



British Columbia Edition

Executive Summary

Under the Radar: The Sexual Exploitation of Young Men- British Columbia
Edition

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In December of 2002, *Strolling Away* was released. *Strolling Away* represented a longitudinal retrospective study that examined young people from the sexual exploitation trade in 1991-1992 and then again in 2001-2002. The opportunity to interview individuals 10 years later was valuable.

One of its major findings was that we know very little about young men involved in the sexual exploitation trade. The young men I interviewed commented on how my questions were “chick questions”. It was clear that we have traditionally looked at this issue through a female lens. It became evident through this study that more research was required in order to understand young men in the sexual exploitation trade.

Interviews for *Under the Radar: The Sexual Exploitation of Young Men - British Columbia Edition* began in April 2004 and wrapped up in March 2005. Forty young men were interviewed in total. Twenty-four interviews occurred in Vancouver and 16 in Victoria.

Characteristics of Respondents

- 43% of this population are of Aboriginal heritage
- Half had involvement with child welfare services
- Close to 50% had completed high school
- 88% had a history of running away
- 78% had a history prior to the street of being sexually violated
- Over three-quarters had been physically violated and witnessed aggression while growing up
- 63% entered the trade under the age of 18 years of age
- 15% entered the trade over the age of 20 years of age
- Males enter the trade younger and stay longer than young women
- 70% experienced staying in shelters
- Almost everyone felt no one should do this type of work
- The fear of gay-bashing exists

- Drug use is extensive
- Exiting the trade is a long process, usually attempted more than once
- Almost everyone has, and does, access HIV / STD testing

Summary of Discoveries

- Young men have comparable histories of sexual and physical abuse to young women
- Young men in this study were gay, heterosexual and bisexual
- Young men create a construct to be able to achieve a level of performance
- The issue of young men in the sexual exploitation trade creates a sense of discomfort
- Young men begin younger and work longer
- A significant portion enter the trade over the age of 18
- Young men fly under the radar of service providers
- Young men have unique service needs different from young women
- Public education on condom use and HIV testing has worked
- The connection between the street and drug use is longer and greater in the variety of drugs for young men
- These young men have strained and distant relationships with their family
- Running away often triggers an entrance into the sexual exploitation trade

Summary Recommendations

1. Efforts should be directed towards supporting the future expansion of this study to other provinces. Upon completion of the four western provinces, those being British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, a report should be developed outlining the differences and similarities in Western Canada. Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia should be considered as future sites in order to allow for national, eastern, central and western perspectives. This population tends to be rather transient so

the opportunity to gain a national perspective as well as regional differences will be of assistance.

2. A need exists for Outreach Programs to gain an exemption, relaxation to Safe Care legislation authorizing involuntary intervention if it becomes a reality. Often outreach programs offer the only lifeline of support for youth involved in the sexual exploitation trade.
3. That we publicly acknowledge both young men and women are being exploited in the sexual exploitation trade, and that we provide services to help them exit.
4. That staff working with young men in the sexual exploitation trade be provided with gender non-conformity training.
5. That service providers create the opportunity for young men in and out of the sexual exploitation trade to tell service providers about the services they require. We should not assume that one service will fit all.
6. That a series of detox and rehabilitation beds be established for young men exiting the trade. Years of extensive drug consumption requires an intervention that will provide them with temporary accommodation while detoxification and rehabilitation takes place.
7. That safe affordable accommodation is provided for this population once they have completed drug detoxification and rehabilitation. This population requires safe, supportive living arrangements.

Coupled with this, they need help seeking alternative employment. Close to half of this population had completed high school and some college and university; however, they have limited employment skills and experience.

Standard employment assistance programs will be required to assist them in supporting a successful exit from the sexual exploitation trade.

8. That we approach the issue of demand, that being customers, with an equal balance for both young men and women who are being sexually exploited. Like women, these men are young people who are in need of our assistance.
9. That prevention information is directed towards both young men and women. We need to provide information that both young men and women in the sexual exploitation trade experienced sexual abuse in their part. We should support, not ridicule them.
10. That the community-at-large recognize the damaging effects of sugar daddy relationships on this young and vulnerable population. In addition, an awareness of the economic disadvantages facing young males involved in the trade must be taken into account and considered as a symptom of the differential power relationship existent in sugar daddy relationships.
11. Develop mentoring connections for the population who are exiting. A need exists for those exiting to have support from those who have exited. An experiential voice can assist an individual who is in the process of exiting the sexual exploitation trade. There are many questions, and those who have been through such a journey can better answer challenges facing those who are exiting.

This type of service could be set up in a formal structure through an agency that works with this population or informally within the volunteer community network. This network could be set up in formal face to face meetings, telephone or online support.

12. A review of prevention, intervention and re-integration materials be completed and adjusted to speak to the sexual exploitation of youth regardless of gender. Materials must recognize the differences facing young women and men in the sexual exploitation trade. Education for both genders needs to be covered in these materials, emphasizing that the trade is a risk for both genders.
13. That an evaluation occurs of harm reduction approaches such as distributing bad date sheets, mobile support services to sexually exploited youth. The opportunity exists to move into a more direct approach to intervention. The ultimate goal must always remain moving someone out of the trade.
14. That the National Youth In Care Network embrace the topic of sexual awareness. There is a need to ensure that youth from care have the same knowledge base as the general youth population. This information could be delivered through DVD, booklets or lectures.
15. That we develop and pay closer attention to youth who are running away. We need to recognize this as the early warning system for possible entrance into the sexual exploitation trade for both genders. For youth, service providers and professionals, the opportunity to successfully support and stabilize a situation is more likely to occur prior to years of abuse and drug use on the street.