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Document Title: Experiences of Youth in the Sex Trade in North Texas: Shattered Lives

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Document No.: 249955

Date Received: June 2016

Award Number: 2009-MC-CX-0001

This report has not been published by the U.S. Department of Justice. To provide better customer service, NCJRS has made this federally funded grant report available electronically.

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Experiences of Youth in the Sex Trade in North Texas

Shattered Lives

By Marcus Martin, Heather Champeau, Susan Ullrich, Aja Johnson, and
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Experiences of Youth in the Sex Trade in North Texas: Shattered Lives

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Acknowledgements

This study was supported by Award No. 2009-MC-CX-0001 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Department of Justice.

2M Research Services, LLC (2M), a professional research services firm headquartered in Arlington, Texas, conducted this study. 2M's founder and CEO, Dr. Marcus Martin, served as the principal investigator. Dr. Martin also led and supervised the field research. Dr. Kathryn Cardarelli, an Associate Professor in the School of Public Health at the University of North Texas Health Science Center, served as the Co-Principal Investigator. Our team of field research assistants included Heather Champeau, Aja Johnson, Brandon Bowles, Malembe Ebama, Susan Ullrich, Lillian Agbeyege, and Phyllis Harris.

All research assistants reported to Dr. Martin, who also handled the project's administrative tasks. The professionalism and dedication of the research assistants is greatly appreciated.

The study protocol was approved by the Office of Human Subjects Protection at the University of North Texas Health Science Center, where Dr. Martin is an adjunct faculty member.

2M would also like to thank the Center for Court Innovation—the Principal Investigator agency for the national study—for extending the opportunity for 2M to participate in such an important project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The following study of youth in the sex trade in the Dallas, Texas Area was conducted by the Center for Court Innovation and 2M Research Services, LLC. The Dallas study is part of a larger project, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and overseen by the Center for Court Innovation, to fill the current gap in scientific knowledge regarding the size, needs, and characteristics of youth in the sex trade. Based on original research in six sites, including Atlantic City (NJ), the Bay Area (CA), Chicago (IL), Las Vegas (NV), Miami (FL), and Dallas, the larger study aims to estimate the size of the population of youth in the sex trade; to describe their characteristics, experiences, and health and service needs; to explore what services are available; and to analyze arrest patterns and prosecution and recidivism outcomes when these youth encounter the juvenile or criminal justice systems.

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; Marcus, Riggs, Rivera, and Curtis 2016; Maurrasse and Jones 2016; Schaffner et al. 2016; Wagner, Whitmer, and Spivak 2016). A multi-site 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 et al. 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.

In states like Texas, the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) has been a growing concern for youth advocates and policymakers over the last decade. The State of Texas took major steps to fight human trafficking in 2003 by passing one of the first state-level anti-trafficking laws (Texas Penal Code, 2011). In addition, this issue has been covered

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

extensively by major media outlets in Texas such as the Dallas Morning News and the Houston Chronicle (Mervosh, 2014).

However, even with the increased media attention, and despite the need to understand the prevalence and nature of this issue, there has been an absence of rigorous research studies on the size, needs, and characteristics of the relevant population of youth in the sex trade. Having sound empirical research on this population of youth could help service providers, law enforcement agencies, and the court systems develop impactful and cost-effective evidence-based strategies that would help youth transition out of the lifestyle.

This study in Dallas, Texas, included 80 face-to-face interviews with young people, ages 13–24, who engaged in sex for money, though in the end only 78 of these interviewees met the eligibility requirements and were included in the data analysis. This report captures the findings from these interviews, conducted between May 3, 2011, and March 31, 2012. In their interviews, respondents discussed their backgrounds, how they entered the lifestyle of exchanging sex for money (referred to as “the life”), how they make and spend money, how they work with customers, how they work with pimps and market facilitators, their health issues, their interactions with law enforcement, and their outlook for the future.

This report provides a qualitative discussion of the common themes and findings derived from a standard interview questionnaire used at all six study sites that was developed by the Center for Court Innovation and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Many of the 78 Dallas, Texas respondents told the interviewers compelling stories of lives filled with poverty, abuse, and profound neglect. Despite the significant hardships many of the kids had experienced in their short years of life, many also expressed a profound desire to experience a better life, to become self-sufficient, and to do all they could to ensure other kids would have the options and economic self-sufficiency to live lives that they were not afforded. It is very important to note that many of these young people entered the lifestyle for different reasons, and many defied the stereotype of having been dragged into the lifestyle by a pimp. Often the interviewers were told stories of very tragic life circumstances, often stemming from living in poverty, which led the respondents into the life as a convenient way to make money.

Chapter 2

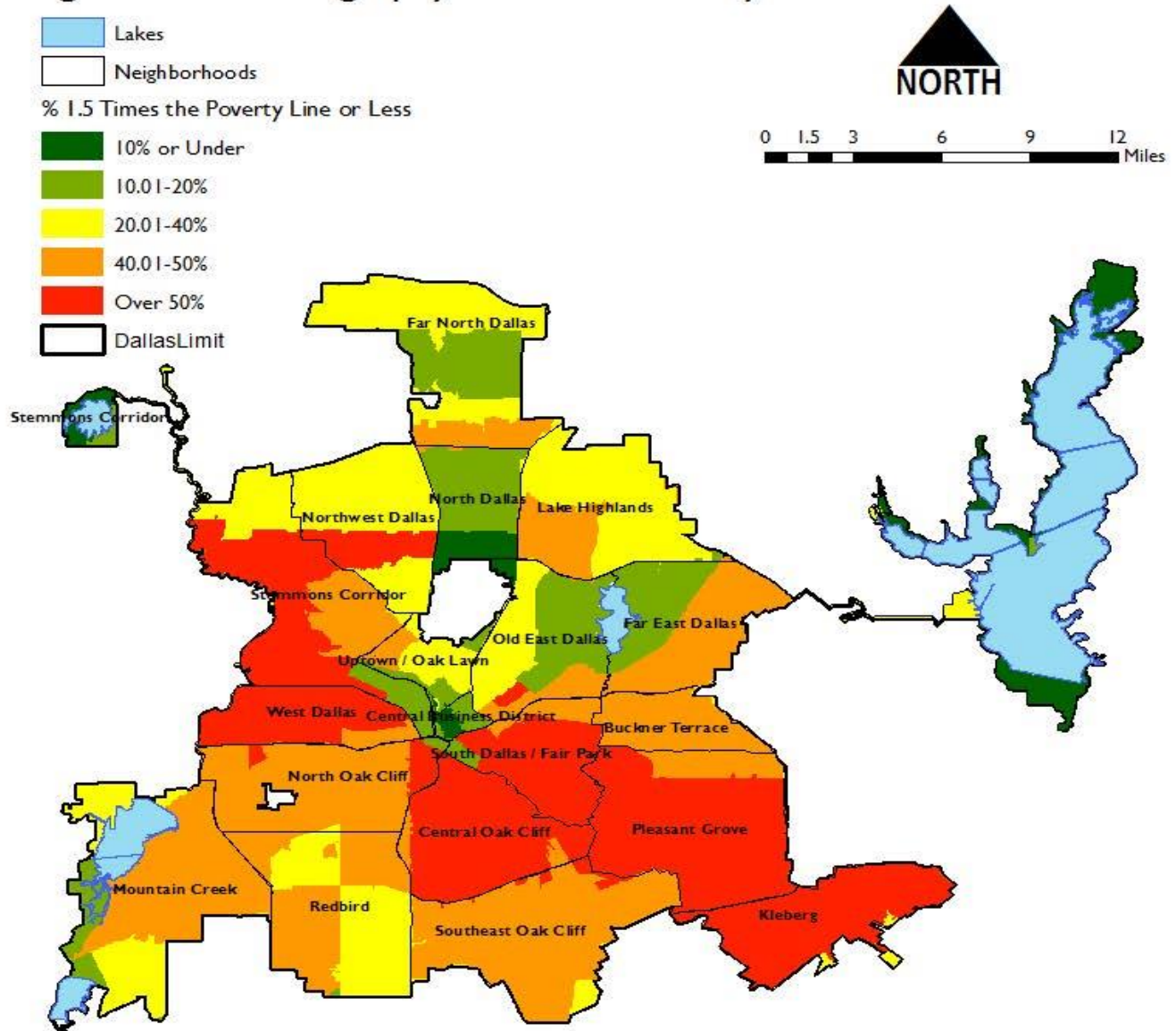
Dallas, Texas: A Tale of Two Cities

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the City of Dallas, Texas, has a total population of roughly 1,257,676 people (US Census Bureau). About 8.6% of the Dallas population is under the age of 5, and roughly 27% of the Dallas population is under the age of 18. The city has a very diverse population that is 25% African American, 42% Hispanic or Latino, 25% Non-Hispanic White, and about 3% Asian American. Dallas, like a few other cities in Texas, is known nationally for its strong and diverse economy that is home to a number of Fortune 500 companies such as AT&T, Exxon Mobil, Tenet HealthCare, American Airlines, and Southwest Airlines.

Many communities throughout the Dallas, Texas, area are known for their significant wealth, such as Southlake, Highland Park, University Park, and Frisco. There are also, however, many communities in the City of Dallas and in the Dallas, Texas, area where deep pockets of poverty exist, schools are low-performing, unemployment rates are high, and communities struggle to help their residents meet basic needs. Many of these communities are located in the southern portion of the City of Dallas and Dallas County, while many of the thriving suburbs are located in the northern portion of the City of Dallas and Dallas County. In fact, a number of studies have found the residents in the southern portion of Dallas often experience higher rates of premature mortality, health disparities, income inequality, crime victimization, and unemployment (Martin & Bray, 2008).

Recently the new Mayor of Dallas launched a “South Dallas Task Force” aimed at reducing many of the disparities just mentioned as well as to increase economic development in many Southern Dallas Communities (City of Dallas, n.d.). Figure 1 below is a map that highlights the various communities in Dallas and their associated poverty rates. As evidenced in the map, many South Dallas communities have poverty rates that are dramatically higher than most communities in North Dallas. A number of our respondents grew up in some of Dallas’ poorest communities (especially the South Dallas/Fair Park Area) and had experienced hardships that would make it difficult for any young person to successfully complete high school, enroll in college, and enter into a successful career in the labor force.

Figure 1. The Geography of Dallas Poverty



Chapter 3

Methodology

The field research team and the Principal Investigator participated in a training session in March of 2011 at the University of North Texas Health Science Center. During this training, we outlined various potential “hot spots” for prostitution in Dallas, reviewed the interview guide, practiced using the interview protocol, discussed self-care for the interviewers, and talked about what to expect and do while out in the field recruiting and conducting interviews as well as how to ensure the safety of the research staff. The field research team began to go out into the streets in these “hot spots” during the third week in April of 2011 after receiving approval for the study protocol from the Office of Research Compliance at the University of North Texas Health Science Center.

The study’s methodology is based on respondent-driven sampling (RDS), which is the approach that guides all of the interviews conducted at six sites across the country, under the Center for Court Innovation project funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. RDS uses a network-based strategy for accessing and interviewing hard-to-reach populations, such as young people involved in the commercial sex market, by recruiting eligible “seed” respondents who then refer others they know to be interviewed for the study.

Overall, the RDS method was not successful in the Dallas, Texas, area. The lack of population density in Dallas, along with the lack of available public transportation options and the high usage of cars often proved that the network of our respondents was very mobile. Hence, many of the other young individuals involved in sex for commercial purposes would have to travel great distances to participate in an interview.

As a result, our team found it more useful to work with social service agencies in Dallas to spread the word about the study. The staff often left small recruiting cards with basic information about the study and a toll-free 800 number to call to find out more information about the study. In addition, flyers were strategically placed in some of the known hot spots across Dallas, which included the toll-free 800 number to call for more information about the study. We were able to recruit our first and second waves of respondents from this method. However, most of these interviews took place in the Southern portion of the city of Dallas, primarily in zip codes 75201 and 75215—the South Dallas/Fair Park Area.

RDS worked in two sets of recruitment “waves,” and the vast majority of these respondents were found through these two distinct networks. A very small number of interviews were disconnected from these two networks. The first recruitment period took place a few months after field research began. Interestingly, the second one occurred after a long delay in activity.

Our original goal was to recruit at least 300 subjects who were involved in sex for commercial purposes. However, given the lack of success in recruiting through known networks, often as a result of the geographical distance of an individual in the network, the researchers experienced great difficulty in meeting their goal of interviewing 300 subjects. Many potential respondents would schedule times to be interviewed but then were not able to make the interviews because of transportation barriers.

Moreover, some of the respondents we interviewed suggested that having customers in suburban communities reduced the risk of being arrested and reduced the risk of a relative or close friend finding out that they were engaging in sex for commercial purposes.

Chapter 4

Interview Procedures

Before serving as an interviewer, each member of the research team, after receiving the appropriate human subjects training, was allowed to sit in on several interviews being conducted by an experienced research assistant on the team to learn the format and structure of the interview, best practices, and the importance of standardized data collection. Interview participants were told that this arrangement was designed as a teaching mechanism only and were asked if they would be comfortable with having another member of the research team present during their interview. No participant refused to be interviewed due to having another member of the research team present for learning purposes of how to conduct an appropriate interview.

Participants were offered \$40 for their interview and were told they could earn another \$30 by referring three people they knew to also be engaged in exchanging sex for money or gifts (\$10 for each eligible person referred). Once the interviewer went over the informed consent form with each participant, the participant would be asked to verbally consent to being voice recorded during their interview. All participants agreed to be voice recorded.

Interviews took place in the interviewer's car to provide privacy, protect confidentiality, and secure a comfortable interview setting. Additionally, this granted the team mobility, which was essential to securing a few interviews that took place in suburban areas because these areas lack public transportation.

Using interviewers' cars provided latent benefits that could not have been expected. For example, at least one team member's personal car was identifiable to potential participants, which reduced the mistrust that participants may have normally had: that we were part of law-enforcement seeking to arrest them. Two participants stated they recognized the interviewer because of her car, which was white with a blue dent in the rear from an accident; many other participants arrived with their referral source, who recognized the team's most common "cruising" vehicle, a tan Suburban. In addition, the audibility of recordings was safeguarded by using team members' cars. As a result, the 2M team recorded high-quality interviews, which were essential to identifying the team's key interviews.

The team utilized the paper survey, taking brief notes during the interview while focusing on encouraging participants to elaborate. Most participants willingly elaborated, sharing their

stories and lives with the research team, though some participants remained skeptical of interviewers throughout and spoke as little as possible. Data were entered into the Access database provided by the Center for Court Innovation after the interview was completed. This data collection method was efficient, minimized silence on the recording, and emphasized the team's commitment to actively listening to participants (as opposed to entering data).

Subject Recruitment and Coupon Design

The 2M team utilized a modified version of snowball sampling where initially selected members recruit a set number of additional individuals from their networks. These individuals, in turn, recruit a set number of individuals from their networks, and so on. The method is based on network theory and is believed to capture visible and hidden members of a population. When analyzed using the respondent-driven analysis tool (RDSAT), the sample is considered a probability sample (FHI 360, 2011).

RDS is dependent on participants' willing and active recruitment of more participants. However, RDS is also a tracking methodology and requires that willing and active recruiters utilize the study's coupon system by providing those they recruit with coupons given to them. Initial recruits are designated "seeds," from which referral "trees" grow. Initially, each seed was intended to recruit at least three individuals; likewise, each of these participants could recruit three individuals. Coupons were numbered, and each participant was provided with a set of three coupons to disperse; the interviewer wrote down which coupons their participant was given. This system would allow the research team to track the growth of trees without collecting personally identifiable data.

Coupons served as referral cards, authenticating the holder's status as an RDS recruit and validating the recruiter's eligibility for compensation. Coupon design may have an impact on the likelihood of their use by participants who are able and willing to recruit for the study. About mid-point into the data collection phase, our team redesigned our recruiting coupon to mimic dollar bills with the belief that respondents would be more likely to subconsciously assign value to them.

Despite the research team's redesign of the coupons and increased exposure to areas known for harboring prostitution, referrals remained minimal. Barriers to recruitment and growing trees were likely the result of multiple factors. Namely:

- Participants remained highly skeptical of interviewers and were convinced that the team was comprised of law enforcement officials or agents of Child Protective Services. Participants would refuse to supply an interview based on this skepticism.
- Participants willingly gave out coupons, but were very hesitant to supply their friends' last few phone number digits for network analysis. Despite our assurances that the last three digits of a phone number could not be traced, the initial skepticism of the participant was too great to overcome.
- Given the distance and lack of public transportation in many areas in Dallas, to many participants \$40 was often not a big enough incentive to travel, given the limited availability of transportation options.

Screening of Prospective Participants

The Center for Court Innovation provided the 2M research team with a cell phone that had a toll-free phone number. Responsibility for the phone was cycled throughout the research team. A prospective participant would call the toll-free number and the team member with the phone would take the following steps to determine eligibility:

- Make sure the prospective participant understood the purpose of the study.
- Ensure the prospective participant had engaged in the act of trading sex for money or gifts.
- Ask the prospective participant's age.
- If the prospective participant was eligible, establish a date and time to conduct the interview.
- Before the interview commenced, the interviewer would again state the purpose of the study and eligibility would be re-established.

Sometimes prospective participants would be asked during the screening call how they found out about our study. If the prospective participant indicated that they had been recruited by another eligible participant, they were asked to bring their coupon. It was common for participants to misplace or forget their coupon prior to the interview. In these instances, participants were asked to identify as best they could (without using names) who referred them to the study. Interviewers later attempted to identify the recruiter. It was not common for recruiters to call the team's hotline to obtain their \$10 referral compensation. However, interviewers attempted to contact the referrer if his or her identity could be ascertained. In some cases, recruiters contacted the team for prospective participants and arrived with their referral. These individuals were told the purpose of the study by the interviewer and eligibility was determined face-to-face.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Before interviews commenced, interviewers went over the informed consent form with the participant, reading and explaining the document to the participant. If participants had questions (this was uncommon), the interviewer addressed these concerns. If participants asked questions during the reading of the consent form, they were generally concerned that their information would be shared with police officers; interviewers assured concerned participants that law enforcement could not, under any circumstances, take the team's research. The confidentiality of participants was emphasized by the interviewers, who stressed that no identifying information would be collected.

The Interview

Interviews were guided by the survey the Center for Court Innovation provided to the 2M research team. This survey instrument included nine sections:

1. **Respondent Information:** This section gathered basic demographic characteristics and inquired about the participant's transience and first sexual experience.
2. **Making and Spending Money:** This section focused on the participant's first experience of exchanging sex for money or gifts, price negotiation with customers, spending habits, and debt.
3. **Market Involvement:** This section inquired about the geographic location where the participant usually works, how much they work, and the safety of neighborhoods the participant works in.
4. **Customers:** This section focused on how participants come into contact with customers, where they go with customers, and customers' demographic information.
5. **Pimps:** This section asked about participants' pimps or "market facilitators," coworkers, and exposure to pimps.
6. **Network:** This section gathered information about how many prostitutes under the age of 18 participants knew and demographic information about the young prostitutes.
7. **Health and Needs:** This section asked about the physical well-being of participants, their exposure to STDs, health habits, knowledge of social service agencies, and drug habits.
8. **Experience with the Police:** This section focused on participants' exposure to law enforcement officers, their history of arrest, and how/whether they avoid the police.
9. **Expectations:** This section begins by asking participants to think about what they like and dislike about their current situation, capacity for leaving the life "tomorrow," interest in school, desired living arrangement, desired support systems, and where they see themselves in 10 years.

Trends in participants' most and least favorite sections of the survey were quickly discovered. Participants liked and appreciated the interview portions that were focused on

them and their life experiences, which was in the first part of the survey and the last, thus making the first and last sections of the survey popular. It was also generally easy to learn about participants' health and needs, experience with the police, and finances. Participants would talk about their customers and market involvement, but seemed less likely to enjoy these topics. Finally, there is a dearth of data with regard to Dallas participants' networks, and very few participants offered information about pimps. Results for each section are examined in the Research Findings section below.

Participants were often asked "probing" questions to encourage elaboration on topics the survey raised. If participants wished to talk about their personal lives, providing information that was not sought on the survey, interviewers did not stop them. For example, one young participant,² Ada, talked about her mother and aunt, both of whom had been raped repeatedly as young girls; Ada went on to confide to her interviewer that she hated her granny, who knew about the situation and allowed it to happen. Interestingly, although the survey instrument itself does not directly go in-depth on the issue of sexual abuse of the participants in the study, the participants often willingly shared these accounts. It may be that participants desired to justify their current or previous behavior, as the authors of the Atlantic City report (Marcus et al., 2014) suggest; however, many participants from the Dallas site could not avoid sharing these details if they were to answer questions related to their first sexual experience, which involved rape or feeling "uncomfortable" for a significant number of participants. For example, Lea, a 20 year-old African American female we interviewed, reported being raped by her stepfather as her first sexual experience. Lea reported that after being raped by her stepfather, he also gave her money.

Stories like the ones referred to above provided context to participants' young lives and struggles. Interviewers sometimes provided light comfort to the participant if he or she seemed upset, generally by saying "it's ok" (connoting it was "ok" for the respondent to be upset) or asking if the participant wanted to stop or pause the interview. Although elaboration was encouraged and sought, the research team was sensitive to the potential for psychological and emotional strain. Interviewers were trained to provide participants with an opportunity to seek or get help, regardless of the interviewer's perception of the participant's psychological or emotional state. A contact reference sheet with social service agencies that

² In order to protect subject confidentiality the researchers will use pseudonyms throughout this report.

had all agreed to provide support services to our respondents were distributed during each interview. All participants received the reference sheet.

We did have one respondent who clearly needed immediate support. She confided in the interviewer after completing her interview that she was homeless and pregnant. The research team was able to secure the services of a community-based non-profit organization, which assisted the participant with finding emergency housing and the appropriate medical screening for her pregnancy.

Research Findings

As mentioned earlier, the 2M research team assigned pseudonyms and have included the self-reported demographics of participants whose stories are shared in the following sections.

Table 1: Self-Reported Gender, Age, Race, and Sexuality of Participants Assigned a Pseudonym

Assigned Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Sexuality
Ada	Female	16	Black/African American	Unknown
Alex	Male	16	Black/African American	Homosexual
Belina	Female	16	Multi-Racial	Bisexual
Blaise	Female	21	Black/African American	Homosexual
Camilla	Female	15	Black/African American	Heterosexual
Clement	Male	20	Black/African American	Homosexual
Demetria	Female	21	Black/African American	Heterosexual
Deni	Female	18	Black/African American	Homosexual
Eva	Female	17	Black/African American	Bisexual
Fara	Female	21	Black/African American	Homosexual
Florian	Male	21	Multi-Racial	Bisexual
Giles	Male	21	Black/African American	Bisexual
Helen	Female	20	Multi-Racial	Homosexual
Irene	Female	18	White	Heterosexual
Joanna	Female	20	Black/African American	Bisexual
Kiara	Female	19	Black/African American	Bisexual
Lea	Female	20	Black/African American	Heterosexual
Maura	Female	18	Black/African American	Heterosexual

Respondent Information

As with the Atlantic City study (Marcus et al., 2014), the 2M research team quickly discovered that Dallas lacked a distinct, street-based market for children exchanging sex for money or gifts. Likewise, it was not common for the team to find references to minors engaged in the overall local sex market. The 2M team decided to mirror Atlantic City's design modifications by expanding the target population to include participation from individuals who self-reported to be older than 18. As a result, about one-third (33.3%) of the

Dallas participants reported being 18 years of age or younger. Twenty-six percent of the participants reported being exactly 18 years old, the second most common age group reported.

Most Dallas participants self-identified as cisgender females (63%), although a substantial number of cisgender males (28%) were also interviewed. In addition, a handful of transgender participants were interviewed (9%): 6 trans women and 1 trans man participated in the study. One example in this group is Blaise, a 21-year-old African American, self-identified lesbian who the interviewer had assumed was male. When the interviewer said “male,” the participant immediately corrected her and said “*Female. I just look like this.*” A similar incident occurred with Deni, an 18-year-old, self-identified African American lesbian who told the interviewer she intentionally dressed in a masculine manner. When asked how she identified, Deni thought for a moment and replied “*I would say female, still.*” Instances like these suggest that some individuals that society might identify as “transgender” do not always define themselves as such. It is unlikely that refraining from self-reporting as transgender was the result of stigma, because the participant already dressed in a gender non-conforming manner; instead, this likely reflects the self-definition and personal paradigm of the participant.

Most of the 78 participants we interviewed self-reported to be of Black/African American heritage (86%) while only one respondent self-identified as being Hispanic/Latino. Multi-racial (10%) and 3% (white) covered a relatively small fraction of interview participants. While many participants self-reported heterosexuality (N=37), this number did not account for even half of the Dallas participant sample (only 47% were heterosexual). There was significant participation from homosexual (N=20; 26%) and bisexual (N=16; 21%) individuals who exchanged sex in return for money or gifts.

Making and Spending Money

The study interviewers worked hard to encourage participants’ elaboration of events that led up to and included participants’ first experience exchanging sex for money or gifts. To provide a dynamic exploration of participant’s first experience exchanging sex for money or gifts, stories have been separated into the following categories:

- Survival Sex
- Prostitution as a Lifestyle
- Polysemous Lifestyles

Generally speaking, participants' first customers paid them less money than they currently charge. For example, Joanna, a 20 year-old self-identified bisexual African American female, explicitly stated that she set her own prices, but that *"as [she] got older, it got higher."* This trend was regularly demonstrated during the interviews.

During the assessment of participants' self-reported earnings, it became clear that often respondents were likely inflating their income. Many self-reported that they were highly unlikely to have a savings account and were entirely cash dependent. This often made tracking of what they were earning and spending problematic for many of them. Many of the respondents also reported that often their incomes were unstable from week to week. Depending on what was going on with the existing clients and their ability to attract new clients, many stated that it could not be guaranteed that they would receive consistent earnings from one week to the next. Finally, some of the individuals we interviewed appeared to inflate their earnings because of the embarrassment of charging low rates to regular clients or low rates when business was really slow during a particular week.

Survival Sex

Survival Sex refers to the selling of sex to meet subsistence needs. It includes the exchange of sex for shelter, food, drugs, or money (Greene et al., 1999).

Participants' first experience with trading sex for money or gifts often occurred as the result of running away from home or being kicked out of their home. Ada, a 16-year-old African American female provided a powerful example of the events that led up to and included participants' first experience in the life:

Ada: The first time, my mama—I was just out on my own. I didn't know what to do. I had no money. At first I tried to stay with my sister, but my sister, she has a child herself, so she could barely maintain for the both of them. So, I don't know. I was at a train station—people be stopping at the train station and stuff (pause) and I was like "no." I was alone doing (pause) but I didn't have no money and then I told them how old I was and they was like, "Well, won't nobody know if you don't tell." So ... (pause, Ada's voice is shaky and she is upset; the interviewer consoles her and says "It's ok.") So, I just figured that "ok, what's the worst that could happen?"

Interviewer: Was this somebody that was waiting for a train or coming into Dallas?

Ada: They wasn't waiting for a train. They was in the car. They just like always stopping by the train stations [there's] a lot of cars and stuff.

Unfortunately, the desperation faced by participants forced them to consider the unthinkable as acceptable. Suddenly, these youth found themselves in a situation so terrifying that prostitution was instantaneously normalized out of sheer need. In most cases, participants could clearly point to the first time they exchanged sex in return for something else; frequently, they reported receiving cash reimbursement for their services. Ada said she was given \$100 by her first client.

It's not about what I liked. It's what I had to do to survive. – Lea

Turning to prostitution out of necessity was commonly expressed. For example, the first experience of Alex, a 16-year-old African American male, illustrates the role that peers can play when youth are attempting to survive on their own. His mother kicked Alex out of the house when he came out to her as homosexual. With nowhere else to go, Alex moved in with his friends for three months. These friends were prostitutes and he “*thought it was cool*” because everyone there was doing it (the way Alex said “cool” connoted acceptability as opposed to popularity). Alex wanted to have money in order to take care of himself and told his interviewer that, “*once [his] mom allowed [him] to move back in, [he] left the life.*”

Alex’s experience with prostitution was textbook survival sex; he began when he was kicked out of his mother’s house and quit when she allowed him to return. Moreover, he felt no need to return to the life because everything he needed was provided. Belina, also 16, reported a similar circumstance. This bisexual, multi-racial female ran away from home and, while on her own, received a phone call from a long-time friend; she told him her circumstance and he said they could “work something out” because she was hungry. While it was unclear whether Belina received food, money, or both for this first exchange, she clearly stated that she only exchanged sex in return for money or gifts for four months and then only with the same two customers, with whom she had been friends.

Importantly, engagement in prostitution redefined the parameters of survival. As a young teenager, survival became dependent on finding the next customer so as to secure food and shelter as opposed to graduating school to secure future opportunity.

Prostitution as a Lifestyle

Although not as common as survival sex, some participants stated that they actively chose to engage in prostitution as a lifestyle. One example is Eva, a 17-year-old self-identified

African American bisexual female who proclaimed that she could return home to her biological mother whenever she wanted, but that she wanted to live with a female and male she identified as her pimps. Overall, Eva seemed to like her life, stating that her pimps “*are great*” and “*take good care of [her]*.” Eva knew of organizations that could help her leave the life, but felt that, as a 17-year-old, she had “*a couple of mistakes to make before [getting] on the right track.*”

Clement, a 20-year-old self-identified African American homosexual male who was in the life at the time of the interview, lived with his mother and had no real need for money. The first time he exchanged sex for money was with a man he was attracted to. After their initial encounter, Clement dated his first customer for a few months. Clement seemed positive about his first experience trading sex for money. He admitted that he liked the ability to have sex frequently and, when asked if there was anything he disliked about the life said, “*Not really. (pause) That’s bad to say.*” Still, although Clement felt he should express more distaste toward prostitution, he displayed no remorse for enjoying the work.

Deni also enjoyed her first experience exchanging sex for money. She proudly told her interviewer how pleased her first customer was with her oral sex skills and boasted about her natural talent. When asked if she disliked anything about the work, Deni replied “*I don’t know. I probably enjoy doing it more than they enjoy me doing it. Seriously, I love giving head. (laughs) I love it.*” Deni lived with her aunt, who paid their bills and infrequently asked for financial help. Deni’s aunt knew about her lifestyle choice and had told Deni that if she needed money, she could ask.

Polysemous Lifestyles

Many participants’ lifestyles were clearly defined as “survival sex” or “prostitution.” Still, some participants’ stories blurred the lines between prostitution and survival sex. These polysemous lifestyles, or lifestyles with multiple meanings, describe the grey area of a continuum that links survival sex and prostitution as a lifestyle. One example was presented by a 15-year-old African American female. Camilla, the youngest participant interviewed by the 2M research team, began prostituting like Alex—as a runaway. Camilla left home at age 14, when her mother’s boyfriend hit her; it happened once, but was the culmination of serial verbal abuse. She was a transient youth, having lived in four different places over the course of the last year, and explained that she turned to prostitution when her aunt kicked her out, leaving her desperate for food. At the time of the interview, Camilla was living with her uncle, who paid all of the bills and did not ask Camilla for financial help. It was difficult to pinpoint whether Camilla engaged in prostitution strictly for survival due to two conflicting pieces of information:

- Camilla was highly transient and, when asked what the first thing she would buy with her money was, she answered “*food.*” Additionally, Camilla disliked being in the life and wanted to leave, but said she didn’t know how. As she talked about this, her voice wavered and she was on the verge of crying.
- On the other hand, Camilla was being fully cared for by her uncle and still reported having \$400 in expenses per week. It is unlikely that a 15-year-old girl could eat \$400 worth of food each week. Instead, Camilla reported sending money to her younger sister in Mississippi.

The factor that compelled Camilla to continue prostituting is unknown; it may be that she felt responsible for her younger sister, that she had some other financial obligation she was unwilling to speak about during the interview, or that she was being compelled to stay in the life by another. Camilla reported having a market facilitator who placed her pictures online for her. Another young female prostitute, this individual managed Camilla’s dates and, as a result, Camilla may have felt peer pressure to continue in the life.

Though money is typically associated with prostitution, *the need for food and shelter*, as illustrated above, was a strong driving force in the decision of these young people to engage in prostitution. A 21-year-old African American female who had left the life at the time of the interview, Demetria was taken in by a man when she ran away from home at age 15. He found her on the street and asked how old she was and what she was doing. When Demetria told him her story, the man let her “*live with him in exchange for sex and would basically supply everything [she] needed as long as [she] agreed to have sex with him.*” Demetria lived with this man for four years; during that time he sheltered her and began to pimp her to other men. While Demetria could decide not to have sex with a man, it was clear from her interview that refusing to have sex, at least with her “john,” would cause her to lose what safety and stability she felt she had. Although this certainly qualifies as survival sex, Demetria’s ability to choose her customers suggests that she also engaged in prostitution as a lifestyle:

Interviewer: And would you get clients off the street?

Demetria: Yeah, but I didn’t too much really like that. Off the streets I mostly dealt with Hispanics or Caucasians because they pay more. A lot of the Black males, they didn’t want to pay as much as you ask ‘em for, because they figure “well, you a prostitute, I don’t need to pay you that much.”

The environment Demetria secured for herself was stable enough to provide her the opportunity to refuse services to customers who would not pay what she asked for. Although she had little option with regard to having sex with her john, refusing service to customers is a luxury that someone engaged in survival sex would never enjoy. As a result, Demetria could be considered to have simultaneously engaged in survival sex and prostitution as a lifestyle.

Finally, many participants openly discussed their various non-prostitution jobs. Irene, an 18-year-old white female, would conduct “bank licks” (tricking ATM machines) with her friends, and had a friend who worked in a bank that would help them. Selling cigarettes was a popular “day” job that helped participants like Blaise come into contact with their customers. Of course, female participants like Kiara often had jobs at strip clubs to make money and attract new customers. Dallas participants often diversified and expanded their opportunities for earning an income by engaging in many different money-making endeavors.

Spending Money

Although some had student loans and credit card debt, Dallas participants typically did not owe money to other people or businesses; those who did owe money generally owed twenty or thirty dollars to a friend or family member for something small, like gas money. A few of the participants said they were going to use the money they received from their interview to pay the person they owed.

When asked about their spending priorities, participants generally reported that they would buy food, clothes, diapers for their child(ren), hygiene products, or pay bills.

Basically I get something to eat, make sure I have drink, food. And it's not really food. It's just like a snack here, a snack there. Because you know food is expensive. ... I got \$60 the other day, and I just wanted to buy shampoo, conditioner, body wash, all that stuff. – Irene

I would buy the necessary things that a woman needs like tampons, hair gel, like perms, body soap, stuff that a woman needs—and then after that came the luxury. Like clothes and—well, I needed clothes but like I was smoking marijuana so I needed that. That came after but I needed all my necessary things first. – Joanna

Irene later told her interviewer that the clothes she was wearing were the only ones she owned. Most participants simply said “food” or “hygiene products”; however, given Irene’s response, it is unclear how nutritional the diet of Dallas participants was. Additionally, the condition of participants’ physical well-being for those who answered “hygiene products” is questionable. Irene was homeless, a condition most participants did not share, and likely struggled more than other participants to maintain a healthy diet and cleanliness. However, health disparities, especially in relation to the affordability and availability of nutritious food, are well-documented and known to disproportionately affect low-income individuals.

Participants infrequently reported that their first purchase after being paid was non-essential. Giles, a 21-year-old bisexual African American male, had a purchasing pattern that was highly unusual:

First thing I would buy when I got paid, some shoes. And I would take myself out like to the bowling alley or something like that, you know.

While most participants told their interviewer that necessities were their first purchase after a date, Florian’s notion of getting into the life and spending money dramatically challenged this idea and presented prostitution as a form of addiction from his perspective.

A real friend wouldn’t put their friend in something like this ‘cause it’s like a drug. It’s like a habit. ... If you’re money hungry, the money comes fast and if you don’t know how to hold your money, it goes fast. As fast as you get your money, is as fast as it will go. ... A lot of people get what they want, instead of what they need and then they broke and they need to go back and do it another day because they don’t have any more money. ... I’m addicted because I’m money hungry.

Florian likened making and spending money to being like a crack addict who cannot conserve his or her stock of drugs and must go buy more every day. Florian reported that he saved \$100 from every date by putting it into a bank account and living off of whatever remained so that he could afford to leave the life when he was ready. His view of the spending habits displayed by other prostitutes suggests that Florian has a strong understanding of conspicuous consumption and the role that a savings account can play in improving the quality of one’s life.

Market Involvement

Just as participants engaged in various money-making schemes, they were also likely to utilize various opportunities for prostitution. Walking the streets and using online resources, as well as some combination of the two, were the options participants found most advantageous.

Walking the Streets

One of the most striking revelations to come out of our interviews was the ease and simplicity participants had in finding customers.

People stop me all the time. I don't think they be knowing—I don't know, some of them probably do know when I just sit at the train station and stuff ... I tell them how old I am 'cause—I just tell 'em, and they be like “Well, won't nobody know if you don't tell.” I get that all the time. ... I swear, everybody say that when I tell them my age. I'm gonna let you know outside, I don't want no confusion or anything. I tell them “I'm 16 years old” and they be like, “Won't nobody know if you don't tell them” every time. – Ada

I can be walking to the store—like really just walking to the store—and find a trick. You know? It's so easy because of the neighborhood that I'm in. – Irene

I will walk down North Dallas. I will walk sometimes on Forest Lane, Abrams, you know, if I was to walk. Usually I get customers just walkin' to my house. – Kiara

Participants who walked the street often claimed that finding customers was this simple; basically, all they had to do was be visible. Kiara, a 19-year-old bisexual African American female received her first customer by being picked up while walking home:

I was about 16. ... I didn't really know nothin'—I didn't really know what I was doin' at the time, so. I had went over my homegirl house and was walking down the street. Some Hispanic man I never saw [before] stopped me and ask do I need a ride? So I was like “Yeah.” He was drivin' me up the street and he asked me, he was like “How much?” I was like “For what?” And he was like “Sex.” And I told him how much I would charge and he was like—he was sold. We went behind a building and had sex.

As illustrated by Kiara, Irene, and Ada, it was not common for participants to state that they initiated conversation with a potential customer. More often than not, customers were the ones who initiated contact on the streets and only Deni shared a story in which a customer was initially surprised by the request for money before performing a sexual act; this person went on to agree to pay Deni.

The ease of striking up a conversation with customers may have led some participants to feel that they were not streetwalkers, though society may see them differently. Blaise, for example, frowned on walking the streets, but met the majority of her customers while in public:

I just meet somebody. It's not the same like a girl walkin' down the street, hoin'. If I meet a female, and I'll be like I'm gonna see what kind of money she got. She gonna want me to come chill with her, I let her know I'm not gonna chill with her unless you pay me. Point blank. Whatever the price would be, the price would be. I tell her how much I want. She gonna give it to me. Whether she wanted me to do somethin' for it or whatever.

While participants frequently displayed extreme skepticism of field researchers, they rarely shared concerns for their physical safety. It may be that participants' instincts and subconscious decision making had protected them thus far. For example, Irene explained how she typically chose her customers:

If I look at them, and nothing—my heart don't start beating or nothing, or my head don't start going off, then I'll get in the car ... But if I talk to 'em and—like if I look at them, and something says, “No,” I'll just keep walking. Because ... there's a lot of situations where my heart has said “No” and there was a good reason.

Of special concern are those individuals who engage in survival sex. For Irene, despite her homelessness, avoiding the “no” feeling was quintessential; unfortunately, this may not be a decision that she and others who engage in survival sex can consistently make.

Online Websites and Chat Lines

Using the internet to obtain dates was quite popular among Dallas participants. Clement claimed to never have walked the streets and even met his first customer after finding him on a chat line. Camilla shared a similar story. One of her friends, another young prostitute,

would post Camilla's photos online and set up her dates; she did not even know which website was used. From Camilla's viewpoint, this friend was doing her a favor.

Overall, Dallas participants admitted to prevalent use of chat lines, social networking sites, and ad sites (like Craigslist and Backpage). Backpage and Facebook were especially popular, but MocoSpace, Myspace, and Craigslist, among others, were commonly used. Although the process of using online websites is relatively well-known, the process of using chat lines is less familiar. Helen, a 20-year-old multi-racial lesbian explained chat lines this way:

First, you call. They give you like a free 60 minutes. Then you call. You record your voice. You let them know what you're on the chat line lookin' for. Then they inbox you through the phone.

She met her first customer through a chat line.

For technologically savvy participants, modern advances revolutionized the potential for exposing prostitutes' services by casting a wide net with which to efficiently attract many customers. Participants also explained that websites helped them appeal to customers who were not local; for example, Demetria's web page brought her customers from as far away as Houston. While the majority of participants who used the internet primarily relied on attracting customers with their ad or page, some would also search ads placed by potential customers:

Well, I've actually been on Craigslist and went on the personals, and actually called them—called the dudes and asked 'em—because dudes be having websites, talking about they want to—you know? So I be calling them too. — Irene

Thus, if customers were not reaching out, participants could still “approach” a potential customer through the convenience of the internet.

Finally, many participants believed that the internet offered protection from law enforcement. Backpage was especially popular for participants to use. Some believed that Backpage attracted better customers and competition than Craigslist because Backpage is not free. Other participants shared a belief that if they used a “disclaimer,” a note on their personal ad saying that they were not selling sex, only time, they would not run afoul of law enforcement. Still, an avid supporter of chat lines, Clement refused to use Backpage, claiming he knew prostitutes who had been lured into revealing their occupation to police

officers posing as customers. Clement referred to Florian, a 21-year-old multi-racial bisexual male, who had in fact been arrested for soliciting sexual services on Backpage. Despite this run-in with the police, Florian continued to use Backpage and Craigslist to find customers. As with the participants who used a disclaimer, Florian developed a system to check the legitimacy of customers: he would ask if they were a police officer before agreeing to meet. Only potential customers who replied that they were not a police officer would get a date.

Multiple Markets

Not all participants had a clear preference for online or street-based customers. In fact, it was quite common for participants to utilize multiple markets for solicitation, especially if their primary source was the internet. For example, Demetria would walk if she was told to and had done exotic dancing, but her pimp preferred to keep her off the streets because she was young and might attract attention. Most of Demetria's customers were internet-based and resulted from a website her pimp put up that included a "portfolio" of photographs and a short excerpt about her. Deni would also occasionally walk the streets if she needed to, but preferred to use Facebook to set up her dates.

Other participants were mostly phone-based and would supplement their day's earnings by walking. For example, Eva had regulars as well as pimps who would call her to set up a date. If she had not received as many phone calls as she wanted, Eva would "go out and work" to find customers on her own. Other participants would not wait for a call to come in; they would actively pursue work by calling regulars to see if any were interested in exchanging money for sex.

Overall, walking was not the preferred method of most participants and was a contingency plan that could be relied upon in times of need.

Hot Spots and Conflicts

When participants were asked about what areas they preferred to avoid, many replied by saying they did not like areas that are "hot." An area was hot if it was considered to have an overabundance of police activity in it. Most participants could easily avoid these areas and, if asked how they did so, would provide a response like "just don't go." If a participant was in an area that became hot, most claimed they would act calm and leave the area.

Participants generally did not have much to say about conflicts in their neighborhoods; many said there were no problems whatsoever. Although some explained that there was gang or drug violence, none of the participants seemed overly concerned about this. For example,

Eva said she would just “*mind [her] own business.*” Giles claimed that he rarely was bothered by conflicts or police presence in the neighborhoods that he worked in, saying:

Competition, police, it wasn't none of that, it was just if I got tired of that area and people [or] money was running low and they couldn't afford what they was affording at first—and yeah, to move to another area, but I didn't ever have that problem. A lot of people I was messing with had a lot of money.

Participants' lack of perceived conflict and ease in avoiding hot spots may reflect the popularity of finding customers online. Because participants were less likely to be walking, it was uncommon for them to complain about competitors being threatening toward them.

Customers

As discussed above, participants preferred to rely on or supplement online ads and pages, while streetwalking was a less popular primary source for finding customers. They would also find customers through referrals from friends and other customers.

Participants' customers varied greatly. Some participants claimed to only have Mexican customers, to have never had a white customer, or to have had customers of all ethnic/racial backgrounds. Participants often had strong feelings about the race/ethnicity of customers and potential customers. For example, Kiara stated:

I do a lot of Africans. I don't too much mess with Hispanics. I don't mess with Blacks too much at all ... because (pause) Blacks are cheap (pause) very. They don't wanna spend they money if they ain't got to. And Hispanics, they will lie. They will be like “I only got twenty dollars.” Africans are more-hard working, so they don't call you unless they got ... what I need.

Belina claimed that her youngest customer was 17, though most participants identified their customers to be no younger than their early 20s. It would be difficult to pinpoint the oldest customer because some participants claimed to have customers “18 and up.”

Customers also seemed to come from many walks of life. Participants frequently stated their clientele included construction workers, businesspeople, and professionals:

A lot of 'em, like the dudes I messed with a while back, one was a private investigator—like police—like security. Female, she used to work at the

Greyhound downtown. Some of 'em work for DART. I mean, I was talkin' with someone who had a taxi driver. I had some everything – Blaise

I'll be like, "Well, what do you do for a living?" Most of 'em are carpenters, roofers, plumbers. I got a few people in real estate. I have a few doctors. I've actually dated a police officer before. That's crazy. But I was scared because after we dated, he was like, "Oh, by the way, I'm a police officer. So if you ever need anything, call me." – Irene

More often than not, participants just considered their customers to be people who had money and could pay for their services. Ada did not think highly of customers, saying *"They just want what they want and that's it."* Many participants, like Florian, seemed disgusted with their customers (he actually called them "disgusting") because the majority were married; at least one participant had been asked to dress up in the clothes of a customer's spouse. Giles believed his customers would continually need a prostitute in their lives, theorizing that *"if you doing this with [me], you are going to do this with somebody else, because your temptations is crazy."*

Dates

A minority of participants were fond of their customers, who they saw as caring, lonely, or interesting. Blaise seemed to enjoy talking to her customers and told her interviewer *"that's what it's about, talkin' to 'em and seein' what they about."* When asked what they found interesting about their customers, some participants would reply that earning money was not always dependent on having sex.

They would just like call me and just want to come over and hang with me and pay me money. You know, it wasn't even, sometimes it wasn't even a sex thing it was more like: I'm coming to hang with you. We gonna kick it, but I want a hug up to you and watch TV. You know, they wanted the normal stuff they would do with a girl. – Giles

I don't always have sex with them. Sometimes I just spend time with 'em. If I'm just spendin' time with you, it go by my time. If I spend 30 minutes with you, you should at least pay me \$50. – Blaise

They're average people. Like I know this one person—every time he call me, we just go to the movies and hang out. And we go out to eat. And he don't even want to have sex. – Irene

Half the times it wasn't even about sex. They just wanted somebody to chill with and talk to and tell their problems to, someone they can have an intelligent conversation with. – Lea

This experience was surprisingly common and suggests that customers may find companionship as desirable as sex. Customers who wanted companionship would often prepare for a date by getting food, drugs, alcohol, and/or cigarettes. Participants did not seem to need to ask for these things; instead, customers appeared to want to provide these things in addition to money.

I called this guy, I was on a chat line and he came and picked me up and it was like, it was cool, you know, we got something to eat, something to drink and you know, got something to smoke. And when I say smoke, I mean, cigarettes. – Giles

Above, Giles was describing his first experience exchanging sex for money. As a 16-year-old, it is not likely that he specifically asked for anything in addition to money. Providing a prostitute with food and drugs during the date in addition to payment was considered normal and frequent enough that some participants claimed to smoke or drink, but only when it was brought to them by a customer. If accepting gifts as opposed to money was a common practice, this did not come through in the interviews. Instead, many participants said that customers had tried to pay them with drugs, but that they only accepted money.

Steadies

Having regulars or steadies was quite common for Dallas participants. A minority of participants had only one or two clients who they saw. For example, Belina engaged in survival sex with the same two male friends multiple times over the course of four months. This was a less common circumstance. Most participants engaged in prostitution with strangers; some of those strangers became regulars and would even be considered friends by the participant.

I try to have a certain client list. You know? I don't want to do all these people. I want a certain amount of people I can trust, and know that they're not police and stuff. – Irene

Over a year, five dudes. But it was like when you first met them, you know that they are not trying to give a lot of money, you don't call that person back, you don't try to mess with them no more; but, when you find the five that's a

regular basis that will come and give you the same amount that you been getting that's what I keep, why I keep them around. – Giles

The accumulation of a small set of regulars was overwhelmingly common for participants who also had multiple (sometimes many hundred) customers over the course of a year. Fara, a 21-year-old African American lesbian, met a stranger who offered her money in exchange for sex. Fara needed money and accepted the offer. What resulted was a two year-long arrangement in which Fara would be given at least \$100 three times each month to have sex with the same woman. This customer was an out-of-state truck driver who Fara estimated to be 26 years old. Fara did not seem overly enthused about her customer and, though she liked the money and gifts that were sometimes brought in addition, Fara did not like having sex with her customer. Despite Fara being one of the few participants who were simultaneously legally employed, she was still dependent on food stamps and the money her customer brought in.

The manner in which Belina and Fara maintained their arrangement with their customers means that it is quite likely that prostitution in general, and especially the sexual exploitation of youth, is seated in shadowy recesses that the light of research will never reach. This may help explain some of the difficulty the 2M team had while attempting to recruit participants for the study. It is possible that there are many individuals engaged in the sex trade in order to live, but do so only with one or two individuals who are (or become) well-known to the prostitute. In such cases, these individuals may not even consider themselves prostitutes and would ignore information about the research if recruitment materials did reach them.

Participants with multiple steadies often expected to see them a couple times each month; though participants rarely pinpointed exactly when and how often, Blaise confidently told her interview that *“payday is when I see them. First, the fifteenth, or in the evenin’ times, like after they get off work. If I leave now, somebody probably gettin’ off at eight or somethin’.”* Most regulars were not given special treatment like a discount or the option of bringing something other than money. Kiara was one of the participants who was an exception; she would offer to “work with” her regulars, but would not give them a deal:

If I been messin’ with somebody for a long time ... and they like “I only have \$50, but I promise you I will pay you the rest when I see you next time,” I’ll do it. It just depends on who.

Lacking steadies was uncommon. Ada was one of the more extreme cases of this. Each day, she had to sit at the train station, waiting for someone to pick her up; she stated that she

worked with around 10 to 15 customers a week and never had regulars. Relying completely on business she could generate at the train station, Ada estimated she averaged about two customers per day and usually performed sex inside the customer's car. While sex in cars was common, many participants preferred hotels/motels. Giles explained why he favored motels:

I was a person that motels was the best thing for me and it was like it wasn't not just no crappy ass apartment. So I mean, motels and it was like nice neat ones ... It was easy because it was like \$30 a night and you could stay here overnight and if I was having a good day then more than one person on a regular day.

Hosting more than one customer per day/overnight in a room was a common reason participants preferred hotels/motels.

Involvement with Pimps

As with the other study sites, the examination of pimps and pimping among Dallas participants defied social stereotypes. Pimps and pimping as popularly defined were uncommon, with a surprisingly small minority of participants claiming to currently have a pimp or have had one in the past. Irene, Eva, and Demetria were exceptions to this trend.

Participants with Pimps

Participants who claimed to have pimps or market facilitators often spoke favorably about them and had met their pimps through various means. Irene was seeking prostitution work and was struggling to find her own customers. She reached out to a trusted friend for help and was referred to her current pimp.

Interviewer: Let's look at your most recent pimp. How did you meet this person?

Irene: Through a friend, actually. The dude that I named my son after—I was like saying, "I need something to shake. Hook me up. Do something. I'm out here, and I don't want to struggle like this. Hook me up with somebody." And he sent me to J-Boy. I don't care about saying his name. He already been arrested for it.

Irene was grateful to have a pimp to look for customers for her, defying the stereotypical perception of prostitutes and pimps. Irene seemed to believe that a pimp offered a service, which she paid for, as opposed to believing a pimp would exploit her hard work. Irene saw pimping as a business arrangement that was good for her, customers, and the pimp. Interestingly, she did not feel obligated to pay every person who worked as a market facilitator, only those who she identified as her pimp. If a pimp had multiple prostitutes working for him, Irene would not identify him as her pimp, only as a referrer, and would not share her earnings.

While Irene's business mindset left little room for friendship with her pimp, Eva's arrangement was nearly the opposite. Eva's pimps were a male/female couple who she was extremely fond of and who managed her dates. She met the couple through a random encounter at a party and was living with them in a house with multiple prostitutes.

Interviewer: How did you get to meet them?

Eva: There was a crowd, sometimes I just hang out with a crowd and we're having fun, so I was attracted to her and tried to talk to her and she laced me up on some stuff, we just kinda hooked up on some stuff. We made it what it is.

Interviewer: So it was just a chance meeting?

Eva: Yeah.

Interviewer: How do you feel about them?

Eva: They great. I'm taken care of. I'm not hurtin at all.

Interviewer: How important are they to you?

Eva: It's like, I'm not goin' nowhere. I'ma stick with them, not go nowhere.

Eva was pleased with her living and prostitution arrangement because she had her own room and was fairly autonomous. She liked her pimps, especially the female pimp, who she called "Madame." Eva believed that if she wanted to leave the life, she could do it whenever she wanted to by returning to her biological mother's house. She was adamant about not wanting to return to her mother's house, stating that she did not want help getting out of the life right now, and was resolute in her loyalty to Madame.

Eva and Irene defy the stereotype of being exploited by a pimp. Both found their pimping arrangement to be beneficial. In the case of Eva, this simultaneously provided a sense of camaraderie with her pimp; for Irene, it was strictly business. Even participants with less autonomy than Irene and Eva spoke favorably of their pimps. Demetria's story reflects more accurately the stereotype of exploited youth:

Demetria: He was just a older guy that I had met when I ran away from home at 15. He basically stuck around—I had my daughter at 17, so he basically stuck around till then ... Once I hit 18, I got a job. He helped me get my own place and stuff. It wasn't really my own place because it was like a place he put me in, but it was like my own 'cause I stayed there and took care of my daughter and I had a job. Occasionally I would still work for him and myself. I would go out and have people—but I kinda slowed down after I had my daughter.

Interviewer: How would you say you feel about this person?

Demetria: I appreciate him being there for me 'cause I was too young to be out there on my own. I still know him to this day, we still talk, but we don't do any business together. As far as I know, he still sometimes has girls out there but he knows that I won't ever work for him again.

Interviewer: How would you say this person is important to you?

Demetria: He's very important. I see him as someone I could count on. I don't have anyone else. He's always been very upfront and honest with me. He's never did anything to harm me. He's never raped me or anything like that. He's been like a protector I guess.

Interviewer: How do you get along with him?

Demetria: We got along sometimes. Sometimes we didn't because sometimes I would get tired of workin', I would get tired of the customers, how many men I would have to be with, and from the things they wanted me to do. We would get into it then, if I threatened to leave or I didn't want to work anymore, but most of the time we got along good. I basically just—whatever I wanted, I got.

Although Demetria was reflecting back on having a pimp at a young age, she seemed mostly positive about him and did not say anything to suggest she felt exploited. She was grateful to have a “protector,” enjoyed having a nice home to live in, and liked the allowance he would give her after a job. Years after their business arrangement had concluded, she still felt indebted to him for caring for her, and Demetria continued to have a platonic relationship with him. Demetria confided to her interviewer that:

While I was there, I was the only one, but I think I was really the first girl that ever really worked for him. I know after, afterwards he got a couple more girls that came and lived there and they was working. If I had a friend that I knew and she needed somewhere to go or whatever, he would let her come and stay, but she would have to do the same things I did.

Demetria’s confession reveals how young girls can encourage others to engage in prostitution without actively recruiting. The rules Demetria’s pimp enforced also sheds light on some of the difficulties researchers have when searching for youth who are exchanging sex for money or gifts. These are the rules Demetria’s pimp would enforce, in her own words:

- No family, no friends [could] know where he lived at. I would go to them, they would never come to me. They didn’t know where I lived. If anyone found out where he lived, we would move.
- I had my own personal phone to talk to my family and stuff on and I had a phone for business. We shared that phone for business.
- Another rule was just basically no hanging out or whatever when I’m not working, basically in the house because of my age. I was supposed to be in school and I was a runaway, so I couldn’t be out like that.
- I had to wear make up all the time and make myself look older.
- I couldn’t leave unless he knew where I was going.

Demetria called these her pimp’s “only” rules, but to an outside observer, restricted time outside, family contact, appearances, and movement seem controlling and authoritarian. In her interview, Demetria came across as intelligent, but slightly meek, with a light voice and pensive personality. Contrasting her personality to Irene and Eva, who enjoyed autonomy and were relatively boisterous during their interviews, expressing their opinions and unapologetically explaining their unconventional lifestyle, suggests that some relationship between personality and level of exploitation may exist, though that relationship is likely complex.

Renegades

Prostitutes who did not have a pimp would be referred to as a “renegade” or “solo.” The vast majority of Dallas participants did not claim to have a pimp and had never worked with one. Renegades tended to hold strong beliefs about pimps, mostly negative:

You're not supposed to ever give a pimp your eye contact 'cause he can actually pocket you and take all the money that's in your pocket. ... If you have a pimp, and you make eye contact with another pimp, they have the right to go in your pocket and take everything out your pocket. ... If you solo and you make eye contact with a pimp, it's like—you tryin' to make money for him, so, basically, he can go in your pocket, take your purse and your wallet, and get your money. You can't do nothin' about it. They meaner and they bigger, I done seen it—I done seen hos walkin' down the street and get ... pushed out of a car. – Kiara

While the accuracy of Kiara's perception is questionable, there is no doubt that participants commonly felt that a pimp could be dangerous, exploitative, and unnecessary. For the most part, participants agreed that pimps would limit their independence and take their hard-earned money:

Ain't no need to have one when you can just make the money on your own. – Ada

I never had a pimp. I felt like if I wanted to get what I needed and get what I wanted, I could set my own prices. My body, this is my decision, this is what I'm deciding to do. – Joanna

The agency and ownership displayed by these participants is striking. Rather than finding exploited, socially underdeveloped children, the Dallas, Texas, team repeatedly found strong-willed survivors who enjoyed substantial autonomy in the selection of customers, hours to work, and who to live with. Participants were often unwilling to compromise their autonomy or share their earnings.

If participants were overly concerned for their own safety, this was not apparent from the interviews and only those participants who had pimps talked about being physically protected. The lack of physical protection that renegades enjoyed may partially explain their preference for a small group of steadies; becoming comfortable and feeling secure while with a customer would greatly limit the need for the protection of a pimp.

It is highly likely that the availability of online websites featuring personal ads and profiles has increased the opportunity for individuals to bypass the need for a pimp. Prostitutes who are computer literate or gain literacy may find pimps to be unnecessary; in fact, having a pimp may not even occur to a computer literate person who chooses to prostitute due to the ease of online prostitution.

Referrals

Another complexity discovered during interviews with Dallas participants relates to defining pimps, referrals, and market facilitators. The prevalence of pimps among Dallas participants may be skewed due to stereotypes and social stigma. When interviewers would ask participants about how they would get customers, participants would often respond that they always found customers on their own. However, participants would also explain that friends or other customers would frequently provide referrals. Giles, for example, said that he would receive referrals and also found customers on his own “*all the time*”:

Interviewer: So did you normally get customers on your own or did somebody have them referred to you?

Giles: We have, you had kind of friends that had new friends that wanted to find somebody that didn't talk or didn't go out there and say, “I did this guy, I did that guy,” you know. ... They needed somebody that was just undercover and really just didn't—um, yeah, I was some of them referred their friends to me, so I got more, so.

Interviewer: Okay, so as far as getting customers on your own, would you say all the time, never—

Giles: All the time.

This suggests that interviewers and their participants were using the same words, but ascribing them different meanings. It may also be that participants took pride in their autonomous accumulation of customers and were hesitant to share credit with referrers, whether friends, acquaintances, or customers. Irene spoke about how, when not with a pimp, she would receive calls for work from a friend:

Irene: They might call [my friend] and be like, “Hey, do y'all have any white girls over there?” And then she'll be like, “Yeah.” And you'll do a two-girl show—or a one.

Interviewer: When you're working by yourself, are there ever—do you do referrals? Or through a friend ever?

Irene: Through a friend a lot, [or] people that I've already dated—I'll be like, "Hey, if you have some friends, tell 'em to call me." Or after a game—"You hang out with your boys or whatever, tell 'em to call me and come over."

Irene stated that, when receiving referrals, even from a male who thought he was a pimp, she would not pay for the referral. This may imperfectly reflect the experience Atlantic City researchers had with participants' view of "spot pimps," who were given little credit and respect (Marcus et al., 2014). Dallas participants did not seem to exchange money for these referrals, but a few participants did seem to exchange favors by referring customers to a friend who had sent a customer to them.

Network

As previously discussed, the development of networks among participants was severely constrained. While the compensation for an interview was enticing enough to promote participation, a \$10 referral fee may not have sufficed to encourage participants to refer networked youth to us. Importantly, many participants were skeptical of the research and interviewer, which may have discouraged referral, and few participants stated they were familiar with minors who openly prostituted.

This led the Dallas team to expand interview eligibility to ages above 18. (In general, the six-site research team ultimately extended the eligible age range to 13–24 years.) The team was optimistic that older participants would be able to lead us to younger ones, and that this would build rapport within the population. While this supplied the team with an abundance of 18- and 21-year-olds, minors remained elusive as participants denied knowing "children," but often referred participants near their own age, either arriving as a group or providing the referral with the hotline number or the cell phone number of their interviewer.

The lack of networking may also reflect the popularity of online prostitution methods like social networking and personal ad sites, which allow prostitutes to not only avoid working with a pimp, but also to work independently from other prostitutes and therefore draw less attention from law enforcement.

Health and Needs

Health and Drug Habits

Surprisingly few participants struggled to access healthcare. Many stated that they had visited the doctor recently (within the last few weeks before their interview) and also explained that they visited the doctor often for testing. Asthma was a common health condition, likely the result of living in low-income housing and neighborhoods, which have historically housed pollutants like lead (Copeland, 2011).

Many participants claimed to prevent STDs by “always” using condoms. However, as some of them had children and reported contracting STDs that could have been prevented with condoms, the prevalence of use is questionable. Equally as important are those participants who served female customers. Though not as numerous, oral sex with these customers was commonly given and received. The dearth of safety devices available specifically for females who have sex with females could be especially harmful to this sub-population. While condoms were popularly known and acknowledged, few participants who had sex with females knew of safety precautions that could be taken to avoid contracting and spreading STDs.

The level of health literacy held by participants is questionable. While they seemed to have a general understanding of the need for STD testing, other measures of health literacy were woefully inadequate. This was evident in the shortage of female participants who stated they were on birth control, suggesting that although regular STD testing was popular, preventative health and yearly well woman exams were less common. Maura, an 18-year-old African American female, displayed a disquietingly insufficient level of health literacy with regard to birth control, pap smears, and even tattoos:

Maura: I heard something about birth control—can you tell me if it’s true? If you’re on birth control and then you get off of it, it messes up your system or something?

Interviewer: It messes up your cycle, your period, a bit. And it kinda depends on the person, too. If you’re thinking of getting on birth control, talk to your doctor first. Don’t listen to what your friends tell you.

Maura: I heard it makes you get a beard or something. I was like “no!”

Interviewer: Well, it is hormones, but everybody reacts differently to hormones. If they're growing a beard, they need to switch. That's why you go to a doctor.

Maura: So birth control is not good?

Interviewer: Birth control is fine, but the reason you need to go to the doctor is you have to find one that works for you and your body.

Maura: There are types?! ... I thought it was just one kind—the little pink thing.

Maura went on to ask her Interviewer to recommend a kind of birth control. The Interviewer responds that she is not a doctor and says:

Interviewer: You need to get a pap smear.

Maura: What's that? ... Is that the thing where they make you flow and then they send the juice stuff to the place?

Interviewer: No.

Maura: What is that?

Interviewer: I don't know. You need to go to the doctor. Stop listening to your friends and go to the doctor.

Maura: What they tell me makes me not want to go.

Maura's lack of health literacy is startling, but potentially indicative of the latent implications "abstinence-only" education propagates, in that children in areas with low health literacy and little understanding of their own bodies are not likely to be well-educated by their parents, who also suffer from low health literacy. The knowledge available to such children is actually misinformation that is a mixture of fear and exaggeration on the part of their peers. Equally as disturbing as Maura's overall lack of health literacy is her seeming knowledge of the "pink thing," likely emergency contraception, which is not intended for regular use as a method for preventing pregnancy. As Maura's interview continues, she asked her interviewer, "Can you have kids if you have a tattoo?" Maura believed that if she was tattooed now and became pregnant in 10 years, a fetus would be harmed by her having a

tattoo. When the interviewer told Maura that, although she did not recommend tattoos she did not believe this would be harmful to a future fetus, Maura remained skeptical.

Because not all participants were as forthcoming as Maura, the level of health literacy among Dallas participants is unclear; however, given the low-income atmosphere in which participants were raised and are living in, the small number of female participants on birth control, and common need for food as both a gateway into prostitution and stated need, it is likely that health literacy among this population is not adequate to promote a lifetime of well-being. Compound poor health literacy with participants' engagement in prostitution and an entire population of individuals struggling with a very low quality of life marked by poor health is all too easy to imagine.

Maura's interview touches on one more sensitive topic: the role of interviewers as educators. Strictly speaking, an interviewer is not meant to educate his or her participants; however, in the case of many participants, failure to do so would have been morally reprehensible and socially irresponsible. Just as participants were provided with educational materials about programs they could seek if they desired to leave the life, researchers conducting future research involving at-risk populations should be cognizant of potential roles interviewers may be asked to fill—such as that of public health educator. While Maura was lucky to speak with an interviewer who had a history of working on public health projects, encouragement to access proper education should not be left to serendipity.

Finally, although participants often associated health with physical well-being, many spoke about mental and emotional illnesses they struggled with when asked about their health. While physical health and STD testing were relatively easy to access, participants in need of mental and emotional support found these services to be less accessible. Given the social stigma surrounding issues with mental and emotional well-being, participants' willing discussion of their struggles is both surprising and disturbing. Participants commonly complained about anger management problems or being diagnosed as bipolar, or displayed signs of mental trauma. It is not clear if participants offered this information as an explanation of their involvement in prostitution or simply thought we would find the information interesting; either way, the dearth of mental health services available to low-income individuals in general, and this population more specifically, will likely have long-term ramifications for those attempting to escape poverty.

Drug Habits

While participants supported the use of condoms, most frowned on drug addiction, and were especially negative about crack/cocaine. This may reflect parental addiction or societal

beliefs. On the other hand, marijuana, cigarettes, and alcohol were extremely popular, especially as date perks brought by customers. Participants often admitted to trying marijuana, cigarettes, and alcohol at a young age. Maura, for example, said she had first begun drinking wine coolers at age eight with her mother, who would sit next to Maura as she drank. Drinking or smoking for the first time with a parent or other adult family member was common among participants. Sometimes participants' stories, like Maura's, showed their parents' actions as positive adult role modeling, like learning how to ride a bike once the training wheels had been removed. Other participants' stories were less positive, with the participant connoting a sense of irresponsibility. Interestingly, few participants related their current habits to their parents' or other adult family members' actions; this is in contrast to instances of rape, for example, which participants seemed to relate to their own choice to engage in prostitution.

Social Services

Receipt of social services was not overly popular. Of the more common services participants were likely to access, organizations offering service navigators who could help individuals sign up for programs like Medicaid or food stamps were commonly accessed. If participants sought programmatic help, this was not common, though a local resource center designed to help youth transition into adulthood was an exception. Many participants had heard of this center or used its services.

One of the reasons Dallas participants may not have decided to access a social service agency was their perception of need. Participants often felt they did not need help or that there were others who had greater need. Still, it was quite common for participants to have decided they simply did not want help. These participants did not like feeling as if they owed another person and were hyper-autonomous.

Irene was one of the few participants who was literate about resources available to her, how to access resources, and where resources were.

Irene: I've been to Job Corps. I got kicked out. But that's why I'm trying to go back. But then they'll move me to Arkansas, if I go back. There's another place called My Friend's Place—Our Friends' Place. It's down the street. But I didn't have no way over there, so I missed my interview a couple of weeks ago.

Although Irene was willing to access a social service agency, roadblocks remained. The incident that caused her to be kicked out is unknown, but the inability to access the other

social service agency suggests that it may not be in an optimal location for homeless youth dependent on public transportation.

Finally, it may be that participants lacked the ability to identify a social service agency. For example, when asked if he had ever had contact with a social service agency, Florian responded, “*what you mean social service a—no.*” Many participants responded that our study was the first time they had received outreach when asked if they had ever been approached by or spoken to a social service agency. They realized that we were not offering a service, but seemed to not understand that a social service agency would provide a service rather than just interview them. Moreover, participants would say they had never accessed a social service agency, but did not identify free health clinics and STD services as resources offered by a social service agency. Finally, when asked about their knowledge of social service agencies, many participants simply did not know of any and were unable to provide the name of a single social service agency.

Experience with the Police

Irene was a participant with significant exposure to law enforcement. She had been arrested for prostitution twice and had difficulty recalling how many times she had been arrested for running away: “*I’ve had four assault and like ten run—eight runaways—seven runaways—eight runaways.*” One of her prostitution charges came as the result of a sting:

Irene: I had this one outcall, and that’s how I got arrested. Because my homegirl—it was her outcall, but I came. It was a sting in Arlington. And I wasn’t allowed in Arlington during the Super Bowl. I really wanted to go.

Interviewer: Oh yeah. They had a big crackdown, didn’t they?

Irene: Yeah. They suggested that. Or they estimated that the hos or the escorts was gonna make like 1.2 billion off the Super Bowl alone³. And I was ready to go, too.

³ This prediction was well-known to the 2M field and research staff as well; unfortunately, participants like Irene and Kiara did not know that the prediction was largely debunked (see Whitely 2011). An examination of large events and prostitution arrests revealed that no significant relationship. Thus, Kiara’s belief that she made \$500 as a result of the Super Bowl is likely either an exception to the rule or money she could have made on an ordinary day.

Irene was not the only participant who went to the Super Bowl; Kiara also went, but avoided the sting. She stated that she earned \$500 as a result of the Super Bowl. To avoid the police, Kiara used the following strategy:

I have never got a prostitution case ... I walk the streets, you know, to get money, but I sit down at like a bus stop. If they, you know, wanna make a deal with me or something, I ask them to let me see they dick because, you know, police officer, you actually have to ask a police officer three times. If they do not repeat “no” or show you they dick, then they a police officer. If they don’t show it, and they be like “no,” or they drive off, you know you’re dealin’ with the law. ... You get a whole lot of undercovers, especially in North Dallas. ... You have to ask the police officer three times. If they do not reveal, they cannot take you to jail because you ask ... “Let me see you dick.” A police officer is not allowed to show theyself.

Florian also had a run-in with the police for prostitution. It was the first and only time he had run into police and resulted from a potential customer he met online.

Dude off Backpage told me that he was gonna pay me \$500. I kinda felt like it was overpriced but I went with it anyway and he just immediately showed me his badge. Three other police came in with him.

Like Kiara, Florian developed a system to establish the legitimacy of a potential customer:

Now, I’ve figured out like, you can ask them are they the police and if they don’t tell you they’re the police, they can get in trouble if they did try to arrest you. [Now] I ask them.

Florian implemented this strategy specifically for customers he found online, to ensure the customer’s legitimacy before meeting face-to-face:

If I feel funny about it and they don’t speak, I know. A customer would speak. I question them, “Are you the police?” A few have not responded so I kinda

Importantly, Irene and Kiara sought out opportunity at the Super Bowl as a result of hearing how prevalent prostitution would be, suggesting that media hype, more than the event itself, could impact a prostitute’s decision to work an event.

figure they are the police since they won't respond to me. The ones that say "No, I'm not the police," I know are real customers.

Overall, relatively few participants had experiences with the police in general and run-ins over prostitution were rare. This is likely the result of participants' preference for finding customers online and strategies they utilize to identify law enforcement

Expectations

Leaving the Life

There's a lot of prostitution around here and I think that it really needs to be stopped because it does destroy a person. You never can forget. You can move on in life, but you never can forget certain things. I think that if I could never done that, I would've never done it. It's not something that you want to remember, getting old. – Demetria

As previously explained, participants like Deni, Clement, and Eva were not interested in leaving the life. However, this sentiment was less common, as most participants wanted to leave the life, did not enjoy having sex with strangers, or even steadies, and had tried to leave the life at least once. Blaise, for example, had this to say when asked if there was anything she liked about prostitution:

Blaise: No (laughs) I'd rather be workin'. I worked all last year. When I was workin' all last year, I didn't do that.

Interviewer: What'd you do?

Blaise: I was workin' for a telecommunication place. Answer the phones and set appointments. ... You can't be proud of gettin' money from somebody. You just cain't—havin' to sell yourself. As soon as I get a job—I get me a job, and they can count me out. Pft. For real. I'm lookin' for one now.

Interviewer: Have you tried doing it before?

Blaise: Yeah. But I end up in the same place if I ain't got no money.

It may be that current economic conditions had worsened the job market available to participants like Blaise, who had some college experience but no degree. For these

individuals, knowing what to do was not the barrier; their attempts were hindered by lacking the knowledge of *how* to go about doing it. Kiara, for example, stated that “*I done did it (prostitution) so long, it just—it’s somethin’ I know how to do.*” Participants like Blaise and Kiara likely need to acquire employability skills and learn how to search the job market. The lack of employability skills may explain why participants with an education continued to struggle to find and maintain gainful employment that would help them leave the life for good. This is especially true for the participants who admitted that, if they wanted to leave the life tomorrow, they would not know how. Worse, some participants believed they knew how to leave the life, but could offer no concrete process for doing so. Clement, for example offered this plan for leaving the life:

Interviewer: If you wanted to leave the life tomorrow, how would you do it?

Clement: I would change my number and try to get it together. I would know as far as changing my number and staying off the line. That’s something I can do. It wouldn’t be hard if I just stay off the line. It would be hard if I have people calling and texting me, “I got this money.”

Changing their phone number was an answer that many participants offered, but the dearth of additional detail beyond that emphasizes how common the lack of planning is. As Blaise illustrated above, this may account for those who attempt to leave the life multiple times and fail; they simply “end up in the same place” for lack of funds. Clement very clearly enunciated what it means to know “what” to do (leave the life) but not “how” to do it (a plan or process to achieve the “what”).

While this was true for most participants, a small handful had a feasible plan of action designed to get them out of the life. Ada presented one of the more concrete plans, but also emphasizes the struggle many participants face when balancing current needs with future goals. Ada had been in the life for almost two years and wanted to join the Army once she graduated high school. However, she would not graduate for another year and did not think she could survive that year without prostituting herself. Ada’s clear plan to leave the life was fairly unique amongst those we interviewed. At the time of the interview, Ada lived with her 18-year-old cousin and had lived in three different places over the last year. For Ada, prostitution was a desperate attempt to survive long enough to put her plan in place. The survival needs expressed by Ada greatly contrasted the situation expressed by other minors involved in our study, but seemed to strengthen her resolve to leave the life for good and provided her with a clearer 10-year goal when compared to other minors.

For those with a plan, participants like Giles shine a ray of hope. Giles reported being out of the life for two years. He was currently going to school and received enough (non-loan) financial aid to sustain his lifestyle without needing to work. He told his interviewer that he had become “addicted to males” and felt that his lifestyle did not reflect the way he had been raised. Reflecting on leaving the life, Giles had this to say:

I had to change [to] go to school and luckily say I made it up out of there safe without any kind of disease or any kind of nothing. I mean, and it's a blessing because [leaving is] hard to do, but the thing about it is, going out there and trying to do it, it ain't worth it. Sometimes condoms don't work for you, you know. ... If you need to make money, do something else besides doing that, because it's not worth it, trust me. It's scary and sometimes you can go and you will never return.

Unlike participants like Giles, Blaise, and Ada, a fair number of participants confided to their interviewer some variation of “school is not for me.” Florian, for example, epitomized the forlorn nature many participants displayed when telling their interviewer that school was not the right option for them. This reflects the greater social debate taking place in the United States with regard to the role of college and university completion. When observed from this angle, Florian and participants like him present an extreme and cautionary account of the alienation and desperation faced by individuals who are a poor fit for the American expectation of college attainment.

Current economic conditions are such that even those who have earned four-year degrees are struggling to find gainful employment; the challenges faced by low-skill laborers are even greater. This means that leaving the life is more challenging than participants were likely to acknowledge and would require the acquisition of an employable skill. Life circumstances and the need to survive drove participants into prostitution and kept them from leaving the life by depriving them of the opportunity to gain necessary skills.

How to Help

I want a chance. That's really all I want, is a chance. – Irene

Most often, participants believed that if an agency existed to help them, it should offer education; however, many of the participants were educated, which suggests that, rather than classes, the majority of participants really need job skills training. Aside from education,

participants desired a stable living situation, transportation, food, financial aid, or job placement.

Hopefully a job. A place to stay. That's just basically it. 'Cause I wouldn't need the money if I had a job. – Helen

They would offer a better living, a school, a better health plan. A better lifestyle. And just really, I mean, just I knew everything like that would just come with hard work, but I'm just saying, if it was, that's the needs that it would cover. – Giles

Transportation, food, and shelter. – Maura

How about some more of these jobs! Maybe that will get some people to where they want to get off the corner. – Eva

Other participants felt that agencies offering abstract services, nothing as concrete as training, job placement, or housing, would be most beneficial for young people in the life. These individuals wanted:

Care, love, and hard work. – Joanna

Someplace that could help you—like writing clubs and stuff. Help you with school (pause) shelter. – Ada

A place to go to build their spirits. – Camilla

More love. – Alex

Food, shelter, and, like—assistance with school (pause) and job placement. – Fara

Help me get to school and get a better life and I would have people that just would help me get out of the life I'm in right now. (pause) People just to help me along the way 'cause I haven't had a whole bunch of help. I've—like I said, I do a lot on my own. That's why I take risks. – Clement

Just somebody to talk to. – Kiara

Participants who desired an abstract service seemed to be searching for emotional and social support services. The statements above also serve to highlight the loneliness faced by participants. They often felt as though the people that they could talk to about their problems would not be understanding about being in the life. The desire for abstract services may reflect the scarcity of mental and emotional health services discussed in the Health and Needs section above. The abstraction of services may also reflect participants' lack of knowledge with regard to services provided by social service agencies. Because they did not know what was available (job training, healthcare, housing, etc.), they struggled to identify services that would be helpful.

Offering support to this population presents a conundrum: participants desired support but often felt as though other people needed help more than they did or that if they received help they would owe someone. The success of counseling marketed as a support group specifically targeting people engaged in prostitution is questionable. However, it is noteworthy that, while deciding which interviews would be looked at in depth, many of the “best” interviews came from participants who had a history of speaking about their experiences with others; for example, Belina was used to speaking with a family friend who had retired from counseling, Joanna trusted her therapist, Ada went to group therapy for juvenile delinquents, and Lea had been in counseling.

Of these four, only Lea disapproved of this kind of support saying, *“Counseling for me didn't help. It's very irritating to want to ask me the same question over and over again.”* However, Lea was confident and forthcoming with her answers and reported that she had successfully left the life. She also told her interviewer that:

You have to let them realize it on their own. ... You can't force it on them. That's like forcing a—the Bible on someone. ... You can't help nobody that don't want no help. So some people you can repeat stuff over and over again, but they don't have a understanding because their mind frame is “I'm not trying to listen to you” or they say “I'm listening,” but it's not what they want. You're not saying what they want to hear. So what you're saying really doesn't matter. At the end, they're going to do what they want to do.

Lea told her interviewer that she had been this way with her own counselor and knew others who had expressed a similar attitude. Although Lea may have felt that counseling was “irritating,” it is quite likely that this support helped her come to the decision to leave the life for good. It may be that a group session would have appealed to Lea's personality.

Finally, while infrequent, some participants believed that a combination of concrete and abstract services was necessary to effectively help:

Job placement, living situations ... and food money. Sorta like a food stamp. But they don't offer services that you actually need when you need 'em. ... Basically just send out little groups or somethin' to talk to the kids. You know. Talk to the girls. Offer assistance. You can tell somebody somethin' a thousand times. It go in one ear and out the other. Unless you show them the change. – Blaise

Dreams

Although school helped Giles quit and stay out of the life, this was not the case for all participants we spoke to. Irene shared the following with her interviewer:

Irene: It's very nice. I'm so happy. I finally got into school.

Interviewer: So are you still currently working in prostitution?

Irene: I do it every now and then because I'm homeless, so I need money ... I mean I have an ad on backpage right now. ... I hate it (the life). I'm not a sexual person, so I don't really like it. And then they be trying to feel—I'm like, "No. No. No touchy. Just come on, get it over with, and go." So.

Interviewer: Would you say—do you want to leave that life behind?

Irene: Oh yeah. Most definitely. That's what I'm trying to do now. I'm trying to—I can't do it on my own. I realize that. It's hard. ... I got to change my ways, so [my son] don't grow up in that. Because I grew up in—my mom was a prostitute. ... So I don't want to be the same thing. ... I want to help women and kids get on their own. I want to open my shelter—"Sweeter than Honey."

Irene was currently enrolled in a school with dreams of obtaining her Master's and Doctorate degrees to become a psychologist and help others. Although enrolled, Irene struggled with her homelessness and continued to engage in survival sex. Her dream was striking and unique. This homeless 18-year-old's dream was to become successful so she could help other people; she hoped to open a shelter that would offer services like a stable living environment, food, and job placement, but would also extend counseling to women and children in need.

Like Blaise, Irene connected concrete and abstract services that would dynamically impact the lives of her target population.

Irene's educational goals reflected her ultimate goals for her own life, which revealed her surprisingly high real estate literacy and desire for "the American dream."

I want to be stable in a house. I really don't want to be in an apartment. ... You can at least buy the house. You know? You just can't buy the apartment. I want to invest money. I want to invest in things. So that's my main goal. I want to save money, invest, and just get financially stable—stable. You know? So my son can be living with me. He can be in school, and everything will be straight. My boyfriend have a job. Me have a job. Son's at school. Come home. You know? Just have a family. That's what I want. But it's hard to get there, though.

Irene's goals were more concretely developed when compared to others. Most participants' "American dream" involved a stable job, nice home, and a family, but lacked definition. Still, participants' goals were remarkably simple:

Whatever I do, I wanna be workin' with people. Helpin' somebody, like, as if I was helped. 'Cause I know I'm gonna be helped. Some kind of way, I'ma help somebody else. – Blaise

Married, house, kids, and job. – Florian

Being a good mom. – Demetria

My goals are to have my own business and help other youths. – Lea

For Dallas participants, having a family, a home, and a nice job, a dream most people can identify with, would epitomize success and where they wanted to be in 10 years.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

Although the majority of the Dallas participant pool is older than originally intended, the expansion of eligibility provided compelling narratives. Frequently, participants recounted multiple attempts to leave the life, suggesting that children who had or were currently engaged in prostitution would relapse or continue. The young age at which the vast majority of participants began prostitution is indicative of the immense struggle sexually exploited youth face, while the ease with which their first experience with a customer came about suggests that childhood prostitution could be more common and autonomous than stereotypically believed. This is not to say that stereotypical child exploitation does not exist, but simply that, as illustrated in the section about pimps, society's preconceived notions may need examination to ensure that funds for prevention and social services are properly allocated.

Dallas participants engaged in prostitution as a result of their life circumstances. For example, many transgender and gay youth experienced personal or familial struggles as a result of their sexuality and/or gender identity. Parents' first instinct was to deprive their child of shelter, food, and emotional support, which ironically drove youth to more extreme engagement in homosexual or transgender lifestyles by (a) forcing them into a state of desperation, and (b) sending them into the homes of peers or pimps who normalized prostitution for them. In addition, while some males had a hard time accepting their own sexuality, others struggled to accept the sexuality that was imposed on them by being in prostitution. It is also likely that customers may have struggled with their sexual identification, as numerous male participants spoke of primarily having dates who were married. Thus, we recommend that future studies about prostitution examine the role and interplay of sexuality and sexual identity.

The struggle of participants, their family members, and even their customers to accept an unconventional gender identity or sexuality further bolsters the argument that greater access to mental health support is needed. Many participants attempted to diagnose their parents' difficulties, implying that a complex intervention that can address family dynamics could help prevent childhood prostitution. Importantly, although the young people who were interviewed seemed to accept the importance of mental health, a history of stigma among

minority populations could pose a barrier to community and family-centric mental health care.

Socially, greater and more efficient outreach to at-risk youth is necessary. Many participants described lives that had been negatively impacted by a complex series of events that included an abusive situation, (lack of) acceptance regarding sexuality, low or no jobs skills, normalization and feasibility of prostitution, and a belief that prostitution was a temporary solution to a temporary problem. The belief that prostitution is a temporary solution is largely unrealistic, as the mental health problems and lack of job skills become permanent problems when youth fail to get the support and training they need to successfully transition into adulthood. Struggle to transition was especially difficult for participants who had a history with Child Protective Services. Thus, mental health and jobs training are the supports that social service agencies should focus on if they intend to offer meaningful aid to at-risk youth.

One of the more important actions that mental and emotional support would provide youth with is a sense of belonging and worth. The loneliness and alienation suffered by these participants was palpable and many seemed numbed to their circumstance. Participants often confided to their interviewer that few people knew of their occupation, that they only had one person they felt they could talk to, and that they felt they could not be proud of themselves as a result of their prostitution. Life experiences for many had accumulated to the degree that participants felt they could not improve themselves. Disturbingly, this could explain some of the hesitancy on the part of participants to seek help; they said “I don’t need it,” but may have believed “I’m not worth it.”

It is also likely that life experiences had accumulated in such a way to fundamentally inhibit forward progression. The lack of employability skills continued to haunt their attempts to leave the life. The lack of job training means that many prostitutes simply don’t know how to do anything else. Participants were especially unlikely to find employment that would be able to support the lifestyle they had become accustomed to: namely, the paltry number of hours they self-reported working, relative autonomy, and immediate access to generating more income. Conventional employment requires a more communal, and likely supervised, employment atmosphere as well as the ability to carry money over from one paycheck to the next. Participants often struggled to carry money over from one day to the next. They also did not earn enough to lift themselves out of poverty and escape prostitution. As a result, social service agencies should focus on educating at-risk youth about employability and finances; ideally, this would be offered while the youth are in a stable living situation and

well-fed, because the need for shelter and/or food was the most commonly cited reason participants first engaged in exchanging sex for money or gifts.

Social service agencies should also focus more on the health literacy of at-risk youth. Many participants displayed an inadequate understanding of physical and mental well-being, engaged in poor eating habits, and seemed to rely on detection measures rather than prevention measures. The disparity between participants' practices and knowledge and/or utilization of safe sex practices was appalling, as many STDs that participants have contracted are preventable.

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