

Clients of sex workers:

Sexual behaviour and safe sex practices

Clients of sex workers are often absent from social research and legal discourse. With the assistance of a 1995 Commonwealth AIDS Research Grant, Roberta Perkins, Frances Lovejoy and Meredith Jacobsen investigated the safe sex practices of men who are the clients of sex workers.

CLIENTS were contacted through advertisements in newspapers in which they were invited to phone us. The ads were placed in the personal columns, where sex workers, brothels and escort agencies solicit business. A total of 667 men responded and agreed to answer questions on their background and sexual behaviour.

Demographical Details

Three hundred and sixty-five (55 per cent) of the respondents were aged between 26 and 40 years, 206 (31 per cent) were over 40, and 92 (14 per cent) were under 26. Three hundred and forty-three (51 per cent) of them lived in a Sydney suburb that was predominantly middle class, and

288 (43 per cent) in a working class suburb.

Two hundred and seventy-six (41 per cent) of the men were married at the time of their interview, and a further 119 (18 per cent) had been married in the past. Two hundred and ninety-two (44 per cent) of the respondents worked in white collar occupations, 319 (48 per cent) were blue collar workers, 14 (2 per cent) worked in the armed forces or other employment, and 40 (6 per cent) were either unemployed or retired. Although 321 (48 per cent) claimed to belong to a religion, only 85 (13 per cent) attended church regularly.

Sexual Behaviour Outside Prostitution

Nearly half of the men (289 or 43 per cent) had multiple sex partners who were not sex workers over the past six months, while the same percentage had only one partner (206 or 31 per cent were wives), and 90 (14 per cent) had only had sex with sex workers over this time.

The kinds of sexual activities they practiced with these sex partners were fairly conventional: vaginal sex (574, 86 per cent); oral sex (509, or 76 per cent); anal sex (91, or 14 per cent); mutual masturbation (25, or 4 per cent); sado-

Table 1. Reasons for clients visiting prostitutes

Reason	% Total sample (n=667)	% Married men (n=276)	% Church-goers (n=85)	% Tertiary degrees (n=165)
Likes sex workers' company	20.1	15.6	18.8	20.0
Sex with sex workers less complicated	33.7	26.1	30.6	36.4
Sex workers 'cleaner'	2.2	3.3	0	0.6
Sexually aroused by sex workers	9.4	11.6	10.6	10.3
Sex workers are 'professional'	13.8	12.3	16.5	17.6
Can talk frankly with sex workers	2.1	2.2	1.2	3.0
Sex with sex workers only sex available	13.3	10.2	20.0	12.1
Have a high sex urge	11.2	10.9	8.2	11.5
Likes sex with a variety	31.2	42.4	31.8	29.7
Sex workers provide relief from stress	11.4	10.9	9.4	15.1
Regular sex partner does not provide sex	9.3	20.7	8.2	7.9
Other	3.0	1.8	2.4	3.0



DEEJ FABYC *Mugs*, 1992. Found object, condoms, rice



masochism (4, or 0.6 per cent); fantasy sex (17, or 3 per cent).

Two hundred and forty five (37 per cent) of the clients said they never used a condom with their partners, or did so only occasionally. All of the men who didn't use condoms engaged in vaginal sex. Eighty-two per cent engaged in oral sex and 15 per cent had anal sex. A quarter of these men had multiple sex partners, and they must be considered to be involved in highly risky behaviour. Three-quarters of the non-condom using men had only one sex partner, and so any risk in their relationship was dependent on the fidelity of this partner.

Sexual Behaviour in Prostitution

Nearly half of the men (313, or 47 per cent) said they visited a sex worker at least once a month; church attend-

ance and marital status did not affect this result, with 133 (48 per cent of 276) of the married men and 37 (44 per cent of 85) of the churchgoers seeing a prostitute not less than once a month. Table 1 indicates the reasons given by the men for visiting sex workers.

Overall, men give similar reasons for visiting sex workers regardless of marital status, religious commitments or education, but there are some significant variations. The churchgoing men were much more inclined to visit sex workers as the only sex available to them, whilst the married men made the largest claim to sexual variety as a motivation for visiting prostitutes. As the findings on this table indicate, lust is not the only motive for seeing a sex worker; seeking an uncomplicated sexual arrangement, and a preference for the company of prostitutes, are motives at least as frequent as pure sexual gratification.

Table 2. Frequency of condom use in various sexual activities in prostitution

Frequency	% Oral sex (n=582)	% Vaginal sex (n=605)	% Anal sex (n=103)
Never	8.4	1.5	1.0
Occasionally	4.8	0.5	1.0
Most of the time	4.6	3.6	7.8
All of the time	85.7	98.5	81.6

Sexual Health of the Clients

Seventy-five (11 per cent) of the clients had contracted a sexually transmissible disease (STD). Twenty (27 per cent of 75) of the infected men claimed the source of the infection was sex workers, 13 per cent claimed it was a casual acquaintance, six said it was a lover, only one attributed the infection to an overseas trip and 20 did not know.

Only one of the clients had regular monthly screenings for STDs, another six had screenings every six months and 24 (4 per cent) once a year. Sixty-nine (10 per cent) said they only visited a doctor or clinic when they suspected they had an STD, although 38 per cent had undertaken an HIV test. None of the married clients had check-ups more often than yearly, and 80 (29 per cent) had been tested for HIV. Table 2 shows the difference in frequencies between the various sexual activities in prostitution.

Clients use condoms much more often in prostitution than they do in their personal lives, however a prophylaxis is used less often during oral sex. Both sex workers and their clients are well aware of the lower risk involved in oral sex compared to the other activities. Since it is the sex workers who insist on using condoms, it is also they who waive them in oral sex¹. Clients generally dislike condoms and resist them whenever they can². Only 106 (16 per cent) ever took condoms with them when visiting a prostitute indicating few intend using condoms. However, with a broad condom policy enforced across the sex industry, most clients have little choice but to use condoms to prevent STDs and HIV if they want to have sex with a worker. Only 12 men admitted to bribing sex workers not to use condoms. Of the 92 clients who indicated that they never use or only occasionally use condoms in prostitution, 75 claimed the prophylaxis caused them to lose feeling.

Discussion

The risk of infection in prostitution is minimal due to the vast majority of clients using condoms during sexual intercourse with sex workers³. The broad mandatory condom policy across the sex industry is a recent post-AIDS develop-

ment⁴. Prior to AIDS in Australia most brothels across New South Wales (NSW) did not enforce a policy on condom use. In fact, the choice of condoms was made by the clients, not the workers. Some sex workers learnt to slip condoms on their clients' penis without them knowing about it. This, however, could result in losing one's job if caught by brothel management⁵. One of the reasons why condoms were discouraged on the premises is to prevent police from seizing them as evidence of prostitution in the event of a raid⁶. The law reforms in NSW in 1979 meant that sex workers could no longer be arrested for an activity related to prostitution, but it took the impact of the AIDS epidemic to prompt brothel management into introducing a mandatory condom policy across the industry.

Shortly after, the client turnover in prostitution began to decline dramatically. No doubt much of this can be attributed to the sensational media stories on AIDS, and the coincidental alteration to the taxation system which disallowed 'entertainment tax'. But, some men may also have stopped frequenting prostitution because of the new condom rule. Those who did continue their visits made their objections to condoms known to the determined sex worker. Although, the men no longer make loud protests the fact that so few carry condoms with them indicates a lack of a sexual health consciousness. Whenever a prostitute has waived condom use her customers have welcomed the event, making it impossible for her to return to a safe sex scenario. In short, rampant STD and HIV infection in prostitution is avoided through the determination of the sex workers, without the support of their customers.

Conclusion

As we have seen clients of prostitutes are still the major obstacle to sexual health within prostitution. To change this situation so that men develop a health consciousness on safe sex and sex workers do not have to do daily battle with uncooperative clients, campaigns for preventing the spread of HIV need to target men in general, through saturation ads in men's magazines, promoting condom use in literary,

cinematic and TV drama scenarios, using prominent male film and sports stars in safe sex advertisements, and especially targeting male youth in sex education in schools. As much effort as required is needed to make clients as responsible as sex workers in combating HIV/AIDS, and, if the spread of HIV is to be checked permanently, encourage a notion of responsibility in all men in our society. ★

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NOTES

1. Perkins, R., *Working Girls*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1991, pp. 318-19.
2. Perkins, R., Dean, M.J., Wade, A. & Lovejoy, F., 'It's like wearing a raincoat' - Clients and Safe Sex in female prostitution in NSW and ACT' *National AIDS Bulletin*, vol. 6 no. 1, February 1992, pp. 31-33.
3. Harcourt, C., 'Prostitution and public health in the era of AIDS'. In Perkins, R., Prestage G., Sharp, R. & Lovejoy, F. (eds), *Sex Work and Sex Workers in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1994, p. 218.
4. *ibid.*, p. 221.
5. Perkins 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
6. Perkins, R. & Bennett, G., *Being A Prostitute*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 50.

