



UNDER **The Radar**
The Sexual Exploitation of Young Men

Executive Summary

In December of 2002, *Strolling Away* was released. *Strolling Away* represented a longitudinal retrospective study that examined young people from the sexual exploitation trade in 1991- 1992 and then again in 2001-2002. The opportunity to interview individuals 10 years later was valuable.

One of its major findings was that we know very little about young men involved in the sexual exploitation trade. The young men I interviewed commented on how my questions were “chick questions”. It was clear that we have traditionally looked at this issue through a female lens. It became evident through this study that more research was required in order to understand young men in the sexual exploitation trade.

Interviews for *Under the Radar: The Sexual Exploitation of Young Men*, began in March 2003 and wrapped up in October 2003. Thirty-seven young men were interviewed in total. Twenty- three interviews occurred in Calgary and 14 in Edmonton.

Characteristics of Respondents

- 54% of this population are of Aboriginal heritage
- Over half had involvement with Child Welfare Services
- Over one third had completed high school
- 95% had a history of running away
- Close to 70% had a history prior to the street of being sexually violated
- Over three-quarters had been physically violated and witnessed aggression while growing up
- Close to three-quarters began under the age of 18
- Males enter the trade younger and stay longer than young women
- 86% experienced staying in shelters

- Almost everyone felt no one should do this type of work
- The fear of gay-bashing exists
- Drug use is extensive
- Exiting the trade is a long process, usually attempted more than once
- Almost everyone has, and does, access HIV / STD testing

Summary of Discoveries

- Young men have comparable histories of sexual and physical abuse to young women
- Young men in this study were gay, heterosexual and bi-sexual
- Young men create a construct to be able to achieve a level of performance
- The issue of young men in the sexual exploitation trade creates a sense of discomfort
- Young men begin younger and work longer
- Young men fly under the radar of service providers
- Young men have unique service needs different from young women
- Public education on condom use and HIV testing has worked
- The connection between the street and drug use is longer for young men
- These young men have strained and distant relationships with their family
- Running away often triggers an entrance into the sexual exploitation trade

Summary Recommendations

1. Efforts to expand this study into other parts of Canada should be supported.
2. Outreach programs need to return to a place of neutrality by providing an exemption for reporting youth.
3. That we publicly acknowledge both young women and men are at risk in the sexual exploitation trade.
4. That service providers be provided with gender non-conformity training.

5. That experiential young men be provided an opportunity to dialogue with service providers to help design services for this population.
6. That a series of rehabilitation beds be established to service young men who are detoxing from extensive drug use.
7. That safe, affordable accommodation is provided to this population after exiting the trade.
8. That we approach the issue of preventing customer demand.
9. That prevention programs and services both acknowledge and warn of the risk to both young men and women.
10. That the community recognizes sugar daddy relationships are damaging given the circumstances of this vulnerable population.
11. That mentoring connections be available from those who have successfully exited the trade or are trying to exit.
12. That prevention, intervention and re-integration materials be adjusted to reflect the risks of the sexual exploitation trade for both genders.
13. That an evaluation occurs of harm reduction approaches to sexually exploited youth.
14. That the National Youth In Care Network embrace the need for sexual awareness education.