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Violence by clients towards female prostitutes in different work settings: questionnaire survey

Stephanie Church, Marion Henderson, Marina Barnard, Graham Hart

Violence by clients towards prostitutes has seldom been the focus of public and academic interest, yet it is a major health issue. Concern has mostly focused on the potential of prostitutes to transmit sexual infections, notably HIV, to their clients and subsequently partners. Features of female prostitution that have a direct impact on the health of prostitutes but not the health of others have therefore tended to be overlooked. The scant research that is available on violence by clients shows that prostitutes who work outdoors in particular are routinely confronted with physical violence.

Methods and results

During 1999 three female researchers (SC, MB, and Catherine Benso) contacted 240 female prostitutes; 115 worked outdoors (40 in Leeds, 75 in Glasgow) and 125 worked indoors in saunas or flats (50 in Leeds, 75 in Edinburgh). We designed a structured questionnaire using previously validated measures to record personal characteristics, working patterns, drug and alcohol use (in the past six months), type and frequency of violence by clients (ever or in the past six months), and levels of attack reported to police. We contacted 156 (65%) prostitutes in their place of work and 125 (55%) through drop-in centres. We used SPSS to test for significance, and multivariate binary logistic regression analysis to identify variables most strongly associated with violence experienced ever or in the past six months.

The table shows that prostitutes working outdoors were younger, involved in prostitution at an earlier age, associated with violence experienced ever or in the past six months. We report on the prevalence of violence by clients against female prostitutes working either outdoors or indoors in three major British cities.

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References:


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Recognising that violence by clients occurs to women responded to more effectively in terms of service provision, the range and content of comprehensive health services for prostitutes is an area that should be addressed with some urgency if levels of morbidity and mortality from violence by clients is to be reduced.

We thank all the women that participated in the study, the staff of the three outreach services in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Leeds, and Catherine Benson for her contribution to the design of the questionnaire, data collection, and data entry.

Contributors: SC helped review the literature, helped collect and enter the data, performed the data analysis, formulated conclusions, wrote the first draft of the manuscript, and revised the manuscript. MH performed the data analysis, formulated the conclusions, and helped revise the manuscript. MB had the original idea for the study, helped review the literature, sought ethical approval and funding, helped with data collection, formulated the conclusions, supervised the overall conduct of the project, and helped revise the manuscript. GH had the original idea for the study, supervised the overall conduct of the project, and helped revise the manuscript. MB and GH will act as guarantors for the paper.

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Correction and clarifications
Lipid concentrations and the use of lipid lowering drugs: evidence from a national cross sectional survey

Because of an error on the part of the BMJ, the authors (Paola Primatesta and Neil R Poulter) of this paper (25 November, pp 1322-5) were said to have no competing interests, whereas in fact Professor Poulter has received funds from several pharmaceutical companies to attend symposiums, speak, organise education, consult, and support research and members of staff. Professor Poulter ticked our form to say that he had received this support but then ticked the box to say that he had no competing interests. Our form did not make sufficiently clear that we regard receiving funds for these reasons as being a competing interest. We failed to pick up on the inconsistency in Professor Poulter’s form, and we apologise to him for that. We have amended the form, which is on our website at bmj.com/cgi/content/full/317/7154/291/DC1#aut

Endpiece
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Freedom of press is limited to those who own one.

H L Mencken
American editor, author, and critic, 1880-1956