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Summary Report for National Institute of Justice Grant #97-IJ-CX-0033 "Focusing on the Clients of Street Prostitutes: A Creative Approach to Reducing Violence Against Women."

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## Project Summary

### The Prostitution Problem

Although the number of working prostitutes in the U.S. is difficult to estimate, Department of Justice arrest statistics for prostitution hover around 100,000 per year. Concern over prostitution has led to the formation of local organizations and task forces designed specifically to address the issue in many communities. There are often complaints about the negative effects of prostitution on the livability of neighborhoods and the harm it does to local businesses. Law enforcement officials share these concerns, and are particularly concerned with the vice often associated with prostitution.

Perhaps most importantly, prostitutes are frequent victims of violent crime, including assault, rape, and murder. Reports of violence are particularly compelling when one recognizes that a substantial proportion of prostitutes begin working while still minors.

The issue of AIDS has added urgency to efforts to understand prostitutes and their clients. While prostitutes do not deserve the reputation they currently hold as polluters of the heterosexual population, prostitutes themselves are under a high risk of contracting the AIDS virus and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The vast majority of those arrested for prostitution are women, with only about 10% of arrests consisting of clients, virtually all of whom are men, a situation that has been decried as unfair and discriminatory. Additionally, arresting prostitutes has proven largely ineffective, with many compelled to continue their activities because of dire economic circumstances, drug addiction, and/or fear of violence from a partner or pimp.

### An Alternative Approach

In 1995, two creative programs, Portland, Oregon's Sexual Exploitation Education Project (SEEP) and San Francisco, California's First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP) began to address the issue of prostitution by focusing prevention efforts on the clients of prostitutes, providing intervention programs for men arrested while trying to hire prostitutes. The Portland program, which has ceased operations, was a 15-hour, weekend workshop run by an independent organization in cooperation with the District Court. The

San Francisco program, which continues to function smoothly, is a one-day diversion program run through the District Attorney's Office. First-time offenders who agree to attend the workshop have charges against them dropped. Fees charged to participants fully fund the program and also contribute to programs for prostitutes and former prostitutes. The program has received national and international attention and has served as a model for several other programs. In February 1999, the National Institute of Justice, Office of Development and Communication, sponsored a demonstration of the First Offender class as part of its Innovations in Criminal Justice Program. Brief profiles of each of these programs are included as products of this grant and are provided in the Final Report.

Both the Portland and San Francisco programs identified solid research on the men who attend their workshops as one of their most essential needs. Meeting this need and providing solid information on arrested clients of prostitutes was the primary goal of this study.

#### Studying the Clients of Street Prostitutes

While earlier studies estimated that 69% or more men had patronized prostitutes during their lives, recent methodologically sound research provides a very different picture. The National Health and Social Life Survey, conducted in 1992 using a nationally representative sample, found that only about 16% of men in the U.S. had ever visited a prostitute, and that only about .6% of men in the U.S. visit prostitutes each year. Further, the percentage of men whose first sexual experience was with a prostitute declined among men who came of age in the 1990's (1.5%) in comparison to men who came of age in the 1950's (7%).

Client intervention programs provide an unprecedented opportunity to gather information from men arrested for trying to hire street prostitutes. Anonymous questionnaires were administered while men were gathered prior to these programs in San Francisco, California (N=986); Portland, Oregon (N=77); Las Vegas, Nevada (N=269); and Santa Clara, California (N=10), for a total sample size of 1342. The findings reported here exclude 36 San Francisco and 15 Las Vegas cases that were gathered using a Spanish-language version of the questionnaire. Information was gathered about the background characteristics, attitudes, and reported behaviors of these arrested clients, with particular attention to the issue of violence against women. Five articles were completed during the course of this two-year grant--all published,

presented or currently under review.

### The Characteristics of Arrested Clients

Differences between the samples largely mirror differences in the cities, with San Francisco having a larger proportion of Asians than Las Vegas and Portland, and Las Vegas and San Francisco having higher proportions of Hispanics than Portland. Though whites make up a majority of offenders in all three cities, minority offenders make up about 40% of offenders in San Francisco and Las Vegas. Ages of arrested clients ranged from 18 to 84 with a mean age of 38 and a median of 37.

Clients were also compared to a nationally representative sample of men who responded to the General Social Survey. Clients were significantly more likely than the national sample to report having attended at least some college, contradicting the widely held view that the clients of street prostitutes come primarily from working class backgrounds. Substantial differences were found in marital status, with clients much less likely to report being currently married (41%) than the national sample (56%) and more likely to report never having been married (37%) than the national sample (29%). Of the married respondents, clients were much less likely to describe their marriages as "very happy" (38% in comparison to 60%) and much more likely to describe their marriages as not too happy (22% in comparison to 2%). While other research has demonstrated that men who have served in the military are more likely to have been with prostitutes at some point in their lives (probably during military service), men who had served were not over-represented among these arrested clients.

### Sexual Behavior and Attitudes

In comparison to the national sample, arrested clients were much less likely to have had one sexual partner over the past year and much more likely to report having had two or more partners than the national sample. About 20% of clients reported having five or more partners over the past year in comparison to just over 3% of the national sample. Nevertheless, clients generally reported somewhat less frequent sexual relations over the past year than the national sample. Clients were about twice as likely to report having watched pornographic movies over the past year than the national sample. In terms of sexual liberalism,

clients were significantly less likely to describe premarital sex, homosexuality, teen sex, and extramarital sex as "always wrong" and more likely to describe them as "not at all wrong."

About 20% of respondents claim never to have had sexual relations with a prostitute. Because men in the sample were almost all arrested while propositioning a decoy posing as a prostitute, it is possible that some had never before sought out a prostitute or had not successfully completed the transaction. Another 21% claim not to have been with a prostitute over the past 12 months. Another 21% claim to have had sexual relations with a prostitute once over the past 12 months, and 28% claim to have visited more than once but less than once per month. Only about 10% of the men sampled reported visiting prostitutes more than once per month. Though one would expect an inclination to underestimate prostitution visits among arrested clients, results indicate that most of these men are not frequent participants in prostitution. Men arrested for trying to hire street prostitutes appear to be less experienced prostitution clients, with more experienced clients better able to avoid arrest, either due to knowledge of police procedures, familiarity with the prostitutes themselves, or participation in off-street prostitution.

The average age of first prostitution encounter among the men sampled was 24 with a median of 21, though ages of first sexual experience with a prostitute ranged from 9 to 62. The most common first encounter involved being approached by a prostitute (33%), followed by approaching a prostitute on one's own without others knowing (30%), though for a significant proportion, peers were involved in setting up the encounter (23%). Seventy-three percent claimed that they always used a condom during sexual activity with a prostitute.

By far, the most significant sexual activity surrounding prostitution was fellatio. When asked whether they had **ever** participated in various sexual activities with a prostitute, 80% reported that they had received oral sex. The second most frequently reported activity was vaginal sex at 55%. Many of the clients (36%) reported participating in "half and half," which includes both oral and vaginal sex. Being manually masturbated was reported by 35% of respondents. When asked to identify the activity in which they participated **most often** when with a prostitute, 52% selected fellatio, followed by 12% who selected vaginal sex, 10% who selected "half and half," and 6% who were manually masturbated.

### Motives for Seeking Prostitution

Arrested clients were asked to agree or disagree with 13 statements designed to reflect popular and scholarly understandings of the reasons men seek out prostitutes. Many conventional understandings were supported by the results. A substantial proportion of clients appear to be excited by the illicit, risky, or raunchy quality of sex with a prostitute. Responses suggest that, for some clients, one of the appeals of prostitution is that it invites a self-focused, consumer oriented, conception of sexuality in which one can conveniently meet sexual needs through purchase. Some of the arrested clients report wanting a different kind of sex than their regular partner and liking rough sex, supporting the idea that some men seek out prostitutes because they can do things with them that other women might find unpleasant or unacceptable. Findings also suggest that some men pay for sex because they have difficulty becoming involved in conventional relationships. For some of these men prostitution is an attempt not only to have sex, but to establish intimate relationships with women. Finally, some of the men simply did not feel that they had the time, energy, or interest to engage in a conventional relationship with a woman.

Overall, most of the items seem to reflect a sense of entitlement to sex among the respondents. Though their partners may not be interested in a particular type of sex or though they don't have time to be involved in a relationship, they may feel that they have a right to sexual access.

### Attitudes Toward Violence Against Women

In order to better understand the relationship between prostitution and violence, this study explored the level of "rape myth acceptance" and the predictors of rape myth acceptance among men arrested for trying to hire a prostitute. Rape myths are attitudes that have been shown to support sexual violence against women. Results indicate that prostitution clients do not exhibit high levels of rape myth acceptance in comparison to other samples that have completed the scale. In fact, none of the items received the endorsement of more than 30% of the respondents, and about 30% did not score positively on **any** rape myth acceptance item.

Only three items emerged as significant independent predictors of rape myth acceptance, attraction

to violent sexuality, sexual conservatism, and thinking about sex less frequently. Findings may point to the existence to a small population of men who are at increased risk of perpetrating violence against women, men who are judgmental about sexuality, who are attracted to violent sexuality, and who have access to vulnerable women in isolated settings through prostitution. This small group of men may be largely responsible for the substantial violence experienced by prostitutes at the hands of clients.

### Treating Sex as a Commodity

Prostitution, the exchange of something of value for sexual access to someone's body, intrinsically involves treating sexuality as a commodity. This study sought to evaluate the degree to which prostitution clients conceive of sexuality as a commodity, the predictors of such a "commodified" view and the consequences of conceiving of sexuality as a commodity. A measure comprising eleven items believed to be associated with conceiving of sexuality as a commodity was developed for this study.

Not surprisingly, findings indicate a strong relationship between frequency of prostitution encounters and this measure of "commodification." More disturbing are the strong relationships between commodification and rape myth acceptance, attraction to violent sexuality, and less frequent use of condoms while with prostitutes. All of these would seem to indicate that a commodified view of sexuality could lead to a lack of respect for or even violence against prostitutes and possibly other women as well. While acknowledging that a commodified view of sexuality is not an inevitable outcome of patronizing prostitutes, these findings suggest that the commodification of sexuality associated with prostitution encounters has a number of negative implications for the men involved, their sexual partners, and for gender relations in general.

### Recidivism Among Program Participants

Of the first 706 men in the San Francisco program, 14 were caught re-offending, 12 in San Francisco County and 2 in other jurisdictions, for a recidivism rate of about 2%. Among the men participating in the Portland program, 2 (about 2%) had subsequent convictions. While these small recidivism rates would seem to prove the success of client intervention programs, recidivism rates for men



who had not completed an intervention program were also very low. What these results seem to mean is that once caught, clients are unlikely to be caught again, whether or not they attend an intervention program.

### Implications

This research has a number of implications relevant to those interested in reducing prostitution:

- 1) While the proportion of men who patronize prostitutes was once thought to be higher, recent research indicates that about 16% of men in the U.S. have visited prostitutes at some point during their lives, and less than 1% have visited prostitutes during the previous year. These smaller numbers bode well for the potential of intervention programs like the ones in San Francisco and Las Vegas to meaningfully reduce demand.
- 2) Background data indicate that men who seek prostitution are not dramatically different from men in general. If the offenders were highly deviant, intervention efforts would face an uphill battle. For some men prostitution may be a temporary measure during times when they are not married or are experiencing marital difficulties.
- 3) While intervention programs would be less likely to change established patterns of sexual behavior, many of the men participating are first time or occasional users and may not have established a habit of prostitution.
- 4) Many of the popular explanations as to why men seek prostitutes are supported by the findings. Underlying many of them is the sense that men are entitled to sexuality, and if conventional relationships are not available or are not meeting their wants, prostitution is an option. This sense of entitlement to sexuality could be addressed in future prevention or education efforts.
- 5) Most of the arrested clients do not exhibit attitudes that would support violence against women. This may mean that much of the violence experienced by prostitutes at the hands of clients is due to a small minority of clients. Men with conservative attitudes toward sexuality, an attraction to violent sexuality, and a habit of visiting prostitutes would seem particularly at risk for perpetrating violence.
- 6) Visiting prostitutes is associated with the development of a commodified view of sexuality. This commodified view of sexuality is in turn associated with a number of disturbing consequences, including

belief in rape myths, an attraction to violent sexuality, and less frequent use of condoms with prostitutes.

Because of its association with sexual commodification, prostitution should not be embraced as a positive form of sexual expression.

7) While intervention programs demonstrate low rates of recidivism, this is not a good measure of program success. Because it is easy to avoid arrest given adequate knowledge, re-arrest is rare among prostitution clients whether or not they participate in intervention programs.

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