

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

---

The Black and White of Male Sex Workers  
and All Shades of Grey

### Introduction

As the gap between the rich and poor widens under our current economic climate, the phenomenon of male sex workers is increasing and does not receive much attention although it concerns thousands of men and young boys.

Nationally there are not many support service providers who target male sex workers. It is a hard to reach target group, which means they live in a marginalised subculture (men who have sex with men, homosexuality and sex work) far away from mainstream society. There is also the emergence of straight men entering the sex industry who do not identify as gay at all. They work selling themselves for financial gain to support their families. These non gay identifying men are at extreme risk as they have very poor knowledge on safe sex issues when it comes to male to male sex.

There are a few local initiatives that have projects offering support for male sex workers despite the growing mobility of male sex workers around Australia. There is no structured national male sex worker project.

This phenomenon of transient male sex workers who travel around Australia and new migrants entering the sex industry requires special programs, strategies and methods for HIV and STI and Hepatitis prevention.

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

Exchange of experience, expertise and mutual support will improve prevention methods.

Male workers fall into a very gray area, as main stream societies pass them by completely. Often they do not identify as gay so they also miss all the education that is available in the gay venues and in the gay culture. If they do identify as gay, the closest they come to gay culture is their advertising in the gay media.

The gay culture is not very accepting towards sex workers. This difficult to understand as a high proportion of young gay males will give the same sort of service to a 'one night stand' (for a few drinks at a bar or club) as sex workers will give a client for enough money to pay the rent, the telephone bill and afford to eat for a week.

The risk factor for HIV, Hepatitis and STI's vary among sex workers. The more isolated the workers, the higher the risk. Male sex workers are very isolated and dealing with the complex issues male sex workers education is a very specialised area.

The outcome from the two day workshop held in Sydney on the 29th & 30th October 1998, highlighted many of the issues nationally. I expect the issues are similar, however there are huge differences between the sex worker support organisations. There are four programs on a national level to support male workers. These four programs vary in the extreme; some are well resourced and some have very limited funding and educational material. Therefore, there is also a huge urgency to bring some of the small sex worker support agencies up to speed on male sex worker issues.

The sex workers agencies that do not have male programs are in desperate need of educational material for male workers. In addition, the relevant training in male sex worker issues would greatly assist

# DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

staff in smaller agencies with methods and programs to obtain important information on HIV, Hepatitis and other STI's to a high risk target group.

## Workshop Attendance

There were staff and management committee members from six different sex workers organisations at the two days. Attendees were:

Brad Reuter  
Male Health Educator,  
SQWISI Queensland

Ken  
Male Health Educator.  
SWOP New South Wales

Wally  
Management Committee Member.  
WISE Australian Capital Territory

Kurt Peterson  
Male Health Educator  
PCV Victoria

Tarquin  
Male Health Educator  
SIN South Australia

Felicity Lewis  
Female Health Educator  
PHOENIX Western Australia

Tracy Edwards  
Female Health Educator  
NT AIDS Council Northern Territory

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

Cliff Anderson  
Management Committee Member  
NT AIDS Council Northern Territory

I would like to thank all the staff and management committee members of these organisations for all there input into the research for this report on issues for male sex workers in Australia.

The obstacles that came up on the two-day workshop were:

- Stigma
- HIV and AIDS
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Hepatitis
- Discrimination
- Drug & alcohol issues
- Psychological issues
- Competitiveness
- Homelessness
- Financial problems
- Maintaining relationships
- Boundaries
- Debriefing
- Police
- Abuse & rape
- Multicultural workers
- Indigenous Workers
- Sexuality / gender

Explanation:

**Stigma**

The stigma that male sex workers face on a day to day basis is severe; both the general community and the gay community judging male sex workers according to

## **DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES**

stereotypes. There are myths that all male sex workers must be gay or they all must be drug users. They all must have sexual health problems. All these negative perceptions can be very distressing and cause workers to retreat and not access health agencies and other support services. This brings on isolation and is the catalyst for many other problems.

### **HIV, STI, s & Hepatitis**

Male sex workers are very fearful of contracting HIV, Hepatitis & other STI's. Male workers are often typecast as having the above conditions and accused of transmissions of these conditions. On the other side of the coin if you are a male sex worker that does have these conditions, there is a whole list of legal issues to take into consideration, and the fear of being outed as positive can generate a huge amount of stress. There are legal implications.

### **Discrimination**

Male sex workers face discrimination from the general and gay communities. Furthermore, there is discrimination from the print media who charge excessive amounts for advertising compared to others selling different services. The banking industry and insurance companies discriminate against workers when they are trying to use their services. The amount of discrimination from the medical community is a concern that is often echoed from workers that have been told that "their sort" is not welcome in this Doctor's waiting room.

### **Drug & alcohol Issues**

These issues very often come up with street workers. Educating workers with dependencies is difficult as you are often dealing with someone in a drug-induced psychosis, and dual diagnoses. There are always difficulties in placing this target group into detox & rehabs, as there is always a long waiting list for these services. Many of these street workers face high

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

incidence of violence and abuse. Drug overdoses are very common in this culture.

**Psychological Issues**

Depression, self-esteem issues and anxiety are common in workers who are forced to work in isolation due to some of the restraints placed on them by the law. Workers who have been assaulted or raped often suffer from post-traumatic stress or obsessive-compulsive behaviour due to the horrific ordeal they have endured.

Workers who have worked for a longer time period can sometimes experience disassociation where they can often have trouble getting out of the work persona and have trouble dealing with the normality. Unchecked this can lead to agoraphobia.

**Competitiveness**

The male sex industry is extremely competitive. Everyone is striving to get as much work as possible, often from the same clientele. Some clients will use a few different male workers and they are renowned for their lack of confidentiality, telling stories from worker to worker.

All this competitiveness can bring on issues with emotional & ego insecurity. Workers can be unjustly paranoid about their body image, and there are some workers who are involved in steroid use to enhance their bodies, thinking that this will improve business; however not all clients are into body builders.

With all the media hype concerning erection problems and the new wonder drugs that are available, a large number of male workers have been asking about these medications for existing conditions. However, these conditions are more than likely to be result of stress and the competitiveness nature of the industry.

## **DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES**

### **Homelessness**

Dysfunctional family units and family breakdown are a major cause of homelessness for young boys. There is a lack of support and appropriate housing for these young boys. It is distressing that opportunistic clients find them when they are at their most vulnerable.

A young boy out living on the street soon learns that men will pay for services. At first, it is for money, for food or accommodation. A young boy in this environment is soon initiated into the ruthless world of street work. In addition, the young boy is shown all the tricks of the trade including drug use. Before he knows what is going on, he is working not for food, but to supply his drug habit.

### **Financial problems**

A large percentage of male workers will have some form of financial problems. Whether it is not getting work, (therefore having to access Government benefits to survive because he can not cope with the demands of the sex industry) or problems with money management. Male workers who are successful in the industry need financial/investment advice and referral to a worker friendly accountant for taxation purposes.

### **Maintaining relationships**

An obstacle for most male workers is finding a trusted partner that is understanding of all the issues of the sex industry. Normally after disclosure of sex work, the relationship fails. Safe sex in relationships is always an issue for workers. Most of the STI infections that workers contract are from inside the relationship. This is a dilemma for sex workers and sex worker educators.

The intense loneliness of some male workers makes them desperate to find a partner. Sometimes they find themselves in very unhappy partnerships in abusive situations where they are supporting the abuser in a violent relationship. They believe that having a bad

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

relationship is better than none at all. This is due to low self-esteem.

**Boundaries**

Without a clear definition of boundary, male workers are open to the risk of physical assaults and the risk of the client pressuring the worker to perform unsafe sexual practices for more money. This lack of boundaries limits a worker's ability to negotiate effectively with their clients, leaving the young workers or inexperienced workers at risk of physical violence or contracting HIV or other STI's.

**Debriefing**

A high percentage of male sex workers operate independently and in relative isolation. This limits the sharing of information that is essential in safe working practices. Working in isolation can have many negative effects on workers, with no one to talk to about small issues with clients which can soon grow into very complex issues. All this confusion can affect the workers negotiating skills and this will affect their personal safety.

**Police**

In some states and territories police need to be more informed of sex worker issues. The treatment of sex workers by some police is an obstacle in delivery of safe sex information, safe working information and safe injecting equipment.

There is a low incidence of reporting assaults, rapes and robberies in the sex industry because of difficulties with Police in some states and territories. There is an even lower incidence of follow through due to the treatment by authorities and there negative attitudes.

**Abuse & Rape**

This is a major problem for sex workers, as they are often open to abuse and rape without support from



## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

the authorities. This difficulty has been alleviated in some areas by police liaison officers that work with community groups in supporting marginalised subcultures. Some sex worker organisations and other service providers have a lack of safety information hence, due to the lack of resources, the right information is not often passed on to sex workers

### **Multicultural workers**

Another extreme risk group is male sex workers from non-English speaking backgrounds. Because of the cultural background, sex work is a taboo subject and not talked about in some communities. There are very limited resources for female multicultural sex workers and unfortunately even less for male multicultural sex workers.

Multicultural sex workers may have language barriers, which hamper communication and negotiation skills with clients. In particular, Asian male workers are often quite gentle by nature, and this may be taken as being subservient. This can place multicultural sex workers in a very vulnerable situation and open to abuse. Often language barriers hinder the negotiation of safe sex. There is a growing demand for multicultural sex workers by clients.

In some cases, sexual health knowledge in multicultural workers can be quite limited and based on myths and misconceptions about safe sex practices and sexual health.

### **Indigenous Workers**

There is not much known about indigenous sex workers. As little research has been conducted with this target group. However, there is a growing concern for their health and safety. The sexual practices occurring in the indigenous target group is more like opportunistic sex work often for much smaller payments or for a few drinks or cigarettes.

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

This target group does not have the negotiation skills that commercial sex workers have and this can leave indigenous workers at extreme risk of HIV and other STI's and risk of assault and rape. Due to cultural differences, these workers are very hard to access and therefore need a specialised educator to go into these communities to educate this target group.

**Sexuality / gender**

There are male sex workers that cross-dress and work dressed as women because there is a high demand for this kind of service. Then there are Transgender sex workers who want to have gender reassignment and because of the high cost of the operation, work in the sex industry to raise the money.

Transgender sex workers face even more difficulties than average sex workers do. Apart from all the issues listed above, Transgender workers have the added disadvantage of having an imbalance of hormones in the body that sometimes can cause drastic mood swings. This can make it difficult to negotiate with clients and very often all this is made worse if there are drug and alcohol issues involved.

**Solutions:**

- National statistics collection program for sex worker agencies.
- Male sex worker educational resources.
- Educational resources for clients.

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

- Update current web site with the male sex workers resources and extensive referral information.
- Advertising campaigns in national gay print media, advertising sex worker support, client information, education and referrals.
- Staff training on male sex workers issues for sex worker organisations and other agencies that have contact with male sex workers.

Detailed description of the strategy:

### 1 National statistics collection for sex worker agencies

SQWISI (Self-health for Queensland Workers In the Sex Industry) has in place a database that collects statistical information on gender, age, type of worker, reason for contact, and referral details etc. All this relevant information is analysed at the end of the month complete with percentage breakdowns. The Report format is very precise and contains important information which goes to management and then on to Queensland Health.

With the proposed generic statistical data collection process the requirements and issues of male sex workers will be easily identified. This will allow us to further our ability to define educational information to better service the target group.

With every State and territory operating on the same system, an extensive understanding of the issues and an accurate account of service delivery from sex workers agencies can be obtained. The ability to keep statistics can only lead to an improvement in understanding and service delivery for all sex workers agencies and this will directly benefit to our target group.

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

## 2 Male sex worker education resources

As this report has indicated, there is an uneven coverage of male sex worker educational material in sex worker organisations. I propose that there be a national male sex worker resource. This resource would be a valuable tool to have in sex worker organisations and other agencies that have contact with male sex workers.

One of the obstacles when educating male sex workers is that there is often only one or two occasions to deliver all the information that is needed. Male workers tend to only access sex worker organisations when they are in crisis. If all the relevant information required by male sex workers needs to be available in one, complete resource.

This would improve the service delivery in all sex worker organisations as educators would be able to give complete workshops from the resources available. Workers would be able to take this comprehensive resource home to refer to later as there is a large amount of information that male sex workers need to know to enable them to work in safety and armed with the appropriate health information.

Some of the chapters in the resources would cover.

- STIGMA
- HIV & AIDS
- SEXUAL TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS
- HEPATITIS
- DISCRIMINATION
- DRUG & ALCOHOL ISSUES
- PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES
- COMPETITIVENESS
- HOMELESSNESS
- FINANCIAL PROBLEMS
- MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

- BOUNDARIES
- DEBRIEFING
- POLICE
- ABUSE & RAPE
- MULTICULTURAL SEX WORKERS
- INDIGENOUS SEX WORKERS
- SEXUALITY / GENDER
- WHAT IS SAFE SEX?
- SEXUAL ACTIVITIES
- YOUR CHOICE
- ADVERTISING
- SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK UPS
- FORMS OF WORKING
- HOW TO STAY IN CONTROL
- CLIENT CONTROL
- STRESS MANAGEMENT
- EXITING THE SEX INDUSTRY
- HOW TO CHECK CLIENTS FOR STI
- HOW TO USE CONDOMS
- HINTS FOR SAFE WORKING
- SAFE DRUG USE
- PERSONAL SAFETY
- TAXATION
- WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

***Please feel free to add more information!***

### 3 Client education resources.

There are thousands of male sex workers in Australia, and some of these workers can see up to four to five clients per day. A high percentage of the clients of male sex workers are married and do not access community agencies and have no idea of safe sex or sexual health. Thus there is a very valid reason to get education out to the clients. Clients often ask male workers to engage in unsafe sexual practices. Male workers often refer clients to sexual health clinics for testing and treatment.

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

A set of post cards that explained safe sex, sexual health and relevant referrals phone numbers could be used by workers as education resources and could act as a very effective negotiation tool for clients who consistently ask for unsafe sexual practices.

#### 4 Update current web page

These male sex worker resources would filter down through sex worker organisations and other agencies that had contact with male sex workers and those who access these services would be very well briefed.

However there are many male sex workers who live and work in regional communities who do not have contact with these services and are poorly educated on health issues and personal safety.

If the proposed male sex worker resources was placed on a web page all workers anywhere could have access to this educational material, and therefore all male workers could make educated decisions about their work and lives.

All community based agencies and support services would have access to important information to further their own education and to improve service delivery to male sex workers. Web pages are very easy to update therefore this web page could also have extensive referral information. This would create a national networking and referral system for all regional male sex workers.

#### 5 Advertising campaign

Advertising campaigns in publications in which male sex workers advertise their services, would refer clients and workers to sex worker support services and also allows young workers who are working and at extreme health risk, access to all the services that are available.

## DRAFT REPORT ON MALE SEX WORKERS ISSUES

This could be done very cost effectively as sex worker support organisations generally have very good relationships with publishers as there are many referrals between the two organisations. This advertising campaign would access thousands of people who would come into contact with male sex workers and those who just say they read the contact columns.

### 6 Staff training / public education

Some sex worker organisations do not have male health educators and therefore there is not much support for male workers. These smaller sex worker organisations and other agencies are often unaware of the issues and often male sex workers won't to speak to female educators about private working boy issues. This further isolates male workers.

The staff in these services must have access to male sex worker information. This will allow the staff at these services to have the knowledge to delivery workshops to male sex workers. This knowledge can be passed on through comprehensive staff training on male sex worker issues for sex worker organisations and other agencies that have contact with male sex workers.

This Staff training is already done in the regional and metro areas of Queensland and to date has been effective. This process allows all community based agencies to have the skill and the knowledge to offer professional service delivery to male sex workers.