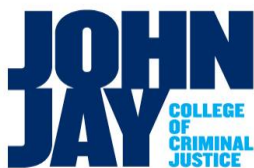

Experiences of Youth in the Sex Trade in Atlantic City

By Anthony Marcus, Robert Riggs, Sarah Rivera, and Ric Curtis



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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study of youth exchanged in the sex trade in Atlantic City, New Jersey was conducted by the Center for Court Innovation and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. An earlier study in New York City was funded by the National Institute of Justice (see Curtis et al. 2008; Muslim, Labriola, and Rempel 2008). The current study, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, added six additional sites, of which Atlantic City was selected as a pilot site. The six sites are the Bay Area (CA), Chicago (IL), Dallas (TX), Miami (FL), Las Vegas (NV), and Atlantic City. Our aims were to produce a nationwide prevalence estimate and population description, which could provide an empirical foundation to better inform policymakers, professionals, researchers, and advocates about the extent and nature of the problem and about the needs of youth involved in the sex trade.

The current report represents one of six site-specific reports that provide systematic, detailed findings drawn from the youth interviews in each site (see, also, Jones and Gamson 2016; Martin et al. 2016; Maurrasse and Jones 2016; Schaffner et al. 2016; Wagner, Whitmer, and Spivak 2016). A multisite report describes the overall study methodology; differences in how that methodology was applied by site; findings from a national and multisite analysis of arrest, prosecution, and recidivism data; themes emerging from social service provider interviews; and multisite quantitative findings from the youth interviews in all six sites (Swaner, Labriola, Rempel, Walker, and Spadafore 2016).¹ Because the multisite report has a quantitative focus, this report and the other five site-specific reports endeavor to provide a rich qualitative account that reveals and gives voice to the experiences, perceptions, and needs of the relevant population of youth.

¹ For all reports produced by this project, see www.courtinnovation.org/youthstudy.

the large number of police in Atlantic City makes this situation unusual, but we would speculate that the growing importance of the internet to sex markets may make Atlantic City typical of what is occurring in sex markets elsewhere.

Over the course of the roughly nine months that we studied Atlantic City, we logged hundreds of hours on the streets and in motel parking lots at every hour of the day and every day of the week, and regardless of whether they were juridical minors or adults, there was little in the way of visible sex market activity. Our respondents simply did not advertise on the streets, preferring to stay in hotel lobbies, boarding house rooms, bars and restaurants and under the boardwalk. During that period, the most common figures of relevance to the study that we observed on the streets were the market facilitators we have called spot pimps.

We observed little of the power that is typically attributed to pimps. For the part-time relationships of opportunity that we have called “spot pimping,” the remuneration was negligible. For the small number of young people in our sample who did say that they had pimps with exclusive management relationships, there was far more mutuality than was expected and far lower standards of living than are typically attributed to pimps. This may provide some of the explanation for the far lower percentage of adolescents who either reported having pimps or gave answers to other questions that suggested that they might have a permanent full-time manager.

However, most of our informants suggested that our findings related to the relationships between our sample and pimps represented a problem with our sample, which selected for younger sex workers who are typically less in demand, less able to charge high rates for sex, have reduced access (due to a drinking age of 21) to the casinos where higher paying customers are present, and therefore were more amenable to our small incentive for doing an interview. In Atlantic City, underage sex work appears to be driven by the subsistence or survival needs (e.g., housing, food) of the adolescents involved.

Our numbers also suggest that very few of the street-based sex workers in Atlantic City are under 19 years of age. Furthermore, our inability to grow robust RDS trees suggests that in addition to low prevalence, the sparse networks upon which street-based sex markets are built do not segregate by age or division of labor. Our first-tier eligible respondents proved to be networked to adult sex workers, drug sellers, spot-pimps, and other street hustlers, rather than to each other, making a general survey of street-based sex markets a more effective approach for generating a prevalence estimate in Atlantic City.

Finally, our sense, after passing thousands of person hours intensively studying street sex markets and the participation of adolescents, is that the sale of sex in street markets by juridical minors is but one problem in the life of “lost boys and girls.” This is how they typically describe it themselves. To them, “the life” was a secondary or subsidiary effect of being adolescent and tossed away. Their future is one of earning minimum wage in legitimate jobs, having little or no access to credit and therefore a lessened ability to make contracts such as a lease on favorable terms, and the expectation that schooling and other specialized training which involves a combination of parental permission and support, is not an option for them.

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Appendix A

Assent Narrative and Consent Form

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to help us do a study of teenagers who engage in sex for money in New York City. The information I will give you can help you make a good choice about joining or not joining the study. We hope that the information we collect will help solve some of the problems that you and others in your situation face, and ensure that these problems become smaller and not bigger.

You are invited to be part of this study because you said you have had sex for money and you said you are less than 18 years of age. This study - sponsored by the National Institute of Justice - is being done by researchers from John Jay College.

Procedures

If you agree to take part, you will participate in a 30-40 minute interview about prostituted teenagers in New York City. You may refuse to answer any questions at any time for any reason. If you refuse to answer a question or do not want to participate any further, you will not be penalized in any way.

Since we are interested in interviewing people like yourself who know about teens who have sex for money, after your interview, we will explain how you can help us recruit other people to participate in the study. If you want to end your participation at this point, you will not be penalized in any way. If you don't want to talk with us, you can stop at any time.

Risks

There are minimal risks from being in this study, but our interview may cause you some stress. Remember, you are free to not answer any questions or stop the interview at any time, but our staff is trained to help you with your problems, and not make you anxious. All the answers you give will be kept private and confidential. They will not be given to the police or anyone else.

Benefits

Benefits you may get from being part of this study include referrals to local social service programs that can offer help for a wide variety of needs, including health and housing, to

name a few. Our staff is specially trained in making appropriate referrals for you, and they will provide you with as much or as little help as you request. If you want us to take you to one of the places that can offer you help, we will do that.

Another benefit is that this study will help professionals learn more about how to better deal with the problems that you and others like you face.

Compensation

To account for your time in answering questions, we will pay you \$20 at the end of the interview or give you a gift certificate for the same amount

If you agree to participate in helping the project recruit additional people to interview, you will be paid \$10 (or a gift certificate) for each eligible person that you recruit who completes the interview.

Persons to Contact

This study is run by Ric Curtis, a professor at John Jay College. His phone number is (212) 237-8962. You may call him with any questions about your participation.

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or if you feel that you have been harmed, contact Dr. James Levine, the Dean of Research at John Jay College. His phone number is 212-237-8422.

Privacy Statement

Your participation in this study is anonymous. Only a pseudonym (a fake name you pick) will be attached to your responses. No one except the study staff at John Jay College will have access to anything you tell us. The report on our findings will not be written in a way that would let someone who reads it figure out who you are.

While your responses are confidential, there is a very slight chance that an unauthorized person may get access to them. To prevent this from happening, you will not be asked to give your name or the names of persons you know to any member of the study team. Any answers that you give us on surveys or in interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the study office, to which only specific study staff will have access.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal Statement

This study is VOLUNTARY. You are not giving up any legal claims or rights because of your participation in this study. If you do join, you are free to quit at any time.

Agreement

Are you willing to be in this study?

Consent Form

I have talked with _____, to assess their psychological state of mind, their physical condition, the degree to which they appear to fully understand the aims of the study, the extent to which they have given their assent to participate, and the relative degree of freedom that they appear to exercise in making decisions. After examining all the factors and information available to us, I believe that this young person is fully capable of and willing to participating in the John Jay College study on prostituted teens in New York City.

Child Advocate: _____

Date: _____