

# Men who Buy Sex

A sample of 103 men in London, England, who used trafficked and non-trafficked women in prostitution were asked about their experiences and awareness of the sex industry.

Almost all (96%) bought sex indoors. Many reported that they were aware of pimping, trafficking and other coercive control over those in massage parlour, brothel, and escort prostitution.

These men were frequently aware of the vulnerability and risk factors for entry into prostitution including childhood abuse, lack of alternative job choices, coercive control and homelessness.

# Multi-country study

- A Research Study of 103 (London) Men Who Describe Their Use of Trafficked and Non-Trafficked Women in Prostitution and Their Awareness of Coercion and Violence

*By Melissa Farley, Julie Bindel and Jacqueline M. Golding, December 2009*

# Key Finding

- The men listed effective deterrents to buying sex which included time in prison, public exposure and being issued an ASBO.
- They described their ambivalence about buying sex and their ambivalence about the nature of their relationships with women.
- Some of the attitudes expressed by the interviewees in this study have been associated with violence against women in other research.

# Methodology

- Nine researchers interviewed 103 London men who had bought sex from women in prostitution.
- Four of the interviewers had previous experience in using the same questionnaires to interview men who bought sex in other countries (India, Scotland, the US).
- Men were invited to participate via advertisements in local newspapers.
- The advertisements listed a phone number, guaranteed anonymity, and stated that payment of £20 would be offered to cover the cost of transportation and as a token of appreciation for their time.

# Methodology cont...

- Each interview lasted approximately an hour and a half to two hours and consisted of both quantitative and qualitative questions.
- The men were assured of anonymity. They were met in a public place and told they were not expected to give their names to anyone working on the research project and that if they used a real name, then that would not be used to identify them in the research protocols.

# Methodology cont...

- Some men disclosed that they would not have participated if they were identified. For example,

*“I haven’t ever told anyone I have been to a prostitute, and I never will. It is like a dirty secret,”*

and also *“It is something that I would not reveal, I am talking to you because you are a stranger.”*

A third man stated that in conversations with others, *“I’d never let on I know anything about it.”*

# What they said

- “Prostitution is like masturbating without having to use your hand.”
- “It’s like renting a girlfriend or wife. You get to choose like a catalogue.”
- “I feel sorry for these girls but this is what I want.”
- “No big deal, it’s just like getting a beer.”

# What they said cont...

- “I like it if it’d be super expensive...she comes in, nothing said and she is instantly very sexual, a sexual creature.”
- “My favourite experience in prostitution was when she was totally submissive.”
- “I don’t like the ones that make no secret of it being a job. I like customer care. They try to finish quickly but I want to take a little bit of time.”

# What they said cont...

- “I have sex as a means to an end to meet my sexual needs... It’s a financial transaction.”
- “I found her on [www.punternet.com](http://www.punternet.com) and she looked at me with the look of a puppy dog in the Christmas window.”
- “Look, men pay for women because he can have whatever and whoever he wants. Lots of men go to prostitutes so they can do things to them that real women would not put up with.
- “If you go to the wrong one, you might as well be in a morgue, there’s a slab of flesh there.”

# What they said cont...

- “We’re living in the age of instant coffee, instant food. This is instant sex.”
- “Prostitution is a last resort to unfulfilled sexual desires. Rape would be less safe, or if you’re forced to hurt someone or if you’re so frustrated you jack off all day.”
- “Prostitution is being able to do what you want without the taxation.”

# What they said cont...

- "It's no strings attached sex, no bother about buying gifts, it's a one off financial commitment."
- "It should be legalised over here. This is the way God created us. It is being human. If you don't have a partner then you have to go to a prostitute."
- "It's unfulfilling, there's no reward. It's empty. It's terrible. You come out feeling even more empty and unloved. You will likely feel quite empty afterwards, as if you have been used."

# What they said cont...

- “Prostitution is like being able to masturbate without doing any of the work.”
- “You pay for the convenience, a bit like going to a public loo.”
- “I hugely recommend it but be sure you know there’s a threshold you’ll be crossing. Prostitution is naturally questionable, whether it’s to yourself or to society.”

# Demographics

- The average age of the 103 research participants was 38, with a range of 18 to 70.
- These age ranges are consistent with other studies of men who buy sex:

McKeganey (1994) interviewed 70 men in Glasgow, whose average age was 37 years, ranging from age 23 to 61.

Busch, Bell and colleagues (2002) interviewed 1,342 buyers arrested for solicitation of prostitution in the Western United States whose average age was 39, ranging from 18 to 84 years.

# Race and ethnicity

- About one-half of the men (47%) described themselves as White British,  
11% were Black British or African,  
10% were British Asian,  
10% described themselves as of Indian or Pakistani descent,  
4% were Eastern European and  
4% described themselves as having mixed ethnic backgrounds.  
An additional 14% included Afghan, Australian, Brazilian, Central American, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, western European, White South African, and African American.
- 88% identified themselves as heterosexual and 12% identified as bisexual.

# Lifestyle

- 54% said that they were currently in a relationship. Other research has found that men's decision to buy sex generally is not because of a lack of a sex partner.  
McKeganey (1994) found that 66% of his Glasgow buyers were married or living with a partner.  
Chetwynd and Plumridge (1994) found that 50% of New Zealand men who bought sex were married or partnered.
- 77% said that they had had more than ten sex partners in their lifetimes, with more than one-quarter (28%) indicating that they had had more than 50 partners.
- In similar findings, Ward, Mercer, Wellings and colleagues (2005) in the UK also found that men who paid for sex were significantly likely to report ten or more sex partners in the past five years. Only a minority of these men's lifetime sex partners (19%) were women in prostitution.

# Age

- 44% reported that their first use of women in prostitution occurred when they were below the age of 21. One man explained, “For a man it’s part of growing up.” Their first use of purchased sex ranged from 12 to 58 years of age. More than three-quarters of the men (78%) had bought sex by the time they were 25 years of age.
- The men were asked about the social circumstances in which they first paid for sex. 43% reported that they were with one or more friends during their first purchase of sex, and 2% were accompanied by a family member. 29% said that prostitution was their first sexual experience

# Methods

- 27% said that they used the Internet to locate women in prostitution for their use.
- The men bought women for sex in both indoor and outdoor locations.
- The vast majority (96%) bought sex indoors and 36% also bought sex on the street or in cars.
- Four out of five (81%) had bought sex in more than one location.

# Where?

- The interviewees most frequently bought sex indoors in what they described as brothels (60%) or private flats that functioned as brothels (55%) or massage parlours (47%).
- Other locations included escort agencies (33%), saunas (27%), strip clubs (23%), bars (20%) and private parties (19%).

# Travel

- 49% of the 103 men interviewed had bought sex outside the UK, having travelled to 42 countries on six continents between them.
- They most frequently travelled to Amsterdam. A number of men mentioned specifically that they travelled to the Netherlands or New Zealand *because* prostitution was legal in those countries.

# Sex tourism

- Several mentioned Prague or other locations not because prostitution was legal there but because it was tolerated and promoted on the Internet.

“I got a Virgin Media package: on Bravo they showed a lot of what was going on in Prague, it looked right up my alley. They’ve got a very liberal attitude towards sex, fetish sex, orgies. I think I’ll go for a walk on the wild side.”

# Attitudes

- 27% explained that once he pays, the customer is entitled to engage in *any act he chooses* with the woman he buys.
- 47% expressed the view to a greater or lesser degree that women did not always have certain rights during prostitution.
- 17% agreed that half of the time or less frequently prostitutes have certain rights during the prostitution encounter.
- Another 22% expressed 60-80% agreement with the statement “women have certain rights in prostitution”.

# Attitudes cont...

- These findings suggest that at various times during prostitution, many of the men who buy women for sex think that the women they buy have no rights in the interaction.

# Rape myth

- 54% of these London buyers subscribed to the theory that prostitution decreases rape. There is no empirical basis for this theory, nonetheless it is assumed to be the truth by many people, including these buyers.
- In part as a justification for prostitution, men who bought sex reasoned that if prostitution did not exist then they would be more likely to rape women who were not prostitutes.
- This belief was clearly held by one man who stated that “Sometimes you might rape someone: you can go to a prostitute instead.”
- 41% of 110 Glasgow and Edinburgh men who bought sex also believed this theory.

# Age of women

- The interviewees thought that on average, 36% of women began prostitution under age 18.
- According to evidence submitted to the UK Government (Home Office, 2004), between 50-75% of women entered prostitution before they were 18, with 15 years being the average age of entry.

# Age of women cont...

- In addition, *Paying the Price* (Home Office, 2004) noted that 75% of children abused through prostitution had been missing from school.
- Cusick and colleagues (2002) found that a majority of British women in prostitution had begun prostitution as minors.
- The average age at entry into prostitution is adolescence (Spangenberg, 2001; Boyer, Chapman and Marshall, 1993; Nadon, Koverola and Schludermann, 1998).

# Denial

- 32% of the 103 buyers estimated that relatively few (0-20%) women in prostitution were abused as children, even as 34% of the interviewees estimated that between 30-40% of all women in prostitution were, and 35% thought that 50-90% were.

# Denial cont...

- In fact, an overwhelming majority of women in all forms of prostitution have been sexually abused as children (Silbert and Pines, 1982a; Nadon et al., 1998). Some estimates are as high as 90%.

# Denial cont...

- The men expressed varying degrees of awareness that a majority of women in prostitution are currently or recently homeless.
- 18% of the interviewees estimated that 50-90% of all prostitutes were homeless;  
26% estimated that 30-40% were homeless, and 46% estimated that 10-20% of all prostitutes were homeless.  
11% of the men believed that no prostitutes were homeless.
- Research has shown that there is a 75% rate of current or past homelessness among those prostituted (Farley et al., 2003).

# Denial cont...

- 44% of the men believed that prostitution had a very or extremely negative effect on the prostitute.
- Only 19% felt that prostitution had a very or extremely positive effect on the prostitute. The positive effect they referred to was primarily a financial benefit.

# Denial cont...

- “Their mind is twisted, or they’re like used,” said one man. “They’ve seen everything already. Their mind is opened up – they have no guards up.”

# Pimping

- 48% of 103 London men said they believed that most women in prostitution are victims of pimps, reflecting a reality that converges with what is known from observation and research studies

(Boyer, 2008; DiPaolo, 1999; Giobbe, 1993; Herman, 2003; Ling et al., 2007; Raphael and Shapiro, 2002; Silbert and Pines, 1982; Vanwesenbeeck et al, 1995; West et al., 2000).

“Prostitution is forced on her,” explained one man, “not always physically, but definitely mentally. To convince her to do a job she doesn’t want to do, you must be a good manipulator.”

# Pimping cont...

- 50% of interviewees said that they had used a woman in prostitution who they knew was under the control of a pimp. As one man explained, “It’s like he’s her owner.”
- “The girl is instructed to do what she needs to do. You can just relax, it’s her job.”
- 51% said that they had observed a prostituted woman who had a pimp.

# Pimping cont...

- 31% used prostituted women who were controlled by women pimps.
- 25% of the men interviewed had encountered a woman who they believe was forced into a brothel, massage parlour or another type of prostitution. Some of the men described pimps as abusive, controlling, opportunistic, coercive and violent.

# Trafficking

- The interviewees were asked about their awareness of deception and trafficking for prostitution.
- 43% of the men said that it was their impression that one-half or fewer of all those in prostitution were fully informed about the nature of prostitution.
- Of the men interviewed, 55% believed that a majority of women in prostitution were lured, tricked or trafficked.

# Ambivalence

- Asked to describe their own feelings before and after the acts of prostitution, the men listed equal numbers of neutral feelings before and after (15% in each case).
- After prostitution, the men listed fewer positive words and a greater number of negative words.

# Ambivalence

- Examples of the words and phrases men used to describe their own feelings after using a woman in prostitution included:

“I’m not satisfied in my mind,” “looking for more partner satisfaction,” “regretful and remorseful,”  
“disappointed – what a waste of money,” “angry at myself,” “morally at odds,” “confused,” “lonely – still,”  
“psychologically dirty,” “guilt about my relationship with my wife,” “asking myself what has led me to this,”  
and “50% satisfied.”

# Deal and Delusion

- Most interviewees said they assumed that to a greater or lesser extent, women in prostitution are sexually satisfied by the sex acts purchased by buyers.
- The interviewees believed that women in prostitution were satisfied by the sex of prostitution 46% of the time.
- One man argued that women who were “professional prostitutes” all like sex. Another said, “A normal woman is never as highly sexed as a prostitute. It would be wrong.”

# Deal and delusion cont...

- A number of the men explained the importance of being able to create an illusion *to other men* that they had acquired an attractive woman *without payment*. These men seem to place as much importance on what other men think of the women they buy as they do on the prostitution transaction itself. For example:

# Deal and delusion cont...

- “I want my prostitute not to behave like one. I want them to role play to be a pretend girlfriend. To a third person it looks like we’re in love – but it’s a casual hook up, I want to chat about lots of things, what I like in life, what my friends are, and not money. She should enjoy her business. I actually want her to be genuinely attracted to me. I feel sorry for these girls but this is what I want.”

## Seven primary reasons for buying sex according to 103 London

1. Satisfy immediate sexual urge, entertainment, pleasure  
128 32%
2. Seeks variety, wants to select certain physical, racial and sexual stereotypes 83 21%
3. Can't get what he wants sexually or emotionally in his current relationship 78 20%
4. Convenience, no commitment, no emotional connection  
58 15%
5. It's a thrill; likes to break a taboo 33 8%
6. It's an addiction or compulsion or result of intoxication  
12 3%
7. Male bonding, peer pressure 6 2%

# Ethnicity and racism

- Ethnicity itself is eroticised in prostitution.  
One man said, “I had a mental check list in terms of race; I have tried them all over the last five years but they turned out to be the same.” Another man sought as much variety as he could buy in prostitution: “Eastern European; Oriental; African European.”
- A 2008 study of men who buy sex in Europe found that “In the customers’ narratives, the young, beautiful and exotic prostitutes were often described as fetishlike objects and were also collected like such objects” (Marttila, 2008, p 43).

# Ethnicity and racism

- An interviewee explained that his use of Chinese women in prostitution was in order to fulfil a fantasy that he held about them. “You can do a lot more with the Oriental girls like blow job without a condom, and you can cum in their mouths.... I view them as dirty.”

# Deterrence

- Asked what would deter them from using women in prostitution, the men's responses suggest that there are a number of equally effective alternatives. These include being added to a sex offender register, prison or being publicly exposed via billboard, newspaper, Internet or letter to family or employer.
- Higher fines, greater criminal penalties and having their driver's licence suspended or their car impounded would also deter these men from buying sex, if they were convinced that laws and penalties would actually be enforced.

# Deterrence

- Being required to sign an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) or receiving an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) would, according to this study's interviewees, serve as a deterrent to approximately **three out of four of these men.**

# What would deter men in London from buying sex?

- Being added to a sex offender register 85%
- Having your picture and/or name on a billboard 85%
- Time in prison 84%
- Picture and/or name in the local newspaper 83%
- Picture and/or name posted on the Internet 83%
- Higher monetary fine 80%
- Letter sent to family members 79%
- Suspension of driver's licence 78%
- Greater criminal penalty 77%
- Car impounded 76%
- ASBO (Anti-Social Behaviour Order) 74%
- ABC (Acceptable Behaviour Contract) 73%
- Community service 72%
- Required to attend an educational programme 47%

# Deterrence cont...

- Several men noted that the current laws are not enforced. Only 6% of the men with criminal convictions had ever been arrested for soliciting prostitution. “Deterrents would only work if enforced, said one man. “Any negative would make you reconsider. The law’s not enforced now but *if any negative thing happened as a consequence it would deter me* but laws are not enforced.” Another explained, “It’s about the enforcement. None of these things are enforced. If I’d get in trouble for doing it, I wouldn’t do it. In this country, the police are fine with men visiting prostitutes.”

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# Deterrence cont...

- Of those with a criminal record, charges included disturbing the peace, drug possession, theft from employer, other thefts, driving offences including driving with no insurance, use of a pellet gun, general public disorder, fraud, drunk and disorderly behaviour, burglary, assault, receipt of stolen goods.

# Ambivalence

- A significant majority (71%) reported that they have some degree of guilt, shame or negative feelings about paying for sex.
- In a separate study of 137 UK men who paid for sex, Coy (2008 p189) noted that many acknowledged “guilt and ambivalence” about prostitution.

As one of Coy, Hovarth and Kelly’s interviewees (2007, p23) said, “I think it’s wrong, in a way, but I suppose it’s just life really, innit? It’s just the way it is. I do think it’s wrong.”

# Ambivalence cont...

- Possibly to deflect self-blame, a significant majority of these 103 men who bought sex (78%) consider their own prostituting behaviours to be **an addiction**.

Many of these men classified themselves 'sex addicts,' suggesting that they view their behaviour as an illness that is out of control and needs to be cured.

- There is no psychiatric diagnosis named "sex addiction" (Irons and Schnneider, 1996).