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FINDINGS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA'S EVALUATION OF THE IPSWICH/SUFFOLK MULTI-AGENCY STRATEGY ON PROSTITUTION FOLLOWING THE FIVE MURDERS IN 2006

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This paper provides a summary of the main findings of an evaluation of a new multi-agency Strategy set up to tackle on-street sex-working, after five prostitutes were murdered in the English county town of Ipswich. It focuses on the outcomes of the Strategy's four objectives, including their cost-effectiveness. It also offers an insight into the lives of the women who were previously involved in street sex-working, the means by which the Strategy helped them to move towards exiting this work, and the ways in

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which younger people identified as being at risk of entering it might be prevented from doing so.

INTRODUCTION

In the closing months of 2006, five women who were on-street sex workers in Ipswich, the county town of Suffolk, were murdered by Stephen Wright, who is now serving a life sentence for these crimes. Although on-street sex working and its associated dangers had been of growing concern to the Police and the local Ipswich community for several years, these tragic events focused the attentions of all the relevant local agencies on the need to tackle this situation with urgency. Thus, the Multi-agency Strategy, led by Suffolk Constabulary, was born, and the University of East Anglia's School of Allied Health Professions was asked to head an evaluation of the Strategy's effectiveness over a period of five years. An interim report was published in late 2008¹ and a final report in mid-2012². The evaluation assessed the extent to which the Strategy's four objectives, set out below, had been met.

I. THE FOUR OBJECTIVES OF THE MULTI-AGENCY STRATEGY

The Strategy group which, together with the borough and county councils, represented all relevant health, social services and criminal justice agencies within the statutory and voluntary sectors, sought to address the problems and risks associated with street sex-working by setting the four following objectives:

1. Tackling demand—by deterring those who create the demand (i.e. kerb-crawlers) and removing the opportunity for street sex-working to take place.
2. Developing routes out—by offering individual multi-agency case conferences and appropriate health/welfare support packages to each street sex worker.
3. Prevention—through awareness-raising and early intervention measures to stop others, particularly children and young people from becoming involved in sex work.

¹ Poland F., Boswell G. & Killett A., *An Evaluation of the Ipswich Street Prostitution Strategy: EVISSTA 1* (Norwich, University of East Anglia 2008).

² Poland F., Boswell G., Killett A., Jarrett J., Fordham R., Houghton J., Varley A. & Seebohm L., *An Evaluation of the Ipswich/Suffolk Street Prostitution Strategy 2007-2012: EVISSTA 2* (Norwich, University of East Anglia 2012), available at <http://sccrw.onesuffolk.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C743C6A8-AABA-44A8-82C6-168F5514F79B/0/2011EVISSTA2FINALreportrevised6Dec11FinalPDF.pdf>.

4. Community intelligence—through understanding the key issues, the extent of the problem, and its impact on the local community.

II. RESEARCH CONTEXT

Sex work in Britain has historically been criminalised. Although prostitution itself is not illegal, soliciting in a public place, and related activities such as kerb crawling, keeping a brothel and pimping are against the law. Until the language was dropped in the Policing and Crime Act 2009, the most frequent type of arrest, sometimes leading to imprisonment, was of women street sex-workers for the offence of Common Prostitute Loitering. However, it has long been recognised that criminalisation of the women workers can lead to displacement to other areas³ and that fines often lead to further street work in order to pay them⁴. Neither has legislation intended to protect on-street sex workers from violence been especially effective⁵ as the Ipswich murders so dramatically highlighted. Thus, arguments have been made for welfare and rights-based approaches to sex work,⁶ while the objectives set by the Ipswich/Suffolk Strategy closely follow the UK Home Office's own suggested strategy combining prevention, deterrence, and support for those wanting to leave sex-work.⁷ The Strategy's multi-agency approach also reflected the perceived need for linked interventions advocated by the Home Office's national evaluation of multi-agency pilot projects.⁸

While the authors' own brief was to evaluate this multi-agency approach as implemented, it is also worthy of note that this approach in itself has been challenged by the suggestion that support to exit prostitution

³ Matthews R., *Policing Prostitution Ten Years on*, BRITISH JOURNAL OF CRIMINOLOGY 45: 877-95 (2005); PITCHER J., CAMPBELL R., HUBBARD P., O'NEILL M. & SCOLAR J., *LIVING AND WORKING IN AREAS OF STREET SEX-WORK: FROM CONFLICT TO COEXISTENCE* (Bristol, The Policy Press 2006).

⁴ Sagar T., *Tackling On-Street Sex-Work: Antisocial Behaviour Orders, Sex-Workers and Inclusive Inter-Agency Initiatives*, in CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE 7 (2): 153-168 (2007).

⁵ Barnard M. & Hart G., *Client Violence against Prostitute Women Working from Street and Off-Street Locations* (2000); Seebohm L. & Smiles S. with Voices Heard Group, *Hidden for Survival*, in NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE: TYNESIDE CYRENIANS (2008).

⁶ Bindel J., *No Escape? An Investigation into London's Service Provision for Women Involved in the Commercial Sex Industry* (London, Poppy Project 2006); CAMPBELL R. & O'NEILL M., *SEX-WORK NOW* (Cullompton, Willan Publishing 2006); Corston J., *The Corston Report: A Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System* (London, Home Office 2007), available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/corston-report/corston-exec-summary?view=Binary>.

⁷ Home Office, *Paying the Price: A Consultation Paper on Prostitution* (London, Home Office 2004); Home Office, *A Co-ordinated Prostitution Strategy, and a Summary of Responses to Paying the Price* (London, Home Office 2006).

⁸ Hester M. & Westmarland N., *Tackling Street Prostitution: Towards an Holistic Approach* (Home Office Study 279) (London, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate 2004).

amounts to a move from punishment to regulation, rather than support, and an attempt to increase social control under the rhetoric of “inclusion”.⁹ This is a challenge which invites researchers not only to elicit policing data and professional opinion, but importantly to seek the voices of on-street sex workers themselves about their experiences and lifestyles. All these approaches were incorporated in this study, as set out in the following section.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In order to gain evidence for the effectiveness of each of the four objectives described above, and the cost-effectiveness of these measures, the authors adopted the following research methods:

1. Tackling demand—by examining kerb crawler arrest rates, changes in police practice, and interviewing the “Street-Free” women Police Liaison Officers.

2. Developing routes out—by interviewing and administering problem checklists with a sample of 14 women currently or previously working with the multi-agency “Make a Change” (MAC) team, 3 of whom were interviewed both in 2008 and 2011; and through interviews with a range of involved professionals.

3. Prevention—by examining evolving multi-agency practice in identifying children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation via coercive networks and other relationships; through interviews with 4 such young people and with involved professionals.

4. Community intelligence—through participant-observation at the Strategy Group’s public meetings, residents’ briefings, and interviews with community representatives.

5. Cost-effectiveness—by an in-depth case record analysis, estimating the cost of the average annual number of hours spent with the women street-workers by professionals from the MAC team, as against the estimated cost to the criminal justice system of criminalising them and processing continuing kerb-crawling.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A. *Tackling Demand*

⁹ Scouler J. & O’Neill M., *Regulating Prostitution: Social Inclusion, Responsibilisation and the Politics of Prostitution Reform*, BRITISH JOURNAL OF CRIMINOLOGY 47(5): 764-778 (2007).

A combination of high intensity police patrolling, environmental changes such as strategic Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) placement, and a zero-tolerance approach to kerb-crawling in the first year of the Strategy (involving regular arrests, police cautions, and anti-social behaviour measures) led to an almost complete disappearance of kerb-crawlers from Ipswich streets. Arrests reduced from 128 in 2007, to 14 in 2008 and to nil from 2009 onwards. Arrest rates elsewhere in the county did not rise during this period, suggesting that displacement had not occurred. Less was known about possible displacement to off-street premises though police activity in this field is intensifying both locally and nationally in the light of increased awareness about sex-worker trafficking.

B. Developing Routes Out

In-depth interviews over time with women who had been involved in on-street sex work, and “before and after” problem checklists covering such issues as family, finance, health and drug/alcohol usage, showed that overall, they felt they had been helped by the MAC team to improve the quality of their lives so that sex-working became less of a necessity. Interviews with the involved professionals suggested that the work was intensive and demanding, needing more resources, especially if the expressed need of the women for greater flexibility, more holistic and long-term support was to be implemented.

C. Prevention

This was identified in 2008 as being the least-developed area of the Strategy. However, where children and young people at risk in Suffolk were known only in small numbers in 2008, there are now over 85 such young people, including 10 who have been internally trafficked. There is also a fast-growing-awareness of the extent of child sexual exploitation, through both the United Nations Palermo Protocol¹⁰ (ratified by the Council of Europe in 2008) and recent prominent prosecutions in the United Kingdom (UK) and elsewhere. The evaluation’s social network analysis of the relationships surrounding MAC clients, their families and associates, suggested a possible network of 750 victims and perpetrators of violent or otherwise coercive behaviour. Professional practice in respect of matters such as internet activity and missing children is under continual review.

¹⁰ United Nations, The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also referred to as the “Trafficking Protocol”) (Palermo, United Nations 2000).

D. Community Intelligence

Public meetings, residents' briefings and interviews with community representatives showed that the Strategy had engaged both their intelligence and their support since the time of the murders. They could think of no way in which the Strategy could be improved. Their main hopes were that the women would continue to be supported to exit prostitution, and that police activity would be sustained so that demand for sex-work does not reappear on the streets of Ipswich.

E. Cost-Effectiveness

The economic analysis of the Strategy's activity through the comparison of estimated professional hours as set against the potential costs to the criminal justice system showed that these costs are reduced from approximately £154,731 to £72,324 per annum, so that the work of the Strategy is reducing the costs to the criminal justice system by 55%.

The following two sections provide further detail from the findings relating to the lives of the women who were previously involved in street sex-working, the means by which the Strategy helped them to move towards exiting this work, and the ways in which younger people identified as being at risk of entering it may be prevented from doing so.

V. THE LIVES OF THE WOMEN, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN OR AT RISK OF ON-STREET SEX WORKING

The 2007 Corston Report on women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system made the following comment about the five Ipswich murders:

The tragic series of murders in Suffolk during December 2006 rightly focussed public attention on these women as women first and foremost—someone's daughter, mother girlfriend, then as victims—exploited by men, damaged by abuse and drug addiction. These are among the women whom society must support and help to establish themselves in the community (Corston, 2007:i).

In other words, the suggestion was that these were women who should be supported rather than punished.

From the authors' interviews with adults and young people (with ages ranging from 17-58 years), and with their support workers from the multi-agency MAC team, the authors constructed eight in-depth case studies analysing their experiences. The authors also refer to six earlier case studies reported in the 2008 interim study, three of whose subjects were re-

interviewed in 2011. Unsurprisingly, the interviews revealed wide-ranging life experiences, but also identified some striking similarities as follows:

A. *Broken and Damaging Family Homes*

A common feature of the cases the authors analysed centred around arguments in the family home during the early teenage years, leading to all four of the young women the authors interviewed being “kicked out” of the family home. Associated problems commonly included witnessing domestic violence, and sexual and/or physical abuse by a family member. These had also been features in the earlier 2008 case studies. As evidenced in their vivid narratives to researchers, rejection, loss and abuse are all factors associated with trauma and traumatic memory in the lives of these young women; all are associated with the onset of troubled and often risky lifestyles¹¹ and with subsequent gender-related victimisation along that risk continuum.¹²

B. *Homelessness/Inappropriate Accommodation*

The vulnerability of all four young women escalated rapidly when they were no longer able to live in their respective family homes. One lived “in and out of hostels” before moving in with a known paedophile. Two others were placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation at 15 and 16 years of age, with one describing this as “*the worst mistake I ever made because basically there were loads of drug addicts, loads of prostitutes and that all kicked off from there*”.

Similarly, the problem checklists completed by the adult women highlighted the lack of appropriate accommodation in their lives at the time of the murders. The Strategy’s early support interventions prioritised housing, and this appears to have been effective as subsequent checklists now show that all of the five adult women are in stable accommodation.

C. *Disengagement with Education*

The adult interviews revealed that being bullied at school was a common experience. Similarly, each of the young people the authors interviewed reported struggling with the move from primary to secondary

¹¹ RENN P., *THE SILENT PAST AND THE INVISIBLE PRESENT: MEMORY, TRAUMA AND REPRESENTATION IN PSYCHOTHERAPY* (New York, Hove, Routledge 2012).

¹² Boswell G. & Poland F., *Exploring Women’s Health—Differences, Discourses and Disciplines*, in *WOMEN’S MINDS, WOMEN’S BODIES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO WOMEN’S HEALTH* (Boswell G. R. & Poland F. eds., Basingstoke, New York, Macmillan/Palgrave 2003).

school, including experiences of bullying, regular truanting and exclusion as a result of behavioural problems. It is therefore of no surprise that most of these interviewees ended their mainstream education prematurely.

D. Peer Group Pressure

Negative peer group pressure was also a common experience amongst interviewees. For example, one young woman started using cannabis at 13 because “*everybody else was doing it and I felt left out*”. One of the adult women reported being enamoured by the life she perceived the people who were sex working had. “*They always had money; they were always laughing or they were always in a happy sort of place because they were nuttered, or whatever, and I just saw me as being on my own, left out again*”.

E. Substance Use

None of the young people the authors interviewed had yet developed an entrenched substance dependency, but their accounts of extensive recreational use and support workers’ assessments suggested a significant risk that addiction to alcohol or drugs could become a feature of their adult lives.

The adult women who had worked on-street at the time of the murders were involved in what may be described as “survival” sex work—a means to fund entrenched and spiralling drug and alcohol problems (predominantly heroin and crack). Many described their compulsion for drugs at the time overriding all sense of personal care and safety, and they reported relatively fragile states in relation to their subsequent abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol.

F. Relationship Violence, Power and Control

The potential for coercive adults involving themselves in the lives of these vulnerable women is exemplified by the case of one young person who was befriended by an adult sex worker who introduced her to “clients”. Two of the young people had experienced relationships with considerably older men, and their support workers felt these relationships increased their vulnerability to sexual exploitation (especially as one was a known paedophile). Another young woman disclosed visiting unknown men in London with a friend during regular periods when she “went missing” from home. Her support workers believed she was being groomed for future sex work.

All the adult women who had been sex-workers (both on and off-street), experienced violence in the course of their work, and domestic abuse was also a common reported experience.

G. Emotional/Psychological Difficulties

Two of the young people in this study told the authors that they had intentionally harmed themselves on a number of occasions and both cited arguments within the family as the reason behind their self-harm. It was evident from interviews that all four young women had difficulty managing their emotions, making positive decisions and thinking consequentially. This rendered them all, to a greater or lesser extent, vulnerable to those who would target them for sex work. Similarly, the problem checklists demonstrated that the majority of the adult women had a history of both poor mental health and self-harming behaviour. It was noticeable that very few had received interventions to address these problems. Concerns about the lack of mental health interventions available for children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation were raised by most professionals interviewed. They also referred to “dual diagnosis” which rendered their clients inappropriate for mainstream mental health provision, and their experience that women are reluctant to take up such services as are offered.

H. Adult Women as Parents

Three out of the five of the adult women most recently interviewed had children, but only one currently had custody of her child. During interviews women described feelings of loss and regret, and of distress at not being able to see more of their children, and some indicated that they had used drugs and/or alcohol in an attempt to block out such negative emotions.

Overall, it is apparent that this sample of women had experienced multiple and longstanding problems, with the younger group evidently at risk of embarking on the adverse trajectory which the older group of women who had been sex-workers had described to researchers.

VI. PATHWAYS OUT OF PROSTITUTION AND SUSTAINING CHANGE

Early on in the Strategy it was identified that fast-tracking women into drug treatment, accessing benefits and alternative accommodation would be the vital initial step on the path to bringing about change. There is a clear indication from repeat problem checklists and interviews that these interventions have been effective, as the following paragraphs demonstrate.

A. *The Quality and Value of the Experience*

During the time of the murders and in the weeks afterwards, it was the female Police Officers who engaged with the women, and they continue to maintain this contact. The women the authors interviewed cited this as a significant source of support. In addition, strong relationships were developed at this time with local voluntary agencies who the women described during interview as being flexible in their approach, centred around emotional wellbeing and “bending over backwards” to support them. Since this time the “Make a Change” team led by Social Workers has been established and is predominant in providing the support.

Women and young people talked about small practical gestures from support workers, from whichever agency, who “*go the extra mile*” —for example, being given a bus pass, towels, a plant... These gestures appear to have greatly enhanced the extent to which they value the relationship—not because of any material gain but because they felt cared for.

Overall, women really valued regular contact from professionals, and particularly appreciated those who were flexible in their approach and demonstrated genuine care and belief in their capacity to change. “*Someone’s got to give some of that sort of hope that you can change, so you know you can do it*”.

This suggests that it doesn’t matter which agency provides the support (e.g. statutory or voluntary sector) —rather it is the nature of the relationship and quality of the experience which are most important.

B. *The Need for Long-Term Support*

Each of the women working on-street at the time of the murders identified the need for continuing support. Their interviews suggested that they continued to experience relatively fragile emotional states as a result of the impact of their past experiences and could benefit from assistance to examine and understand these experiences. In addition, assisting women to forge alternative personal identities, opportunities and “behavioural scripts” is a process which requires considerable time. These women had clearly made genuine progress in changing their lives to exit prostitution, though their emotional state and recovery continued to fluctuate. As one suggested, “*It’s going to be so easy for me to go back to drugs or go back to the streets, because you know I was a good thief and I was a good working girl*”.

In respect of young people, many professionals the authors interviewed highlighted children’s reluctance to disclose sexual exploitation especially during Child Protection Investigations (Section 47, Children Act, 1989,

England & Wales). As a Safeguarding Manager observed, “*You cannot take things at face value; you need to dig and keep in there to find out about what is going on*”. There is also increased understanding that children will require a particularly long-term approach to address their needs, and resource-stretched social work teams may not have the time nor sometimes the specific skills required for such lengthy interventions. Therefore the need for the specialist team to undertake this work was emphasised by the authors’ research.

C. Meaningful Activity: The Building of Social Capital and an Alternative “Script” for Their Lives

Most of the women the authors interviewed who have successfully found routes out of prostitution cited examples of finding some kind of meaningful activity as a necessary feature of sustaining change—to occupy their time, enhance their self-esteem, maintain motivation and unlock their potential. For example, one woman has become involved in a peer support mentoring project for other drug users. Another woman is working with a local theatre company, and says:

Drama has helped me tremendously—just being somebody else for a while, not having to be myself, playing other people, so you’re not thinking about your life and going to an empty home, do I wanna score, do I think of drugs? You’re not thinking about that all the time, you’re thinking about your next idea of what you want to do.

This requires creative and innovative interventions by the “Make a Change” team—a further recommendation of the authors’ research.

D. Prevention

The often traumatic childhood experiences reported by the adults the authors interviewed pointed to the need to identify the potential for particular interventions which might have prevented their introduction into prostitution had they been in place. Early identification of vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation and the appropriate interventions to address the emotional/psychological impact of abuse appear to be crucial to prevention.

The Prevention element of the MAC team is led by qualified Social Workers with the aim of raising awareness amongst professionals working with children and young people. They provide advice and training, including up-to-date information on social networking and new technologies associated with child sexual exploitation, access to internet at younger ages, and coercive adults targeting vulnerable children via Bluetooth. They also

provide information about the more recent phenomenon of “party houses”, where young vulnerable children are invited to parties, introduced to older people as well as drugs and alcohol, wherein a gradual escalation of exploitation may begin.

Three particularly innovative approaches to address the prevention element of the Strategy have been devised by this group:

- ***Chronologies***: Specialist practitioners from the MAC team regularly explore the “CareFirst” social work recording system and develop chronologies on current cases. They can use this database to make key connections between young people, locations, contexts and relationships with potentially coercive adults. Social Workers managing high caseloads do not have the capacity to carry out this depth of investigation.

- ***Identification of Coercive Adults***: The team are developing processes and systems whereby agencies share information and intelligence to create a picture of networks of potentially coercive adults, possibly involving organised groups and links to other areas. The police see this as taking a classic problem-solving approach—it is rare for children and young people to disclose sexual exploitation so it is not possible to gain information from this source. Therefore there is a need to refocus and identify the adults behind the exploitation.

- ***Multi-Agency Risk Management Panels***: These are held on a monthly basis to implement risk management strategies for current cases of children at serious risk of sexual exploitation. They do not “let go” of a case until there is actual evidence that risk has reduced, whereas in the past there has been a risk of a child “slipping through the net” if they do not engage with a plan.

Overall, then, much progress has been made in the drive to encourage women to exit prostitution and to prevent under-age girls at risk entering it—but it is necessary for the Strategy Group to heed the women’s need for ongoing, genuine and high quality professional support, for them to continue to be offered innovative pathways to new constructive identities, and for prevention activity in this age of international sex-trafficking to be ever-vigilant.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of this Strategy showed that co-ordinated multi-agency activity had been successful in:

- eliminating street prostitution and kerb crawlers in Ipswich;
- helping women make life changes to move on from prostitution;

- making effective in-roads into preventing others, especially the young, from becoming involved in prostitution; and
- reducing demand and costs on the criminal justice services.

The evaluation highlighted the central importance of a joint commitment of criminal justice, social, health and voluntary agencies and their sustained relationships with the local community in developing a shared change in attitude towards prostitution and those involved in it. Finally, it concluded that there is much to commend this collaborative Strategy both to other regions of the UK and to other countries, as an innovative, effective and cost-effective means of achieving justice for all stakeholders.