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By [CASH](#), Vol. 1 No. 1, March 1994 (Author: G. Cajetan Lune, Joven Project)

For the past thirty years attention has been focused on the health practices and problems of male sex workers. In the last decade, an even greater level of interest in this area has come about due to: (1) a growing interest in homosexual behaviors, lifestyles, and social issues and (2) concern and panic generated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. With respect to the second factor, recent research studies and media reports have suggested, erroneously, that male and female sex workers are primary "vectors" of HIV transmission into the "heterosexual community." The stigmatizing and blaming manner in which sex workers are viewed with respect to HIV completely ignores the behaviors and practices of sex workers' clients ("john") and the varied and complex nature of the interactions between these two groups.

Little research has focused on the lifestyles, health beliefs, and sexual practices of the clients of male sex workers or sought to understand the true nature of the "demand" side of male sex work. This rather glaring imbalance is a reflection of practical and political factors alike. Researchers and social service providers find access to this population highly problematic, since most people who pay for sex are reluctant to self-identify as such. Anecdotal accounts make it clear that clients come from all echelons of society and are frequently married and parenting. The overwhelming social and legal sanctions connected with soliciting the services of a sex worker (especially when same-sex activity or sex with a minor is involved), combined with the "infidelity factor" for those who are married, means that most people participating in these activities do so in secret and mean to keep it that way. At the same time, sex workers are rarely willing or able to identify their clients out of fear of retaliation or the loss of future income. Law enforcement might be expected to provide an effective, if unwelcome point of access to the hard-to-reach sex industry consumer. However, such institutions generally prefer to identify, control, and penalize sex workers rather than their customers who may be viewed as "family men" and "law-abiding citizens," or whose wealth, political power or social standing makes them less-than-attractive targets for police intervention.

The characteristics of the sex industry must be better understood from both the sex worker and client perspectives in order to distinguish the range of activities that occur and their impact upon the individuals involved. The range includes abusive and exploitative relationships as well as caring and supportive ones, and casual or one-time contacts as well as regular clients of "sugar daddy" arrangements involving ongoing and/or more emotionally based pairings. Many sex workers report that they have found individual clients and "sugar daddies" to be more helpful and supportive in the long-run than social services or agency interventions. Innovative outreach and service interventions should both recognize and reflect the variations in what is too often simplistically viewed in generic "Sex worker/john" terms and seek to devise creative means for directing health education to sex workers as well as their clients.

Given the difficulty of identifying and reaching out to johns, interventions which prepare male sex workers to function as health educators for their peers, intimate partners, and clients continue to be useful and necessary. At the same time, HIV education messages and information about services and resources which speak directly to johns may be published in newspapers and magazines which advertise "outcall," massage, and male model or escort services – without making these individuals vulnerable to exposure. Targeted HIV prevention literature may also be broadly distributed in appropriate locations such as bars, parks, theaters, and street areas where contacts are made. Media reporting, which misrepresents or exploits sex workers must be countered; non-sensationalized reporting which places equal emphasis upon the supply and demand side of sex work should be encouraged.

Progressive research must be initiated to understand the significant influence that clients' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors may have on sex workers' potential risk for HIV infection. For example, a client's willingness to pay more for unsafe sexual activities can lead sex workers – especially

younger, financially needy, or less experienced ones – to take unnecessary risks in the work settings. In response, health interventions must do more than teach safer sex practices; they must help sex workers learn and develop communication and negotiation skills – best achieved through peer education activities in which sex workers share amongst themselves tried-and-true techniques for communicating with clients and self-protection.

At the same time, as researchers, advocates, social service providers, and outreach workers, we should continue to explore ways of creating a fair and equitable balance in our approach to the issue of HIV prevention in the male sex industry – one which seeks to address the needs of workers and clients alike, and to overcome stereotypes and misinformation which cast sex workers as HIV “vectors” into other communities.



Now disbanded, CASH (Coalition Advocating Safer Hustling) was a revolutionary group attempting to gather outreach workers from around North America to discuss sexwork seriously.

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