

Bridging the Gap:

*Commercial sexual exploitation of young people
in metropolitan Melbourne*

**Paula Fitzgerald
November 1997**

ECPAT Australia Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was made possible by the valuable and thoughtful participation of 41 youth and community services organisations in metropolitan Melbourne. Thanks to Dr Linda Hancock for support and direction, and to the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria for their ongoing advice and support. Our thanks also to the Lance Reichstein Foundation for financial assistance that has made this research, and ECPAT's national inquiry, possible.

*ECPAT Australia, GPO Box 2593W, Melbourne Vic. 3001
Tel. 03 9650 3295 Fax: 03 9650 8383*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bridging the Gap: the commercial sexual exploitation of young people in metropolitan Melbourne

This report was commissioned by ECPAT Australia Inc as a pilot for ECPAT's national inquiry into the commercial sexual exploitation of young people under 18 years of age in Australia. The principal objectives of this report are to gain insight into the nature and extent of commercial sexual activities of young people in metropolitan Melbourne, to investigate areas where youth and community services could be enhanced or changed to better meet the needs of young people. The report also serves as a starting point for ECPAT's national inquiry and is intended to proffer shape and direction for the national inquiry.

The method adopted in this research was a dialogue with 41 youth and community services agencies and workers in metropolitan Melbourne. We sought their advice and insights into the extent and nature of sex work participation by young people, the significance of links to other issues in young people's lives, and their views of how services could be improved to better meet young people's needs. Time and resource limitations precluded the direct involvement of young people in this pilot study.

Bridging the Gap reveals that up to 300 young people are confirmed participants in sex work, and a further 300 young people are thought to be sex work participants, ie. their involvement was not clearly disclosed. This means that potentially 1 in 7 young people accessing youth and community services agencies in Melbourne are participating in commercial sexual activity.

This report reveals also that sex work participation is one of a number of 'high risk' activities that young people may undertake in order to have their needs, material and/or emotional, met. Underage sex work participants are often homeless (ie. insecure living arrangements), are likely to use drugs, and tend to have a very poor self image.

ECPAT Australia understands that sex work participation is interconnected with other high risk activities and circumstances and that all of these issues should be dealt with collectively. However, we have found that the issue of sex work participation by young people has fallen through the gap in terms of community understanding and support. ECPAT is advocating an increased and sustained focus on this issue on a national level, on a local level, in governments and in youth and community services agencies.

Some key recommendations for enhancement of youth and community services, with particular emphasis on young people in sex work, are:

- i funding and provision of outreach and support services for 'high risk' youth;
- ii increase appropriate accommodation opportunities, particularly medium to long term, for young people;
- iii development of services specifically targeting young people who are sex work participants;

- i multi-disciplinary teams within youth and community services agencies who are trained, equipped and funded to work with young people's high risk issues and circumstances;
- i intensive personal development programs for young people in sex work

Recommendations for ECPAT's national inquiry are:

- i further inquiry into the nature of commercial sexual activity by young people in Australia;
- i direct participation in the research process by young Australians who have participated in commercial sexual activity;
- i analysis of the impact of the Federal Government's policy changes affecting young Australians, particularly young people in vulnerable circumstances.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
1. Introduction.....	6
2. Literature Review	8
3. Research Question and Objectives	11
4. Definitions.....	12
5. Research Design and Methodology	14
6. Scope and Limitations.....	16
7. The Findings.....	17
7.1 The extent of youth sex work participation.....	17
7.2 Health and safety	23
7.3 Gender	25
7.4 Ethnicity	27
8. Recommendations	28
9. Conclusion	30
10. Bibliography	31

Appendices

- A. Research Questionnaire
- B. Research participants
- C. ECPAT Australia Inc.

1. INTRODUCTION

ECPAT Australia Inc is a coalition of agencies and individuals working to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children through advocacy, awareness and policy change.

ECPAT Australia was launched in 1992 as the campaign to end child prostitution in Asian tourism and has worked successfully on advocacy, education and lobbying strategies involving the Australian Government, tourism bodies, international development agencies, churches and individuals in Australia and throughout the world.

In 1996 ECPAT Australia launched phase 2, addressing the need for a global campaign against child prostitution, child pornography and the traffic in children for sexual purposes. The World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm, Sweden, in August 1996 recognised that although commercial sexual exploitation of children is a global phenomena little attention has been paid to the issue in western societies. The Agenda for Action that emerged from the Congress called for an immediate global response (ECPAT 1996).

In 1997 ECPAT Australia announced its intention to facilitate a national inquiry into commercial sexual exploitation of children/young people in Australia. As a new national initiative, a thoughtful planning phase is crucial. Which approach is most suitable? What are the key determining factors for young people in high risk situations in Australia? What Australian research exists, and which research methods worked particularly well? In April 1997 ECPAT Australia commissioned the commencement of a Melbourne-based research study to address these issues, acting as a pilot for the national inquiry in terms of shape and direction.

This report, *Bridging the Gap*, presents the findings of a five-month inquiry into the nature and extent of involvement by young people, under the age of 18 years, in commercial sexual activities in metropolitan Melbourne. Data has been gathered exclusively from youth and community services agencies, both government and non-government, working closely with young people in Melbourne.

This report is not intended as a definitive statement or solution to commercial sexual exploitation of young people in this city. It aims to seek greater understanding of the issue on a local level, and to draw on the insights of youth and community workers to

identify areas where young people's needs are not being met and where services for young people could be changed or enhanced to more effectively fulfil their needs.

It is clear that sex work involvement by young people does not stand alone as an issue in their lives: it is one part of a cycle of difficulties that ranges from family breakdown to economic deprivation. The issues raised in this report are challenging and complex. However some balance is provided by the input of youth and community services workers who, in spite of current and continuing financial constraints, are working supportively and non-judgmentally with young people in high risk and vulnerable circumstances in Melbourne.

Young people are continuing to fall through our community's gaps, and there are indications that community support for young people in crisis is decreasing. Youth and community services agencies are juggling contradictory forces: aiming to maintain high standards of professional practice on one hand and coping with shrinking budgets, with correspondingly downsized services and workforce on the other. Young people are hit by these difficulties from two directions: the limited capacity to identify young people in vulnerable circumstances before their formal introduction to high risk practices (eg. sex work, drug use) and limited opportunities to offer young people appropriate pathways to an optimistic and fulfilling future.

This report aims to open dialogue on the circumstances and conditions currently affecting our Melbourne youth, with particular emphasis on their involvement in commercial sexual activity. Why do young people, under the age 18, become involved in sex work? How closely is sex work participation linked to other issues in their lives? What are the risks? And, where do we go to from here?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A complexity of issues influence the young person's introduction into sex work. Family breakdown, sexual abuse histories, homelessness, and unemployment are just a few of the issues that can precipitate a young person's involvement in commercial sexual activities. What is clear is that once a young person becomes actively involved in sex work they face a host of hazards and difficulties. The literature available points to some common themes: young people participating in commercial sexual activities are likely to have fled dysfunctional families, they are susceptible to unsafe sex practices, and are exposed to drug and alcohol use and abuse. A report by the Perth Inner City Youth Service (PICYS) indicates that social attitudes which perceive prostitution as a moral act rather than an economic strategy further undermines the young person's sense of belonging, lowers self-esteem and thus the capacity to seek out and make informed choices, and increases self-destructive behaviours (Marsland 1989:33).

In Victoria, the Prostitution Control Act 1995 allows for sex work participation by adults in certain circumstances, eg. regulated brothels and escort agencies. Street work has remained illegal for everyone and all commercial sexual activities are illegal for young people under the age of 18 years (Masik 1996). Sex work participation by young people, therefore, is as secretive as it is hazardous. Young people engaging in sex work do so by undertaking street work, exchanging sex for favours eg. accommodation, drugs, or working in illegal brothels and escort agencies. Street sex work is a dangerous and isolating activity, and particularly so for very young workers who tend to lack the capacity to adequately negotiate for fair payment and for safe sexual practices (Pyett & Warr 1996). The Kirketon Road Centre, a primary health care facility targeting sex workers in Kings Cross, New South Wales, has found that street workers are significantly younger than brothel and escort workers, are often homeless, and are habitual drug users (Van Beek 1996). Simply clamping down on street work, however, is not the answer. Local and overseas examples indicate that where street work is stopped in one area it simply appears again in another (Brady 1997, Lee & O'Brien 1995, Marsland 1989).

The phenomenon of 'sex for favours', sometimes called 'opportunistic prostitution', may be the most common form of commercial sexual activity involving young people in Australia. It is the least visible form of sex work and the one least likely to be identified as sex work by a young person (Tschirren, et al, 1996, Van Beek 1996). Several studies have indicated that young women particularly will exchange sex for shelter rather than become visibly homeless (Dwyer 1989, Hancock 1985, Hirst 1989).

Australian studies focussing specifically on sex for favours activities include the Brisbane study: *Between a rock and a hard place* (Ferguson 1993) and an Adelaide study *Sex for Favours: the On the Job youth project* (Tschirren, Hammet & Saunders 1996). The Brisbane study adopted an interactive participatory model of research and produced a powerful account of young peoples' personal experiences in opportunistic prostitution. The report is an example of the value of including young people in the direction and process of research, giving a voice to their experience and reality. Although time and resource limitations prevented this Melbourne study from pursuing participatory research opportunities with young people, it is recommended as a model for ECPAT's national inquiry.

Sex for Favours: the On the Job Youth Project, the definitive report explores the nature and extent of sex for favours among young homeless people between the ages of 12 and 23 in Adelaide, South Australia. Of 106 young people interviewed 36 young people were found to have engaged in sex for favours, and a further 10 young people indicated that they would engage in sex for favours in the future (Tschirren, et al, 1996). The report examines the socioeconomic status, the physical and sexual abuse histories and mental and emotional health of young people involved in sex for favours incidences. The report offers a valuable guide to definitions and has been used to some extent as a model for this report's definitions (refer Section 4, Definitions, p. 12.)

In Victoria there are two research studies available focussing specifically on the involvement of young people in prostitution in this state. Linda Hancock's 1985 research report *The Involvement of Young People in Prostitution*, prepared for the Neave Inquiry into Prostitution in Victoria, documents the extent of prostitution in Melbourne in 1984. Data in this research was drawn primarily from official sources, eg. police records, youth training centres and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The police and youth training centres records can be valuable sources of information as they track an individual young person's path to prostitution and links to involvement in criminal activity. The limitations of official data providing only part of the picture was recognised by Hancock.

Hancock's follow-up report, *Young People Involved in Prostitution in Victoria*, (1993/94) provides updated youth prostitution data from official youth statistical sources and draws more extensively on information from welfare agencies. The findings are linked to the policy changes affecting young people that were underway at the time, eg. The Children and Young Persons Act 1989.

The most recent document to emerge in Victoria is the Department of Human Services report, *Overview of High Risk Adolescents in Placement and Support Services* (1997). A random sample of 20 clients on the DHS metropolitan high risk schedule showed an alarming 65% were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This report makes some worthwhile recommendations for improvement of departmental services in respect to high risk young people.

The Victorian reports available to date have focussed particularly on organised commercial sexual activities. *Bridging the Gap* seeks to present a broad perspective on the extent of participation in sex work by young people, focussing on homelessness and other high risk situations, eg. drug use, as a starting point. We threw our research net wide: including youth and community services agencies in city, urban and suburban areas of Melbourne. We have included both official and anecdotal data from the agencies to more realistically represent the extent of youth commercial sexual activity. The limitations of doing this are discussed in Section 8, Scope and Limitations, p.16. Further, the experience and insights of youth and community services agencies working closely with young people in vulnerable circumstances are highlighted and discussed at some length, and their recommendations for enhancement and/or changes to social services available to young people form the basis of the report's recommendations.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the nature and extent of involvement of young people (under 18 years of age) in commercial sexual activities in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Research Objectives

The primary research objective is:

- i to gain insight from youth and community workers into the nature and extent of involvement by young people (under 18 years of age) in commercial sexual activities in Melbourne, and to understand the factors leading young people to participate in sex work.

Secondary research objectives are:

- i to gather information from youth and community service providers working with young people of support services that could be enhanced or changed to better meet the needs of young people, particularly those in high risk circumstances (eg. sex work);
- i to assist in identifying a direction for ECPAT Australia's national inquiry into children/young people's participation in commercial sexual activities.

4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

ECPAT uses the term 'the commercial sexual exploitation of children/young people' to describe the various activities which exploit children/young people for their commercial value. This implies that the child/young person is not only sexually abused but that there is a profit arising from the transaction. The commercial sexual exploitation of children usually refers to children in prostitution, the use of children in pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for the prevention of these abuses.

Young Person

The term 'young person' is used throughout this report and refers to all people under the age of 18 years.

Sex Work

As part of our inquiry we sought to learn how youth and community services agencies and workers defined the term 'sex work' in respect to young people. The Youth and Community Services questionnaire distributed to agencies in this research (refer Appendix A) asked which of the following activities would be considered sex work by the respondent:

- i brothel work
- i escort work
- i street work
- i sex for favours, eg. in exchange for accommodation, food, drugs, etc.
- i production of pornography

In answer, 86% of respondents indicated that they considered all of the above activities as sex work. The term 'sex work' is used frequently in this report for convenience and refers to all the above commercial sexual activities in which young people can be engaged. The term 'sex worker', however, has been avoided as it implies some degree of formality. Instead, we refer to 'sex work participants' as those young people who have participated in a commercial sexual activity.

The term 'prostitution' has been excluded from use in this report. The term 'sex work' is increasingly replacing 'prostitution' as the preferred term used by Australian sex worker organisations (Tschirren et al 1996). Further, it has been found that some

young people involved in one form or another of prostitution would deny that they are prostitutes (McMullen 1986:237). The term sex work, although imperfect in this context, is less likely to provoke unwelcome labelling of young people in vulnerable circumstances.

Sex for favours

We have used Tschirren, Hammet, and Saunders' definition of sex for favours as being instances when young people engage in sexual activities in exchange for gains, which may include accommodation, food, clothing, safety, drugs, or transport (1996:8).

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

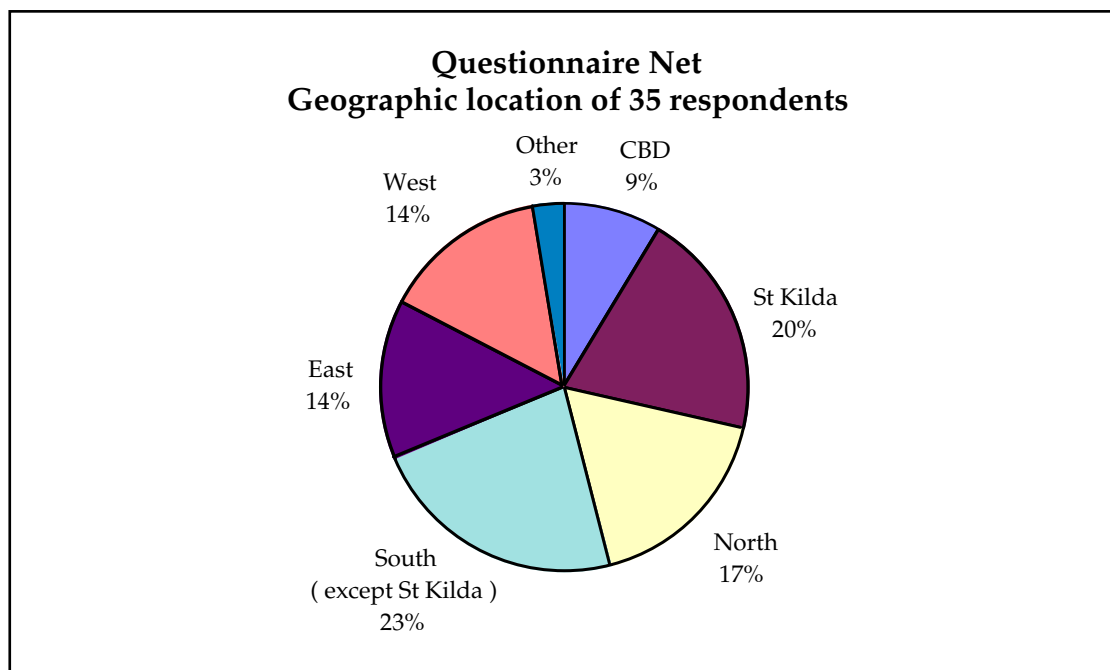
It was decided at the outset that a genuine effort would be made to gather statistical data on the extent of young people in sex work. The statistics presented in this report, however, are intended as a useful indicator of the extent of sex work participation by young people in metropolitan Melbourne, and should not be considered absolute. The research questionnaire (refer Appendix A) was designed to gather as much information as possible on the number and ages of young women and men, under 18 years of age, participating in commercial sexual activities (sex work) in Melbourne, along with the key factors influencing their involvement. For the purpose of data collection, the questionnaire covers a one year period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997. The questionnaire also covers areas such as:

- i level of sexual health and safety awareness amongst young people;
- i the links between sex work and other issues in young people's lives;
- i recommendations for change or improvement to services for young people.

Contacts were made at government and non-government agencies working with young people in central Melbourne and the metropolitan area. An objective of the research design was to include agencies from a broad range of professional disciplines, and from a wide geographic area. A total of 62 Melbourne agencies and services were approached during the research period of 1 May 1997 - 30 September 1997, with 35 completing and returning the research questionnaire.

Questionnaire Respondents Professional Diversity	
i Advocacy and legal services	i Post release support
i Child protection	i Sex workers' services
i Crisis centres	i Youth accommodation facilities
i Homeless youth support services	i Youth counselling services
i Juvenile justice	i Youth health services
i Outreach services	i Youth housing services
i Sexual abuse counselling	i Youth resource centres

The chart below indicates the percentage of questionnaire respondents from each area of Melbourne.



The overall response rate from youth and community service agencies was 66%: 56% return for questionnaires only, increasing to 66% with interviews. Statistical data was drawn exclusively from questionnaires.

The researcher conducted 10 personal interviews with youth and community services workers in Melbourne. These interviews were unstructured, giving the researcher and the worker an opportunity to discuss the issues of young people in sex work in some depth. The information shared during the interviews has served to enrich the findings presented in this report.

Confidentiality and Coding

The sensitive nature of the research material is recognised. We wanted all participants in this research to feel free to be frank and candid in their questionnaire and/or interview responses. We have, therefore, assured confidentiality for all participants and have adopted the following coding procedure:

<i>Type</i>	<i>Code</i>
Questionnaires	Q1 to Q35
Interviews	D1 to D10

Several agencies have given their formal approval to us to include the agency's name in the Research Participant's List. Please refer to Appendix B.

6. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Statistics

The use of statistics in this report is intended to provide useful indication of the extent of involvement of young people in sex work in metropolitan Melbourne. The figures are included as indicated by the agencies participating in the research questionnaire. No cross-checking was undertaken, and the possibility of overlapping exists. In addition, respondents were invited to include figures of young people who are thought to be involved in sex work, but whose involvement remained undisclosed. All undisclosed statistics have been separated from confirmed statistics, and are clearly distinguishable throughout the report.

In spite of these limitations, it appears that the figures shown in this report are conservative, and respondents were generally cautious in their estimation. In 3 instances respondents clearly indicated knowledge of young people participating in sex work, but declined to include statistics in their response, or in one instance, placed a tick (✓) in the data collection boxes instead of a numerical figure. In this case, and in all cases where a figure has not been clearly indicated, it has been counted as zero (0).

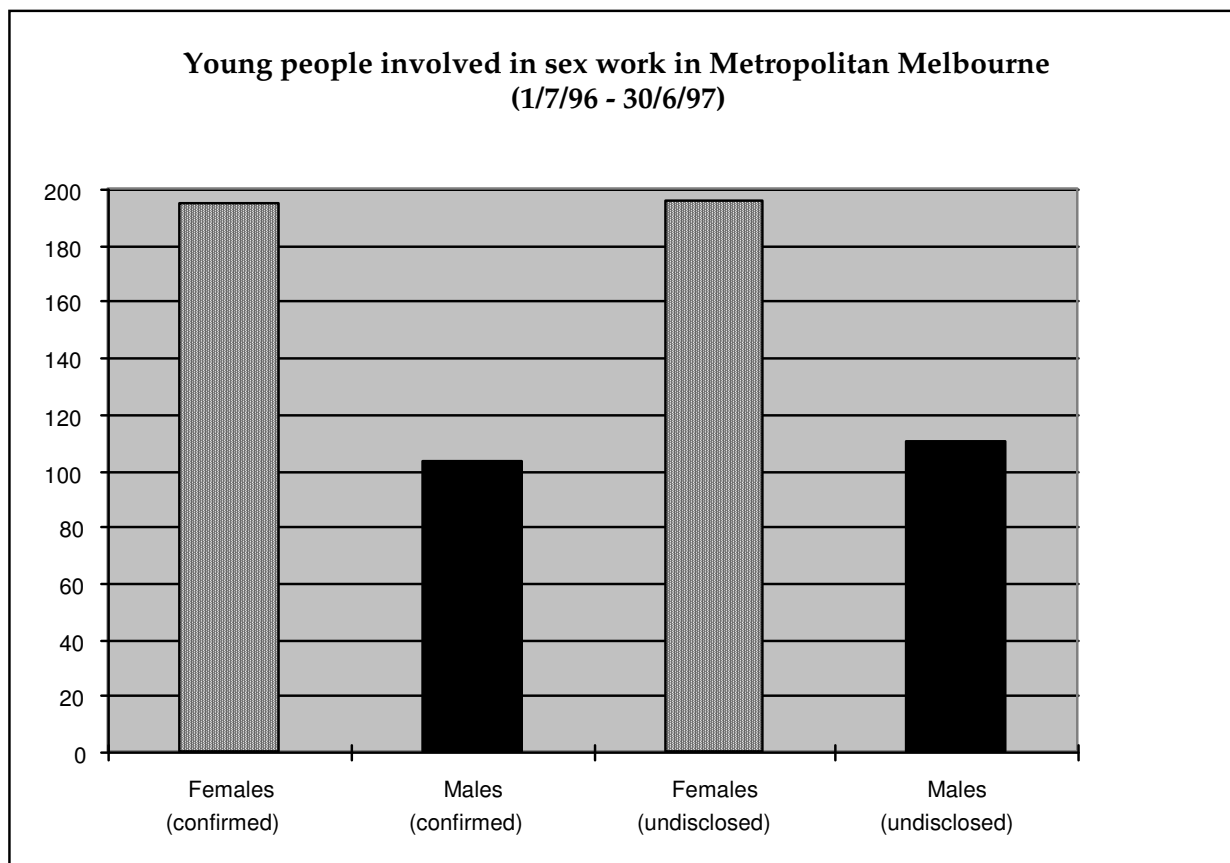
Youth participation

The direct involvement of young people in the research process adds power and authenticity to the findings, as seen in the Brisbane report *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (1993). Unfortunately, time and resource constraints precluded the direct involvement of young people in this pilot study. ECPAT Australia is a supporter of participatory research methodology and will be pursuing opportunities for direct involvement of young people in its national inquiry.

7. THE FINDINGS

7.1 The extent of youth sex work participation

In this study youth and community services agencies were asked to indicate in the questionnaire the number of clients of their agency, under age 18, who were known or believed to have been involved in sex work in the one year period of 1st July 1996 to 30 June 1997. Of the 35 agencies and services that participated in the questionnaire, 4 agencies did not know of any young people involved in sex work; 31 agencies confirmed knowledge of young people in sex work and 90% of this group (28 respondents) included statistics.



The table below indicates the number of young people who are confirmed participants in sex work in each age group.

** CONFIRMED **				
Age of young people involved in sex work				
1/7/96 - 30/6/97				
	Under 10 years	10 - 12 years	13 - 15 years	16 - 17 years
Females	0	3	29	163

Males	0	0	30	73
-------	---	---	----	----

Youth and community workers indicated that they usually learned of the young person's involvement in sex work directly from the young person who is most likely to reveal the information in an informal conversation. The next most likely environment for the young person to share this information is in counselling. Other less frequent methods of confirming the young person's involvement in sex work is through outreach, assessment, and behaviour observation.

The following table indicates the number and age of young people thought to be involved in sex work, but whose participation remained undisclosed.

** UNDISCLOSED **				
Age of young people involved in sex work				
1/7/96 - 30/6/97				
	Under 10 years	10 - 12 years	13 - 15 years	16 - 17 years
Females	0	0	51	145
Males	0	2	28	80

Respondents indicated that the suggestion of involvement was usually raised through conversations with the young person who alluded to undertaking sex work activity/ies. In other less common instances the youth worker may notice the young person has significantly increased and/or unexplained material resources, or they may receive information from another youth worker or from another young person.

Ratio of youth and community services clients : sex workers

The table below shows a sample of six (6) Youth and Community Services agencies across metropolitan Melbourne who participated in our survey. It reveals a client / sex work participant ratio of 7.5 : 1. In other words, potentially 1 in 7 young people who access youth and community services facilities are participating in sex work.

Location of Agency	No. of clients (female)	No. of clients (male)	No. of female clients involved in sex work (confirmed)	No. of male clients involved in sex work (confirmed)	No. of female clients involved in sex work (undisclosed)	No. of male clients involved in sex work (undisclosed)
CBD (Q25)	75	100	15	5	-	-
St Kilda (Q35)	400	575	40	25	80	32
North (Q29)	70	70	2	2	6	6
South (Q33)	54	132	2	-	1	2
East (Q2)	60	85	1	3	2	1
West (Q5)	120	80	-	-	10	8
TOTAL	779	1042	60	35	99	49
	1821		243			

Gender ratio: females: 5:1, males: 12:1.

Responses

How do youth and community services workers respond when they know/believe a young person is involved in sex work?

Provide them with a non-judgemental and confidential environment in which to discuss issues of concern; ask questions; seek referrals and support. (Q24)

In every instance, questionnaire respondents and interviewees indicated a non-judgemental approach in the way they support young people involved in sex work. Health and safety issues are a key concern.

(We offer a) therapeutic service which provides education and support to assist young people to make informed choices and recognise safety issues. (Q2)

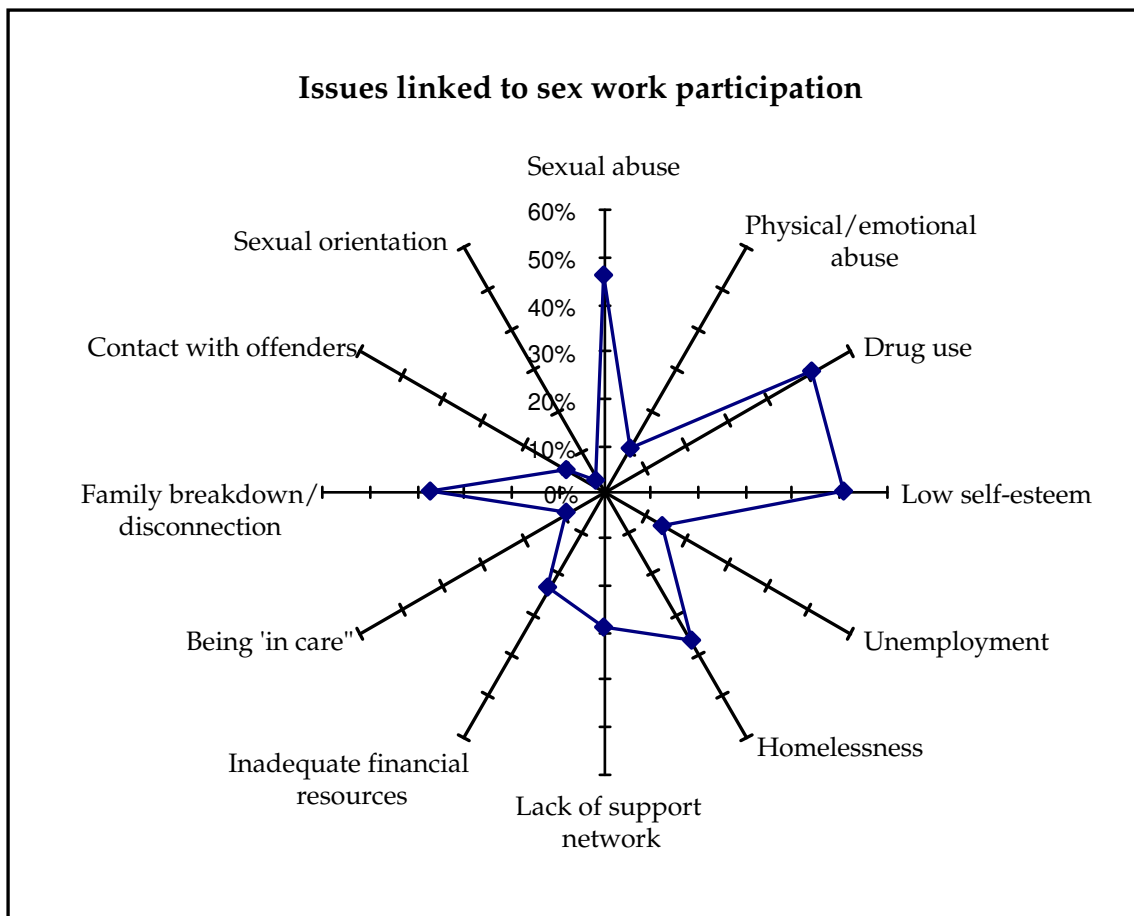
Case worker would discuss the issue of sex work with their client, this discussion would involve harm minimisation strategies, including safe sex, dangers involved, agencies that assist with sex workers (eg. PCV), the legal/illegal practices. (Q3)

Why do young people become involved in sex work?

Young people become involved in sex work for many reasons. The youth and community services agencies participating in our research indicated that sexual abuse histories (46%), family breakdown / disconnection (37%), drug use (51%), and homelessness (37%) were the most common factors influencing entry into sex work.

As the research progressed a cycle of abuse and disempowerment emerged that young people might enter at any point and are then vulnerable to the other factors in the cycle. The graph below indicates some of the factors that can precipitate and accompany young people's involvement in sex work. The percentages indicate the frequency of response in our survey.

“Poor self esteem is a particularly big issue for underage workers.” (D6)



“(A) Significant proportion of young people in sex work have unresolved/unknown history’s of child abuse and neglect - lack of support networks and inadequate resources to meet their needs.” (Q2)

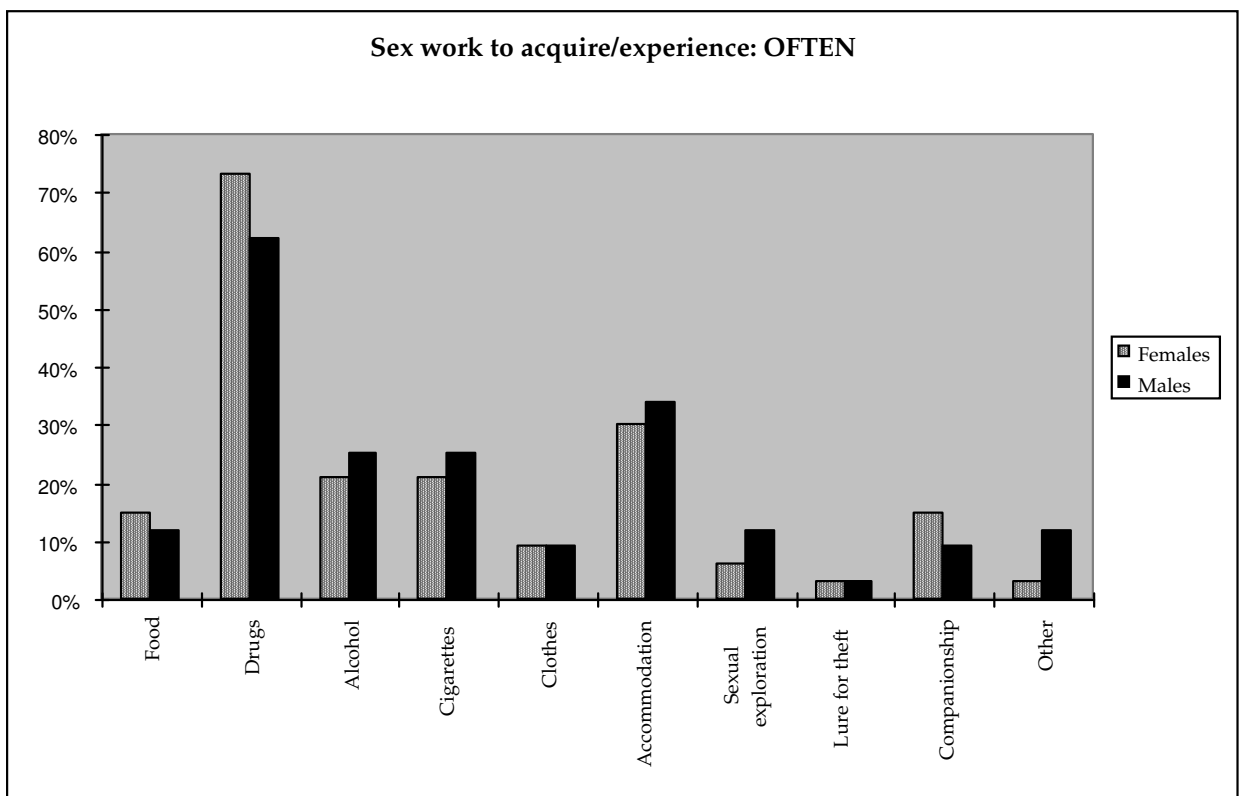
Often the links are quite significant eg. sexual abuse, lack of self-esteem/confidence, financial insecurity and lack of stable accommodation. (Q8)

Most are homeless which relates to many other issues such as: no support (family/friends), no/low income, need for survival (housing, food etc.), drug addiction. (Q9)

Usually symptomatic of the lack of control/sense of hopelessness in their lives. (Q10)

Sex work begins for survival, or abuse from older male. It is the indication of lack of home, supports and security in their lives. Or may be a safer way to support habits. (Q16)

We asked youth and community services workers what they considered to be the most common acquisitions and/or experiences sought by young people when undertaking sex work.



The table demonstrates the frequency with which items were nominated as *öoftení*, as opposed to *ësometimesí* or *ërarelyí*, by youth and community services workers (eg. 73% of youth and community services workers felt that acquiring drugs is often a motivating factor for young women participating in sex work, compared to 62% for young men). The link between drugs and sex work participation is complex, with many factors at work. This was evidenced in the Brisbane study which found that *ì(M)any young people said that they had either ìworkedí* (ie sex work) for drugs, or took drugs to cope with having to *ìwork.í* Whichever way, young people felt like they were caught in a vicious cycle.í (Ferguson 1993:30).

The table above also indicates that sheer practical and survival needs such as accommodation and food are motivating factors influencing a young personís participation in sex work.

ìIt is inherently linked to homelessness, drug and alcohol issues.í (Q23)

ìLack of sufficient income, homelessness are rife. Drug use and sex work are most of the time symptoms of these.í (Q27)

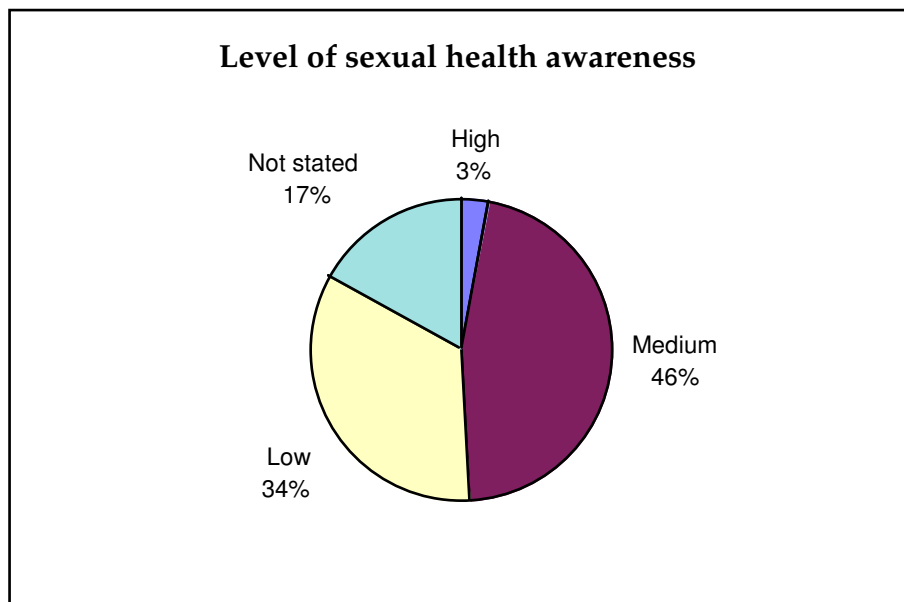
ìNo supports, no \$, no housing, no info, no self worth, no nothing.í (Q30)

ìLack of income from other sources and being too young to obtain work. Also both confirmed cases had histories of sexual abuse.í Q33)

ìYoung women often undertake sex work as a means of survival and the low income they receive (from official sources) doesnít or canít realistically support them in rent let alone food etc. Often there isnít a choice.í (Q34)

7.2 Health and safety

In asking youth and community services workers their estimation of the level of sexual health awareness of young people, the responses ranged from high to appallingly low. A number of issues arose: the effectiveness of the information, power imbalance and negotiation, and the level of need versus self protection.



Effectiveness of information

‘The information is available but I feel that the young people don’t relate to the information or feel that it relates to them.’ (Q4)

Effectiveness of safe sex information						
Excellent	Very good	OK	Not very good	Poor	Don’t know	Not stated
0	6%	23%	26%	3%	23%	19%

The table indicates effectiveness ranges generally from ok to not very good. Many youth and community workers consider the information available is targeted to an adult audience. Wordy pamphlets particularly are unlikely to effectively persuade a young person to adopt safe sex practices. The usefulness of pamphlets depends on a

reader with adequate English and literacy skills, and the time and inclination to sit down and read it. Youth and community workers consider posters a more effective option along with peer generated information. A number of agencies invite guest speakers from health agencies to visit and discuss sexual health issues and safe sex practices with their clients. Easy access to free condoms and lubricant is considered helpful.

Many of the pamphlets are difficult for young people who cannot read - nor youth friendly. (Q3)

Effective negotiation

Transforming safe sex theory into practice by young people engaging in sex work is closely linked to issues of self-esteem and confidence. A study of street workers in Melbourne has revealed that the very young women workers lacked the skills to effectively negotiate with a client: (A)lthough these young women expressed a determination to practise safe sex, their capacity to protect themselves was severely limited by a profound lack of power. According to their own reports, all decisions upon entering the client's car were left up to him (Pyett & Warr 1996:6).

A similar theme emerged in this study.

Sexual health knowledge of young people is ok, but the real issue is that they are unlikely to negotiate effectively with a client for condom use. (D2)

... you can do all the stuff that you like on education and safe sex practices, but if they don't have the confidence, voice and self esteem to say 'hang on', then they come back saying 'oh my God, I've got this and that and I'm dying.' (D8)

Need versus protection

In some instances, the young person's level of need outweighs their determination to practise safe sex. Indeed, the very needs that drive a young person to participate in sex work may be the ones that lead them to compromise their health and safety.

‘The needs or driving forces usually supersede the information, ie. ‘I got more money without condoms.’ (Q19)

Recklessness, self-harm and denial can also be influential.

‘In some cases it is effective, however some young people feel they are invincible and have the attitude of ‘it can't happen to me.’ (Q32)

‘(There was one kid) I had to beg, I literally had to beg the kid - I would have worked on him for about 45 minutes - to take condoms with him.’ (D6)

Safety

In addition to health, safety is a key concern. Youth and community workers consider young people to be just as vulnerable to violence including assault, rape, death, as they are to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Other significant risks and dangers to young people include emotional and psychological damage, introduction to drugs, self harm and suicide, pregnancy, making connections with criminals, and social isolation.

7.3 Gender

There are some striking gender differences in motivation, attitude and peer group support. Participation in sex work appears to be a particularly isolating experience for young women. Youth and community workers generally indicated that young men are more supportive of each other in these circumstances than young women. Sexual experimentation was not considered an influencing factor for young women, whereas

in some instances it can be a factor for young men. In addition, a young man's sexual orientation is immediately called into question. For young women there are strong links to sexual abuse histories, very low self esteem, and disconnection. The link to sexual abuse is less significant for a young man, however family breakdown and homelessness remain key factors.

Young women

Boyfriends are often influential in drug related sex work. (Q34)

Many young women we see don't believe that they are sex workers, they see their activities as situational based, or how to resolve a particular crisis. Young women often fail to identify the risks, and once entrenched find it difficult to leave this type of work. (Q35)

I had one female client who had sex in exchange for money on two occasions. She did not need the money and said that she had done it as 'she was brought to this world to be used.' (D3)

A young woman will identify something as a rape, when a young man won't. Young women are more aware of those dangers than boys. (D8)

Young men

For males there are really only two options open for them in terms of sex work: they can do street work or they can have an older benefactor and it may not be an exchange of money per se.....it's provision of food, clothing, that sort of stuff. (D6)

Most young men see their work as transitory in nature (a phase they go through) and as a result of needing to obtain income. Many of the young men engage in at risk behaviours (sexual, drug and alcohol). (Q35)

With males the question of sexuality is very much brought into light..... because the money to be made is not male to female work, it is male to male work. So if they decide to do sex work on the street, regardless of how they see themselves in terms of their sexuality, it's brought into question straight away, and inevitably I would say 7 out of 10 young boys would say 'I'm straight' and they would vehemently tell you that, repeatedly. (D6)

Sometimes the boys are experimenting with their sexuality, or they're interested in hanging around with older men whom they see as glamorous and affluent. Sometimes having a warm bed, a roof over the head, food, clothes and attention are seen as ok exchanges for sex. (D10)

7.4 Ethnicity

A detailed analysis of the ethnic origin of young people participating in sex work in Melbourne was beyond the scope of this research. It appears that the majority of young people engaging in sex work are of Anglo Australian ethnicity. However, young people who are Anglo Australian may be seen to be more actively involved in sex work simply because they are more likely to access, or come to the attention of, youth and community services agencies.

One interviewee working with the Indo-Chinese community indicated that working with this community is more complex than working with Anglo-Australian people due to a reduced likelihood of problem revelation. This worker, along with other outreach workers, are attempting to develop culturally appropriate techniques to work in a trustful and sensitive manner with vulnerable young (Asian) people at risk of commercial sexual exploitation.

(We) can't use the same techniques as non-Asians - it just doesn't work. (D7)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for changes and/or improvements to youth services are as recommended by youth and community services workers.

- i Funding and provision of outreach and support services for 'high risk' youth, ie. homeless and drug users, in key risk areas across metropolitan Melbourne. This should include training for workers in identifying and appropriately supporting 'high risk' youth.
- i Increase secure and reliable accommodation opportunities, particularly medium to long term, for young people.
- i Development of services specifically targeting young people who are sex work participants. These services should be tailored to the needs of the young people with consideration of gender and ethnic differences paramount. Participation in the design and development of these services by young people who have experience of sex work participation is recommended. Services could include appropriate education prevention strategies including support networks, outreach teams and educational materials (Tschirren, et al, 1996:61).
- i Multi-disciplinary teams within youth and community services agencies who are trained, equipped and funded to work with young people in areas of drug and alcohol use, housing, health and sex work participation.
- i Intensive personal development programs for young people in sex work, including counselling, self protection, negotiating safe sex, consideration of viable alternatives to sex work.
- i Greater recognition by policy makers that some young people cannot live at home and need appropriate supports, including counselling, accommodation/ housing, and adequate income.

Recommendations for ECPAT's national inquiry

- i Further inquiry into the nature of commercial sexual activity by young people in Australia. *Bridging the Gaps* approach has been broad, covering all potential commercial sexual activities under a general banner of 'sex work'. An insight into the dominant commercial sexual activity of Australian youth is necessary in order to accurately understand the nature of commercial sexual exploitation in an Australian context.
- i Direct participation in the research process by young Australians who have participated in commercial sexual activity.
- i Identify and promote innovative support services for young people in Australia that are creatively and effectively working with young people who are sex work participants.
- i Analysis of the impact of State and Federal Government policy changes affecting Australian youth.

CONCLUSION

Among the findings of this report is that along with the structural and service changes that need to be made in respect of appropriately supporting young people in sex work, is the need for an attitude adjustment. Young people are falling through our community's gaps not only because tangible supports are lacking, but also because there is little intangible support. A profound sense of isolation seems to accompany sex work participation for many young people. The possibilities of transforming participation in high risk activities into participation in life-affirming activities are reduced if young people feel that their place in the community is not valued.

Recommendations for innovative services for young people involved in sex work have been made since Linda Hancock's 1985 report *The involvement of young people in prostitution*. It seems that few of these recommendations have been picked up, and we can only ask, why not? Indeed, there are indications that support services geared to young people, particularly those engaged in high risk activities (such as drug and alcohol use), are being reduced. The needs exist but the services are increasingly under threat. The question needs to be asked of just how serious we are as a community of appropriately supporting young people in high risk and vulnerable circumstances?

One of the aims of this report is to encourage dialogue in the community regarding sex work participation by young people in Melbourne. However, what is also needed, and one of the principal aims of ECPAT's national inquiry, is to encourage national dialogue, and action. Knee-jerk reactions are unhelpful. Innovative, thoughtful and adequately funded action, through programs geared to the needs of young people, are helpful.

As a community, there is also a need for us to consider preventative measures, in order to minimise the likelihood of a young person in vulnerable circumstances moving on to participate in high risk activities, that only increase their vulnerability and isolation, and devalues us all.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brady, N. 1997, 'Sex Street, 3182: Where prostitution is everyone's business', in *The Age*, 24 September 1997.
- Dwyer, P. 1989, *The Young Homeless: A summary and analysis of the Burdekin Report*, Working Paper No. 1, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, Australia.
- ECPAT Australia, 1996, *The Implementation of the Stockholm Agenda for Action - Australia's Response*, ECPAT Australia Inc, Melbourne, Australia.
- Ferguson, S. 1993, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: young people and opportunistic prostitution in Fortitude Valley and Brisbane City*, Brisbane Youth Service, Qld.
- Hancock, L. 1985, *The involvement of young people in prostitution*, A report for The Inquiry into Prostitution, July 1985.
- Hancock, L. 1993/94, *Young People Involved in Prostitution in Victoria*, Deakin University, Geelong, Vic., Australia.
- Hirst, C. 1989. *Forced Exit: A profile of the young and homeless in inner urban Melbourne*, Crossroads Youth Project, Salvation Army, Vic, Australia.
- Lee, M. & O'Brien, R. 1995, *The Game's Up: Redefining Child Prostitution*, The Children's Society, London UK.
- Marsland, D. 1989, 'Aids and the sex industry: Juvenile Prostitution', in *National Aids Bulletin*, March 1989.
- Masic, D. 1996 'Child Prostitution in Victoria' in *Proceedings of the National NGO and Government Consultation on the World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, held in Canberra on 20 June 1996.
- McMullen, R.J. 1986, 'Youth Prostitution: A Balance of Power?', in *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, Vol. 30, No. 3.
- Protection and Care Branch 1997, *Overview of High Risk Adolescents in Placement and Support Services*, Department of Human Services, Victorian Government, Australia.
- Pyett, P.M. & Warr, D.J. 1996, *When 'gut instinct' is not enough: women at risk in sex work*, Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, Carlton South, Vic. Australia.
- Tschirren, R., Hammet, K. & Saunders, P. 1996, *Sex for Favours, The On the Job Youth Project: The Definitive Report*, Sex Industry Network, Second Story Youth Health Service, HIV/AIDS Worker Training Project, Adelaide, South Australia.
- Van Beek, I. 1996, 'Young People and Prostitution in Australia' in *Proceedings of the National NGO and Government Consultation on the World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, held in Canberra on 20 June 1996.