

Substance Abuse and Survival Prostitution: Co-occurrence and Interaction of Risk Factors

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Abstract

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By: Amanda Katherine Bayliss

This thesis explores factors that put young women at risk of criminal and potentially self-destructive behaviour. To accomplish this, the thesis will use the theoretical framework of developmental criminology, which will help to identify risk factors among pre-adolescent and adolescent girls that can indicate a predisposition to prostitution. A review of the extant literature suggests that child sexual abuse, substance abuse, and homelessness are the most common risk factors that lead to involvement in the sex trade for young women. The literature also indicates that the relationship between these sex trade risk factors are not symmetrical but causal. In particular, childhood sexual abuse and trauma can lead to substance abuse and homelessness. A better understanding of these risk factors and their complicated relationship may lend itself to the development of preventative measures customized to combat both substance abuse and survival prostitution.

Introduction

This essay examines factors that put adolescent girls at risk of involvement in the sex trade. Research suggests that there are many factors that put some adolescent girls more at risk than others. Sexualized childhood violence, substance abuse, and homelessness are identified as the most prevalent factors leading to prostitution. In addition, this essay explores the extent to which substance abuse, homelessness and prostitution are rooted in risk factors that develop in childhood, in particular childhood sexual abuse and trauma stemming from abusive families and negative social environments. The underlying thesis is that one must examine two interdependent levels of risk factors for involvement in the sex trade. The first underlying level of risk factors is childhood sexual abuse and trauma. In turn, these risk factors give rise to another level of risk factors: substance abuse and homelessness.

This essay begins with a background of the salient issues, which will be achieved through a review of the extant literature. To the extent to which it pertains to the research goals and objectives, this thesis will integrate an analysis of how the family and home environment can create risk factors for future involvement in the sex trade. The thesis begins by exploring how the independent variables of sexual abuse, substance abuse and homelessness are linked to the onset of prostitution among high risk adolescent girls. This will be followed by a discussion of the complex relationship between all three independent variables and their relation to prostitution

Problem Statement

The literature does not directly link risk factors for both prostitution and substance abuse. By disseminating the literature, what becomes apparent is that substance abuse is independently linked to childhood sexual abuse, homelessness and prostitution. The research indicates a consensus on an unusually high rate of childhood abuse among adult sex worker, specifically childhood sexualized abuse. Initially, the purpose of this research was to determine the relationship between substance abuse and prostitution by exploring risk factors for both. Consequently, the research indicates that the most common occurring risk factors are potentially causal, and that those risk factors are significant indicators for both substance abuse and prostitution. For example, Burrow and Sanchez (2006, 285) determined that parental abuse is a key risk factor for future substance abuse, while Lung et al.(2004) has determined that the same risk factors can contribute to involvement in the sex trade.

This thesis argues that we must shift our perspective away from a focus on a unidirectional relationship between cause and effect, and attempt to look at the complex and recursive interaction of root causes of prostitution from a developmental standpoint. The significance of this research is to develop a better understanding of the complex interaction of risk factors during adolescence. By better understanding the root causes of prostitution risk factors during childhood this research can lead to the development of preventative measures customized to combat both substance abuse and survival prostitution. Tailoring the response to specific causes of substance abuse among high risk young women could potentially lower the rate of prostitution and deter dependency on harmful survival strategies linked to street life.

Research Objectives

The overarching goal of this essay is to investigate the root causes of involvement in the sex trade by adolescent females, with particular emphasis on how childhood sexual abuse, substance abuse and homelessness correlates with and/or can lead to the onset of prostitution among high risk adolescent girls. In order to do so, the research will accomplish the following:

- Describe the field of Developmental Criminology and how it can contribute to a better understanding of factors that put young girls at risk of involvement in the sex trade.
- Explore both theories and research that identify adolescent and pre-adolescent risk factors for involvement in the sex trade.
- Deconstruct the intricate relationship between all three of the afore-mentioned risk factors to determine how they interact and contribute to the involvement of adolescent girls and women in the sex trade.
- Given the importance of the afore-mentioned risk factors in precipitating involvement in the sex trade, explore the extent to which the family constitutes the most significant social environmental influence for prostitution.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guides this essay is as follows: What are the most prevalent risk factors during childhood and the teenage years that contribute to involvement in the sex trade and what is the extent to which these risk factors interact? Other significant research questions that will guide this research include:

What is developmental criminology and how can it contribute to a better understanding of why adolescent girls become involved in the sex trade?

What are the most dominant risk factors for adolescent prostitution? What, if any, is the relationship between these risk factors? How does the interaction of risk factors contribute to adolescent prostitution?

How does home life and family environments create risk factors which can lead to adolescent prostitution? How does negative social environments precipitate risk factors for adolescent prostitution?

To what extent does childhood and adolescence abuse contribute to harmful survival strategies akin to substance abuse, homelessness and prostitution?

To answer the afore-mentioned research questions, this essay will attempt to determine how abusive homes and family environments can lead adolescent girls to develop substance abuse problems, which in turn places them at high risk girls for homelessness and prostitution. In order to accomplish this goal, this thesis will thoroughly examine risks factors that develop in childhood. The importance of understanding family-based risks could potentially help inform better policies and programs that are directed towards minimizing the long-term negative effects of childhood abuse.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research in order to ascertain how negative childhood experiences can affect the life course of adolescent females will be developmental criminology. France and Homel (2007) argue that: "Developmental criminologists are concerned with questions of continuity and change in behaviour, including the onset of and desistance from offending, and patterns of offending over time" (p.2). By identifying the relationship between

negative experiences and criminogenic acts, preventative measures can be developed and then utilized in order to minimize the potential for further self-harm. Moreover, the theoretical assumptions that are directing this research can be capsulated by Le Blanc and Loeber (1998) who state, “Developmental criminology poses new questions and therefore encourages innovation in analytic methods that may help to describe and explain longitudinal changes in individuals' offending... It is important to search for variables that determine or mediate the variation of behavior with age” (p. 115).

This research will explore variables identified in the literature that lead to adolescent prostitution. To accomplish this goal, risk factors for prostitution among at risk youth will be examined and informed by existing knowledge on the topic. Such distinctions between cohorts of at-risk youth and youth that will be used for this essay are explained by Schneider (2015), who states: “... chronic offenders differ considerably from nonoffenders in the prevalence of criminogenic risk factors in their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood” (p. 104). Examples of negative childhood experiences that have been considered for this essay include: physical, emotional and sexual abuse; criminal and or drug using parents or guardians; growing up in lower-income households as well as communities with lack of positive resources for youth. Research also indicates other risk variables such as out of home care and being in the child welfare system (Sepowitz, 2012, p. 565).

A key feature of developmental criminology is to identify factors that put children and youth at risk of future criminal offending. However, this research defines criminal offending in a very particular way. To be precise, it is important to note that for the purpose of this research, offending will be viewed mainly as a self-destructive behaviour that is principally

rooted in negative childhood experiences. This research does not necessarily view offending as an act of criminality and deviance per se, but as a secondary effect to childhood abuse. For the purpose of this research, offending is conceptualized as a means of survival through processes of socialization and by the development of maladaptive coping strategies. For instance, Haines (2005) suggests that socialization variables are the strongest predictors of delinquency and self-harm – second to criminal parental figures (p.170). Family functioning plays a central role in determining behaviour in children, thus, it is crucial to focus on how the family and home life are absolutely central to the creation and manifestation of risk variables attributed to harmful survival strategies, such as prostitution.

The socialization factor identified in this research is in essence, negative social environments. Negative social environments have a significant role to play in the manifestation of risk factors. Negative social environments precipitate harmful survival strategies of at-risk youth, and potentially normalize criminality and substance abuse. Farrington's (2005) analysis of developmental criminology stresses how children's temperament and "adaptive or maladaptive behaviour" is shaped by their environment, and that in some cases, those experiences "influence the likelihood that the child will develop conduct problems by altering the social learning environment and by influencing the child's reaction to it "(p.17). An example of negative social environments are neighbourhood with high crime rates which usually associated with an excess of drugs usage and availability, and often times, lack positive resources for youth.

In addition, this thesis will specifically focus on family-based risk factors, and how this critical social environment can directly and indirectly contribute to the onset of other risk

factors that the literature correlates with prostitution; that is, how family-based risk factors can contribute to childhood sexual abuse, substance abuse and homelessness. For that reason, at risk youth may be exposed to multiple risks, both from home and in the communities in which they reside. These multiple risks tend to interlock and give rise to new level of risks that can be an indication for future criminality, self-harm and even adolescent prostitution. Schneider (2015) elaborates on this point by stating:

The family is society's most crucial institution in promoting or hindering the development of future criminogenic behavior in a child. This is because the family is a child's most immediate and influential environment affecting his/her development and socialization. The development and socialization of young people is highly influenced by various family characteristics and practices, including family structure, parent-child relationships, disciplinary practices, family mental health, nutrition, the occurrence of neglect or abuse, and family history of substance abuse or criminal behavior. Because family risk factors are the single most important determinant of whether child assumes delinquent or criminal behavior later in life, effective and nurturing family practices (especially in child rearing) are key to protecting children from a future life that may include chronic delinquency, criminality, or other antisocial behaviors (p.33).

Children and adolescence who face numerous risk factors are especially vulnerable to a wide range of detrimental life outcomes. By identifying the patterns in offending and self-harm, through an examination of shared childhood experiences, developmental criminology can be applied in order to recognize how exactly longitudinal changes in behaviour stemming in childhood, are rooted in processes of socialization, negative social environments and family-based risk factors. The risk factors discussed are undeniably compounded by numerous circumstances and are indeed multifaceted, likewise, Schneider (2015) argues that "The

development and socialization of young people is highly influenced by various family characteristics and practices, including family structure, parent–child relationships, disciplinary practices, family mental health, and nutrition, the occurrence of neglect or abuse, and family history of substance abuse or criminal behavior “(p.33). For the reason that negative childhood experiences typically begin in the home, parenting and other family-based ecological influences represent an overarching category as the family and home life encompass a crucial environment for the development of adolescent girls. Risk factors, therefore, develop during childhood and adolescence

An important component of this research is to also explain how the manifestations of addiction related disorders develop and how this can contribute to homelessness and prostitution. Much of the research conducted on negative childhood experience of homeless women shows a strong correlation between childhood abuse and negative childhood experience, and their subsequent involvement in street life. For example: Sepowitz (2012) argues that one third of the prostitutes studied (n=113) were abused before the age of 18, while Hermida et al. (2003) discuss how addiction-related disorders develop in childhood and states: “drug-use habits emerge at a time, pre-adolescence or adolescence, when target subjects are under the tutelage of their parents or guardians” (p.3). Likewise, developmental criminologists such as France and Homel (2007) argue: “foundation assumption is that the ‘baggage’ people carry from the past – the continuing effects of earlier experiences such as a happy childhood or sexual abuse –affect the ways they behave in the present. Thus developmental criminologists reject traditional approaches that emphasise between-group differences in favour of a study of within-individual changes in offending in relation to changes

in many other factors” (p. 1). Consequentially, this research will focus on those factors which influence individual changes in behaviour by looking at childhood experiences.

Therefore, developmental criminology is the best approach for achieving a comprehensive understanding of how childhood risk factors can cause prostitution and other harmful life outcomes. Each variable that will be discussed – sexualized childhood abuse, substance abuse and homelessness – will be traced back to childhood. Childhood sexual abuse can be traced back to abusive family and home life, especially when the perpetrator is a relative. Conclusively, developmental criminology and its family based approach is essential in determining if a causal relationship between risk factors and prostitution exists. Indeed, connections can be made between socialization variables, negative social environments and family-based risks as well. However, these variables are not separate entities that exist on their own. Family and ecological influences can be attributed to the socialization of adolescent girls. We are all taught how to behave through our environment: familial customs and value systems are shared and then reinforced through systems of reward and punishment. On one hand, when their family and environment is modeling destructive behaviour such as drug abuse, and criminal acts, adolescents begin to learn that such behaviour is acceptable. On the other, adolescents may flee abuse from parents or guardians, and without the capacity to care for themselves, they end up on the streets, where they become susceptible to drug abuse and prostitution.

Methodology

Secondary research was surveyed through a systematic examination of the extant literature on the topic of risk factors for prostitution. Secondary research is defined as: “a description or summary of another person’s work. A secondary source is written by someone who did not participate in the research or observations being discussed” (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012, p. 48). In order to complete this survey, various databases were utilized to acquire peer reviewed, scholarly sources. Novanet was the primary search engine, which accesses academic databases such as JSTOR, ebsco and Sage CRKN. In addition, academic literature from reputable journals such as the *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*; *Violence Against Women*; *the Journal of Urban Health* and *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* was assessed for this essay.

Overview of Prostitution

Definition

Prostitution is defined as the exchange of sexual services for money, drugs, shelter or other resources, which involves the commodification of sexuality. There are no gender biases when it comes to prostitution; anyone is able to sell sexual services. However, generally, there is a consensus that there are more women who are part of the profession than men. Dr. John Lowman, a Criminologist at Simon Fraser University, has spent his career examining prostitution and prostitution law in Canada. Lowman (2005) states in his report submitted to the committee who in 2012 recently amended prostitution laws in Canada: “I use the term “prostitution” to distinguish direct contact commercial sexual services from other forms of sex work, and the term “sex worker”, and prostitute to refer to a person who sells direct contact sexual services “(p.1). Furthermore, Lowman (2005) divides prostitution into three broad categories: “a) Sexual

slavery involves one (or more) person(s) forcing another to prostitute; b) Survival sex involves a person engaging in prostitution because he or she has few or no other options; and c) Opportunistic prostitution involves a person making a rational decision to engage in sex work rather than some other kind of labour because of the greater financial reward it brings” (p.1).

Since the first prostitution laws in what would become Canada, in 1759, sex work specifically is not illegal, but the law makes it difficult to participate in the act without it being considered a crime. There have been many revisions to this law over the decades. Currently, the Criminal Code of Canada (2016) makes the subsequent acts unlawful: “owning, managing, leasing, occupying, or being found in a bawdy house, as defined in Section 197; transporting anyone to a bawdy house (Section 211) procuring (Section 212) Living on the avails of prostitution; paying for sex with anyone under the age of 18 (Section 212); communication in a public place for the purposes of prostitution (Section 213) and transporting someone for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation (Section 279)”.

Dangers of Involvement in the Sex Trade

Prostitution perpetuates further victimization of at risk girls, which can entail sexualized violence and even death. There are several physical and emotional ramifications to sex work that should be taken into account. Farelly and Chimino (2012) state that those involved in the sex trade industry are 18 times more likely to be murdered, and have a substantially high rate of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and human immune deficient virus (HIV); out of the 854 participant interviewed in over 8 countries, 68 percent met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (p.1236).

There are many legal, social and health implications for street based sex work. Street sex workers report the highest rate of victimization amongst sex workers. Bridgenorth – an organization in the York region in Ontario who are dedicated to helping sex workers, and who work to educate the public – conducted a study on victimization rates of active sex worker in Vancouver (n=237) and determined that during an 18 month period, 57 percent reported violence ranging anywhere from rape to kidnapping and beatings. Conversely, other studies conducted on victimization rates of street based sex workers report higher degrees of violence. O' Doherty (2007) states that up to 98 percent of street based sex workers are exposed to violence from their pimps, cliental or fellow sex workers (p.2). There seems to be a consensus that street based sex workers are at more risk of experiencing harm than off street based sex workers.

Street based sex work

There are several types of sex work in Canada. The first is the most visible: street prostitution. It is difficult to get an exact of number of individuals who engage in street prostitution, but estimates range from 5-20 percent of all sex work is street based (Parliament of Canada). It is challenging to get a comprehensive picture of how many prostitutes are constituted as street based sex worker. However, most statistics are generally based on arrest rates for street based sex work as they tend to be more visible than off street sex workers. For instance, the highest rate of sex work arrests appears to be in the Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal areas (Duchesne, 1995, p.7). This fact may not infer that these particular cities have more sex workers in general than others, but that they may, however, have more street based sex workers.

The definition of street based sex work has evolved over time. Up until 1972, the law described a street prostitute as any woman who was found in a public place while not being able, when required to, to offer up a good reason for being in said public place. There are two problems which arise from such a definition: 1. this law was gender specific, and 2. it did not refer to an actual act. The law has since been reformed to refer to both women and men, and to include the actual act of soliciting sex for money. Currently in Canada, the “johns”, or customers, and individuals living off of the avails of prostitution, are penalized.

The second component of sex work is off street sex work, and can include: escort and call girl service, massage parlor services, stripping, and technology based (on-line) sex work. O’Doherty (2011) estimates that 80 percent of sex work is off street (p.10). However, this statistic can differ based on geographical regions.

Sex work is recognised as perhaps one of the oldest known professions, but due to the atypical nature of such a profession, many who work in the sex industry experience challenges which reflect outdated policy, and negative social perceptions. For off street sex work, Althorp (2008) states: “ In spite of the stigma and resulting lack of legal protections experienced by exotic dancers, when considering the economic position of young working class women in Canada, it becomes clear that erotic dancing provides a viable opportunity for them to earn an above average income with little educational attainment “ (p. 19). Generally, off street sex work tends to be less visible, and perhaps perceived as more socially acceptable than street based sex work, yet it is still considered to be socially constructed as a deviant profession. Most major cities in Canada have any number of these kinds of sex related businesses. Most are legitimate businesses offering sexually based services, but are prohibited by law from allowing

the purchase of actual sexual contact. However, the purchase of sex in such businesses is a common occurrence.

The Scope of Prostitution in Canada

In Canada, it is estimated that 75-80 percent of sex workers are women. According to Hui (2014) a reporter for the Georgia Straight who wrote an article summarizing a working paper by Cecilia Benoit of the University of Victoria: “77 percent of sex workers identify as women, 17 percent as men, and 6 percent as other genders” (p.1). Generally, it is extremely difficult to get a clear picture of the scope of prostitution in Canada, or how it changes from year to year, since methods of data collection on the rate of prostitution is unreliable. From what is known, most estimates are based on arrest rates, which indicate that more than 90 percent of arrests made under current prostitution laws are for street based sex work. *The Challenge of Change: A study of Canada Criminal Prostitution Laws* (2006) articulates how problematic it is to grasp the scale of prostitution in Canada: “It is very difficult to draw a representative picture of the people who sell sexual services in Canada for the same reasons that it is difficult to gauge the scope of prostitution. Prostitution activities are usually carried out in secret, which makes most of the people involved invisible to conventional research. It is no surprise then, that research into prostitution centres on a specific group — those who sell sex on the street “(p.5). Nevertheless, there are numerous media reports that attempt to pinpoint a rough estimate.

According to *BCBUSINESS, Spotlight on Sex Work* (2008), there are 10,000 prostitutes in the Greater Toronto Area, and more than 4,000 women are in the escort trade. In Canada, the escort industry takes in an estimated \$500 million annually (Pron, 1997). The same article

determined that roughly 80 percent of adult sex workers began their profession as a minor, and claimed that hundreds of children under the age of 17 work in the sex trade industry in Vancouver. Arrest rates for prostitution tends to reveal a justifiable concern that youth are currently engaging in prostitution. Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2010) estimate that 1,450 youth were arrested for prostitution in the United States in 2005 (p.20). In addition, The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics reported (1993) that much of the police activity is directed at the street level – over 10,000 prostitution-related incidents were reported in 1992; 95 percent for communication offences, and 5 percent for bawdy-house & pimping offences.

The Adolescent Sex Trade

Adolescent sex work is the commodification of sex which is procured by a minor under the age of 18. Lung et al. (2003) broadens the scope by including bar girls, street sex worker, call girls, strippers, saunas and brothels, and who are under the age of 18 (p.285). A more detailed definition is provided by *The Victims of Violence Centre for Missing Children* (2016), which defines adolescent sex work as: “a form of sexual abuse involving the commercial sexual exploitation of children in which a child performs sexual acts in exchange for some form of payment”. Most countries have strict laws surrounding the sexual exploitation of children, which lead many customers to engage in what is known as child sex tourism: travelling to foreign countries to evade the laws within their home country (Victims of Violence, 2016). Technology has also allowed children to be prostituted over the internet, increasing the levels of child pornography and human trafficking across the globe. According to The Victims of Violence website (2016): “Child prostitution is rarely a personal choice, and is generally a form of organized crime run by an individual pimp or, more commonly, by a large-scale sex ring “.

Conversely, Lowman (2015) who has conducted extensive research on prostitution in Canada states in his paper for the Department of Justice that: “Generally, the survey literature indicates that there are two sets of factors involved in a youth's drift into prostitution. The first set of factors "push" a youth from home -- be it their parents' home, a foster home or group home -- while another set of factors "pulls" them to the street “ (p.2).

Since the first inception of prostitution laws in Canada, sex with a minor has been deemed a criminal offence. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, most adult prostitutes begin their career in their teens (Deuchesne, 1995, p. 6). Furthermore, studies show that under aged prostitute are in high demand, as many clients prefer women perceived as “cleaner” and less experienced. This demand is pressuring third parties, such as pimps or other agents of the sex industry, to provide younger women to their cliental. In 1995, three percent of prostitutes In Canada were reported to be underage, two point eight percent of them were female, and zero point two percent of them were male (Deuchesne, 1995, p. 6). Biesenthal (2000) estimates that approximately 10 – 15 percent of all prostitutes in Canada are adolescents. According to the Canadian police statistics, five percent of those charged with prostitution are youth, and of those over 80 percent are young women. It is extremely difficult to estimate the average entry age for adolescent prostitutes. Figures are debatable, but range between 12 and 14 years of age. To further complicate the issue, it is challenging to get a clear estimate of prostitution as whole, considering that there are many forms of prostitution: street based sex work, off street sex work, and sexual exploitation. Estimates tend to not reflect the differing nature of each of these categorizations of sex work, as prostitution statistics are often

based on arrest rates of street sex work. However, according to the Parliament of Canada (2016), the average age range for first experience of prostitution is between 14- 18 years old.

Characteristics of Adolescent Sex Trade Workers

According to Lowman's (2015) research on prostitution that was conducted for the Department of Justice in Canada: "The debate about "causes" of female youth prostitution centres around the role of "sexual abuse" and other familial factors that may contribute to a girl's running away from or being thrown out of home, and external factors such as recruitment by "pimps." adolescent sex work. " (p.2). Furthermore, a 2002 British Columbia Government report estimated that adolescent sex workers started their profession after running away from home to flee abuse. As such, a great deal of adolescent sex workers are homeless. Most of the literature on adolescent prostitution shows that the youth tend to come from abusive and neglectful homes. The abuse reported is wide ranging: emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, and neglectful or absent care givers. Furthermore, qualitative research conducted on adult sex workers shows that participants report significant victimization during childhood: high rate of substance abuse in the home, physical, emotional and sexual parental abuse and poverty (Lung et al. 2004, p. 287). In addition, Lung et al. (2004) state that adolescent sex workers tend to come from "dysfunctional family, including an unhealthy family structure, deviant behaviour and moral conduct that their parents demonstrated in their teens" (p. 286).

The literature also indicates that adolescent sex workers tend to display anti-social, deviant and unhealthy behaviour, including risk taking and drug use, and that childhood abuse tends to cascade these negative effects (Wilson, 2010, p.211). Furthermore, Reid (2014)

characterizes adolescent sex workers with early onset of drug use, and reports that they have typically been victimized as a child, and display low self-esteem and low self-worth. In a great deal of cases, prostitution appears to be a symptom of negative childhood experiences.

Reviewing the research literature on adolescent women who are entrenched in survival sex work, as defined by Lowman (2005) in the previous section, suggests that risks begin to cumulate in childhood, and while preventative measures at an individual level can deter this from occurring, it is essential to take into account the insidious nature of causal risks that ultimately characterize adolescent sex workers.

Additional precursors to adolescent women's involvement in prostitution can include experiencing poor parenting, conflict and family violence, having low social support and there being a high rate of substance abuse within the home. Lung et al. (2004) conducted a study to determine the personal characteristics of adolescent prostitutes using a questionnaire on one hundred and fifty active sex workers and compared those results with a control group of sixty five high school aged young women (p. 285). The results concluded that the most direct causal effects for active sex workers entry into prostitution are having experienced lack of maternal protection, lack of paternal care, having displayed neurotic tendencies, early onset of tobacco use, discontinuing school, and having had a dysfunctional family (p. 286).

It seems to be difficult - if not impossible - to estimate the average age adolescents become sex trade workers. The research does not support a consensus. The range in age can be anywhere from 10 years of age to 18. Furthermore, differences in age will depend of geographical locations: rural verses cities, and from province to province. Having said that, Duchesn (1995) determines that most adult prostitutes admit that their first sex work

experience was in their teens. Lowman (2000) states that adult sex workers report their first sex work experience as having happened between the age of 14 and 18, while Sepowitz (2012) determines that one third of the adult sex worker interviewed began their profession before the age of 18 (p. 565). Therefore, I will not make fine distinctions according to precise ages, but will rather use “adolescent sex workers” to refer to sex workers who have not yet reached 18 years old, but who would not be considered a child : 13- 18 year age range.

The socioeconomic status of adolescent sex workers prior to their involvement in prostitution indicates that most of the youth come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Poverty is a considerable push factor for street level adolescent prostitution and prostitution in general (Chimo, 2012, p. 1236). Reid (2014) also identified economic and systemic factors, such as deviant environments and poor neighbourhoods, which are associated with high crime rates and drug use (p. 249). Police statistics, as well as those of social agencies, suggest that most street-based sex workers are young, single, female, addicted to drugs, are undereducated, and come from backgrounds with a history of poverty and abuse, and/or controlled by pimps. Although how women become involved in prostitution is currently debated. Geadlah as cited in Lowman (2000) indicates that not all sex workers are forced into prostitution by a third party, but that it, in most cases, is a result of “lack of choice and of their own free will” (p. 4). Poverty and opportunity – as seen in cities with a large network of sex workers - seem to be factors that influence this situation.

Much of the research on adolescent sex workers reports that they struggle with addiction related disorders. Lung et al. (2004) identify substance abuse – drugs, alcohol and tobacco – as factors that contribute to the problem (p.285). Similarly the study of Oshri et al.

(2014) demonstrated a relationship between substance abuse and risky sexual behaviour (p. 101). Chimino (2012) also states that drug addiction is high among adolescents and adult women who are prostitutes (p. 1237). While, Lavoie et al. (2010) study shows that 23 percent of adolescence living on the streets in Canada (n= 361) have traded sexual services for drugs. There appears to be an overwhelming amount of research that points to a correlation between addiction and adolescent sex work.

The ethnicity of adolescent sex workers tend to vary across Canada. According to *Gender, Violence and Health* by Benoit et al. (2014), most Canadian sex workers are Caucasian and 89 percent of sex workers were born in Canada (p. 3). In Canada, there is nonetheless a disproportionate amount of Indigenous sex workers including adolescent sex workers. The prevalence of Indigenous adolescent sex workers may vary from region to region within Canada. The prairie region in Canada tend to see a larger population of Indigenous adolescent sex workers, whereas Toronto and Montreal have more Caucasian sex workers. Kate Shannon of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver conducted an observational study of 237 prostitute women on the streets of Vancouver during an 18-month period in 2006 to 2008. Her study revealed that 48 percent described themselves as Indigenous. Furthermore, according to Lowman (2015): "In cities in British Columbia and across the Prairies, aboriginal women appear in disproportionate numbers in the ranks of street prostitutes" (p.2). Research on youth involvement in prostitution has emphasised that indigenous youth tend to become involved in prostitution at an earlier age than others, and a larger proportion are involved in the use of illicit hard drugs, including heroin and crack cocaine. In addition, Zubrick (2003) state that

indigenous youth experience higher rates of negative childhood experience which can be a result of cultural factors, their people's history and social structures (p. 7).

The characteristics of indigenous sex workers reflect Indigenous communities in Canada that have historically battled with high rates of addiction. Indigenous women who are active drug users are two times more likely than non-indigenous women to initiate IV drug usage (Ahamad, DeBeck, Feng, Sakakibara, Keer & Wood, 2014, p. 153). For Indigenous youth, they can see drug use normalized through familial and peer exposure, exasperating already present environmental factors that may lead youth to experiment with drugs (Roy, 2003, p.101). In addition, childhood abuse is common within impoverished, Indigenous communities, in part due to generational trauma incurred by residential school survivors. Familial exposure to drugs, high risk communities and the stigma associated with racialized misconceptions about indigenous women set in motion circumstances that have been identified as risk factors for adolescent prostitution.

Human trafficking and the sex trade

Another unfortunate side of the sex industry is human trafficking. It is difficult to get an accurate estimation of how many young people end up in the sex trade as part of human trafficking. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) (2013) define Human trafficking as: "... the recruitment, transportation or harbouring of persons for the purpose of exploitation (typically in the sex industry or for forced labour)". The RCMP (2013) makes further distinctions between domestic trafficking - within Canada-, and international trafficking – trafficked victim

crossing borders. Wolak (2010) determined that 82 percent of adult prostitutes were pimped out (p.20). The RCMP (2013) claim that most trafficked prostitution involves off-street sex workers; it is exceedingly difficult to track, since most victims tend to be non-cooperative with the police (p.10 -17). Findings from field studies indicate that many women work for themselves: 62 percent in Vancouver, 50 percent in Toronto, and 69 percent in Montréal (RCMP, 2013, p. 17). The victims of trafficking are usually female between the age of 14 and 22 years old; 40 percent of those are underage (RCMP, 2013, p. 17). In addition, a large portion of girls trafficked in Canada are Canadian, and of those victims, most are Caucasian. Other ethnicities of trafficked girls include Black, Indigenous, and Asian (RCMP, 2013, p. 17).

Though not all prostitutes are victims of trafficking, it is irrefutably an important component to this discussion, since young women are especially vulnerable. The presence and influence of pimps appears to be more extensive in the Maritimes and in the Prairies (RCMP, 2013). Pimps in particular are known to use exploitive tactics to manipulate girls into prostitution. Pimps may provide girls with shelter, clothing and protection from the perils of street life, exploiting the inherently low self-perception, and low self-esteem characterized by young at risk women. According to an RCMP report on Domestic Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Canada (2013):

- Traffickers force victims to provide sexual services to customers primarily in hotels/private residences and in adult entertainment establishments.
- Traffickers who force their victims to provide sexual services in hotels/private residences acquire clients primarily through online advertising. External agencies

(escort and dancer placement agencies) are also used by traffickers to acquire clients, but not to the extent of online advertising.

- Traffickers usually take all of their victims' profits: victims typically earn between \$500 and \$1,000 per day.
- The majority of traffickers are male, Canadian citizens, between the ages of 19 and 32 years, and are of various ethnicities or races.
- Adult females and individuals under the age of 18 years (especially those who are female) are increasingly becoming involved as human traffickers for sexual exploitation.
- Female traffickers usually work with at least one male and this partnership is sometimes relationship-based.
- Traffickers who are under the age of 18 years commonly work in partnership with adults (p. 5).

Research Findings: Factors that put girls at risk of involvement in the sex trade

It is important to take into account multiple risk exposure that ultimately have a cumulative effect on life outcomes. Developmental criminology argues that the long term offenders experience multiple risk factors during childhood. Examples of this can include personal risk factors such as learning disabilities, or impulsivity; family risk factors such as substance abuse

and parental conflict; community risk factors such as poor neighbourhoods, and situational risk factors such as access to weapons and drugs (Schneider, 2015, p. 104-107). These risk factors for offending are often times the same risk factors for adolescent prostitution.

The following sections will include an overview of three independent variables that put girls at risk of involvement in the sex trade: sexual abuse during childhood and adolescence, substance abuse and homelessness. Through a critical analysis of the literature, this thesis argues that the aforementioned risk factors - both separately and in combination with one another - directly and indirectly contribute to involvement in prostitution. Substance abuse and homelessness occur to a high degree among survivors of childhood and adolescent sexual abuse. Through examining primary research on the characteristics of adult sex workers, childhood sexual abuse, substance abuse and homelessness is the most common occurring risk factor for prostitution. Furthermore, risk factors can be traced back to negative family and home environment. Therefore, based on an analysis of primary research, the main focus of this thesis is the intricate relationship between different risk factors and prostitution in order to (1) explore how those risk factors are rooted in childhood, (2) understand the complexity and multifaceted nature of the risk factors, and (3) determine how these risk factors are influenced by family and home environments.

Sexual Abuse during Childhood and Adolescence

Childhood and adolescence sexualized abuse will be defined as any and all physical sexual contact between a child under the age of sixteen and an adult (Barkan, 2006, p. 324).

Estimating the degree to which sexual abuse occurs in the home is problematic. Often, such

acts are considered too shameful to confront, and it is challenging to prove their occurrence. Barkan (2006) estimates that “89,000 cases of child sexual abuse occurred in 2002, for a rate of 1.2 per 1,000 children...the Gallup poll parent survey noted earlier yielded an estimated 19 cases of sexual abuse per 1,000 children, a figure almost 16 times greater than the HHS estimate “(p. 325). Despite the variation in estimates about the degree to which this type of crime is reported, evidence does suggest that childhood sexual abuse generally occurs more often among girls and that poverty seems to be a factor.

It is difficult to quantify the harm caused by sexual abuse, especially when a great number of the estimations are based on studies that have been conducted on adults recalling their childhood experiences. For victims of childhood sexual abuse that have been studied, it is clear that they are especially vulnerable to further psychological and emotional harm, in addition to supplementary risks that tend to branch off of the initial abuse, such as difficulties in school, and increased vulnerability to substance abuse and tactics used by traffickers.

In order to fully understand the implications of childhood sexualized abuse, it is important to note the impact that such a life event can have on a child. The emotional impact of childhood trauma resulting from sexual abuse has been linked to patterns of self-destructive behaviours that can exasperate feelings of low self-worth and self-blame (Wilson & Widom, 2010, p. 215). As such, through internalizing these feelings of worthlessness and self-blame, victims of childhood sexual abuse are especially vulnerable to prostitution and further sexual exploitation. In the absence of effective therapy, consumption of drugs and other self-destructive behaviour are perceived among survivors as a way to reconcile with the

psychological ramifications of sexual abuse. While drugs can appear to offer temporary reprieve from the emotional impact of sexual abuse, drug abuse gives rise to further risks.

The research suggests that without intervention by authorities, sexual abuse in the home tends both to escalate and to lead to other forms of external maltreatment. Childhood sexual abuse is typically compounded by a combination of other variables: physical abuse in the home, mentally ill mothers, and social isolation (those children often have no one to confide in) (Fleming, 1997, p. 48). Fleming (1997) reveals that those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse were two times more likely to experience physical abuse at home, and that abuse was considerably more severe than in the control group, and occurred for a longer time and more often (p. 53). Specifically, the physical abuse tends to be perpetrated by emotionally detached and mentally ill mothers (Fleming, 1997, P. 53). Unfortunately, for the child trapped in an abusive home, that abuse, and the great level of adversity that goes with it, ultimately sets the stage for a series of further interconnected risks.

Negative familial and ecological factors are at the core of childhood sexualized abuse. Although not all abuse is perpetrated at home, a great deal of abuse does indeed begin at home. A number of risks for childhood sexualized abuse have been identified in the literature. The relationship between variables is exemplified by many negative childhood experiences that can lead to drug addiction, running away from home and poor coping mechanism.

Negative environmental and situational factors can act as breeding grounds for a more direct trajectory leading adolescent women to risky behaviours. Family environments have the capacity to model both positive and negative life skills, and it is crucial that in order to identify

the intricate relationship between family environments and prostitution, one must understand that negative life events can have a domino effect: a high rate of drug use at home coupled with neglectful or absent parents give rise to maladaptive coping mechanisms and stress which give rise to risky behaviour that can manifest itself in a number of ways.

Evidence shows a causal connection between sexual abuse during childhood and prostitution. Research indicates that childhood sexual abuse is a risk factor for becoming involved in prostitution: Nixon in Sepowitz (2012) reported that in Canada, 80.3 percent of women involved in prostitution were victims of childhood sexual abuse, which is also associated with a younger age of entry into the sex industry (p. 575). In addition, Lovoie, Thibodeau, Gagné and Hébert (2010) conducted a study that investigated both risk and preventative factors for the buying and selling of sexual services, and discovered that sexual abuse victims were 3.03 times more likely to engage in prostitution (p. 1153). Although not all victims of childhood sexualized abuse end up in the sex trade industry, as shown by the study's result, adult sex workers report high rates of childhood sexualized abuse, which thus can be an indication of certain detrimental life trajectories.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse, as well, can be identified as a significant factor that puts adolescent females at risk of involvement in the sex trade. Substance abuse is defined as a chronic dependency of a drug leading to negative psychological or physical effects. Again, there is evidence to suggest that some adolescent girls are more at risk of developing a substance abuse problem than others. In Canada, 33 percent of adolescents between the ages of 15 and 24 have used illegal

drugs. A 2004 *Canadian Addiction Survey* (CAS) showed that 11 percent of adolescents 15 years or older had tried cocaine or crack, making this particular substance a serious problem in urban areas. Furthermore, a startling 31 percent of street youth report using cocaine or crack in Toronto, 85 percent in Vancouver and 20-33 percent in Halifax (Murphy, 2013, p. 81). In addition, it seems clear that substance abuse is a growing cause for concern, and it does not appear to be stifled by police crackdown on drug related crimes, in all actuality there has been a 22 percent increase in drug related arrests in Canada, over a 10 year span, the exact number rising from 80,142 to 97,666 (Murphy, 2013, p. 81).

There are a number of studies that attempt to highlight potential causes of substance abuse. Indeed, there are similarities between prostitution risk factors on one hand, and substance abuse risk factors on the other. Research shows that the sexual abuse of pre-adolescent and adolescent females is a risk factor for both substance abuse and prostitution. Sexual abuse victims are especially susceptible to developing substance abuse related disorders as a potential coping mechanism for adversities. Reid (2014) explored variables associated with adolescents' and adults' engagement in commercial sex, and determined that for both cohorts, younger age for onset of drug use is present, and both cohorts report childhood sexualized abuse (p. 323). In some cases, sexual abuse may contribute directly to the involvement in the sex trade; in other cases, substance abuse may mediate the cause-effect relationship: sexual abuse leads to substance abuse which leads to prostitution.

Victims of childhood abuse may see drug use as a way to cope with the emotional repercussions of a life so far characterized by fear and adversity. Drugs are perceived as offering reprieve from the emotional and psychological impacts of childhood abuse. Wilson and Widom

(2010) state that victims of childhood abuse initiate drug usage as a way to cope with adverse home life, to minimize the symptoms of depression, and to increase self-esteem (p.214).

Further research also argues that PTSD and depression are particularly high among victims of childhood abuse, and drug use can indicate a symptom of a greater problem (Sator et al., 2013, p.994). As was mentioned in the previous section on childhood sexualized abuse, victims of sexual abuse tend to report higher rates of emotional and physical abuse, and neglect. Abuse tends to be compounded by internal and external stressors. Girls who experience sexual abuse are two times more likely to initiate IV drug use, while research suggests that preventative interventions could lower this number (Roy, 2003, p. 95). Childhood abuse tends to occur in families of lower socio-economic status, and what is typically found in lower income communities are higher rates of crime, which can include an accessibility of drugs.

Communities that are devoid of adequate resources can impede a child's chances of thwarting off addiction, especially when the child is already considered especially vulnerable. Feng et al. (2013) state that youth involved in street life face constraints such as lack of accessible mental health and addiction treatment (p. 500). Many young women face barriers such as unavailable beds in detox facilities, which make it difficult for them to receive the long term help they require. Furthermore, many detox facilities are ill-equipped to safely detox someone off of harder drugs, such as heroin. These barriers can further entrench high risk girls into street life and survival mechanisms, such as drug abuse or prostitution

The literature indicates that the family environment may correlate with substance abuse among minors and in adulthood. Exposure to drugs and criminal activity through family members and the community in general can normalize those acts for developing adolescents.

Adolescents may learn negative behaviour through familial exposure to substance use and adopt substance usage as a way to cope with stressful environments (Whaley and Smith, 2013, p. 654). Since adolescence is a period in which the formation of identity and individualization from family occur, and thus is a crucial period in development, exposure to negative values, coping strategies and behaviours often lead to emulation. Reid and Piquero (2014) state that deviant environments, such as abusive homes, are empirically linked to an excess of drug use, and in some cases, criminal activity (p. 247). Home environments can normalize certain behaviours, and deter others. Consequently, exposure to risk behaviour such as familial substance abuse, maladaptive coping mechanism and abusive environments, distinguishes family and home life as risk factors for adolescent girls developing drug problems later in life (Lavoie et al., 2010, p. 1148 and Cimino, 2012, p. 1237).

The results of Lung's (2004) study clearly points to a positive correlation between substance abuse and prostitution: 41.9 percent of adolescent sex workers admit to having abused alcohol and 16.9 percent admitted to having abused harder drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine, while the control group had a rate of 8.3 percent for the former, and 3.8 percent for the latter (p.287). Increased substance abuse leads to a greater risk of involvement with risky sexual behaviour. Genetics has been established as a factor which can indicate a susceptibility to addiction related disorders, coupled with environmental and situational factors that in turn increases risk of engaging in prostitution. In addition, youth may not fully be able to assess risks linked to high risk drug use. Their capacity to anticipate that substance abuse disorders tend to go hand in hand with both street and off- street sex work is limited.

Homelessness

There are generally two factors debated concerning the cause of homelessness. The first is structural factors, such as lack of affordable housing, and impoverished communities. The second factor is individual, such as mental illnesses, trauma stemming from abuse, and addiction. Koegal et al. (1995) argues that in order to get a comprehensive picture of risk factors that lead to homelessness, both perspectives are needed (p. 1642). As such, a clear pattern begins to emerge.

Once on the streets, adolescent girls may face multiple risks that can be difficult to break free from. According to a study conducted on the reoccurrence of homelessness, one in five respondents was able to acquire stable housing, only to be back on the street six months later (Mc Quiston et al., 2014, p. 506). Furthermore, seventy five percent were involved in the criminal justice system, and the consequences of incarceration can both lead to housing loss, and affect the possibility of attaining safe housing (Mc Quiston et al., 2014, p. 508). Systems that are in place in order to deter criminality can at times act as a double edge sword. The stigma surrounding homelessness can act as an impetus for many who find it difficult to adapt to normal life. The challenges faced by homeless girls who have already come in contact with the criminal justice system can force girls to resort to extraordinary measures in order to survive. Without many options for safe housing, coupled with previous criminal charges, homelessness often times exasperate harmful survival strategies. Individual risk factors that are usually characterized by homeless adolescents are typically interconnected with structural risk factors. In Koegal, Melamid and Burnam's (1995) study (n= 1563), nearly half of the participants experienced some kind of family trouble, 38 to 51 percent were sexually and

physically abused, and half suffered from chronic substance abuse problems, all made worse by pre-existing psychiatric conditions (p. 1643).

Once completely immersed in street life and further exposed to various risks, young women are often coerced into sex work. Homeless women are at continual risk for further sexual exploitation, and it appears that much of that abuse is not reported. It is a vicious cycle of victimization: young women fleeing abuse in the home, only to end up on the streets where they face further abuses, in turn creating or exacerbating substance abuse related problems. Indeed, homeless women and adolescence are especially susceptible to sexual exploitation; Wolak (2010) determined that 82 percent of adult prostitutes were pimped out at some point in their life (p.20). Pimps in particular are known to use exploitive tactics to manipulate girls into prostitution. Pimps may provide girls with shelter, clothing and protection from the perils of street life. While homelessness can set the stage for being pulled into survival sex, some are simply pushed into the lifestyle as a result of “high intensity drug use, mental illness and inability to access mental health and addiction treatment” (Feng et al., 2013, p. 500), which is often accelerated by a string of perpetual trauma

The causes of homelessness are complex and varied. Interviews conducted on 422 high risk youth in Vancouver, Canada reveal that 239 reported being homeless, 107 reported using methamphetamine, 184 reported using crack-cocaine, and 48 reported using heroin (Feng et al., 2014, p. 500). Within a six-year span, more than half of these youth ended up on the streets, and many of them developed serious, life threatening substance abuse issues which suggests that there is a correlation between drug using and homelessness. On the other hand, some youth may be on the streets by choice. For those high risk youth, what is the “appeal” of

street life? It may be that the harsh reality of experiencing street life is rationalized as being the lesser of two evils, and is eventually embraced; especially so for those who are pushed into street life because of abusive family and home environments. With that perspective, it would perhaps be difficult to expect adolescent women to fully comprehend the actual dangers of street life, namely the dependency upon substance usage and/or survival sex, and the further risk of victimization.

The research points to a high probability that homeless youth precisely face such risks: Saewyc and Edinburg (2010) state that one in three runaway girls in the United States had been sexually assaulted, and had traded sexual services for money, drugs, shelter or other resources (p. 180). While, Roy (2003) identifies homelessness as a key factor in substance abuse initiation (p. 101); homelessness is also correlated with the onset of survival prostitution, while childhood abuse is linked to homelessness, prostitution and substance abuse (Sepowitz, 2012, p.564). Running away from home has been identified as a potential mediator for prostitution (Wilson & Widom, 2010, p. 215). The very nature of homelessness, in all that it entails – lack of safe environments, high prevalence of drugs, daily struggle to find food, clothing and resources – can act as a precursor to survival sex. In addition, many homeless youth end up on the streets because they are fleeing abusive homes. It should not come as a surprise, since a considerable amount of abuse in the home goes unreported, and many young girls flee their abusive homes, rather than confront the trauma. Family and environmental factors, to varying degrees, are linked to homelessness, which along with substance abuse, is causally connected to childhood trauma that is the result of abusive homes

The Complex Relationship Between Family-based Risk Factors and Prostitution

The complex connection between risk factors and prostitution can be explained through a cause effect relationship which begins in childhood. Specifically, family risk factors have a role to play in the onset of prostitution and substance abuse, in particular childhood abuse from parents or guardians, and learned negative life skills. Thus, the end result, substance abuse among homeless girls can be exceedingly difficult to address. The causes of substance abuse and its relationship to homelessness and prostitution indeed appear to be deeply rooted in childhood. Reid (2014) states substance usage is extreme among adult female sex workers, but also that those who have been in the industry long term report higher amounts of substance abuse by their parents (p. 338). Moreover, Macdonald (2014), who conducted an ethnographic study on risk perceptions amongst high risk youth, states that one participant experienced severe emotional abuse from her father. This participant was later removed from the home by child protective agency where she was eventually shuffled between group homes and emergency shelters, until she ended up as a “responsible injection drug user” living on the streets (p. 499), in essence embracing her position in society as a homeless drug user.

To further compound family and environmental risks, Saewyc and Edinburgh (2010) indicate that maladaptive psychological responses to stressful environments during development can be directly linked to substance usage, suicide attempts and risky sexual behaviours (p.181). In addition, Green et al. (2012) identify that childhood physical abuse has detrimental psychological effects on homeless women, while pointing out that chronic drug abuse is prevalent among said cohort of women (p.22). Conversely, Sepowitz (2012) report that only six percent of prostitutes in Canada, according to a 2002 study, describe high degrees of

physical childhood abuse, while 77 percent report out of home care, such as living in foster or group home (p. 575).

Family and environmental influences, such as early exposure to an excess of drug use and childhood trauma, can also lead to dependency on drugs later in life, either as a learned behaviour or as a coping mechanism, in some cases both. Then a new interdependent level of risk comes forth, which increases the likeliness of becoming emerged in street life. Street life creates new risks that cycles back into the risks associated with prostitution: increased physical, sexual and emotional victimization.

Risk factors situated either in the home, or in the community, can indeed lay the groundwork for substance abuse, homelessness and prostitution. Consequentially, many of the risk factors that have been determined to be most predominant are ultimately directly or indirectly traced back to abusive family and home environments. Wolak (2010) even reports that 14 percent of sex workers were introduced to the trade by an acquaintance, and 3 percent by an actual family member (p.19). Unstable home life, coercion, childhood sexual abuse and drug dependency are noted as key factors that push towards prostitution (Cimino, 2012, p.1236). Disadvantaged community environments, with lack of programming and positive options, often exasperate family risk factors among adolescent females, which can only reinforce harmful survival strategies linked to street life.

Conclusion

Expectations are placed on young girls that they should be able to discern between the right and the wrong paths in life. The very ability to discern what the first path is, has to be

systematically instilled in everyone. We discover the world in which we live through our culture: media, traditions, and social norms. Our home life has a role to play in how we may develop personal values, and common belief systems are then shared and reinforced through systems of reward and punishment. We all grow up exposed to the world in which we are meant to live. The ability to identify the wrong path, too, is not a given. We learn what not to do through the implementation of laws and rules that are meant to be deterrents for bad behaviour. From birth, we are integrated into a society that is outwardly structured in such a way as to protect us from an array of harms, some tangible, some not. But the whole process can unravel, and some communities become breeding grounds for addiction and crime. Young girls from those communities may still be able to perceive what is the right path in life, but might not be able to take it; it is something that they will never be able to attain, while they blindingly take part in a perpetual cycle of abuse and addiction, that in turn sentences them to a reality that does not seem to offer any reprieve. Substance abuse can act as the mediating variable between sexual abuse and prostitution; a vicious cycle where risk factors feed into each other, resulting in life outcomes such as an increased victimization characterized by sex work and the dangers associated with street life.

First, this essay has argued that the three major risk factors for involvement in the sex trade are childhood sexual abuse, substance abuse and homelessness. Many other factors are also at play, including physical and emotional abuse, negative family and environmental influences, and being displaced at an early age. Belonging to some specific groups, such is the case with Indigenous girls, is a risk factors on its own. The research identifies common risk factors for prostitution and substance abuse. For some, substance abuse is a push factor into

prostitution, others use drugs as a means to cope with the trauma associated with childhood abuse, and others are pulled into the sex trade industry by family members or acquaintances. There are also those who may engage in survival sex in order to survive the struggles that go hand and hand with being homeless. The risk factors for both prostitution and substance abuse tend to overlap, and can even be seen, at times, as directional and causal.

Secondly, this essay has argued that risk factors for prostitution are connected. The relationship between prostitution and substance abuse is a complex one. It is multi-faceted and is also individualized. However, risk factors for prostitution are often the same risk factors for substance abuse, and amongst those, homelessness and childhood sexual abuse stand out. Furthermore, sexual abuse can lead to substance abuse. Substance abuse is prevalent among prostitutes, and sex work can act as a means to sustain one's addiction. Research reveals that sexual, physical and emotional abuses are independently associated with prostitution among drug using street youth (Stoltz, 2007, p.1216). Similarly, Cimino (2012) identifies childhood sexual and physical abuse, as well as poverty, as being the most pertinent push factors leading adolescents and women into prostitution (p.1236). One research in particular clearly points out to a directional relationship between substance abuse and prostitution: 61 percent of prostitutes interviewed reported having been sexually abused as a child, and 95 percent reported having used illicit drugs prior to entry into prostitution (Potterat et al., 1998, p. 333).

Thirdly, this essay has argued that risk factors are rooted in negative family environments. Specifically, this essay stressed the importance of addressing family based risk factors in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how women begin a life characterized by criminality and self-harm, so to implement a more effective method from

which to support active survival sex workers. Positive environments during childhood and adolescent are crucial. However, this cannot always be ensured. Thus, it is important to be able to recognize changes in behaviour during adolescence, such as drug use. These changes in behaviour can indicate that there could be problems at home.

This essay has argued that those initial changes in behaviour can easily snowball into serious and life threatening behaviour later on in life. Indeed, substance abuse often indicates a more fundamental problem. To better address substance abuse, one would have to address the causes of substance abuse. Considering that the research shows a correlation between substance abuse and childhood trauma among both survival sex workers and the homeless populations, it would seem that repairing the harm caused by negative home life would be a step in the right direction. This approach seems to be warranted by the literature indicating several commonalities of risk factors among survival sex workers.

The key to minimizing further victimization of at risk adolescents is to acknowledge that such risk tend to first manifest in childhood. Rather than viewing the problem from the perspective of the current life outcomes – prostitution, addiction and homelessness – a shift in paradigm is required: the addict, the prostitute and the homeless girl has to be seen as the former victim of childhood sexual, physical and emotional abuse. As a result, we may be better equipped to treat the secondary symptom: addiction. Understanding that such risk factors place at risk adolescent girls in a situation which further perpetuates victimization may help shift the negative stigma associated with homelessness, prostitution and substance abuse. This perspective, in essence, humanizes the problem. With this in mind, the hope is that, as society

view at risk adolescent girls for the victims they truly are, it could develop better tools to break this vicious cycle, or even better strategies to prevent it from even starting.

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