

Explore the concept of ‘risk’ and ‘resilience’ in sex work, considering how barriers to full engagement in society affect the likelihood of their integration into community.

A hard to reach group is a group that is under represented or marginalised in society, these groups can often be described as hidden populations. Hard to reach groups can be groups such as homosexual people, ethnic minority groups or people with disabilities. However, the term hard to reach is complex and vast and covers a plethora of different categories (Brackertz, 2007). The hard to reach group which will be explored in detail in this essay is sex workers, and the risk and resilience factors that surround them, along with the barriers that may affect their likelihood of fully re-joining society.

The term sex worker refers to someone who is engaging in using sex in exchange for something, usually financial benefit, otherwise known as – with negative and sexist connotations – prostitution (May, Harocopos and Hough, 2000). It is thought that within the UK there are around 72,800 sex workers with around 32,00 of these are working within London (Houses of Commons Home Affairs Committee (HCHAC), 2016. Pg. 4). However, it is essential to remember that statistics surrounding sex-work come with difficulties and gaps. This is because, sex work research has low response rates a great deal of research that is conducted is done so on small scales and with specific groups and organisation, making it unrepresentative of the UK as a whole. Often sex workers do not respond to research because of fear of legal responses (HCHAC, 2016, pg. 9).

The purchasing of services of sexual nature between persons who are of an age in which they can consent, is legal in Wales and England. However, there are certain type of sex work which is illegal in the UK such as kerb crawling, the keeping and selling of prostitutes in brothel's and forms of exploitation, under the Sex Offences Act 2003 (HCHAC, 2016, pg. 4). There is a great deal of risks surrounding the sex industry this essay will explore some of these risks, and aims to explore some approaches which may help or guide sex workers to escape from this industry, also known as resilience approaches (HCHAC, 2016)

The concept of risk is often associated with the prospect of harm occurring (Gigerenzer, 2014), however within social work professions, the concept of risk becomes a more complex matter; in social work the likelihood of the risk occurring and its seriousness, are factors also taken into consideration when dealing with potential risks. In contrast when dealing with risks it is not only the negative value which is examined, but also the positive procurement by removal of the risk (Taylor, 2017 pg. 9-10). The concept of resilience, however, surrounds the idea of

removal of negativity and risk or, as it can also be perceived, the attainment of positive outcomes in situations in which a negative or different outcome would often be expected (Kaplan, 2005).

This essay aims to explore; the risk factors for entry in to sex work, with focus of the link between child sexual abuse and exploitation and sex work, the impact this has on the individual and the support which is in place for victims of this; the stigmatisation of sex work and the debate surrounding the decriminalisation of sex work, and the barriers in which these issues create regarding full integration or re-integration to society for sex workers.

There is an abundance of reasons that people may become involved in sex work. In many cases entry into sex work can be the result of a combination of interconnected issues. May and Hunter (2006) reveal that the risk factors of entry to sex work can be such issues as; socio-economic deprivation, meaning factors such as poverty and poor education; breakdown, or absence of positive family relationships and role models; history of sexual or physical abuse; involvement in criminal activity and low self-esteem. For the purpose of this essay, the focus will be surrounding the link between child sexual abuse and involvement in sex work.

There is a plethora of research proving links between child sexual exploitation and abuse and sex work in the future. studies also reveal that a high percentage of people, especially girls, who have been sexually abused as a child and are later involved in sex work, become involved in their adolescent years (Farley, 2003). In the United Kingdom if a person under the age of eighteen is involved in sex work it is considered as Human trafficking. Trafficking is a process in which people gain profit by the exploitation of others. Trafficking is a form of modern slavery and is illegal under the Modern Slavery Act (2015) (Legislation.gov.uk, 2017). Sexual trafficking of a minor involves forcing a child or young person to engage in sexual acts, in exchange for their own financial gain. Young people who are victims of trafficking are often affected by difficulties such as dangerous or unsafe environments and households, and lack of access to proper or good standard of food and shelter (PCAR, 2013).

A real life, large scale example of Child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, is the Rotherham grooming gang case, where seven men were found guilty of sexual offences to vulnerable minors, including trafficking between 1997 and 2003, with 1,523 potential victims (Halliday, 2018); highlighting the danger posed to young people when effected by risk factors of sexual exploitation, when not addressed.

Sexual exploitation, and being involved in sex work at a young age can have devastating impacts on one's emotional health, frequently resulting in forms of coping mechanisms like 'escapism' (Nixon *et al*, 2002). Escapism describes the process of using drugs or alcohol as a way of 'escaping' reality and numbing the trauma caused by the experiences in their exploitation and involvement in sex work. Sex workers can often become addicted to such substances because of this. These coping mechanisms can create further barriers to these individuals creating or maintaining positive relationship, support networks and health services (Nixon *et al*, 2002). However, some policies and projects have been set up in the UK in order to protect vulnerable young people who are being exploited.

'Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution (2000)' was set up by the National Assembly of Wales and the Department of Health. This multi-agency approach was created to create a network of support for victims. The main aims of this project include: acknowledging sexual exploitation at the earliest stage possible and providing support strategies to encourage and help these young people to exit the exploitation in which they are involved. These projects are working to break down barriers young exploited people face in their reintegration to society (Barnardo's Cymru, N/D). However, there is always a great deal of negative connotation by society to sex workers, regardless of age, this is often displayed in the form of stigma (Berthe, 2018).

Throughout society runs a stigmatisation of certain 'hard to reach groups', this stigma, does not ignore sex workers. Stigma is the process where a prejudice or stereotype surrounding a particular group or person in society produces a discrimination against such group. This process results in the group experiencing feelings of being outcast shunned upon by society, furthermore creating barriers of integration by this group to society, and moreover can cause detrimental effects to people's mental health. stigma can occur on a one to one level, or on a level where it is society creating a stigma against a particular group, in this case sex workers (Government of Western Australia, Department of Health, 2009)

Stigma of sex workers paints a picture of these workers being 'whores', being a group of disgrace and one that should be shunned upon. Politicians are still reported to be using derogatory terms, explaining a want for 'solutions for prostitutes' and not for 'sex workers', creating and emphasising the negative connotations surrounding the sex industry (Berthe, 2018). Rapper, Cardi B is an example of a victim of the stigma attached to being involved in sex work. Despite her successful career in the music industry now, Cardi B still faces

discrimination and hatred regarding her past involvement in erotic dancing. Cardi B explains that her involvement in this field, doesn't mean she or anyone else who is in the same position cannot progress and advance in their lives as women and in hers as a music artist (Arneson, 2018).

The stigma in which sex workers suffer may be a result of how the law perceives this type of work and the people who are involved in it (Berthe, 2018). The fact that sex work is illegal in the UK, leaves space for the rest of society to perceive the industry as negative, and to discriminate against those who are involved, without understanding the individual circumstances, which marginalises sex workers further. This marginalisation generates more vulnerability for sex workers, which makes it more difficult for them to have the confidence and support to escape sex work and reintegrate fully into the community (Boynton and Cusick, 2006). The criminal justice and police systems often have a prejudice or discriminative perspective of sex workers, this discourages sex workers from reporting crimes and violent acts against them, because of fear of being treated as a criminal, rather than a victim, again creating barriers against sex workers, and placing them in increased danger (Boff, 2012).

Sex workers also experience a great deal of systematic discrimination where organizations and businesses and creates a situation in which a group, in this case, sex workers are 'other' to the rest of society (Stardust, 2017). 'Othering' is the process in which society narrowly define a marginalised group, based on an unconscious or conscious societal view about this group being a danger or threat to society (Powell, 2017). This systematic discrimination has been displayed by companies such as PayPal who have closed the accounts (Stardust, 2017).

Thankfully, organisations such as United Nations, the World Health Organisation and Amnesty International are currently advocating for better protection of sex workers, legally and socially. hopefully, in the future this can be the change in which drives sex workers to feel confident enough to seek help regarding health, stigma, mental health and advice regarding what to do to help themselves fully reintegrate positively into society (Berthe, 2018). Along with the protection of sex workers as individuals, in order to create a more positive environment for them to live in; there is mass speculation into whether the decriminalisation of sex work in the UK would have positive outcomes for those involved, and those whom surround them (End Demand UK, 2014).

Decriminalisation of sex work has been introduced in certain countries across the world such as Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden. The understanding is that by

eliminating the opportunity for a small minority of men who want to, and are paying for sex will therefore eliminate the exploitation of who are mostly women and girls through trafficking and prostitution, it is understood that without supply there can be no demand (End Demand UK, 2014).

There is a great deal of evidence in favour of decriminalised sex work, putting into perspective some of the positive outcomes which come with this. Sweden for example, in 1999 introduced the sex buyer law, this law makes being a prostitute legal but makes paying for sex a crime, therefore making the client a criminal not the provider of the service. An evaluation of the Sex Buyer Law several years after its introduction revealed that street prostitution had reduced by half following the criminalisation of paying for sexual services and along with this there was no evidence suggesting that sexual services had diverted to the internet (HCAC, 2016, pg. 26). In contrast a 2014 survey of 124 sex workers in Sweden disclosed that they had experienced more prejudice from the authorities since the law had been introduced (House of Commons (HC), 2015 pg. 6). Prejudice being an opinion of a person due to a group they belong to, in this case a negative one (Stangor, 2000) Violent attacks from clients was reported by 29% of these women, however due to the prejudice experienced by authorities, only two of these women reported they would feel confident to report a future attack (House of Commons (HC), 2015, pg. 6).

The Prostitution Reform Act 2003 (PRA) saw the decriminalisation of sex work in New Zealand. The purpose of this reform was to decriminalise sex work, and to introduce provisions and regulations to the business. The intention of the law was not to promote prostitution as a justifiable career choice, but to give sex workers the opportunity to access the same protection and services as other workers can. Some aims of the PRA was to promote better health and safety for sex workers, for example by, creating an environment which is accessible and conducive for sex workers in regard to public health and to protect sex workers and children from prostitution related exploitation (New Zealand Parliament, 2012).

A review by Christchurch School of Medicine in 2007 found that over 90% of sex workers found that since the 2003 Prostitution Reform Act their rights in regard to the legal system, employment and to health and safety had improved. 70% had better trust in authority and reported that they were likely to report a crime of violent nature to the police. This evidence suggests that in practice the rights, opportunities and safety are improved by decriminalisation of sex work (HC, 2015. Pg. 5). Some do have differing opinions on decriminalisation of sex

work or introduction of Sex Buyer Laws. University of Kent's, Professor Phillip Hubbard for example explains that evidence from Sweden suggested criminalisation rather than eliminating sex work or making it safer, only forced sex workers to need provide their services in a more confidential manner. Meaning in practice sex workers feel pushed to underground work, therefore leaving them more at risk, and more exposed to exploitation (HCAC, 2016, pg. 29).

It's clear that there are advantages and disadvantages to different types of legislative models to sex work. The Houses of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2016) explain that none would have great benefit in Wales and England due to social welfare support available, and the employment law. However, do state that there are advantages to the different types of models.

To conclude, it is clear that the barriers that society build up against sex workers are high, and incredibly difficult to break through. For those who have experienced sexual abuse as a child entering this line of work is a likely consequence (Farley, 2003) and with the stigma surrounding such work being so evident and impactful, reintegration into society for these individual's is a process which appears would be exceedingly difficult and would require a change in paradigm from society to being more understanding, less judgmental and more accepting (Boynton and Cusick, 2006).

Another requirement needed to impact braking down barriers to integration for former sex workers is more adequate and accessible provision of services and help for these individuals For this to happen there needs to be a better understanding of the vulnerability of sex workers, requiring society, and the criminal justice system along with methods of policing to adopt a differing approach which ends criminalising and discriminating against individuals who may be victims of violence and abuse (Boff, 2012). With this, sex workers or former sex workers may feel in a more comfortable position to begin to reintegrate into their communities, and start afresh.

Evidence suggests decriminalising sex-work in the UK may have a positive effect on sex workers integration with society and trust in the criminal justice system (HC, 2015. Pg. 5). Along with this suggesting the decriminalisation may also encourage sex workers to access health services on a more regular basis, by eliminating the discrimination and judgement they face; and creating better provision and a safer network discouraging and supporting children who are victims of abuse and exploitation from entering the world of sex work in the future (New Zealand Parliament, 2012).

References:

- Arneson, K (2018) 'Cardi B won't let you disrespect her because she used to be a stripper' *Glamour*. Accessed at: <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/cardi-b-stripper-career> (accessed on: 20/03/2019)
- Barnardo's Cymru (N/D) Child Sexual Exploitation in Wales: 3 years on. Accessed on: https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/130812/mod_resource/content/0/child_sexual_exploitation_in_wales-3_years_on_no_3_policy_and_practice_briefing.pdf (accessed at: 25/03/2019)
- Berthe, P (2018) *The Stigmatization Behind Sex Work*. Accessed at: <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/the-stigmatization-behind-sex-work/> (accessed on: 20/03/2019)
- Boff, A. (2012) Silence on Violence: Improving the Safety of Women. The policing of off-street sex work and sex trafficking in London. Available at: <http://www.uknswp.org/wpcontent/uploads/SILENCEONVIOLENCElondonmajorofficereport19thmarch2012.pdf>
- Boynton, P. and Cusick, L. (2006) Sex workers to pay the price: UK plans to cut street prostitution will threaten sex workers' health. *British Medical Journal*. 332: 190-191.
- Brackertz, N (2007) *Who is hard to reach and why?* Accessed at: http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/875/1/Whois_hard.pdf (accessed on: 25/03/2019)
- Cusick, L. and Berney, L. (2005) Prioritizing punitive responses over public health: commentary on the Home Office consultation document Paying the Price. *Critical Social Policy*. 25(4): 596-606.
- Cusick, L., Kinnell, H., Brooks-Gordon, B. and Campbell, R. (2009) Wild guesses and conflated meanings? Estimating the size of the sex worker population in Britain. *Critical Social Policy*. 29: 703.
- End Demand UK (2014) *What is the sex buyer law?* Accessed at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw50/statements/NGOCSWConsultationCH26feb06.pdf> (accessed on: 10/03/2019)
- Farley, M. (Ed). (2003). *Prostitution, trafficking, and traumatic stress*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Gigerenzer, G. (2014). *Risk savvy: How to make good decisions*. New York, NY: Penguin
- Government of Western Australia, Department of Health (2009) STIGMA, DISCRIMINATION AND MENTAL ILLNESS. Accessed at: http://www.health.wa.gov.au/docreg/Education/Population/Health_Problems/Mental_Illness/Mentalhealth_stigma_fact.pdf (accessed on: 25/03/2019)
- Halliday, J (2018) 'Rotherham grooming gang: seven men guilty of sexual offences' *The Guardian*. Monday 29th October, 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/29/rotherham-grooming-gang-seven-men-convicted-of-sexual-offences> (accessed on: 27/03/2019)

House of Commons (2015) *Decriminalisation of Prostitution*. London. Accessed at: <file:///F:/hard%20to%20reach/decriminalisation%20of%20sex%20work,%20houses%20of%20commons.pdf> (Accessed on: 12/03/2019)

House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2016) *Prostitution*. London. Accessed at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/26/26.pdf> (accessed on: 05/03/2019)

Kaplan, H.B. (2005) Understanding the Concept of Resilience. In: Goldstein S., Brooks R.B. (eds) *Handbook of Resilience in Children*. Springer, Boston, MA

Legislation.gov.uk (2017) The Modern Slavery Act (2015) Accessed at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted> (accessed at: 25/03/2019)

Matthews, R (2008) 'Prostitution, Politics & Policy'. Routledge-Cavendish. New York

May, T & Hunter, G (2006) 'Sex work and the problem of drug use in the UK'

May, T., Haracopos, A. and Hough, M. (2000) For Love or Money: Pimps and the management of sex work. London: Home Office – Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

New Zealand Parliament (2012) *Prostitution law reform in New Zealand*. Accessed at: <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/research-papers/document/00PLSocRP12051/prostitution-law-reform-in-new-zealand> (accessed on: 12/03/2019)

Pennsylvania Coalition against Rape (PCAR) (2013) *The Intersection Between Prostitution and Sexual Violence*. Accessed at: https://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/pages-pdf/the_intersection_between_prostitution_and_sexual_violence.pdf (accessed on: 25/03/2019)

Powell, J, A (2017) 'Us vs them: the sinister techniques of 'Othering' – and how to avoid them' *The Guardian*. Wednesday 8 Nov 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/08/us-vs-them-the-sinister-techniques-of-othering-and-how-to-avoid-them> (accessed on: 20/03/2019)

Sexual Offences Act (2003) accessed at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/part/1/crossheading/exploitation-of-prostitution> accessed on (05/03/2019)

Stangor, C (2000) *Stereotypes and Prejudice: Essential Readings*. UK: Psychology Press

Stardust, Z, Z (2017) *The stigma of sex work comes with a high cost*. Accessed at: <http://theconversation.com/the-stigma-of-sex-work-comes-with-a-high-cost-79657> (accessed on:20/03/2019)

Taylor, B. J. (2017a). *Decision making, assessment and risk in social work* (3rd ed.). London: Sage. Pg. 9-10

William, C, W. Holroyd, E. Bingham, A. (2010) *Stigma and sex work from the perspective of female sex workers in Hong Kong*. *Sociology of Health and Illness*