

Men Involved in Prostitution in Glasgow

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Men involved in prostitution are one of the hardest to reach and most vulnerable groups of men in Scotland. Less is known about the circumstances and social contexts of male prostitution compared to the evidence base underpinning female prostitution. The health outcomes for this group of men are poor, with depression, suicidal ideation, attempted suicide, addiction, and sexual ill health including risk of exposure to HIV and other STI's frequently reported.

The threat of an HIV epidemic in the 1980's first cast a spotlight on this population within the London area and rapidly resulted in the establishment of a clinical sexual health service (The Working Men's Project, St Mary's Hospital, Paddington) and a drop-in service offering emotional support (Streetwise Youth, later to become THT's SW5 Project, Earl's Court) targeted specifically at men involved in prostitution.

In Glasgow, the existence of men involved in prostitution was highlighted by two social work reports entitled "Pilot Study – Male Prostitution, Glasgow" (David de Croy 1990) and "Report on street based outreach work in Glasgow" (David de Croy 1991). The first report pulled together the scarce evidence base to highlight the experience of men involved in prostitution, while the second report qualified the utility of providing street outreach to this population group. Notably, further reports were published by Mick Bloor, Marina Barnard and Neil McKeganey (University of Glasgow) focusing mainly on HIV and risk behaviours.

In 1996-97 PHACE west (as was) and Barnardo's (Barnardo's at the time being under the auspices of the City Centre Initiative or CCI) collaborated to provide street outreach work with men involved in prostitution which itself evolved to incorporate a report on the support needs of young men involved in prostitution and the establishment of a multi-agency network, which were both entitled "Out On The Streets" (report by Tom Lusk & Alice O'Flynn, published 1997, network chaired by Tom Lusk, operational 1997 – 2001). PHACE west, Barnardo's and Simon Community all continued to independently provide outreach services to this population group in both specific and/or generic contexts.

The next milestone in Glasgow's increasing recognition of the existence of men involved in prostitution and the harm and exploitation experienced was informed by the publication of the MRC document "An Overview of Male Sex Work in Edinburgh and Glasgow: The Male Sex Worker Perspective" (Judith Connell & Graham Hart, 2003). While public concern most often focused on the transmission of HIV, this report focused primarily upon the mental and physical health consequences for the men involved, the family and social backgrounds of the men involved, and the timing and nature of their entry into prostitution:

"As the majority of men saw no real viable alternative, or simply felt they had no choice in selling sex, it was not surprising that their initial feelings surrounding sex work were ones of fear, apprehension and repulsion. Words frequently used to describe their initial experience of sex work included: disgust; scared; threatened; nerve-wracking; worried." (p. 42). The report continues:

"Many men described being caught in a vicious circle of poverty and deprivation. It was the acute need for money to pay for food, clothing, housing, child support and debts that drew them back into prostitution. Sex work was a means of survival for these men and one in which they felt trapped." (pp. 117-118).

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In 2002, as preliminary findings from Connell & Hart's study became available, NHS Greater Glasgow (as was) commenced the Glasgow Male Sex Work Network, bringing together agencies that had a stake or level of contact with men involved in prostitution to assess the needs of this population group and begin to identify actions which might address these needs. The group was chaired by the SHPO (Senior Health Promotion Officer) for Sexual Health - Nicky Coia - with participation from the SHPO for Men's Health – Alastair Low. Taking the 2003 MRC report as a basis for understanding male on-street prostitution within Glasgow, and mindful of the increase in internet and mobile phone-based off-street prostitution, the Network supported an application made by the SHPO Sexual Health in 2006 to fund a two year pilot project which would work with men involved in prostitution. The application successfully secured monies from NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde's allocation of National Sexual Health Strategy monies and Blood Borne Virus (BBV) prevention monies.

Hosted by West Glasgow Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) and named the Open Road Project, it became operational in April 2007 and employs two staff: Project Manager Julian Heng and Development Officer Phil Forbes. The purpose of the project is to identify the hidden population of men currently involved in prostitution and to ensure that this population receive the appropriate service provision from services across NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde.

The Open Road Project defines prostitution as males who engage in sexual activity in exchange for some form of payment such as: money, drinks, drugs, consumer goods or a bed or roof over their head for a night. This may take place in a variety of settings including private accommodation, brothels or on the street. With this in mind, the project's key aims are:

- To identify the men involved in prostitution through effective processes and partnership working,
- To assess the needs of men currently involved in prostitution,
- To address the needs of men involved in prostitution by appropriate service delivery across a range of partners,
- To ensure that mainstream services provide appropriate services to address the clients needs,
- To contribute towards establishing an evidence base to inform future policy and services, and
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the project and it's approach.

From 2007 the Open Road Project have also taken responsibility for the operation and chairing of the Glasgow Network, now named the Glasgow Male Prostitution Network.

The Open Road Project is currently working in partnership with Glasgow Caledonian University (researcher – Phil Eaglesham) to perform research into the scale and nature of internet-based off-street prostitution in Greater Glasgow & Clyde and expects to report on this by February 2008.

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