off a lot of people. It would make a lot of people have a hard time findin' a place to go or hang out. I think it would cause a lot of trouble. People would be, in a way, lost. People find that place like home. The staff there, for myself, the staff are next to family to me in its own way. They're the closest thing to family I've got now. It's cool”.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations within this study. One of these limitations was the sampling method and population. In order to maintain a feasible research study within the time and budget constraints of the project, a sample of 15 youth was selected. Findings from this study provide practical and useful information for the Youth Action Centre and other service providers, but may not be generalizable to the larger population of street involved youth. As a result, the external validity of this study may be low. The sample size and selection method preclude estimates of reliability of findings. The nonrandom nature of convenience sampling for the most part does not result in a representative sample of the population. Random sampling, where members of a population are selected until the desired sample is reached, was not an option as the actual numbers of youth working on the streets is unknown, and can only be roughly estimated. Convenience sampling was determined to be the most efficient and successful method to access participants for the study.

One of the major barriers that this project discovered early in the research process was the use of the term 'benefit'. This study was attempting to discover the attractions and aversions of youth involved in the sex trade. In very simple terms the project was examining what keeps youth involved and what makes youth want to leave. For simplicity and brevity, the terms benefit and risk were selected for use in the project title. At the onset of this project these terms seemed appropriate. Behaviour theory suggests

that it is the reward or benefit that reinforces behaviour and the punishment or risks that deter such behaviour. The title of the project that was originally submitted to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board was 'Attitudes and Perceptions of the Benefits and Risks of Vancouver Youth in the Sex Trade'.

As the researcher, I struggled with the terminology for some time. 'Reward' seemed completely inappropriate even though previous studies had used this term (Silbert and Pines, 1982 and Jesson, 1993). From the researcher's perspective, it actually seemed insulting to suggest youth were 'rewarded'. The decision was made to select the term 'benefit' after reviewing the definition of 'prostitution' in the Social Work dictionary that read: "the act of offering oneself for sexual contact with another in exchange for money or other *benefits*" (Barker, 1991). In this sense, one goal of the project was to discover what youth identified as these 'other benefits'.

Before initiating the semi-structured interview with youth, an important part of the process was reviewing and signing the consent form (Appendix C). The researcher actively read and reviewed the consent form with each youth. The title of the project appeared at the very top ('Attitudes and Perceptions of the Benefits and Risks of Vancouver Youth in the Sex Trade'), and one of the first points on the form read: "The purpose of this study is to talk to youth regarding the perceived benefits and risks of their involvement in the sex trade". During the interviews, it became clear that the way the word 'benefit' was being utilized on the consent form posed a problem for some of the youth. Even when alternate words were used during interviews, such as what did you gain/get from working, the word benefit caused and created confusion. For example, one youth commented:

"There really isn't any cause like, I work on the streets and I do drugs and all my money goes to drugs so I guess there is no benefit".

On the same subject, another youth said:

“Well, I get money for dope. Now that’s a loaded question. Having a drug habit is good, but having a drug habit is bad”.

The use of this terminology was considered a barrier that could have affected participant’s responses. There are several ways to have avoided this situation. First of all, a definition of the word ‘benefit’ for the purpose of the study could have been given to youth. It is clear from the comments above that these youth associated ‘benefit’ as equivalent to positive factors or outcomes. This logical association points out the researcher’s failure to achieve consensual definitions of key concepts at the outset of the project. This is a risk to internal validity. This factor was minimized however, as the researcher also conducted the interviews and was able to address these concerns directly. For future research, it is suggested language be kept very simple, and it should not be assumed that all participants will impute the same definition of terms. Verifying the measurement on a test group would have been another way to avoid the problem.

This project interviewed 12 female, 2 transgender, and 1 male youth. Due to the limited number of transgender and male youth in the sample, the results did not lend themselves to a gender analysis. This is unfortunate as current literature on male and transgender youth in the sex trade are limited. However, the qualitative nature of interviews were helpful in highlighting gaps in services for transgender youth, and served as a reminder that there are similarities and differences among and between all genders involved in the sex trade.

It appears from the research results that all of the youth in the study identifying as currently involved in the sex trade use illicit substances and may be battling drug addiction. This can serve as a limitation in the study as participants may have been actively under the influence of drugs during the interview, affecting their responses.

Youth were asked to think back to when they first began in the sex trade. Mind altering substances may have affected or interfered with this process to some extent, though the researcher had no evident reason to doubt the validity of the responses.

Despite these limitations, the information gathered from this study provides valuable information to the Youth Action Centre on a sample of their clients.

Youth identified barriers to participation in recreational activities. Some of the youth involved in these activities viewed participation as a way to escape or get away from their current world. Youth suggested these activities served a much greater purpose in their lives than just 'something to do'. When seeking grants or financial support for programming, the Youth Action Centre can utilize the results of this study to reinforce the importance of providing safe, alternative activities for youth who derive the majority of their economic, social, and emotional needs from the streets. Regular outings and activities are not 'programming fluff', but an essential element in a harm reduction model that seeks to assist youth in exploring personal growth, and their positive potential in this world.

Recommendations

These results and accompanying commentary highlight the needs and gaps in service provision. Recommendations are included to address these service limitations and suggest the direction that social work practice may take in approaching this complex social issue. There are a significant number of potential recommendations that can be offered to address the problem of sexually procured youth. This paper has chosen to focus on those deemed most urgent and salient as reflected in the responses provided by participants.

Recommendation #1.**Immediate funding for the expansion of detoxification beds and substance abuse services for youth in Vancouver.**

Throughout this paper, the significant role of drug use and abuse was resounding. Youth comments, attitudes, and perceptions illuminated the double bind that drug use has placed them in. Drugs were found to serve as a critical reinforcement factor of working the streets, while also being deemed one of the main reasons youth wanted to exit.

Vancouver has very limited detoxification services to youth. There are only 9 detox beds for youth within the Vancouver region; 4 beds at the Downtown Eastside detox, 3 beds at the Downtown South detox, and 2 PLEA beds. These facilities remain full to capacity with the current demand far exceeding available supply of services. Statistics from the Downtown Eastside and South detox centres in 1996 revealed that 1121 requests were made for service while only 129 youth were provided with available service (Chand et al., 1997).

Even having said this, there are further gaps in service that do not address the unique needs of youth. Current services have limited intake hours, generally 10:00 a.m. to 17:00. If youth decide after 17:00 that they want and need detox services, there are few options available. Safehouses generally can not and will not accept youth currently under the influence of any substance. The window of opportunity for intervention with youth is very small and available services need to recognize this critical factor. Youth must have access to available services when they determine it is needed, when they decide they are ready. Intervention services accessible 24 hours a day would offer an alternate to youth who want to get off drugs. Limited beds and lack of resources has resulted in a hit and miss experience for youth. Participants in the study expressed concerns about the unique needs of youth in the sex trade and the service received in detox facilities. These included:

"I want to get off the drugs. (Asked 'what can help?') I don't know..for detox lesser waiting lists. By the time you get into detox there's all these drunks there and its just a place to stay (for them). A specialized detox for youth in the sex trade..that would help".

"Our solution to addiction is detox, recovery, and treatment. I am a transvestite prostitute. These houses are either male or female. They send you to detox which is fine, I can get along in a detox. Fine. But going up to Surrey and throwing myself in a closet and pretending I'm a straight male in a recovery house that is full of nothing but butch men...I ended up coming out with more baggage. They can't accept you being gay in Surrey, never mind transgendered... The counsellors told me to stay and keep it in my own hat. Don't even share it with the group. And its group therapy right! I can't win".

Long-term treatment is even more scarce, with Peak House being the only residential alcohol/drug facility for 89 communities in the entire province. In addition, the wait list generally stands at six to eight months (Chand et al., 1997). In order to provide effective and accessible service to these youth, additional funding must be provided to expand addiction services and programs. This includes the spectrum of services of detox, treatment, and recovery.

Recommendation #2.

Establishing housing options that include additional safehouses, transition homes and beds for youth currently utilizing illicit substances.

Many youth on the streets have run away or were thrown out of their family home. These youth quickly become involved in 'survival sex' to meet basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Those without a place to live are at greater risk of entrenchment on the streets including being procured for sexual purposes and drug use. On this subject, one youth insightfully commented:

“It’s funny cause as far as agencies or government are concerned.... It’s homelessness that is out there. These kids are running away from home to be homeless. There’s got to be some happy medium. Our answer to homelessness is a coffee and a muffin, in Vancouver that’s the strategic answer for homelessness....We’ll feed ya but you can’t have a place to stay unless you want to go to detox or recovery. But you can have a coffee and a donut anytime. That says it all right there. Read in between the lines. We just need more homes, more everything, more low income housing”.

Youth require a place to live in order to address other needs in their life. Without the stability of housing, the continuum of care for youth is greatly disrupted. Safe, affordable housing is a basic necessity that impacts several facets of a person’s life. Being on the street without a place to live simply reinforces entrenchment on the streets. Additional safehouses and transition homes with staff experienced in working with street youth and drug issues offers a safe alternative to youth 24 hours a day.

Recommendation #3

For law enforcement to invest time and energy into arresting and prosecuting johns who procure children and youth for sexual services.

This research project is guilty of one of the most common faults of examining youth in the sex trade; the fact that the procurer remains unnamed and invisible. Traditional approaches to this social problem have focused on youth involved, and rarely on those seeking sex with children and youth. It is time for law enforcement to take a strong stand on the issue by reinforcing strict penalties and consequences for those attempting to buy sexual services from children and youth. Prostitution and addiction are reciprocally reinforcing in a spiral of entrenchment. Penalizing the johns intervenes directly in the cycle.

When it comes to law enforcement, there are basically 5 statutes relating to prostitution: bawdy house laws; living off the avails of prostitution; the procuring of prostitutes; offering to purchase sexual services from anyone under 18 (section 212 (4) of the Criminal Code); and the communicating law (Lowman, 1989). The Communicating Law is found in section 213 of the Canadian Criminal Code and states:

“1) every person who in a public place or in any place open to public view

a) stops or attempts to stop any motor vehicle,

b) impedes the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic or ingress to or egress from premises adjacent to that place, or

c) stops or attempts to stop any person or in any manner communicates or attempts to communicate with any person for the purposes of engaging in prostitution or of obtaining sexual services of a prostitute is guilty of an offense punishable on summary conviction” (Moon, 1997).

This law applies to all sex trade workers, both youth and adult, as well as the johns. However, it is the communicating law that has been enforced to criminalize youth in the sex trade. As noted in the earlier literature review, youth in British Columbia were 60 times more likely to be charged for selling sex than the men were for buying it (Daum, 1997a). On February 18, 1997 the Vancouver Police stated that sex trade workers would no longer be charged unless exceptional circumstances were noted (The Vancouver Sun, 1997). However, while for the most part youth are no longer being charged, neither are the johns. Commitment from law enforcement to begin charging johns is necessary to send a strong message that buying sex from children and youth is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in our society.

One of the recent difficulties expressed by police is that current law renders section 212 (4) of the Criminal Code unenforceable. As mentioned in the introduction, Section 212 (4) reads:

“every person who, in any place, obtains or attempts to obtain, for consideration, the sexual services of a person who is under the age of 18 years (or who that person *believes* is under 18) is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment to a term not exceeding 5 years” (Greenspan & Rosenberg, 1998, p. 371).

In order to obtain a conviction under section 212 (4), the following is required: evidence that the accused attempted or did obtain sexual services - if directly obtained, this means the youth would need to give evidence to that effect; the age and identity of the victim is required; there must be evidence that money or other considerations such as drugs, food, shelter etc. was offered in return; as well as evidence that the accused knew or should have known that the youth was under 18 years of age (Moon, 1997).

The bracketed statement in section 212 (4) was added in December 1995 as a result of Bill C-119. Utilization of the word *believes* in section 212(4) limits the enforceability of the law. This requires the prosecutor to provide evidence that the ‘john’ actually thought that the youth was under the age of 18. Being able to prove an individual’s state of mind is difficult, if not impossible, and hence provides a plausible loophole to escape a conviction.

Further, the fact that youth need to be identified and provide evidence in court creates a situation where the onus of a prosecution rests with the victim. This is an unrealistic expectation, and youth would undoubtedly face increased negative repercussions such as intimidation and violence while on the street.

All efforts must be made to devise a law that can be enforced, with the purpose of protecting children and youth. Youth in the sex trade are continual victims, not criminals.

Charging youth serves to reinforce the misconception in society that these youth have done something wrong and deserve punishment. Youth in the sex trade require supportive social interventions, not punitive and criminalizing approaches. The perpetrators, those who seek out children and youth for personal sexual gratification, are reinforced every time they are allowed to 'purchase' a child. There are no consequences for their actions and the men procuring children are well aware of this fact.

The ultimate goal must be protecting youth from pedophiles and perpetrators. The way to facilitate this goal is by ensuring an enforceable law is in place to prosecute those who procure children and youth for sexual purposes. Enforcing this law sends a clear message that buying sex from children and youth will not be tolerated.

Recommendation #4

Education initiatives to target youth, parents, service providers (such as teachers and doctors), social workers, and the general public conveying the message that sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexually procured children and youth are part of the same continuum.

As noted in recommendation #3, a clear message can be sent through law enforcement by beginning to arrest and prosecute johns who procure children and youth for sexual purposes. This message is critical in setting the stage for raising awareness about sexually procured youth. The message is simple, buying sex and sexual services from children and youth is sexual exploitation, and sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse that will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. This message reinforces the fact that all forms of sexual abuse are intolerable, and that sexually procured youth are worthy of the same protective services as other abused children.

Education is vital to early identification of sexual exploitation and abuse of children and youth. Teachers, doctors, and child protection social workers are in the

position of dealing with children and youth on a daily basis. Recognizing the signs of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation is important in initiating early intervention. Early interventive services provide the opportunity to offer supports to families before youth run away from their home environment. Youth who are deemed high risk for entering the street life need to be identified within the community and adequate services and supports are required to assist these families. Without a continuum of services to offer children and families, dysfunctional patterns will persist, remain unaddressed, and pressure to leave the environment will increase for youth. One youth shared during an interview:

“I was sexually abused as a child and I’ve been abused so much as a child that its all I know so I continue to abuse myself. That’s my theory on myself. I was abused so much in every which way, physically, mentally, emotionally, every which way all through my life. I lived in more fear in my childhood than I do working the streets right now”.

Social workers who investigate child protection matters need to be sensitive as well as educated about abuse issues. The focus must always remain on the best interests of the child. Other professions such as physicians and teachers must also be educated both in the classroom and through field experience.

Youth are exposed to an increasing number of pressures in relation to sex, drugs, and independence. Education programs that address these topics within a school setting are important, and can assist youth in identifying exploitive situations. These programs can educate as well as instruct youth about the realities of sexual exploitation, and provide practical ways to help children and youth protect themselves.

Education of the public plays an important role in debunking stereotypical myths about involvement in the sex trade. Recognizing the fact that the vast majority of youth in the sex trade originate from severely dysfunctional families is an important aspect of

this social problem. Another reality to expose is the intricate connection between youth in the sex trade in the Downtown Eastside and the street drug scene. Similar to prostitution, drug use is still viewed as a criminal, not a social problem. Substance abuse, dependency, lack of self-worth and self-esteem may all play a critical role. Placing responsibility on those procuring children and youth is important if society is to realize that youth in the sex trade are repeated victims of adult abusers. Education of the public serves to broaden the narrow view society has about youth in the sex trade, and to shed light on what society as a whole can do to help change this pervasive social problem.

The above recommendations have been reiterated continually within numerous reports addressing the issue of youth in the sex trade. Service providers and youth themselves have been advocating for programs and services, but have been met with minimal success. The recommendations explored here were not viewed as innovative ideas, but as confirmation that serious gaps in service provision exist for youth in the sex trade.

Findings In Relation To Theoretical Framework

One of the most significant findings in this study relates to the window of opportunity that is available when working with substance addicted youth in the sex trade. Social learning theory suggests that involvement in drug use and the sex trade leads to lost opportunities that are deemed response costs. An individual utilizing hard drugs and working in the sex trade is likely to experience diminished opportunities in several areas of their life including health, economic, social and emotional domains.

The incorporation of recreational activities within a harm reduction model is an essential element for introducing self-regulated incentives designed to help alter behaviour through motivation. A harm reduction model of intervention that utilizes a recreational component minimizes lost opportunities by introducing positive, prosocial

activities. In this sense, recreational activities are not a 'luxury' but an essential component of programming aimed at decreasing substance usage and increasing self-worth, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.

The testimony of youth in the study suggested that recreational activities are a powerful motivating factor that temporarily precludes the use of illicit substances and working in the sex trade, as they are mutually exclusive. The introduction of recreational activities into the behavioural repertoire of youth in the sex trade creates new learning opportunities and experiences. These few hours of involvement in activities are critical, and have enduring importance in the context of generating a sense of personal power, ability, enjoyment, self-esteem, and self-worth. These factors, in turn, are significant building blocks in addressing issues of substance abuse and exiting the sex trade.

Feminist theory provides an important meta perspective on this social problem. Radical feminists advocate the elimination of male control in areas of social, emotional, economic, and political domains. Historically, women have been constructed as sex objects for men's personal pleasure and this has resulted in the commodification of sexuality. Prostitution is a glaring example of the objectification, marginalization, and control of women by men. Feminist theory also explains how sexual orientation and gender are constructed to oppress and marginalize gay and transgendered youth. Feminist theory would suggest that the lost opportunities referred to in social learning theory are a result of a power imbalance in society. It is by the abuse of power that women, children, and youth are marginalized and oppressed by a hierarchy of adult men.

The active demand for sexual services from young children highlights the inherent power imbalance between the johns and procured youth. In every hierarchical structure, power plays a critical role. Feminist theory seeks to disable this hierarchy in order to promote positive social change. It is this power that maintains control over others and

promotes a victim/abuser 'relationship' dynamic where youth in the sex trade are devalued, assaulted, and exploited.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for the examination of the opportunity and response costs of the problem of youth in the sex trade. Social learning theory is helpful when exploring issues at a micro level, while feminism offers a broader lens through which to understand the social problem. Both theories examine the interactive nature of relationships not only between individuals, but also within their environments.

Implications for Social Work Practice

One of the primary roles that social workers may occupy when working with youth in the sex trade is that of an advocate. A clear distinction must be made between what the social worker perceives the youth as needing, and what the youth themselves identify as a need. One of the main purposes of this research project was to listen to the voices of youth. Results indicated that youth were cognizant of several high risks such as 'Physical Abuse', 'STD/HIV', and 'Being Murdered' but that these risks may not be personally internalized.

Social workers place great emphasis on the detrimental effects of these risks, for self-evident reasons. However, youth perceptions in this study indicate that it is not these risks per se, that are given as reasons for wanting to exit the sex trade. The majority of youth noted they wanted to exit the sex trade to 'Get off Drugs', and 'Wanting a Different Lifestyle'. The risks were rarely named as individual reasons for wanting to exit the sex trade. Participants did indicate that most other youth likely wanted to exit because they 'Dislike It' and 'Physical Abuse'. Youth more often mentioned the risks as reasons for wanting to exit for others, than for themselves.

The findings suggest social workers cannot presume that the risks of working in the sex trade are internalized by all youth as reasons for wanting to exit. In fact, some youth noted they currently had no desire to exit the sex trade and were well aware of the potential risks. Sometimes this is a developmental stage, wherein adolescents feel invincible. Other times, it can relate to the lack of options or lost opportunities that contributes to remaining in the sex trade in spite of obvious risk. Participants in the study highlighted the risks and perceived them as a daily reality. The bottom line is that youth can list the risks but not necessarily identify them as a direct reason for personally wanting to exit the sex trade. Social workers must be prepared for these perceptions and not convey that youth are 'wrong' in their views. After all, many of these youth have normalized violence and abuse in their lives to such an enormous degree that it has become an accepted part of their daily lives.

Social workers are most effective in this situation by conveying concern for the youth's safety and offering supportive services and resources as alternatives. Maintaining a positive connection is a critical component in working with youth in the sex trade. Social workers who can establish rapport with youth are able to engage in reciprocal exchanges that can assist in completing a psychosocial assessment. This assessment is important for several reasons. First, it attempts to explore the uniqueness of the individual and provides the opportunity to identify their potential strengths. Second, it allows the social worker to assess, developmentally, where the youth has excelled or been delayed. If social workers can identify an individual's response costs or lost opportunities, they can explore services and resources to address outstanding needs. Some youth may benefit from clinical interventions, while others may respond best to experiential tasks. In either case, finding a program to assist and support youth based on their needs is important for providing positive and prosocial experiences they will not get on the streets.

Of course this is relatively simple to say in theory, but direct practice is much more complex. Youth in the sex trade are often transient, and may tell social workers they are satisfied obtaining the majority of their economic, social, emotional, and psychological needs from the street. This makes connecting with and locating youth difficult. As a result, initiating an assessment with youth in the sex trade can prove time consuming and arduous. As a result, each and every minute the social worker has to connect with youth in the sex trade is valuable as a potential window of opportunity for intervention.

The findings in this study indicate that social workers need to be aware of and able to identify patterns of drug use. Youth in this study clearly identified drugs as a predominant factor in the balance sheet of involvement in the sex trade. 'Money for Drugs' was mentioned as an overwhelming benefit, and 'Getting Off Drugs' was the main reason for wanting to exit the sex trade. These results suggest social workers advocate for improved services to youth in relation to detox and residential drug and alcohol treatment facilities.

Finally, one of the missing pieces in this equation remains the 'johns'; men who seek sexual gratification from children and youth. Continued research and the redirection of responsibility onto those procuring children and youth are important elements in addressing this social problem. Protecting youth on the street means that not only must social workers advocate for better services and programs, but they must address the other side of the problem as well. Those demanding sexual services from children and youth are perpetrators engaging in sexual abuse and exploitation. Contrary to the message society has provided, youth in the sex trade are not 'throw-aways', and deserve the same protection as other abused children.

Conclusion

The focus of this research was on the attitudes and perceptions of sexually procured youth. This focus was selected in order to highlight experiences and perspectives of youth involved in the sex trade. The social work role is to assist individuals in enhancing their personal functioning within family, community and society. Without hearing and understanding the perspectives of youth, supportive interventions would be based on an external world-view. The voices of youth are imperative when seeking to assist youth in exiting the sex trade. These voices serve to direct practice and service initiatives, and offer valuable insight into this pervasive social problem.

Social work is a profession that strives to assist the most vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized members of society. Youth in the sex trade are continual victims of predators and circumstances. They are not a priority because they are marginalized, rendered as disposable as the syringes that convey oblivion in their lives. They are without constituency and have johns instead of advocates. Often labeled as 'service resistant', youth in the sex trade become square pegs in round holes. Youth must make themselves 'fit' within existing services, instead of the logical approach of establishing services based on the needs of youth in the sex trade.

The unique and extensive needs of this population remain unaddressed. By allowing youth to remain without service and by refusing to fund adequate programs to assist youth in the sex trade, society has inadvertently reinforced the notion that these youth are unworthy of such an investment. It is a community responsibility to explore and establish a way to reach these youth. It is a community responsibility to convey the message, through words and actions, that every sexually procured child and youth has the right to a life free from abuse and exploitation.

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APPENDIX A: Agency Letter of Approval

APPENDIX B: Ethics Board Certificate Of Approval

APPENDIX C: Participant Consent Form