

Tackling Client Violence in Female Street Prostitution: Inter-agency Working between Outreach Agencies and the Police

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Research has shown that a characteristic feature of female street prostitution globally is the high incidence of violence perpetrated against women by men who approach them as clients. Given the absence of legislation in the United Kingdom that enhances the safety of street sex workers, this article contends that schemes which promote inter-agency working between sex worker outreach agencies and the police are vital in tackling the unacceptable level of client violence in street prostitution. A case study of a scheme operating in Merseyside is provided and positive intermediate outcomes are discussed. The scheme—known as “Ugly Mugs”—encourages women to report violent incidents to outreach workers who can disseminate the information to other sex workers and the police. “Ugly Mugs” has resulted in an increase in reports of violence and contributed to convicting two clients of violent crimes against street sex workers, thus demonstrating the valuable role such schemes can play in crime reduction.

Keywords: Street prostitution; Client violence; Outreach agencies; Inter-agency working; Reporting violence; Crime reduction

Introduction

Female street sex workers are vulnerable to violence perpetrated by men who solicit them for sex and there is a growing body of international literature highlighting the prevalence of client violence in street prostitution (Campbell, 2002; Church et al.,

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2001; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Lowman, 2000; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Pyett & Warr, 1999; Williamson & Foleron, 2001).

The majority of street sex workers surveyed in the United Kingdom have experienced multiple incidents of client violence (McKeganey & Barnard, 1996; Campbell et al., 1996; May et al., 1999). Church et al. (2001) report that 81 per cent of 115 street sex workers surveyed in Leeds and Glasgow had experienced client violence, and half had experienced client violence within the last six months. In a survey of street sex workers in London, Ward et al. (1999) found that 68 per cent of 193 women had experienced physical assault. Hester and Westmarland (2004) reported that three-quarters of 125 street sex workers surveyed in Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent, Hull, Kirklees and Hackney (London) had experienced physical violence, mostly from clients.

In the United Kingdom, at least 60 sex workers have been murdered in the last ten years (O'Kane, 2002). Kinnell (2000, 2001) has recorded the murders over a ten-year period of 51 women and girls involved in prostitution. The mode of working is known for 44 of the women, the majority (84 per cent) being street sex workers. In the 29 cases where charges are known to have been brought, 18 (62 per cent) involved clients. Similarly, in Canada, 64 per cent of 86 street sex workers murdered between 1992 and 1998 were killed by clients (Lowman, 2000). A police operation set up in 1996 and run by police at Scotland Yard in London was tasked with investigating links between 207 unsolved murders of sex workers and other vulnerable women since 1986. The investigation (known as "Operation Enigma") concluded that there was no evidence of a serial killer operating, but some men may have killed more than one woman (O'Kane, 2002).

Kinnell (2000) argues that a relatively small proportion of all clients may be responsible for a disproportionate number of attacks. She identifies a group of repeat offenders with convictions for rape, sexual assault or murder of sex workers who have a past history of offending against sex workers and other women (Kinnell, 2000). She found that half of 16 convictions for sex worker murders involved clients with previous convictions for violence against women (including murder, manslaughter, rape and assault).

The challenge faced by the police in tackling client violence in female street prostitution is made more difficult because of a conflict between a public order agenda and the welfare of sex workers (Campbell & Storr, 2001). Street prostitution has traditionally been framed within a public nuisance discourse that essentially remains the one outlined in the Wolfenden Report (1957), that the presence of street sex workers in public spaces is offensive to the moral decency of the ordinary citizen. Three key pieces of legislation inform the policing of street prostitution in the United Kingdom:¹ first, the Street Offences Act 1959 which criminalizes loitering or soliciting in a street or public place for the purposes of prostitution; second, the Sexual Offences Act 1985 which makes kerb-crawling an offence (kerb-crawling became an arrestable offence in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001); and third, the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Policing of street prostitution is often ad hoc, usually responding to a rise in the number of complaints from residents, businesses and local community activists (Benson & Matthews, 1995; Hubbard, 1997). Reducing the level of street prostitution in an area does not feature in police key performance targets (KPTs) and therefore is not a policing priority. Nevertheless, in street prostitution areas, police must respond to community concerns, including anxieties regarding traffic noise, the propositioning of men by street sex workers and women and girls by kerb-crawlers, prostitution-related litter (specifically, used condoms and drug injecting equipment), and the witnessing of sexual activity (Matthews, 1992). This reactive policing approach often involves “crackdowns” whereby there is an increased police presence and multiple arrests are made of sex workers and their clients for soliciting, loitering and kerb-crawling offences, providing a degree of respite for the affected community, albeit temporarily.

Such “crack downs” have negative implications for the safety of street sex workers and involve women in a cycle of arrests, convictions and fines that are inevitably paid off through further selling of sex from the street (Campbell & Storr, 2001; MeKeganey & Barnard, 1996). Increased anti-prostitution policing activity and the issuing of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders without appropriate support results in the temporal and geographical displacement of street sex workers. O’Kane (2002), reporting on a survey commissioned by Channel 4 Television and designed and conducted in consultation with academics, notes that of 110 sex workers from 18 towns and cities across the United Kingdom, 65 per cent worked longer hours as result of police crackdowns, and 71 per cent worked later into the night to avoid the police. Only two women said that they had ceased selling sex on the street as a result of police activity. Women resort to working in isolated and unfamiliar areas, accepting clients they would normally avoid either because of a reduced client base, or a shorter negotiation time with clients to reduce their risk of arrest for kerb-crawling (Campbell & Storr, 2001; O’Kane, 2002).

The criminalization of soliciting and loitering also leads to a perception among street sex workers that they have no recourse to justice, resulting in a reluctance to report violent clients (Lowman, 2000; Pyett & Warr, 1999; Williamson & Foleron, 2001). Campbell (2002) found that women fear that outstanding fines or warrants against them will be imposed if they identify themselves to the police, and that the police may not take them seriously. They are also concerned that reporting an attack could result in them being “outed” as a “prostitute” to family, friends and the wider public, and may lead to reprisals from the attacker.

In a survey of 55 sex workers arrested in Kings Cross (London), May et al. (2001) reported that 30 (54 per cent) had experienced violence from clients, but only nine had made a formal statement to police. Church et al. (2001) report that although 81 per cent of street sex workers surveyed had experienced client violence, only 44 per cent had reported an incident to the police. Similarly, May et al. (1999) found that while over three-quarters of their sample said that clients had subjected them to physical, sexual or other forms of violence, less than half had reported these incidents to the police. O’Kane (2002) found that 73 per cent of street sex workers

surveyed had been attacked by clients in the last 12 months, yet 69 per cent said they had reported no or hardly any attacks to the police.

Violence against sex workers has been linked to an “anti-prostitution” climate that portrays sex workers and their clients simply as a nuisance or rubbish which should be cleared from the streets (Hubbard, 1998; Lowman, 2000), with street sex workers being constructed as dirty, deviant “others”, who carry diseases such as HIV, and blight an area through encouraging drugs and crime (Hubbard, 1998). McKeganey and Barnard (1996) state that the commonly held belief that there is little cost when a sex worker is attacked makes street sex workers “easy” victims. Clients know they are unlikely to be reported for violent offences, and even when women do report offences, their credibility as witnesses is questioned because they are street sex workers. Client violence can thrive where myths such as sex workers cannot be raped and sex workers “deserve” or provoke violence in choosing to sex work are perpetuated (Miller & Schwartz, 1995; O’Kane, 2002; Williamson & Foleron, 2001).

The welfare and safety of street sex workers has traditionally been the concern only of sex worker outreach agencies. These agencies are often funded through health monies and operate within a harm minimization framework, distributing condoms and sterile drug injecting equipment, as well as offering referral to genito-urinary, drug treatment and housing services. The high incidence of violence in street prostitution has led such agencies to promote safer working practices through newsletters, leaflets and self-defence skills training. Many agencies operate “Ugly Mugs” or “Dodgy Punter” schemes that encourage street sex workers to report incidents of client violence and informally circulate the information to other sex workers, alerting them to dangerous clients. Details of reported attackers and their vehicles are posted on bulletin boards in drop-ins and information may also be circulated via newsletters or leaflets. While this informal circulation of information regarding violent clients remains the key objective of such schemes, many projects have utilized them in other ways, including the provision of intelligence to the police, and as evidence to support charges brought against perpetrators of crimes against sex workers (Campbell, 2002).

In this article we present a case study of a multi-agency initiative in Merseyside that aimed to reduce the incidence of client violence in female street prostitution and increase the detection and arrest of perpetrators. This case study serves to highlight the important role that sex worker support agencies can play in informing police practice, and demonstrate how inter-agency collaboration can result in positive outcomes for reducing levels of violence in street prostitution within the existing legislative framework.

A Multi-agency Initiative to Tackle Client Violence in Female Street Prostitution

The multi-agency initiative to tackle client violence in female street prostitution in Merseyside was funded through the government’s Crime Reduction Programme (CRP). The CRP was part of the government’s Crime Reduction Strategy, a

three-year programme of work beginning in 1999, during which £250 million was invested to obtain evidence on those methods employed by the police and policing partners to reduce crime and disorder and get greatest impact for money spent. One strand of the CRP was entitled "Tackling Prostitution: What Works?" and in December 2000, the Home Office awarded £850,000 to 11 multi-agency projects, designed to tackle the crime and disorder associated with prostitution. The projects comprised a range of initiatives focusing on enforcement, support and exit strategies for sex workers, protection of young people and community safety.

The Merseyside multi-agency project was unique in its aim to reduce the levels of violence, sexual offences and robbery experienced by street sex workers. The initiative was led by a sex worker outreach agency (the Linx Project²) and partners included outreach agencies, local health authorities and the police. This was to be achieved via the extension and consolidation of an existing "Ugly Mugs" scheme, the purchase and use of a telephone messaging system to alert partner agencies to new reports of violent clients, and the establishment of a computerized regional database on which reports of attacks could be systematically collated. As part of the initiative, an independent evaluation was conducted by the Criminal Policy Research Unit (CPRU), South Bank University (May 2001 to April 2002) to assess the implementation, delivery, costs and impact of the "Ugly Mugs" project.

Methods

The article draws mainly on evaluation data from semi-structured interviews conducted with outreach workers, police officers and street sex workers in Merseyside. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at two points in time with members of the multi-agency partnership. This was a core method for documenting project implementation and delivery. The first round of interviews took place at the start of the evaluation period (May–June 2001) to correspond with the first few months of project implementation. The second round took place approximately eight months later. This allowed an examination of progress made in multi-agency partnership working by comparing different partners' accounts of the project. Interviews were conducted with five sex worker outreach agency workers and 12 officers from Merseyside Police. A total of 15 street sex workers were also interviewed specifically about the Ugly Mugs scheme and their levels of confidence in reporting violence. In addition, four outreach sessions and three drop-in sessions were observed in order to witness the practical operation of the scheme. Finally, a brief analysis of reported violence was undertaken via incident report records. An evaluation of the Linx Project, undertaken by Campbell (2002), including a survey of 70 street sex workers (carried out between November 2000 and July 2001), also provides valuable contextual data.

Increasing Reporting and Raising Awareness of Client Violence

The "Ugly Mugs" scheme operated by the Linx Project in Merseyside has been operational since June 2000. Campbell's survey of local street sex workers found that

just over two-thirds (67 per cent) had heard of the “Ugly Mugs” scheme and had received “Ugly Mugs” information from an outreach worker. Over a third (37 per cent) of women surveyed stated they had reported an incident to the scheme (Campbell, 2002). Any incident reported to the scheme is recorded on an “Ugly Mugs” incident report form. The incident report is filed confidentially at the Linx Project, and logged for type of offence and whether or not it was reported to the police. If given permission by the reporter, the project will pass the incident report to the police and arrange for a supported or anonymous statement if required. Summary sheets of “Ugly Mugs” reports providing brief descriptions of attackers, their vehicles and where the attacks took place are distributed to street sex workers on outreach and in the Linx Project drop-in, and sent to 14 partner agencies (including the police, outreach agencies, drop-ins for the homeless and drug treatment services). The summary sheets are colour coded to help women identify whether or not they have received the latest bulletin. Partner agencies are also alerted to new “Ugly Mugs” reports via a telephone messaging system.

During the evaluation period, nine “Ugly Mugs” summary sheets were produced with 215 street sex workers receiving at least one sheet (representing 77 per cent of all outreach contacts). An analysis of Linx Project monitoring data shows that between June 2000 and March 2002 the Linx Project had collected 174 incident reports from an estimated 80 women. During 2001–2002, 112 violent incidents were reported to the Linx Project “Ugly Mugs” scheme (an increase of 50 reports on the previous year), including 39 assaults, 29 sexual assaults, 21 robberies and 23 other types of violence (such as abduction, protection or pimping, flashing and other forms of harassment, and being threatened with weapons). Of the 112 incidents, 28 (25 per cent) were also reported to the police. Linx Project outreach workers believe that the circulation of the Ugly Mugs summary sheet has led to a wider awareness of the scheme among street sex workers, and also to the increase in reports:

I think part of what prompted people to make more reports is the summary sheets, because they really like seeing their report listed. Even if they don't want to go to the cops or something, it's an acknowledgement of what's happened to them, it makes it real, it counts. ... Plus ... they want to know who to avoid. (Linx Project Outreach Development Worker LP2)

Evaluation data collected through interviews with sex workers lends support to this view. Of 15 interviewees, seven received Ugly Mugs summary sheets regularly and four occasionally; nine said it was very important to them and four that it was fairly important; seven stated that listings on the Ugly Mugs summary sheets had caused them to refuse clients on more than one occasion. The women gave comments regarding the importance they attached to the summary sheets of which the following are typical:

It makes you aware of people to look out for, cars, anything nasty, it's like the Echo [local newspaper], but our Echo, it's helped me avoid some of the kids that are going round. (Street sex worker 11)

It gives us an insight as to what's ahead of us, what's out there, and what to look for, it's like a third eye. (Street sex worker 14)

Campbell (2002) reports that 63 per cent ($n = 44$) of Merseyside street sex workers surveyed identified “Ugly Mugs” or “Dodgy Punter” schemes as a means of making their work safer. Nevertheless, the majority of women interviewed for the CRO evaluation had experienced violence while working in the last twelve months. Thirteen of fifteen interviewees reported violent incidents ranging from rape, indecent assault, assault, abduction, and being treated with a weapon. Of these women, four had reported a violent incident to the Linx Project and four reported violence to the police. Five women had made no report to either agency. In all, 13 women said they would report a violent incident to the Linx Project, and the remaining two stated that it would depend on the circumstances, their reticence pointing to fear of reprisals and lack of self-esteem:

I couldn't say, if you know them, you'll get a comeback. (Street sex worker 15)

I'm from the old school, guys get away with it. (Street sex worker 5)

Although the majority of women were positive about reporting violent clients to the Linx Project “Ugly Mugs” scheme, there were clear barriers to reporting to the police. Campbell (2002) found that while 70 per cent ($n = 55$) of street sex workers surveyed reported being attacked by a client, just over half (51 per cent; $n = 36$) said they would not report such an attack to the police. Campbell (2002) also found considerable dissatisfaction among those women who had reported a violent client to the police, with 60 per cent ($n = 17$) feeling unsatisfied with the process. Our interviews with sex workers showed a common perception among the women that the police are unsympathetic:

I'm not confident that they're interested. (Street sex worker 4)

They [the police] look on it with a different perspective if you're a working girl. (Street sex worker 1)

The police are bastards, they just say “you shouldn't have been there”, they looked at me as if I was dirty. (Street sex worker 10)

However, women were more positive about making a statement to police with the support of the Linx Project, and indeed four of the women interviewed had done so. Women who had experience of making formal statements had found that the presence of a Linx Project worker at the police station, identity parade or in court was beneficial for them:

I wouldn't go to make a report to the police on my own, but if people from the Linx would come with me, then yeah. (Street sex worker 7)

When you're a prostitute Linx get you the respect you need before you go, they treat you as a person rather than a lump of shite. Linx were brilliant, I wouldn't have done it without them, they stayed with you through the interview and ID parade, they made sure you had a cup of tea, and it was someone you could chat to. (Street sex worker 14)

Increasing reporting of client violence has clearly been facilitated by the Linx Project “Ugly Mugs” scheme and women described a sense of mutual responsibility to report violent clients:

It's easy to report to Linx, you can make the report in your own time and they take time to listen to you. I would make a report to Linx as a warning to others working the area to be aware. (Street sex worker 9)

“Ugly Mugs” and the Detection and Arrest of Violent Clients

By March 2002, there had been two convictions of violent clients after police investigations that had utilised information reported to the Merseyside “Ugly Mugs” scheme. The first case involved a male in his mid-thirties, who had forced oral sex at knifepoint from street sex workers in Liverpool. The Linx Project took the first incident report concerning the defendant in June 2000. He became known on the street as “Silver Astra Man” (a reference to his car) after the Linx Project received and circulated three incident reports from different women.

During a separate enquiry (involving the murder of a Liverpool street sex worker) Merseyside police also took a report relating to “Silver Astra Man” and requested further information from the Linx Project to obtain more detail and corroborating evidence. The Linx Project were able to supply Merseyside Police with the three incident reports, two of which gave the registration number of the vehicle used by the defendant which linked him to the crimes committed. With the assistance of the Linx Project, the police were able to encourage one street sex worker to make a formal statement. This required sensitivity since the woman began to feel pestered rather than supported by the police. The Linx Project acted successfully as an intermediary between the police and the woman, accompanying her to appointments and providing full support through the identity parade that took place in November 2000 and the subsequent court case, which went to trial in June 2001.

It was worth noting that during the intervening period between the police identity parade and the trial, in incidents unrelated to her involvement in the case, the woman experienced accommodation uncertainties and was attacked by a group of youths. Such difficulties are very much a feature of the lives of street sex workers and make following any criminal cases through to a conclusion extremely difficult:

There'd been another attack, this was actually an attack by kids, it was really nasty ... they damaged her face, [there was] ... some concern over her eye for a while. Because that's the other thing ... just because you're going to court doesn't mean your drug habit stops, just because you're going to court and you've made an incident report doesn't mean that drug services suddenly kick in and give you a script, so the girls have still got to work because they've still got to feed their habits and so other stuff, all kinds of other stuff can come in that is going to make it difficult for them to continue through the criminal process. (Linx Project Outreach Development Worker LP2)

Nevertheless, in June 2001, “Silver Astra Man” was found guilty of indecently assaulting a Liverpool street sex worker. He received an 18-month custodial sentence and was ordered to sign the sex offender register for 10 years. Merseyside Police were grateful to the Linx Project for sharing the intelligence that had aided their inquiry:

When I went to the Linx Project they had a history on the dates [of offences committed and] because the women had completed the Ugly Mugs sheet, they could show the pattern [of what] he'd done, so ... for intelligence purposes [the Ugly Mugs scheme is] absolutely brilliant. (Detective Inspector MP7)

The second conviction for violence against street sex workers involved a 38 year-old male employed as a security guard who was reported to the Linx Project in June 2001 by a woman he had abducted, imprisoned and assaulted. An incident report form was filled in on outreach by the Linx Project and was passed to Merseyside Police, who immediately asked to speak to the woman. However, before an interview took place, another woman was attacked by the same individual and sustained serious head injuries requiring hospitalization.

The Linx Project were able to connect the attacks and urgently contacted the woman who had given the previous report. She agreed to make a formal statement to the police and within a week the perpetrator had been arrested. The Linx Project then identified a third woman who was also attacked by the defendant and had reported the incident to the "Ugly Mugs" scheme some weeks earlier.

The police were able to use the "Ugly Mugs" incident reports to build up a body of evidence regarding the offences committed. With the support of the Linx Project all three women consented to proceed with charges against their attacker and in January 2002 the defendant received three life sentences for imprisoning and indecently assaulting three Liverpool street sex workers and causing one grievous bodily harm with intent. The judge recommended that he serve a minimum of nine years before becoming eligible for parole, and he was ordered to sign the sex offender register for life. The life sentence imposed was automatic because of two previous convictions for violence against women. Merseyside Police acknowledged the important role played by the Linx Project in securing the first formal statement regarding the offender:

It was great because they were an encouragement to get [the first woman] to come forward, because now having spoken to [her] and knowing [her] now as I do, she wouldn't have come forward, there's no two ways about that, she would not have come forward. (Detective Inspector MP7)

The Importance of Inter-agency Working

Valuable inter-agency working has been fostered through the formalization of the "Ugly Mugs" scheme resulting in a constructive partnership between the police and the Linx Project aimed at reducing the incidence of violence in Merseyside street prostitution. Partnership working has led to a number of positive developments, two of which are highlighted here. The first development relates to the standard of intelligence provided through the "Ugly Mugs" scheme. Merseyside Police were invited to participate in consultation meetings between the Linx Project and the company commissioned to design the "Ugly Mugs" computerised database. It was at these meetings that the police expressed their concern that the incident report form used by outreach workers was inadequate as a tool to assist in the detection and

arrest of violent clients. The police were able to assist the Linx Project in redesigning the instrument to meet their evidence requirements for building up cases against violent clients that could lead to their arrest and successful prosecution.

The [Incident Report Form] initially was pretty vague ... [the Linx Project needed to] make it more so it's tick box or circle ... which is quick stuff, but you're getting masses of detail ... just basically getting as much detail in that short period as possible ... because you're getting intelligence then. (Detective Inspector MP7)

[Before it was] a 20-second interview, and we're talking about serious crimes, we're talking about rapes, knifepoint robberies. ... So [now] it's trying to make [the women] have a realisation that if they want to do something about it ... they need to spend a little bit more time on filling that information in. ... If they're having sex with somebody they will notice things about their body that maybe other people don't know, or they will notice jewellery. [We need to know] what kind of rape was it? Was it anal rape? ... Did she ... scratch him, pull any hair out, so can we secure any evidence, albeit that she might not want to do anything at the moment? (Community and Race Relations Officer MP2)

Rather than simply take a longhand account of an attack, Linx Project and other outreach agency workers now use a tick-box form that encourages the systematic recording of a large amount of information. Data fields include personal details of the reporter, physical appearance of the attacker, accent/expressions used, clothing and jewellery, distinguishing features, details of any vehicle involved, where and when the incident took place, incident type (including the use of any weapon), any injuries sustained and whether or not they were recorded or photographed, whether the reporter visited a GP or hospital and had an examination, and details of any report made to the police.

It is worth noting, however, the difficulties in attempting to achieve a balance between the intelligence requirements of the police and the reality for outreach agencies of taking incident reports from a chaotic client group:

With reporting, what we find is, yes they are willing to tell us, there and then, [but] because they're working you're biting into their time, and if it's over and done with it's not [so important], getting money is the most important thing. ... They have no problem in giving you the information, it's the time and space in which to do it. (Outreach Worker, Wirral OO1)

Now most of the incident reports are taken on outreach on the street. With women who have already become clients [of the Linx Project], who I've already got a bit of an ongoing working relationship with, I can quite often agree with them, "oh look I'll call round tomorrow and we'll do the incident report then", and they're sound with that, but they are in the minority, they are people who've got homes I can call round to (Linx Project Outreach Development Worker LP2)

However, as the "Ugly Mugs" scheme has developed and success has been achieved in terms of convicting violent clients, there is an acknowledgement among both outreach and street sex workers of the value of improved intelligence, although the considerable effort expended by outreach agencies in obtaining this must be supported. Positively, as street sex workers become increasingly familiar with the "Ugly Mugs" scheme they are more willing to report incidents and spend time doing so:

It's funny, they do get better at it. ... I suppose they're used to the questions we're asking, and so they start in their heads already trying to remember that stuff for us. (Linx Project Outreach Development Worker LP2)

The second important development arising from multi-agency working on the "Ugly Mugs" initiative has been a realization of the need to address police attitudes towards street sex workers wishing to report client violence through the establishment of a police training course. Police acknowledge that the chaotic lifestyle of street sex workers, attitudes of individual officers, as well as enforcement of soliciting legislation, leads to a reluctance to report crime:

If I had one of my staff dealing with a prostitute who'd been attacked, I would want them to deal with it in exactly the same way if you or I turned up at the police station. It doesn't always happen, and to be fair sometimes the attitudes of the women coming in doesn't help, sometimes they won't stay to make statements, sometimes they won't want to be examined. Sometimes they say "well I don't want to go to court". ... But you want to ask yourself why their attitude towards the police is hostile. Police officers are renowned at driving through the red light district to hassle the women. If it's quiet ... they're an easy target, most of them are known to the police and it's an easy arrest. ... I think generally though the police have got better at dealing with sexual offences. (Operational Officer MP5)

During investigations leading to the January 2002 conviction, the police were concerned to discover that a fourth woman had also been attacked and reported it to police, yet no follow up was made. Merseyside Police have now put a training package together with the Linx Project that is being delivered to operational police with the aim of educating officers to a better understanding of client violence experienced by street sex workers and promoting improved relations between sex workers and the police:

[The package involves] trying to explain perhaps why the girls have the lives they do and the difficulties they may have in reporting stuff ... because we had this successful case ... that came about as a result of an Ugly Mugs report coming into our office, and the outreach workers worked bloody hard to get those girls to make statements. But we know that an initial report was made to a police officer at a front counter where they just said "yeah, thanks very much" and off she went, and she's never been traced. So what we're trying to say is maybe if that bobby on that very first occasion ... we may not be going down this line where three other girls were subjected to [attacks], and there may be more that we don't know about. (Community and Race Relations Officer MP2)

Outreach workers are positive about the effect that convictions of violent clients of street sex workers can have on both the reporting of violence and professional attitudes towards the existence violence in street prostitution:

[I]t's an acknowledgement that what they suffer is criminal ... it's not an occupational hazard, it's criminal, and that the courts are going to look on it seriously. ... I think there is a change in attitudes going on, there's people looking at the priorities, you know this is serious violent crime. (Linx Project Outreach Development Worker LP2)

Discussion

The formalization of the “Ugly Mugs” scheme through the production and distribution of incident report summary sheets, the telephone messaging system for partner agencies and the establishment of a computerized database of incident reports has served to encourage constructive partnership working between the police and sex worker outreach teams in Merseyside. Outreach workers play an important role in encouraging women to disclose information on violent attacks. Clear channels of communication between outreach agencies and the police facilitate the passing on of intelligence that aids the detection and arrest of violent clients of street sex workers. Furthermore partnership working ensures that women can be encouraged and supported both in making formal statements regarding attacks and continuing with a complaint through the judicial process.

If “Ugly Mugs” schemes can demonstrate a crime reduction impact, then partnership working between the police and outreach agencies will be cost effective. The estimated cost of one serious wounding is between £100,000 to £160,000 (Brand & Price, 2000). This includes costs associated with the emotional and physical impact on the victim, lost output (productive work the victim would have been doing if not wounded), the cost of victim services (counselling, etc.), the cost to health services and criminal justice costs. In contrast, the annual on-going costs of running the “Ugly Mugs” scheme in Merseyside are relatively low at just over £30,000. Since the costs of client violence bear also on wider society through the cost of health care services accessed as a result of violence, and in the criminal justice system when reports are made, the benefits of reducing client violence include the saving of public sector resources that can be re-deployed elsewhere. A further key issue is that because some men who are charged with violent offences against street sex workers have previous histories of violence towards women (Kinnell, 2000, 2001), their conviction and imprisonment may prevent multiple incidents of violence.

Paper-based violent client information schemes used by many agencies could benefit from further developments following the Merseyside example in order to ensure that the standard of intelligence collected through reports made to outreach agencies is sufficient for purposes of police investigation, and that partnership working between sex worker outreach agencies and the police maximizes the likelihood of detecting and arresting violent clients and then proceeding with charges against them. This is an essential short-term recommendation, and should be considered a minimum requirement for adequately addressing the issue of client violence in street prostitution. The success of local schemes also points to the potential for regional and national schemes. The development of a secure national “Ugly Mugs” scheme would require some resource investment to develop a network between and harmonization of existing schemes. Yet the research presented in this article suggests that the potential benefits in terms of crime prevention are many.

Inter-agency working within current legislation is beneficial for street sex worker safety. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships that bring together local statutory and voluntary agencies provide an important forum for communication and the

development of local protocols that ensure that law enforcement does not compromise the health and safety of street sex workers. At a basic level, such communication can reduce the disruptive impact of policing operations on harm reduction outreach, and enable health and outreach services to provide advice and support to women who are arrested. On a more philosophical level, such communication serves to increase awareness of the prevalence and severity of violence experienced by street sex workers among both statutory and voluntary service providers (including the police) and foster an attitude of zero tolerance to violence towards street sex workers.

Partnership working aimed at reducing the incidence of client violence in street prostitution is further extended within existing legislation through the informal establishment of "tolerance zones". Tolerance zones have been the subject of debate in the United Kingdom Parliament over the last decade, and recently in the Scottish Parliament (Scott, 2002), as a means of regulating and containing the activities of street sex workers in order to reduce nuisance and increase safety. It has been argued (see, e.g., Kinnell, 2000; Campbell & Storr, 2001) that tolerance zones result in a number of positive outcomes for the reduction of client violence: women no longer have to work increased hours to pay off fines; they are more likely to report crimes committed against them; they do not have to lower prices and accept clients that they would normally avoid when under pressure from police activity; the police can concentrate on protecting street sex workers from violence; outreach teams can reach larger numbers of women in a shorter space of time; the women themselves can more easily keep an eye on each other; and it reduces the stigmatization of street sex workers, which results in their acceptance of violence and sanctions members of the community to behave abusively towards them (Campbell & Kinnell, 2000; Campbell & Storr, 2001; O'Neill & Barbaret, 2000; Pyett & Warr, 1999).

An obvious disadvantage of tolerance zones is their political acceptability, which remains questionable in a climate of understandable frustration among local communities in street prostitution areas. Zones in the United Kingdom have rarely become formal street walking zones and part of official policy, as has been the case in the Netherlands. The nature of such "de-facto" or "informal" zone arrangements makes them vulnerable to changes in agency policy, public opinion and political climate (O'Neill & Campbell, 2002; Hubbard, 1999), as evidenced by the shutting down of the unofficial zone operating in Edinburgh (Seenan, 2002).

Also, although there are anecdotal reports from the zones operating in Glasgow and formerly Edinburgh, that tolerance zones reduce the incidence of violence (Khan, 2001; O'Kane, 2002; Scott, 2002), this is difficult to measure since there is no baseline for violence against street sex workers. An accurate baseline only becomes possible when established "Ugly Mugs" or "Dodgy Punter" schemes are able to encourage reporting of violent incidents from the majority of street sex workers in an area. The establishment of an accurate baseline for incidence of violence against street sex workers is a requirement if the success of tolerance zones is to be monitored and assessed. Zoning as a means of improving the safety of street sex workers (and reducing the impact of street prostitution on local communities) should not be dismissed without evidence-based review and piloting.

While client violence is so prevalent, and in the absence of policies that address the many complex reasons why young women may turn to prostitution (Ayre & Barrett, 2000; Campbell et al., 1996; May et al., 1999; Phoenix, 1999; Shaw & Butler, 1998), there is an urgent need to protect street sex workers from client violence through multi-agency initiatives such as the Ugly Mugs scheme in Merseyside. In the longer term, it is essential that prevention strategies for those at risk of entering street prostitution, and exit routes for those at risk within street prostitution, are developed. Only then will the unacceptably violent conditions in which street sex workers survive no longer be a reality.

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Notes

- [1] Legislation relating to adult prostitution was made gender neutral in the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- [2] The Linx Project is based in Liverpool and is overseen by NACRO, a charity for the care and resettlement of offenders. The Linx Project was founded in 1999 and is funded through the Safer Merseyside Partnership, Merseyside Health Action Zone and Expanding Horizons. The original remit of the project was to address violence against street sex workers through establishing an "Ugly Mugs" scheme.
- [3] The findings from an evaluation of this strand of the CRP are reported in Hester and Westmarland (2004).

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