

Street Prostitution: Ten Facts in Search of a Policy

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Introduction

This paper is based upon research which has been conducted in Britain over the last 2 years, involving a survey of vice squads, prostitutes working in a range of settings, clients, residents groups and local authority representatives†.

There is a growing dissatisfaction throughout Britain with the ways in which prostitution is conducted and regulated. Residents associations, in particular, have become increasingly militant on this issue, engaging in a range of activities involving lobbying, demonstrations and in some locations, vigilante type operations engaging directly with street prostitutes as well as their clients and pimps.

Most of these grievances are formally focused on issues of noise and disturbance, spilling over into concerns about the safety, particularly of women, on the streets. Underlying these formal concerns are issues relating to the control of public and private space and growing demands for freedom of movement and expression. At a deeper level there are inevitably questions of morality and social values. For the most part these

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†This paper is concerned exclusively with 'female' street prostitution. Issues relating to male homosexual prostitution and 'rent boys' are not addressed in this paper. The research on which this paper is based involved a national survey of 30 vice squads, semi-structured interviews with 30 women working on the streets and 18 women who worked from off-street locations. Interviews were conducted with 38 clients who visited massage parlours and saunas, and police data on 280 men reported for kerb crawling were examined. A residents survey was conducted in Leicester involving 210 residents, followed by several in-depth interviews with residents groups in Balsall Heath, Birmingham. The research also involved a number of interviews with health, housing and local authority representatives.

issues have—following the dictum of the Wolfenden Report that ‘questions of morality are not the laws business’—remained subordinated to the questions of order maintenance and public nuisance.

It has also become apparent to those seriously engaged in the ongoing debate, that the familiar broad brush and ‘quick fix’ responses: legalization, decriminalization and the introduction of zones of tolerance; are unlikely to provide realistic and acceptable solutions. These responses at best, cater for particular interests, at worst, they would probably encourage a greater level of street prostitution, increase the level of nuisance, and increase the vulnerability of working women. Since these options are regularly offered as ‘solutions’ in the public discussions, it is necessary at the outset to briefly review their implications for the organization and regulation of street prostitution in Britain (see Matthews 1986).

Legalization

Legalization has received some support from the police and some residents’ groups, who see it as a way of providing a safer more comfortable and manageable setting for both prostitutes and clients. It is claimed that the establishment of state-run or state-sponsored brothels would allow better access to health, welfare and education services for both parties. Equally as important, this option is seen to provide a method of removing women from the streets, by providing an acceptable setting for them to work, in a way which overcomes the hypocrisy and unjustness of the present system.

Although it is possible, in some cases, that legalized brothels might provide improved conditions for some of the women who decide to work in these settings, there are some serious limitations to their effectiveness in terms of health services, working practices and the selection of clients. In terms of health, even regular check-ups provide no guarantees and can lead to complacency. Invariably in these settings there is no provision for checking (infected) clients. Evidence from abroad provides little support for both state-sanctioned and privately-run brothels. Indeed, research into brothels on the continent suggests that the only parties who actually benefit from these commercialized and exploitative arrangements are the clients and the owners (Jaget 1980).

Brothels do not provide an attractive option for many women currently working as street prostitutes. The strictly controlled working environment, involving regular hours and shift work, will be viewed by many women working as prostitutes as inflexible. Many women would resist both unofficial or official registration as prostitutes. Evidence from Germany indicates that only 12% of prostitutes work in the state-run eros centres,

since as Jaget explains, "the rest would rather live in illegality than accept the state's working conditions, wages and control".

Furthermore, the working conditions of the women often militate against attempts to ensure their welfare. Evidence from Holland and elsewhere suggests that behind this 'liberal' approach, is the tendency to import women from poorer 'third world' countries, who are lower paid, more malleable and who are, in some cases, held in conditions of subjection (Goodson 1992). For example, in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht, prostitute women from Latin America, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and Eastern Europe, reportedly constitute 40%, 65% and 50% respectively of the prostitute population in these areas (Golding 1994).

Legalization may also encourage prostitution. The message that prostitution is socially acceptable, albeit in designated settings, may exacerbate the situation, by encouraging the recruitment of women outside the system who feel that prostitution is more socially acceptable.

Alternatively, the state is put in a hypocritical position of allowing prostitution in brothels whilst cracking down on the street trade. Those women working outside the brothel remain subject to the same, if not an increased, level of control.

Zones of Tolerance

The designation of specified areas away from residential streets, is an approach which has been piloted abroad, particularly in Holland. In Britain, the idea has found support amongst city councils, police officers and residents' groups. By providing an 'acceptable space' where women can work, this option claims to offer a manageable setting in which the trade can operate, leaving the police to spend a larger proportion of their time and energy on more 'serious' offences. The role of the police is limited to providing protection for the women from dangerous clients, rather than arresting them for soliciting and loitering.

Evidence from abroad, however, indicates that the creation of 'zones of tolerance' produces more problems than it solves. Rather than providing protection for the prostitutes, violence against prostitutes in these zones is reported to be common, (*Guardian* 8/5/95). Indeed, they have acted as a magnet for a range of illegal activities which have then reportedly overspilled from these zones into surrounding areas (Golding 1994). Consequently a significant number of street prostitutes refuse to work within these zones.

There are also problems of where such zones are to be located and the setting up of 'positive' rather than 'negative' zoning raises potentially a

whole range of problems, not only for those persons living and working in designated zones, but also for those living nearby (Matthews 1993).

Indeed, the appearance of an industrial area or a car park full of sex workers, also raises questions about health and safety and whether such places may resemble little more than a concentrated version of the conditions which street prostitutes currently experience. Such an option does little to address the wider issues related to the 'demand and supply' of prostitutes and clients and, like legalization, it may in fact ultimately encourage street prostitution by signalling its acceptability.

Decriminalization

The fundamental principle which most advocates agree on, is that existing legislation is littered with anomalies and inequities. In particular the application of the term 'common prostitute' to those who are charged with soliciting offences appears anachronistic, while the sex specific nature of 'soliciting' for women and 'importuning' for male prostitutes also seems incongruous.

In response, some commentators have argued that the best method of overcoming these anomalies is to remove the legal control of prostitution and decriminalize it. In effect they argue, prostitution is not the law's business and that it should only be subject to the same amount of levels of controls as other occupations (Jaget 1980; McLeod 1982; The Second World Whores Congress 1986).

Although there are various degrees of decriminalization advocated by different groups, they all fail to recognize that the stigma which is associated with prostitution is not solely a consequence of legal regulation, but rather it is the legal regulation which is a function of social stigmatization. At the same time, decriminalization does not address the particular problems of nuisance and exploitation which is associated with street prostitution and overlooks the degree to which legal regulation is legitimately concerned with the regulation of public order and attempts to provide some degree of protection and support.

Most importantly, decriminalization takes little or no account of the deterrent effects of legal controls; serving to deflect a significant number of young women, particularly in periods of growing inequality, away from prostitution, making it a less attractive choice.

Decriminalization also increases the possibility of exploitation through the commercialization of the sex industry. The potential profits from the commercialization of prostitution are enormous and there is no shortage of entrepreneurs who are willing to exploit such an opportunity. Like any normal business activity, this would involve an attempt to control of the market in sexuality, restricting competition, undermining competitors and

maximizing output in order to maximize profits. It especially leaves juvenile prostitutes vulnerable, who would be less safeguarded under such measures, particularly in relation to their 'youth premium'.

These popular 'solutions' therefore are generally untenable and do not in themselves provide a basis for the construction of realistic policy. Importantly, advocates of these options fail to recognise and take account of the different interests and dynamics which are at play in this issue. The objective cannot be to aim for the eradication of street prostitution, or to attempt to balance off, or synthesize all the interests involved. Rather, the aim is to develop an approach which is able on one hand to respond to the current situation and which can take into account the different interests involved, on the other.

In the course of investigating this issue, we have attempted to examine it from a number of different vantage points with a view to policy formation. It has become evident that the approaches discussed above—legalization, zones of tolerance and decriminalization—are based upon dubious assumptions which have been found to have, at best, limited validity. In examining the data, a number of significant empirical findings have emerged which it would seem, need to be taken into account in developing a practical and viable policy in this area.

Ten 'Facts'

1. *The majority of women who work on the streets became involved in prostitution at a relatively young age*

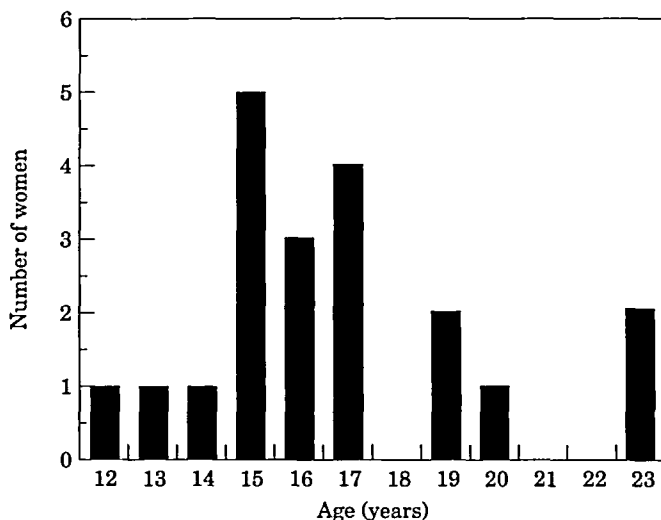
Our research indicates that the majority of women who contact their clients on the streets are considerably younger than the women who work in other forms of prostitution. The average age of these street prostitutes was 21 years. In contrast, the average age for women contacting clients through off-street methods was found to be 25.5 years but rises to an average age of 31.6 years for those women who work in saunas. Furthermore, the present research also indicates that women involved in street prostitution began their involvement whilst relatively young.

Thus 75% of our sample of working women were aged 17 years or under at the time of their initial involvement in street prostitution, and some 40% were 15 years or under. Other studies have revealed similar figures. For example, Faugier & Cranfield (1994) reported that 63% of women they contacted, started working as prostitutes before the age of 20 years. Similarly in Malvolwane *et al.*'s (1989) study of London prostitutes who worked predominantly from the streets, it was reported that 79% of women entered prostitution when they were under the age of 20 years, and of these 40% were 16 years or under.

In relation to young women's involvement in prostitution, there is also a disturbing connection in some areas with children who have been in residential care. In Nottingham for example, during 1993, the Anti-Vice Squad dealt with 22 juvenile offenders involved in prostitution (21 young women and 1 young boy). The Squad believed that 13 of these juveniles were from local authority Community Homes. However a 'snapshot' from the local authority reported that there were 26 young people (14 girls and 12 boys) known or strongly believed to be involved in prostitution on a regular basis (see also O'Neill *et al.* 1995).

These findings suggest that the majority of women became involved in street prostitution at an age when they are vulnerable and impressionable. The disturbing evidence of the relation to residential care, suggests that this particular route of entry into prostitution requires more detailed examination.

Figure 1. Age ranges at time of entry into street prostitution.



2. *Most women who work on the streets, do so on a sporadic and temporary basis*

The research which we have conducted also indicates that the average length of involvement in prostitution for those women who contact clients on the streets, appears to be much more limited than is often assumed. In a sample of 20 women who worked predominantly on the streets, there were three women who had been involved in prostitution for 9 years, 10

years and 20 years respectively. However, the average length of involvement for 17 other women who worked on the streets, was 2.8 years.

Similar findings were reported by McKeganey & Barnard (1992) in their study of street prostitutes in Glasgow. They found that the average length of time spent working as a street prostitute was 2 years. Malvolwane *et al.* (1989) however, report an even lower duration of 10 months, whilst Matthews' (1990) study of street prostitutes in Finsbury Park, found that the largest group of working women were those whose involvement was of a temporary nature, often drifting in and out of prostitution.

The implications of these findings are that those women who contact their clients on the streets are not predominantly 'career' women, and that their commitment to prostitution is far more transient than is often suggested.

3. There is very little mobility between street prostitution and commercial and organized forms of prostitution

In many areas, there is a hierarchy of working women, with street women at the bottom and brothel workers at the top. Interviews conducted with both groups of women suggest that there is restricted mobility between these two settings. For example, women who work in brothels tend to describe themselves as attractive, mature, reliable, organized, 'clean' (i.e. non-drug using) and 'independent' (working without pimps). The conception which those who operate in saunas have of street prostitutes however, ensures that access to such establishments, for many 'working women' is denied. As the manageress of one massage parlour explained:

Street girls are different. They're often young and inexperienced and a lot of them are on drugs or have a pimp. Most of them have been in trouble with the police too. I won't have them here, they are bad for business. We don't want the police around here any more than we have to. We've only been raided once in two years. They come around every now and again but they seem to leave us alone mostly. We're all mature ladies, experienced and reliable. We don't need any trouble.

Many women working on the streets admit that they are less organized and consequently reject the controlled environment of a legalized brothel or the presently operating 'illegitimate' brothels (saunas), preferring the flexibility which the streets can offer. Indeed, saunas and state brothels were the most unpopular places of work for women who worked on the streets, with only 12% and 6% in our sample respectively, opting for such a change of location. Thus the research indicates that an expansion of more organized and commercialized forms of prostitution will not attract a very significant percentage of those who currently work on the streets.

4. *The majority of women working as prostitutes have economic, social and health-related problems*

It has long been recognized that the primary incentive for women to become involved in prostitution is money. Prostitution offers relief from relative deprivation. It requires no qualifications, no experience and street work in particular, offers flexible working conditions. Although not all women who become involved in prostitution do so as a means of economic 'survival' (see Roberts 1993: 326–329), many studies show that the main reason for entering prostitution, particularly for women who work on the streets, is a function of mounting financial pressures. These pressures may be the result of many factors, although studies both in Britain and elsewhere, provide a fairly consistent picture of the main factors. These include child care expenses, drug addiction and unemployment (see Jaget 1980; McLeod 1982; Delacoste & Alexander 1987; Hoigard & Finstad 1992).

Indeed, many women involved in prostitution experience the pressures of being a single parent or the sole family earner. In our research, 11 of the 30 women surveyed (37%) had dependent children (nine women worked on the streets). McLeod's (1982) research found that 60% of her sample group had children, whilst Malvolwane *et al.* (1989) similarly reported that over 57% of the women they interviewed were parents. Furthermore, nine women (30%) of our sample of street prostitutes had dependent males, which included both 'partners' or 'passive ponces' and 'pimps'. The term 'pimp' is universally recognized as a problematic category legally covering those males who may have a commercial interest in the prostitute's earnings and those who exploit and exercise control over the women (McLeod 1982; Lowman 1985; Edwards 1993). Nevertheless, the existence of a dependent adult can reinforce the commitment to prostitution.

Despite assertions that women working as prostitutes are relatively well organized and therefore, should be allowed to continue their 'freely chosen' occupation unhindered, the reality is that many suffer from different forms of dependency. The myth of the 'happy hooker' unfortunately persists. In our sample of street prostitutes, 12 of the women (40%) admitted injecting drugs at some time, while only 20% admitted to being current drug users.

The literature on drugs and prostitution is divided between those studies which have found very low rates of drug abuse and injecting, to those which have found widespread use of drugs. Day *et al.* (1988) for example, found 14% of the prostitutes they contacted in London were injectors while Ward & Day (1993) found 9.6% were current or past drug injectors. Likewise Morgan-Thomas *et al.* (1989) found a 20% rate of injecting in Edinburgh. Kinnell (1989) in Birmingham found little over one-quarter of the women were injecting. McKeganey & Barnard (1992) meanwhile, reported 71% of

206 Glasgow prostitutes were injectors while the study carried out by Green *et al.* (1993), showed 83% were intravenous drug users and concluded that; "Prostitution is thus the cornerstone of an apparently 'black economy' associated with drug abuse."

Undoubtedly different research methods employed in different areas can produce varying rates of intravenous drug use. Some of these women had become involved in prostitution in order to finance their addiction, while others became involved in drug use as a consequence of their involvement in prostitution. However, it was evident that for both groups of women, their involvement in drugs compounded their commitment to prostitution. As one woman stated:

When you've got an expensive habit, you can't be thinking, "Oh I'd like to get out, I'd like to be doing a straight job, this one's no good." You just know this is the only way to keep yourself going... You've got to get enough to keep on top, you can't think about tomorrow or the next day, it's just about what you need for now.

There was also evidence of the widespread use of drugs such as alcohol, amphetamines and marijuana amongst female prostitutes. One woman who worked as a prostitute explained how her drug dependency was compounded by her experiences of prostitution:

I hate them [clients] I do. They make me feel sick. Some of them don't even talk to you, they just grunt at you like you're a piece of meat... I can't handle it unless I've had a smoke. It numbs you and you can't remember how many you've done, it just makes me forget...

Research on drug addiction indicates that this not only produces health issues in itself, but can also reduce the probability of condom use and therefore the possibility of protection against sexually transmitted disease (Morgan-Thomas *et al.* 1990; Bloor *et al.* 1991; McKeganey 1992).

5. Women who contact their clients on the streets are the repeated victims of both sexual and physical violent attacks

Despite assertions that prostitution is essentially a 'job' just like any other, the widespread evidence of abuse experienced by these women, suggests an alternative view. Twenty-six women (87%) in our sample had been the victims of abuse from clients in the last 12 months. The abuse ranged from being verbally assaulted by clients to being stabbed, beaten up and raped. Indeed 27% of the women reported that they had been the victim of rape in the last 12 months. A further 43% had suffered some sort of physical assault or abuse. The widespread occurrence of violence was also reported

by Barnard (1993) and earlier by McLeod (1982) who stated that; "Almost without exception, prostitutes I have had contact with have experienced some form of serious physical violence from their clients."

Many of these women (73%) were multiple victims. Eleven women experienced two offences, six women experienced three offences, one woman experienced four offences and another woman experienced six offences within the last 12 months, indicating that certain structural features of prostitution increased the likelihood of repeat assaults. Indeed, of those women who were high multiple victims (three to six offences) only one woman did not work on the streets. In contrast, only one of the four women who had not been victims of abuse in the last 12 months, contacted clients on the streets. Thus it would seem that street contacts are the most dangerous way of meeting clients. There is evidence that the rapid kerbside encounter of street prostitute and clients, by its very nature, reduces the women's ability to screen out potentially violent and dangerous clients, especially when business is conducted in deserted and dimly lit areas (Barnard 1993).

The evidence of widespread and constant levels of violence and attacks underlines the precarious nature of the street trade. Undoubtedly, most women who contact their clients on the streets are cautious of the clients they pick up and attempt to avoid certain types of men. However, in a brief encounter it is extremely difficult to make informed decisions, particularly for those women who are desperate for money.

6. The majority of clients have regular partners or are married

Most studies have found that the majority of clients are married (McLeod 1982; Kinnell 1989; Barnard & McKeganey 1992; Matthews 1993; Faugier & Cranfield 1994). Accurate numbers are difficult to come by, due in part to the highly discretionary nature of the amount of genuine information a client will give about his personal life. However, Kinnell (1989) puts the figure at between 28.8% and 43.7% in the two surveys she conducted, whilst Barnard & McKeganey (1992) put the figure at 51%. Similarly, Faugier & Cranfield (1994) reported 60% of clients were married or lived with a partner, whilst 65% of McLeod's sample of clients were either married or cohabiting.

Our research indicates that out of 280 kerb crawlers who were reported for summons by vice squads in Norwich and Balsall Heath, 85% were married. Furthermore, of 38 clients who used saunas and massage parlours, the total number who were married or had a partner was 64%. This was confirmed by all of the women interviewed who worked in massage parlours. As one of the women explained:

Most of the clients here are married and they're either not getting enough at home or they don't like to ask for certain things... They like coming here because they know they can drop in here any time and they feel they can do what they want and then go back to their wives and families.

The vast majority of these clients had 'no complaints' about their sexual relationships with their wives. One client interviewed echoed a popular response which clients offered in relation to being questioned about why they visit massage parlours:

I come here once in a while for a bit of excitement. My wife is really nice, she's an attractive woman too, quite adventurous in the bedroom I suppose, but even when you've got caviar you want something else don't you?

Whilst prostitution, therefore, may provide an 'extra' or alternative form of non-relational sexual encounter, it does not appear to provide an essential sexual service for the majority of male clients.

7. Many kerb crawlers are middle-aged and a large proportion of them are middle class

Very little academic research has focused on the characteristics of the clients of prostitutes. Our research found that the ages of 280 kerb crawlers ranged from 19 to 71 years, with an average of 35 years (See Figure 2).

Although over one-third of kerb crawlers were aged between 17 and 29 years, just under one-third were 30–39 years old, and a further one-third were over 40 years of age.

Information on the social class of the kerb crawlers was based on Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC). Although detailed records were not available, the job title entered on police records provided a basis for categorization.

Seven men were retired at the time of the offence. Twenty-six men (9%) were unemployed, three others (1%) were students and information for one kerb crawler was missing.

Almost one-third of kerb crawlers belonged to social groups i and ii; while just under three-quarters fell into the top three social classes of professional, managerial and skilled non-manual workers.

The implications of these findings are that a large proportion of clients are unlikely to be deterred by the level of fines which are currently given out to female prostitutes. It is more likely that some form of shaming will have the greatest deterrent effect on this group.

Figure 2. Age range of kerb crawlers.

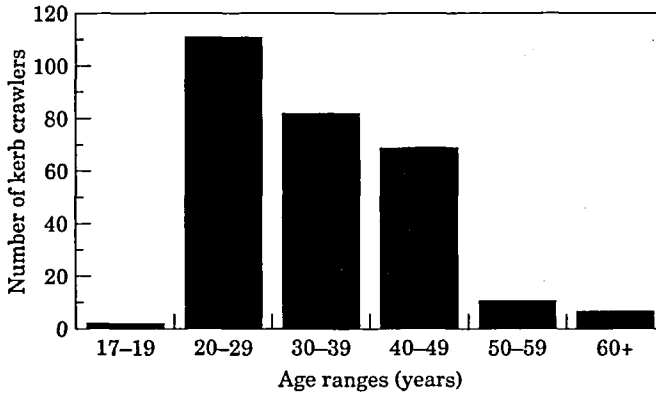
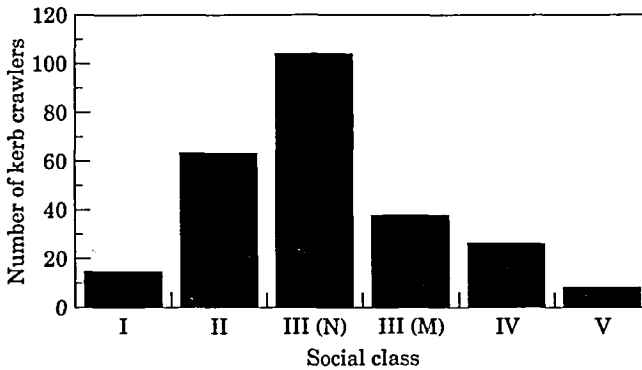


Figure 3. Social class of kerb crawlers, based on occupation.



8. Clients who patronise saunas and massage parlours are not generally involved in kerb crawling

Just as it was found that there are significant differences between those women who work on the streets and those who operate in saunas and massage parlours, the same distinctions appear to apply to clients. All of the clients in our sample who were interviewed in saunas and massage parlours stated clearly that they never engaged in kerb crawling activities. For these clients, the service available in the massage parlours was distinguishable in four ways from that available on the streets.

First, most of the clients interviewed emphasized the importance of being able to relax in the massage parlour. The availability of a massage,

bath or jacuzzi before and during the sexual services was seen as an important feature. This type of service could not be enjoyed with prostitutes who worked on the streets, unless they took the women back to their own homes or hotels, which for many of the clients, was considered impractical and expensive. Secondly, the clean appearance of the massage parlour and of the women working there was identified as a very important factor by the majority of clients. Indeed, many of the clients who visited the massage parlour saw the street girls as 'dirty' and unclean. Thirdly, the friendliness and professionalism of the women in saunas was also viewed by men as a desirable feature. This was felt to be less in evidence amongst street prostitutes, who were viewed by these clients as young and inexperienced.

Finally, the clients unanimously agreed that one of the most important attractions which the sauna offered was its discreet, semi-legitimate nature, and its apparent safety from the police and on lookers. They also felt a sense of personal safety in the sauna. In contrast, clients expressed a fear and uncertainty in relation to picking up prostitutes on the streets.

9. The regulation of prostitution is low status police work

Street prostitution remains very close to the bottom of a national scale of police priorities, while work in the vice squad is not generally seen as 'proper' police work. Consequently, some vice squads devote a considerable proportion of their time and resources to related issues such as drugs and robberies, which command more respect and status (see Benson & Matthews 1995).

The police focus on street prostitution in most areas is consequently largely reactive and the result of pressure from local residents. One vice squad officer explained that the police response, which included a combination of strategies involving heightened visibility and 'cracking down' on the prostitutes, was largely an attempt to placate local residents rather than produce a coordinated strategy designed to achieve a long-term reduction of street prostitution. As he explained:

You've got to be seen to be doing something, even if they [the prostitutes] do just go straight back out there. If we didn't we'd be over-run with girls and complaints about them.

Moreover, another officer interviewed in Wolverhampton stated that the women who work in the more industrial areas are arrested far less frequently than those who choose to stand in residential areas, despite the fact that both are formally breaking the law. As he stated:

It's not that we don't arrest them exactly, its just that we target the girls who are causing the most problems and they happen to be those who work in the residential areas. If they all worked in the industrial areas then we'd concentrate our efforts there, but at the moment we're happier if they're away from the residents.

Other squads indicated that they operated an informal selective system of arrests, depending on whether the women co-operate with police. Many vice squads see the prostitutes as a useful source of information about other criminal activities. For this reason the police have a vested interest in developing the cooperation of women involved in prostitution and of securing a 'good working relationship' with these women. This can, and does, lead to a situation in which the police fraternise with the women one day while arresting them on another. These contrasting practices create confusion and uncertainty for all concerned and lead to differential arrest rates for each area. Over a 12-month period, it was found in the course of our research that arrests per working woman ranged from 0.2 in Cambridge, to 23 arrests per working woman in Bradford.

Whilst police forces in many areas have turned their attention increasingly towards the male kerb crawler, there was similar evidence of a wide variance in cautioning and prosecution rates for clients. The range for cautions over a 12-month period varied from 0 in Cambridge, to 325 in Charing Cross (London).

Thus, it can be seen that the police often operate in relation to conflicting demands. Consequently, the effectiveness of the existing forms of regulation is not just a function of the legislation, but is also conditioned by the processes of enforcement.

10. Despite growing inequalities over the last decade, the number of women working as prostitutes on the streets in the majority of areas has either remained constant or decreased

The situation which the Wolfenden Committee responded to in the 1950s has changed considerably. The Committee reported that there had been nearly 7000 arrests in 1953 and that there were about 1000 women working on the streets of the West End of London alone. Contrary to some assertions that "more women are turning to the streets as a way of making a living than ever before" (Edwards 1993:123), current levels of street prostitution indicate an opposite tendency. In Southampton for example, the vice squad reported that the average daily sightings per quarter in 1985 was 30 women. By 1990 this had dropped to 14 women and by 1995 it had decreased to around six women. Similarly, Balsall Heath vice squad reported that in 1990, over an average 24-hour period, there were 40

women working on the streets and at any one time there were about 20 women. In 1995 this has dropped to about 14 women working over a 24-hour period, with only six women working at any one time. Indeed, many areas have witnessed a considerable decrease in the numbers of women working on the streets over the last 10 years.

Meanwhile, a recent survey of vice squads revealed that in over 50% of cases, the numbers of women working on the streets have remained relatively stable over the past year. These squads included: Blackpool, Bournemouth, Coventry, Derby, Doncaster, Essex, Hull, Leicester, Middlesbrough, Mosley, Northampton, Nottingham, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton and Stoke on Trent (see Reading *et al.* 1992; Benson & Matthews 1995).

In eight areas (30%), the respondents reported that street prostitution levels in their area had decreased. These areas included: Bradford, Cambridge, Cardiff, Charing Cross, Norwich and Greater Manchester. Only three respondents indicated that street prostitution had increased in their area: Sheffield, Bristol and Wolverhampton.

Summary and Discussion

In sum, there are a number of significant findings which emerged from recent research, which provide a useful starting point for considering the formulation of viable policy options.

Previous experience also indicates that this issue is unlikely to be satisfactorily addressed through legislative means alone. The law is a clumsy instrument in dealing with these matters and the ambivalence of those agencies who are charged with implementing legislation, make such an option on its own, unrealistic. Thus, there is a need to consider both legal and extra-legal approaches which can provide a more effective response to this issue. In relation to the 'facts' identified above, there are a number of legislative reforms in the British context which seem to deserve some consideration.

Possible Legislative Reforms

The removal of the wording 'Common Prostitute'

The wording 'common prostitute' in existing legislation appears to be an anachronistic and stigmatizing label, which in effect pre-empts the possibilities of developing any realistic deterrence (Edwards 1984; Smart 1985; Roberts 1992). Legislative bodies could remove this wording.

The inclusion of gender neutral language

Gender neutral language in legislation would expand the remit of the present legislation to include 'solicitation' by men. The inclusion of clients into the legislation may encourage the law to treat the activities of male clients, particularly those who approach non-prostitute women, in the same way they treat female prostitutes.

The removal of the wording 'Persistence' from kerb crawling legislation

It is becoming increasingly evident that kerb crawlers are more susceptible to regulation than women who work as prostitutes, and are the 'weak link' in the relation. In terms of controlling the nuisance aspects of street prostitution, it therefore seems preferable to increase police powers in relation to kerb crawlers, and within the current legislation, the most obvious way to do this is to remove the word 'persistent' from the legislation. This change in the legislation would increase the vulnerability of those kerb crawlers who, in some areas, seem to be more of a problem than the prostitutes.

The introduction of 'Shaming' sanctions for kerb crawlers

It is apparent from police evidence that kerb crawlers may be much more susceptible to shaming sanctions rather than the imposition of fines. This may be particularly relevant to the large proportion of clients who are married or cohabiting. Alternative sanctions, such as the use of licence points for the offence of kerb crawling, could be considered.

The development of 'Procurring' legislation

The large percentage of women who began their involvement in prostitution as teenagers is disturbing. Those who have been in local authority care or hostel accommodation are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to procurement. Although legislation exists to address this issue, it is rarely enforced and carries relatively light sanctions. There is, in light of the available evidence, grounds for re-examining this legislation and increasing its impact and applicability.

Extra-legal Reforms

Development of multi-agency initiatives

Multi-agency initiatives have been seen to be effective in some locations,

particularly when they have been well-coordinated and driven by residents groups. The problem has been that in many locations, such intervention has not been 'multi-agency' enough. That is, they have relied too heavily on one strategy or agency to 'solve' the problem, rather than developing more comprehensive approaches. Agencies such as local authorities, social services departments, health services and education departments can be brought together, with a view to offering support to the women by offering a range of services and advice on addiction, drugs and health issues.

Examination of child support

In the present survey, 37% of the women had dependent children, while 20% stated that they became involved in prostitution in order to support their children. There is, therefore, a need to extend the existing provisions for child support and provide advice to claimants, particularly single mothers. There is also a need to look at equal opportunities policies with regard to examining child care facilities and other problems which working women encounter.

Examination of welfare and housing issues

Similarly, there is a need to extend the range of welfare facilities available to young people at risk. It is essential that there is a recognition of the growing problem of homelessness of juveniles aged 16–18 years, who may engage in commercialized sexual activities in return for accommodation, (Young Homelessness Group 1989). The uncertainty of the benefits system, the lack of benefits and problems of finding low-priced accommodation, all serve to increase the pressure for young people to become involved in prostitution (Green 1992; Taylor & Hattenstone; 1992). Both Birmingham and Liverpool local authorities have called for the restoration of benefits to these youngsters.

Some local authority housing departments have begun to be involved in schemes which offer temporary respite from prostitution in an emergency hostels and 'safe houses'. These are set up for domestic violence victims and are also able to accommodate women who urgently need to get away from damaging situations.

Enhancement of health education and advice

Forty percent of the women in our sample admitted injecting drugs. Others were regular abusers of other drugs such as alcohol, amphetamines and cocaine. Health advice should be aimed at both drug prevention and dependency. Furthermore, 10% of the women admitted that they did not

always insist on condom use, and a further 20% admitted that they were susceptible to offers of financial rewards by clients for unsafe sexual practices. The apparent demand for unsafe sexual services suggests that health information needs to be directed towards male clients, and that more imaginative strategies for developing support and advice should be explored.

The improvement of safety for women working as prostitutes

There is also an urgent need to recognize the risks of violence and sexual assaults which women working on the streets experience. Barnard (1993) critically asserts that the apparent lack of academic and/or professional attention to such issues is possibly 'because selling sex is not generally considered a legitimate vocation'.

In the present study, 87% of working women had been subject to some sort of abuse from clients in the last 12 months. Furthermore, approximately 73% of these women had been multiple victims highlighting the vulnerability of these women to repeat assaults. Many of these women, however, had not reported the assaults to the police. Both preventative strategies and the role of the police and intermediaries needs to be closely examined in order to improve the safety of these women.

Development of alternate and 'exit' routes

Forty-three percent of the women from our survey admitted that they had thought about getting out of prostitution. However, very few felt that they had any available alternative means of employment. Many of these women lack qualifications and training, although they expressed an interest in engaging in alternative occupations. Indeed 57% of women in the survey indicated that if they could get a legitimate job which paid a good living wage, they would give up prostitution.

Increasingly, therefore, services and opportunities could be developed in order to provide the women concerned with a wider range of options. In developing 'exit' strategies, the aim is to help those women who want to leave prostitution, but feel trapped. A combination of training, employment, health and welfare provisions will need to be developed if this objective is to become a reality. A combination of these policies could help to make prostitution a less attractive option for these women. Reforms therefore, could aim to:

- (1) Reduce the number of women who enter prostitution.
- (2) Reduce the period of time in which women are involved in prostitution.

- (3) Increase the range of occupational options available to women at risk as well as those involved in prostitution.
- (4) Increase the range of assistance to those women who express a desire to leave prostitution.

Conclusion

In recent years in Britain, there has developed a two-pronged response to street prostitution, both sides of which now appear to be inadequate. On one side, there has been an essentially coercive response provided by the police which has been primarily directed at 'keeping the lid on' the public order problems associated with street prostitution. Vice squads have been encouraged to 'crack down' on street prostitutes, arresting and rearresting them on a continual basis.

On the other side, there has been a medicalization of prostitution, largely centred around concerns over the transmission of HIV and AIDs. This response, which involves the supply of condoms, lubricants and the dissemination of health education advice, generally fails to address the conditions which produce prostitution or the public order issues which have become associated with it.

It is clear that although these two responses continue to play a major role in the policy debates around prostitution, a review of current developments suggests that it may be the time to move beyond these two options. As the level of street prostitution has begun to level off and even decrease in many parts of the country, it appears that it is time to consider more comprehensive and imaginative forms of intervention than those which are currently available.

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