

The Involvement of Children in Commercial Sexual Activity

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Abstract

This study explores the factors leading to the first involvement of a young person in underage prostitution. The target group were sex workers who began commercial sexual activities before the age of 18. Questions focussed on the first time payment was received for sex. The respondents outlined the factors leading to this first involvement. In a majority of cases other people were influential in guiding under 18 year olds into commercial sex. They generally received advice with regard to setting a price. The first client was most frequently a businessman. Four fifths of the respondents had tried to stop having sex for money but most recommenced due to lack of money.

Introduction

It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 years old to be prostituted (*Prostitution Reform Act 2003 Sections 20--23*). The illegal status of this activity and the consequent secrecy and deceit surrounding it make it difficult to obtain accurate information. The relative absence in the literature of children's own accounts of commercial sexual activity highlights the powerlessness of young people (Shaw & Butler, 1998). The New Zealand Government attended the Second World Congress Against Commercial Exploitation of Children in Yokohama in 2001 and presented the *New Zealand National Plan of Action*. ECPAT NZ¹ was designated the organisation to carry out research into the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Initially ECPAT NZ conducted a national survey of counsellors and welfare agencies and found over 195 known cases of underage commercial sexual activity. Children under 16 years of age were involved in 145 of these cases (Saphira, 2001).² As most children being prostituted do not come to the attention of professionals, this figure was thought to represent only a small proportion of those involved. Commercial sexual activity involving children was reported in country districts and provincial towns as well as large cities. The *Young in Oslo* study in Norway in 1996 attempted to obtain prevalence figures (Pederson & Hegna, 2002). This study mapped all young people in the mid-teen age group and found that 2.1% of males and .6% of females had been paid for sex (Pederson & Hegna, 2002). Recent youth research in New Zealand did not include a question on money for sex (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003).

¹ ECPAT NZ is a non-government organisation and part of a global network. The acronym stands for End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes.

² This study surveyed counselling agencies, truancy officers and non-governmental welfare services to ascertain how many young people they knew were doing sex work in the three years from March 1998 to March 2001. The demographic details and circumstances given ensured that the young people were not counted twice (Saphira, 2001).

The clinics for sexually transmitted diseases reported that a small number of underage youth present themselves. Clinic workers suggested that number represented only a percentage of actual activity. They believed that young people do not present for fear of prosecution or entrapment (Ministry of Social Development (2003). It is suggested that fear of the authorities may be causing young people to put their lives in danger by not seeking help for illicit drug usage and the treatment of diseases. A recent study of 303 sex workers in the Christchurch area identified 12 workers under the age of 18 years. All but one were working on the streets (Plumridge & Abel, 2001). Of significance is the fact that 31% of the total number of these sex workers became involved in prostitution when they were under the age of 18 years. In a qualitative study of six gender liminal³ youth, the ages reported were young, four of the six were under 15 years old, (Worth, 2000). Of the 194 young people in the ECPAT NZ survey, 10% were 12 years old or under, 15% were 13 years old, 20% were 14 years old and 30% were 15 years old (Saphira, 2001). It is not known at what age they started sex work.

One New Zealand study of 29 sex workers from Dunedin found that the sex workers were more likely to have had difficult early developmental experiences with more interpersonal challenges and more penetrative sexual abuse as children than a community sample of women of similar age (Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999). They were more likely to have left home early, left school early with lower qualifications and to have had an earlier pregnancy than the control group. While this does not indicate a causal effect, the author suggests there may be some linkage. The researchers did not ask the women how they got involved in sex work at such a young age (Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999).

An Australian national inquiry into commercial sexual activity found the main reasons for engaging in sex for money included the need to obtain drugs, accommodation, money and food (Grant, Grabosky & David, 1999). Other reasons cited were fear of violence, peer pressure and poor judgement (Martyn, 1998). Some young people also mentioned emotional contact and said that commercial sexual activity was a “tool for companionship” (Martyn, 1998). The influence of peer pressure is well documented for teenagers but it may be stronger for adolescent street youth (Unger, Simon, Newman, Montgomery, Kipke, & Albornoz, 1998; Adalf & Zdanowicz, 1999). Peer pressure has also been associated with delinquent peer glory (Vitaro, Tremblay, Kerr, Pagani & Bukowski, 1997).

In commercial sexual matters, teenagers lack not only a cognitive understanding of the transaction and its long term consequences, but they also lack the sexual maturity (both physically and socio-emotionally) to engage in a fully competent manner (Johnson, 1999). Young people have a greater risk than adults of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. This risk is further increased by early sexual activity and multiple partners (Lemmey & Tice, 2000). In addition, the sexual activity is often rough which can cause internal damage and tissue tears. In females it can easily destroy the normal vaginal and infection barriers ((Lemmey & Tice, 2000). Even if teenagers have the knowledge, Fitzgerald (1997) reports that they are still unlikely to negotiate effectively with adult males. Young people engaged in commercial sexual activity may also be coping with depression (Pyett & Warr, 1996), a sense of entrapment (Wilson & Arnold, 1986) and self harm and risk taking (Stewart, 1994; Tschirren, Hammet & Saunders, 1996).

A study of six transgender sex workers in Auckland’s Karangahape Road indicated that they may have become involved with sex work as part of the process of developing their sexual identity (Worth, 2000). One said it was difficult to get into sex work because the older girls would “bash you up” but she had been helped by an Auntie who worked the street. One began in Fiji at 11 years old; another when she ran away after a beating and needed money to survive; another had watched drag queens and felt a strong affinity for them. It has been suggested that transgender people may turn to sex work because it is difficult for them to obtain employment dressed as women (Boles &

³ ‘Gender liminal’ is a term defined as the adoption by certain individuals of attributes associated with a gender other than their own (Besnier, 1994).

Elifson, 1994). Two transgender people in the Karangahape Road study were on a benefit but felt they could not survive without doing sex work.

Cusick (2002) suggests that the most common route to commercial sexual activity appears to be through an introduction by a friend (Jesson, 1993; O'Neill et al., 1995). Swann (1999) describes a scenario in which a young woman becomes dependent on her boyfriend, becomes isolated, is introduced to drugs, subjected to violence and becomes trapped. She finds it difficult to admit the relationship is abusive and blames herself. Palmer (2002) says that none of the boys involved in prostitution is making truly informed choices. They are victims of predatory adults. Feelings of loss of control and low self worth coupled with early emotional distress may lead to too few options for making choices (Kidd & Kraal, 2002). In an address to the United Nations, New Zealand recognised that two categories of children are particularly vulnerable. These are children in lower socio-economic groups and children of indigenous people (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001).

The following study set out to uncover what factors surrounded young people's first involvement with commercial sexual activity.

Method

A questionnaire was developed in consultation with medical and psychological researchers including Maori, the Auckland Ethics Committee, and Maori Community Workers in South Auckland. Members of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective and the staff from sexual health clinics in Auckland and Waikato also viewed the questionnaire with opportunity for comment. The Auckland Health Ethics Committee altered the questionnaire before its final acceptance.

Some of the questions included were:

If you were not living with your parents at the time you started having sex for money who were you living with?

When you had sex for money did you use condoms? **Please circle one**
Never Seldom Sometimes Nearly always Always

Thinking about the first time you had sex for money? Where did it happen?

How old were you?

How did you set the price?

Were most of your clients teenagers?

How much sexual experience had you had before the first time you had sex for money?

The questionnaire was distributed through a network. Completed questionnaires were returned from massage parlours, escort agencies, private workers, and from street workers and former workers who were recruited via a snowballing technique where one participant refers another and some street workers were approached directly. A clinical psychologist using the same set of questions interviewed some street and parlour workers.

Results

The 47 respondents ranged in age from 15–47 years with an average age of 24 years. Maori respondents tended on the average to be younger. The sample consisted of 37 females, 3 males and 7 male-to-female transgenders. Some females may have been transgender but considered themselves more female. Those early in the transition seemed to call themselves male and those who were more developed called themselves transgender or female. One interviewee was proud of her hospital bracelet from a recent admission that showed her as female.

There were 20 Pakeha (43%), 19 Maori (40%), 5 Pacific Peoples (11%), and 3 European (6%) immigrants (refer Table I).

Table I Demographics

| <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>Gender</i> | | | Total | % | <i>Northern Region</i> North Statistics* |
|-------------------|---------------|------|-------------|-------|-----|---|
| | Female | Male | Transgender | | | |
| Pakeha | 20 | | | 20 | 43 | 65% |
| Maori | 13 | 2 | 4 | 19 | 40 | 27% |
| Pacific | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 11 | 8% |
| E. Migrant | 3 | | | 3 | 6 | |
| Total | 37 | 3 | 7 | 47 | 100 | 100% |

*These percentages are for Northland, Auckland and Waikato regions (NZ Census 2001)

Only seven of the group were living with both parents, two were living with their mother, one with an older sister and the rest were living with other relatives, friends or in foster homes. Most lived in a house or flat. Four stated they were living on the street.

The average age when consenting sex began was 13.5 years old and the range was 9 – 17 years of age. One woman was uncertain as to whether she had ever agreed to have sex. The man who had consenting sex with another boy at the age of nine had been abused at a very young age over a long period of time. He was very clear that he was consenting on this particular occasion.

Table II First Consenting Sex and Parental Contact

| <i>First Consenting Sex</i> * | <i>With whom they were living</i> | | | | Total | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------|-------|-------|--|
| | Both Parents | Mother | Elsewhere | Total | | |
| Under 12 years old | 1 | | 3 | 4 | 8% | |
| 12 –13 years old | 4 | 2 | 15 | 21 | 45% | |
| 14 –15 years old | 1 | 1 | 13 | 15 | 32% | |
| 16-17 years old | 1 | | 6 | 7 | 15% | |
| Total | 7 | 3 | 37 | 47 | 100% | |
| Total | 15% | 6% | 79% | 100% | | |

*The law does not allow children under 13 years old to give consent due to their lack of cognitive ability to give **informed** consent.

Fifty-nine percent of respondents disclosed childhood sexual abuse. There were ethnic differences in the rate of disclosure. Seventy four percent of Maori disclosed sexual abuse as a child compared to 40% Pakeha and 60% Pacific People,. This may be related to openness to disclose in a one-off interview rather than actual rates in the community. There may be under-reporting due to forgetting and to an unwillingness to acknowledge abuse, particularly incestuous abuse (Femina, Yaeger & Lewis, 1990). Both previous studies of prevalence (showing a sexual abuse rate of 10% - 25%) were carried out only on a South Island population which has a different ethnic mix, less transient people and less crowded urban areas (Anderson, Martin, Mullen & Roman, 1993; Fergusson, Lyskey & Horwood, 1996; Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999).

Table III Ethnicity and Childhood Sexual Abuse

| <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>Childhood Sexual Abuse</i> | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------------|
| | No Disclosure | Disclosed Abuse | Total | % Disclosed |
| Pakeha | 12 | 8 | 20 | 40% |
| Maori | 5 | 14 | 19 | 74% |
| Pacific | 2 | 3 | 5 | 60%* |
| Migrant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 66%* |
| Total | 20 | 27 | 47 | |

Childhood sexual abuse occurs more frequently in lower socio-economic areas. The recently published Youth 2000 research which was carried out throughout New Zealand on school pupils aged from 12-17 years, recorded a regional range of 24% - 31% (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). The high of 31% was recorded in South Auckland which has the highest child poverty in New Zealand. All research dealing with the prevalence of sexual abuse depends on the willingness of the person to disclose the abuse. This may vary with different populations and with different methods of data collection. Anderson, Martin, Mullen & Roman (1993) reported that 30 women in their control group, who had not disclosed abuse on paper, disclosed abuse when interviewed. Another 16 women declined to talk about their previous disclosure in the interview. This may indicate a difficulty in disclosing such personal details in a one-off interview.

The age the respondents had begun to receive payment for a sexual activity ranged from under 10 years to 17 years. The average age was 14.5 years (see Table IV).

Twenty four respondents (52%) had been having sex for a year or less before they first had sex for money. For two males it was the first time they had had sex. Twenty two percent had had sex since they were under 10 years old.

Table IV Prior Sexual Experience and Age of Involvement

| <i>Sexual Experience</i> | <i>Age at Involvement</i> | | | Total |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | 13 & under | 14-15 | 16 & over | |
| A few months | 2 | 5 | 4 | 11 |
| About a year | 2 | 2 | 7 | 11 |
| Over a year | 1 | 7 | 4 | 12 |
| Three years or more | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| Since I was young | | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| First time | | 2 | | 2 |
| No response | | 1 | | 1 |
| Total | 7 | 20 | 20 | 47 |
| Percentage | 15% | 42.5% | 42.5% | 100% |

The first act of sex for payment occurred in a variety of situations such as in cars, parks, on the street or in motels, parlours or rooms (see Table V). Nearly twice as many Europeans as Maori engaged in their first sex act indoors, in parlours or escort motels (59% Pakeha, 29% Maori) (see Table V). Young people over the age of 15 were more likely to begin in parlours. Only two under the age of 16 began in parlours (see Table VI).

Table V Place of First Commercial Sexual Activity and Ethnicity

| <i>Place of First Commercial Sex</i> | <i>Ethnicity</i> | | | | Total |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| | Pakeha | Maori | Pacific | Migrant | |
| Car | 2 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 10 |
| Park | 2 | 4 | | | 6 |
| Massage parlour | 7 | 3 | | 1 | 11 |
| Apartment/ house | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 4 |
| Own home | 1 | 2 | | 1 | 4 |
| Motel (escort) | 3 | 2 | 1 | | 6 |
| Street | 3 | 2 | 1 | | 6 |
| Total | 20 | 19 | 5 | 3 | 47 |
| Percent | 43% | 40% | 11% | 6% | 100% |

In over half of the instances (56%), the price for sexual acts had been set by the client, pimp, parlour, gang or an older woman. Although it is illegal to employ people under 18 years of age, 28% had the price set by a parlour and 36% committed their first act of sex for money in a parlour or as an escort.

Table VI Place of First Commercial Sexual Activity and Age

| <i>Place it occurred</i> | <i>13 years & under</i> | <i>14-15years old</i> | <i>16-17years old</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Car | 1 | 5 | 4 | 10 |
| Park | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| Massage Parlour | | 2 | 9 | 11 |
| Apartment/ House | 1 | 3 | | 4 |
| Own Home | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Motel (escort) | | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Street | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Total | 6 | 21 | 20 | 47 |
| Percentage | 13% | 45% | 42% | 100% |

Half of the respondents said they always used condoms when they first started having sex for money. About a fifth used them occasionally or less. Condoms were used less frequently in situations where a pimp or client set the price. A third of the respondents said that they set the price themselves. This could indicate that they had contact with people involved in the sex industry who advised them on the price to ask (see Table VII). Most of those who set the price themselves had had the idea of performing sex for money suggested to them by some other person (see Table VIII).

Table VII Setting the Price and the Use of Condoms

| <i>Setting the Price</i> | <i>Never</i> | <i>Seldom</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Mostly</i> | <i>Always</i> | <i>Total</i> | |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|------|
| Myself | | | 1 | 6 | 9 | 16 | 34% |
| Parlour | | | 1 | 4 | 8 | 13 | 28% |
| Client | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 20% |
| Friend | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6% |
| Pimp | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6% |
| Older woman | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2% |
| Gang | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2% |
| Relative | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2% |
| Total | 3 | 2 | 4 | 13 | 25 | 47 | 100% |
| Percent | 6% | 4% | 9% | 28% | 53% | 100% | |

Table VIII Influences of Others in Price Setting

| <i>Suggested I do Sex for Money</i> | <i>Set the price myself</i> |
|--|-----------------------------|
| A female friend of the same age | 5 |
| A male friend of the same age | 2 |
| The client | 1 |
| An older male | 1 |
| An older female | 3 |
| Thought of it myself | 3 |
| Relative | 2 |
| Total | 17 |

The influence of other people in the process of becoming involved in underage commercial sexual activity is highlighted by the fact that almost half the respondents said a female friend or an older female suggested it (see Table IX).

Table IX Influences of Others in Suggesting Involvement

| <i>Who Suggested Commercial Sexual Activity</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---|--------------|----------|
| A female friend of the same age | 12 | 26% |
| Thought of it myself | 11 | 23% |
| An older female | 10 | 22% |
| The client | 5 | 11% |
| An older male | 3 | 6% |
| A male friend of the same age | 2 | 4% |
| Newspaper advertisement | 2 | 4% |
| Relative | 2 | 4% |
| Total | 47 | 100% |

*Percentages are rounded up and weighted for lower numbers

Eleven of the sample of 47 reported that they thought of getting into the sex industry themselves but only two of those set the price themselves (see Table X).

Table X Who Set the Price When it was Their Own Idea

| <i>Set the price</i> | <i>Thought of it myself</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Client | 2 |
| Parlour or agency | 6 |
| Myself | 2 |
| Gang | 1 |
| Total | 11 |

Over half the respondents described their first client as a business man considerably older than themselves (see Table XI). Few of them reported any teenagers among their subsequent clients. Commercial sexual activity was generally with an older age group.

Table XI Men Who Use Young people who are Underage

| <i>First Client</i> | <i>Young Person's Age at first Sex for Money</i> | | | <i>Total</i> | |
|--------------------------|--|------------------|-----------------|--------------|------|
| | <i>>14yrs</i> | <i>14 -15yrs</i> | <i>16year +</i> | | |
| Businessman | 1 | 10 | 13 | 24 | 52% |
| Tradesman | 2 | 6 | 4 | 12 | 26% |
| Seemed unemployed | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6% |
| Pensioner | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 4% |
| Gang member | | 1 | | 1 | 2% |
| Taxi-driver | 1 | | | 1 | 2% |
| Teenager | | 1 | | 1 | 2% |
| Can't remember | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6% |
| Total | 7 | 20 | 20 | 47 | 100% |

Four fifths of the respondents had tried to stop having sex for money but only about one fifth succeeded (see Table XII). Money was the main reason the respondents cited for returning to commercial sexual activity after they had tried to stop. Those who succeeded found a variety

of alternatives. Two of the group had it imposed on them when they went to prison (See Table XIII).

Table XII Reasons for Continuing Commercial Sexual Activity

| <i>Returned After Trying to Stop</i> | <i>N</i> |
|--|----------|
| Ran out of money | 22 |
| Partner made me | 2 |
| Had an abusive relationship | 2 |
| Moved towns | 1 |
| Police threatened me so I stopped | 1 |
| Lifestyle | 1 |
| Total | 29 |

Over half of the respondents advised other young people, who might be thinking about having sex for money, not to do it and to check out alternative options. A third suggested that the young people needed to educate themselves about the dangers in the sex trade. Three respondents suggested the young people get counselling before they considered entering into commercial sexual activity.

Table XIII Reasons for Ceasing Commercial Sexual Activity

| <i>Reason for stopping</i> | <i>Number</i> |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Busy doing other work/things | 4 |
| Got off drugs | 2 |
| Went to prison | 2 |
| Got a partner not a pimp | 1 |
| Did not like it | 1 |
| Recognised the effects | 1 |
| Became a Christian | 1 |
| Too scared | 1 |
| Total | 13 |

Discussion

The nature of the sample prevents trends expressed by the data from being generalised to cover all young people who become involved in commercial sexual activity. Most respondents were clear about the first time they were engaged in sex for money. One respondent had been paid for sex while at primary school. Her father coached her to have sex for money from a very early age. In cases like this, the boundaries between child abuse and commercial sexual activity are blurred (Saphira, 2001). When an offender pays a child before or after sexual abuse, it could be seen to fit into a category of sex for favours or survival sex. If a child is older than ten and is paid for sex by several offenders, it is more likely to be classified as an example of underage commercial sexual activity.

This study had a disproportionate number of Maori (40%). This compares to the New Zealand Northland, Auckland and Waikato rate of 21% (Statistics NZ, 2001) and the combined Youth 2000 samples for the upper North Island of 14% (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). The elevated rate may be due to a high response of South Auckland street workers. The earlier Christchurch study of 303 sex workers also had a disproportionate percentage of Maori (11%) in their sample compared to the 7% Maori population in the South island (Plumridge & Abel, 2001). Overseas research indicates that higher numbers of indigenous people are found in the sex trade (Grant,

Grabosky & David, 1999). The New Zealand government has also acknowledged this (MFAT, 2001).

Over three-quarters of the sample in this study were not living with either parent at the time they began commercial sexual activity. This is a higher number than in the Dunedin study where almost half grew up with both parents (Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999). The fact that fewer respondents lived with their parents could suggest difficult early developmental experiences. This is a similar finding to that recorded by the Dunedin respondents (Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999). The Dunedin study found respondents were more likely to have left home early, left school early with lower qualifications and to have had an earlier pregnancy than the South Island control group of women (Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999). In a literature review, seven of the studies quoted found that 'living in local authority care, running away from home and homelessness were strongly correlated with young people's entry into prostitution' (Cusick, 2002, p 10).

Young people who have experienced a high rate of abuse and who lack the guidance and security of a stable home could be very susceptible to suggestion from other people. The idea of commercial sexual activity was suggested to most of the respondents by others. Even when they thought of it themselves, someone else set the price in all but two instances. Only a few of the group were living with both parents. Most were living in other situations. A small number lived on the streets. Some said that when they started commercial sexual activity they moved about, living short term with various mates. A transient lifestyle and lack of resources would increase their vulnerability. Half of the respondents had had less than a year of consenting sexual activity before becoming involved in commercial sexual activity. The earlier trauma and disrupted psycho-social development of these young people would make them vulnerable when confronted with the social experience and predatory intentions of the sexual exploiter (Davidson, 2001).

The results support previous findings where higher rates of childhood sexual abuse were found among studies of women involved in commercial sexual activity in Dunedin than in a control group (Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999). The absence of Maori respondents in that study may account for the high disclosure rate in the current study. Previous prevalence studies of childhood sexual abuse in a general population of South Island women likewise recorded lower rates of between 15% - 30%. This was in a randomly selected sample of 2,250 women in Dunedin (Anderson, Martin, Mullen & Roman, 1993; Fergusson, Lynskey & Horwood, 1996). These studies were carried out in Otago and Canterbury areas with fewer Maori (7%). In a study of school pupils aged 12-17 years old, the National Youth 2000 research reported a range of 25% - 31% of unwanted sexual touching or activity. The high of 31% was recorded in South Auckland and had 22% Maori participation (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). The rate of childhood abuse in a study of sex workers in Dunedin and Wellington was 36%. Of these, 25 % reported that complete penetration had occurred (Potter, Martin & Romans, 1999).

Herman (1981) has suggested that childhood sexual abuse can prepare a young girl to be passed about like a chattel as the young person constructs a system that gives meaning to and justification for her abuse. Childhood sexual abuse has been correlated with an increased risk for a wide range of mental health problems (including suicidal behaviour, substance abuse and eating disorders) even when an allowance has been made for family dysfunction (Mullens, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1993). Early sexual behaviour has been seen as predictors of underage prostitution (Brannigan & Van Brunschot, 1997). The higher rate childhood sexual abuse for Maori recorded in the current study may be due either to reduced access to services for healing childhood abuse than for Pakeha or to a higher disclosure rate for Maori. The higher disclosure rate may be attributable to the presence and support of a Maori community service worker at the time of interview. Childhood sexual abuse occurs more frequently where there is parental violence and institutional care (Bifulco, Brown & Adler, 1991). This is in accord with earlier studies that indicated an association with behavioural difficulties, depression and anxiety (Mullens, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison,, 1993). These studies suggested that those young people who have suffered genital sexual abuse in childhood are vulnerable. They may find it difficult to plan ahead and take care of themselves

(Briere, 1992). One New Zealand study found that those who had experienced abuse involving penetration have a worse outcome than the abused group as a whole (Mullens, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1993). Any disruption of family attachments can lead to early sexual behaviour. A negative home life and sexual precocity have been found to be significant predictors of prostitution (Brannigan & Van Brunschot, 1997).

When they first started commercial sexual activity, half of the respondents said that they always used condoms. About a fifth used them occasionally or less. Those who said a pimp or client set the price were less likely to use condoms. This may be indicative of their susceptibility to persuasion. Young people are generally at greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases than adults. This risk is further increased by early sexual activity and multiple partners (Lemmey & Tice, 2000).

No respondents engaged with their peer group of other teenagers for their first experience of sex for money. The adults who used them had more maturity, more social experience, were physically fully developed and brought considerable power to the situation. Few who remained in commercial sexual activity had paid sex with their peers – the group they should be relating to developmentally.

Most of the respondents had tried to stop commercial sexual activity but many of them ran out of money. The literature found that financing addictions (Trinity Youth Options, 1997) and lack of income for living expenses (Hancock, 1994) were the most frequent reasons for engaging in commercial sexual activity. When they did earn enough money, they found it difficult to put any aside. Depression (Pyett & Warr, 1996), a sense of entrapment (Wilson & Arnold, 1986) and self harm and risk taking (Stewart, 1994; Tschirren, Hammet & Saunders, 1996) have been noted in young people engaged in commercial sexual activity. Of the 13 respondents who managed to stop commercial sexual activity, four found other work, two went to prison, one found a boyfriend who was not a pimp and another became a Christian. Many young people engaged in commercial sexual activity find it difficult to enter stable caring relationships as opposed to abusive exploitative ones (Martyn, 1998). This was observed in some of the 25 respondents who were interviewed. It is not clear how much this relates to their sex trade experiences and how much to their earlier childhood experiences of relationships.

Conclusion

Young people who have experienced a high incidence of sexual abuse in early childhood and who are living apart from their parents may be more susceptible to the suggestion that they can make money from commercial sexual activity. Indigenous young people appear to be most vulnerable to this form of exploitation. There is a need to provide better support and health care for young people in distressing home environments and for those who have been subjected to sexual and physical violence. Enhancing family attachments may decrease early sexual behaviour and drug and alcohol abuse and allow healing to occur. Multi-agency networking and an increase in law enforcement against those who use young people for commercial sexual activity would reduce this exploitation of young people.

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