



STREET BUSINESS: THE LINKS BETWEEN SEX AND DRUGS MARKETS

Policing and Reducing Crime Unit - Police Research Series Paper 118
by *Tiggey May, Mark Edmunds and Michael Hough*
with the assistance of *Claire Harvey*
November 1999

Summary

An earlier PRC report (CDPS 80) found that a significant minority of those who bought drugs in open markets were involved in sex work. This report builds on these findings by examining the links in more detail and the scope for, and value in, tackling drug markets through preventive strategies aimed at sex markets.

The report describes three geographical areas where drug markets co-exist with sex markets. It suggests that a properly co-ordinated strategic approach to the problem should combine enforcement with primary prevention aimed at diverting young people from becoming involved in sex work, and secondary prevention enabling those in it to leave.

The report highlights the need for the police to work with other agencies, particularly health, to provide specialist services for drug-using sex workers. The report should be of value to those developing strategies to tackle the social problems which create and maintain linked sex and drugs markets.

Main findings and implications

Sex markets can play a significant role in the development of drugs markets (and vice versa). Where this occurs, the threats posed by drug markets to public order, public health and to vulnerable individuals intensify.

There are linkages between sex markets and crack markets. Crack is a drug which facilitates sex work.

The significant amount of money which sex workers can earn means that they are ideal clients for crack markets. Where sex and drug markets appear to be only loosely linked, the arrival of crack may provide a trigger for their closer integration.

The closeness of the links between sex and drugs markets varied by area. One of the sex markets studied made only a small contribution to the viability of a local drug market. Sex workers there comprised only a small proportion of illegal drug buyers. There were signs, however, that a market in crack-cocaine was developing and that the sex market was fuelling this development. Other local sex and drugs markets showed a closer degree of integration - with sex markets in two areas sustaining drug dealing.

There are some clear patterns in sex workers' histories. Half of the sample of 67 sex workers interviewed for this study started sex work while still minors, and just over half (34) had been 'looked after' by a local authority at some time in their lives.

Points for action

This report suggests that effective action to tackle local drug markets should include attention to the role of sex markets in supporting their development and buoyancy. The precise form of action will depend on the particular features of the local drug and sex markets, and the extent and nature of links between them.

The first step is for Drug Action Teams (DATs), working closely with Crime and Disorder partnerships and Youth Offending Teams, to ensure they have a full understanding of how drug and sex markets interact locally. The recently issued guidance for the DAT template provides a useful model for collecting data from a range of sources, including local crime and disorder audits. This information can be used to develop a multi-agency strategy tailored to local need. Where drug and sex markets are found to co-exist, the strategy should include:

- primary prevention - designed to avoid the involvement of at-risk groups in sex work;

- secondary prevention - to help those engaged in sex work to leave it; and
- harm reduction - to ensure that sex markets take the least socially harmful shape, having assessed what that shape might be locally.

Other related PRC papers

CDP paper 80: *Tackling Local Drugs Markets*.

PRS paper 109: *Policing Drug Hot-Spots*