Journal of Youth Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713393791

On a fast-track into adulthood: an exploration of transitions into adulthood for street-based sex workers in New Zealand

Gillian Michelle Abel [a]; Lisa Jane Fitzgerald [b]
[a] Department of Public Health and General Practice, University of Otago, Christchurch, Christchurch, New Zealand [b] School of Population Health, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Online Publication Date: 01 August 2008

To cite this Article Abel, Gillian Michelle and Fitzgerald, Lisa Jane(2008)'On a fast-track into adulthood: an exploration of transitions into adulthood for street-based sex workers in New Zealand',Journal of Youth Studies,11:4,361 — 376
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13676260802104808
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676260802104808

Journal of Youth Studies
Vol. 11, No. 4, August 2008, 361–376

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

On a fast-track into adulthood: an exploration of transitions into adulthood for street-based sex workers in New Zealand

Gillian Michelle Abel[a]* and Lisa Jane Fitzgerald[b]

[a]*Department of Public Health and General Practice, University of Otago, Christchurch, Christchurch, New Zealand;* [b]*School of Population Health, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia*

There have been many debates in the literature about the extended transition to adulthood many young people are experiencing in late modern times. However, not all young people make this prolonged transition and, for some, resources within their family and community networks are insufficient to enable an extended transition into stable, independent adult roles. The findings presented in this paper are drawn from a large participatory research project investigating the impact of decriminalisation on the health and safety practices of sex workers in New Zealand. This paper utilises the talk of 17 street-based sex workers who entered the industry under the age of 18 years, as well as using data from a survey of 772 sex workers in New Zealand. For young people entering the industry prior to the age of 18, the period of adolescence was short-lived and their inability to gain support through either their family or the government meant that they opted to work in the sex industry to survive. Unsupported transitions into adulthood are characterised by a high degree of risk with limited employment options. This research highlights the need for policy-makers to develop holistic, multi-sectorial policies for young people which are not based on age-specific frameworks.

Keywords: transition; young adulthood; youth culture; exclusion; identity

Introduction

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa/New Zealand defines young people as 'moving between childhood and adulthood aged 12–24 years inclusive' (Ministry of Youth Affairs 2002, p. 11). However, it has been argued that it is unhelpful to refer to such a long period as one developmental phase as this time is characterised by numerous changes (Arnett 2006). In the wake of this debate, the period of adolescence has been described as the period between ages 10 and 17 and a new term, 'emergent adulthood', is being used to describe the age group 18–25, with some scholars arguing that this period could even be extended to age 30 in some countries (Bynner 2005, Arnett 2006). Emergent adulthood, they contend, is the phase when young people are transitioning into stable, independent adult roles. More young people in contemporary late modern times are drawing on the resources of their families for longer, delaying marriage, having children at a later age, participating in tertiary education, travelling abroad and maintaining ties with the family home (Jones 2002, Arnett 2006, Webster *et al*. 2006). This protracted transition to adulthood had previously only been associated with middle-class young people, but increasingly their working-class counterparts are taking up opportunities of extended

*Corresponding author. Email: gillian.abel@otago.ac.nz

ISSN 1367-6261 print/ISSN 1469-9680 online

DOI: 10.1080/13676260802104808
http://www.informaworld.com

education (Jones 2002). Yet not all young people make this prolonged transition into stable independent adult roles, and for socially excluded youth, transitions can be risky, complex, stigmatised and fast-tracked.

There are multiple maps of youth lifecourse and different timetables of life transitions. Young people of the same age may be at different stages of transitions, and therefore the conceptualisation of youth transitions as linear and concluding at age-specific points is problematic (Jones 2002, Webster *et al.* 2006, Valentine and Skelton 2007). Structural factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity and locality are key in the timing of young people's transitions, and young people who have a family network characterised by more resources experience a lengthier transitional period (Jones 2002, Bynner 2005). Young people are not a homogeneous group and their transitions to adulthood need to be understood within the context of their diverse peer, family and community networks (Marshall and Stenner 2004, Valentine and Skelton 2007). They are embedded within a network of social relations and the control they have over their individual development is dependent on the material and symbolic resources available in these networks (Raffo and Reeves 2000).

Many young people leave home without resources and despite the risk of homelessness, because they need to gain independence from their parents (Jones 2002). Yet in many countries, including New Zealand, there is little in the way of government financial support for young people who are not at the age of majority (legal adulthood), yet are independent of their parents or caregivers. Economic restructuring in New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the scrapping of financial support to all people under the age of majority, which in New Zealand is 18 years, and young people who were living independently from their parents were forced to fend for themselves. More recent changes have seen the unemployment benefit offered to people 16–17 years of age only if they are living with a partner and children who they are supporting. The Independent Youth Benefit is available to 16–17-year-old young people without children if they can prove they are unable to live with their parents. However, to be eligible for the $148.73 per week, they must sign a contract to take part in activities such as education, training or preparing for work and be involved in this for between 30 and 40 hours per week. This interventionist policy approach assumes ethically reflexive agency, with 'individuals assumed to be able to negotiate and transcend obstacles in their path by exploiting opportunities, developing skills and managing risk' (Gillies 2005, p. 85). Material and structural constraints are not recognised. Some young people who are unable to overcome these obstacles resort to marginalised activities, such as commercial sex work as a survival strategy.

Street-based workers represent just one-tenth of the sex industry in New Zealand, but they are more likely than both managed and private workers to start working in the industry prior to the age of 18 years (Abel *et al.* 2007). Some brothel owners have been charged following enactment of the Prostitution Reform Act (2003), which decriminalised sex work in New Zealand, for having underage workers operating from their premises, but the majority ensure that they do not have workers under the age of 18 years in their establishments. Therefore, most young people who choose to work in the industry begin working on the street. Yet, there is scant literature on the transitions to adulthood such young people experience.

Research design

The research project 'The Impact of the Prostitution Reform Act on the Health and Safety of Sex Workers' is a multi-method study that has examined the impact of decriminalisation

of the sex industry on the health and safety practices of sex workers in New Zealand. It was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand. This study takes a community-based participatory approach, considered best practice for doing research in the sex industry (Wahab and Sloan 2004, Benoit *et al.* 2005). It is an approach which is especially beneficial to marginalised populations, whose perspectives are not well represented in traditional research processes. A community-based participatory approach involves an active and ongoing partnership between the researchers and the community at all stages of the research process with the aim to improve public health. Through the direct involvement of the participants in the research process, there is a power sharing – which means that participants are less likely to be exploited in the research relationship (Liamputtong 2007). By building relationships with community groups and working in partnership, research is more likely to reflect the perspectives of hidden populations. Partnerships help to bridge cultural, ethnic and social class divides that often prevent the incorporation of participants' perspectives in research (Denner *et al.* 1999). It is argued that health improvements will only be achieved with research embedded in the local knowledge and with the active support of community members (Baum 1995).

The present research was conducted by public health researchers from the University of Otago, Christchurch, in partnership with the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective (NZPC). The relationship between the NZPC and the university is a long-standing one, dating back to the early 1990s. The entire process of the research, from the identification of research questions to the development of the data collection tools, the collection of data, write-up and dissemination of the research results, has been carried out as a partnership.

The study was carried out in the three main cities of New Zealand – Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch – and also included two smaller regional cities: Nelson and Napier. A questionnaire was administered by NZPC staff, trained in interviewing techniques, to a sample of sex workers in the five cities. Although random sampling was not carried out, care was taken to represent the diversity of the industry within the final sample by conducting an estimation of the number of private, managed (people working in brothels and escort agencies under a system of management) and street-based sex workers, including the gender distribution within each sector, across the five locations of the study. Participants were sampled purposively within the sectors and locations of the study and street-based, small city, male and transgender workers were over-sampled because of smaller numbers in these populations. The final sample achieved was 772, which represents 32% of the estimated sex worker population across those areas.

Questionnaire data were analysed using SAS 9.1. Disproportionate sampling and inequalities in the selection frame and procedures create unequal selection probabilities and are corrected by weights inverse to those probabilities (Kish 1965). Weighting of a sample to a known population distribution will adjust for differences in sampling rates and will also adjust for the difference in response rate of different sectors of the industry (Kalton 1983). Unequal weights were applied to control for bias. However, although bias is controlled, the unequal weights also increase imprecision through increasing the standard error of the estimates. Therefore, SAS Survey Procedures were used, as these use weights for point estimates and also take into account weights for standard errors.

In-depth interviews were carried out with 58 sex workers in the five locations of the research. The diversity of the industry was also reflected in this sample. The interviews utilised a semi-structured interview guide and were conducted by NZPC outreach workers who had been trained in interviewing techniques. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed to word accuracy. Thematic analysis was undertaken, which is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke

2006, p. 79). There are divergent understandings of what constitutes good thematic analysis (Holloway and Todres 2003) as it is a flexible method that allows for a wide range of analytic options (Braun and Clarke 2006). Transcripts were read and re-read, and data-sets were developed by cutting and pasting relevant quotations by participants around a range of subject areas. Each data-set was analysed, identifying themes or patterned responses or meaning. The authors were also attentive to contradictions and differences in participants' talk.

Names of all participants have been changed to protect their identity.

Findings

The present paper presents the talk of the 17 street-based workers who participated in the in-depth interviews and who entered the sex industry before the age of 18. In addition, some references are made to the results of the survey of 772 sex workers across the locations of the study. In this survey, 17.4% reported starting in the sex industry before the age of 18 years. Street workers (57.2%) were more likely than managed workers (9.6%) and private workers (15.8%) to have started before this age (see Table 1). The higher incidence of underage workers in street-based sex work has been found in other studies (Cusick 2002).

Coming onto the street

Many of the street-based workers who participated in the in-depth interviews ran away from home at an early age and were living on the street prior to starting sex work. There have been many studies which have found correlations between entering the sex industry and running away, homelessness and experience of statutory care and protection (O'Neill 1997, Shaw and Butler 1998, Cusick 2002). Nadon *et al.*'s (1998) study, which looked at a group of young sex workers and a comparison group of non-sex workers with similar backgrounds, concluded that there were high levels of childhood abuse, runaway behaviour, drug and alcohol use and dysfunctional families among young sex workers. Yet, they argue, these factors were equally common amongst non-sex working young people, and therefore background factors may be 'insufficient conditions to justify prostitution activity' (Nadon *et al.* 1998, p. 220).

Table 1. Age of entry into sex work of survey participants by sector[a].

Age at entry into sex work ($N=771$)	Total ($N=772$)	Street workers ($N=201$)	Managed indoor ($N=378$)	Private indoor ($N=191$)	Comparison across sectors
<16 years	9.0 (1.1)	29.4 (3.8)	3.9 (1.1)	8.3 (1.9)	$\chi^2=443.2$
16–17 years	9.3 (1.1)	26.6 (3.7)	5.7 (1.1)	7.6 (2.3)	Degrees of freedom = 10
18–21 years	35.6 (2.0)	29.7 (3.7)	42.3 (2.7)	27.1 (4.0)	$p<0.0001$
22–29 years	27.1 (1.9)	9.8 (2.2)	32.3 (2.5)	26.3 (3.9)	
30–45 years	16.8 (1.7)	3.6 (1.4)	14.2 (1.9)	26.7 (4.0)	
>45 years	2.2 (0.7)	0.9 (0.9)	1.6 (0.7)	4.0 (1.7)	

[a]Weighted estimates to account for variation in probability of selection and response. Data presented as percentage (standard error).

The street-based participants in this study had not experienced stable and supportive family lives and some had experienced foster care. Although all the street-based workers were at an age typically referred to as adolescence, none at that stage resided with parents, attended school or were supported financially by their parents, factors which are termed the sociological markers of adolescence (Benoit *et al*. 2008).

> Well since I was 11, I was put into CYF's (Child, Youth and Family) care. . . . And I learned to deal with the fact that's my friends and my family, because my family hasn't been around me. You know, my mum walked out on me when I was two and a half, and my dad, he's just an idiot. (Joyce)

Joyce ran away from her foster family at the age of 14 and went to live on the streets. Her foster sister had been working on the street and Joyce was attracted by the money that she saw her making.

> And she took me out there and I just watched for a while. And just watched for a while, sat back and just, yeah, watched how it went. And then I noticed after a few jobs my sister come back with all this money, and I was like, 'Man, I'm broke as. I need some money as well.' So my sister was like, 'Oh yeah, go and have a try.' I was like, yeah, real nervous of course, and um, yeah, within 3 hours I'd made just about 800 bucks.
>
> But then like after, after trying it out myself, you know, I could understand where she was coming from. . . . Cause she was going from house to house and, you know, she paid for motels every night and that's how she lived. (Joyce)

On arriving on the street, most participants were transient, experiencing secondary homelessness, moving from place to place, staying in motels, sometimes sleeping on the street and at other times sleeping at friends' flats.

> IJ: Yeah, and you were 14 at the time?
> J: Yeah.
> IJ: Okay, cool. Um you talked about running away from home, so where were you living at the time when you did that?
> J: I was living [. . .] oh I moved round every day basically. I was living with different people, different friends. (Janine)

The survey of sex workers found that participants under the age of 18 years at the time of entering the sex industry were more likely than their older counterparts to report that they had friends working in the industry prior to joining and they were minding a friend when they were asked by a client for sex (see Table 2). Participants in the in-depth interviews said that they hung around in groups of young people on the street. Some of the members of the group would be engaged in sex work whilst others were 'minders', being paid a fee from the money their friends earned. Some participants were resistant to actually working themselves, articulating an initial disgust but revising their decision when they saw the money that their friends were earning.

> And then I had friends, my friend, her friends were working. She was like, 'Oh come down to the street, you know, and watch my friends and they'll pay you.' I was like, 'Oh yeah.' You know, I was against it. At first I was against it. It was like, 'Fuck that, dirty bitches,' you know, all I thought was, 'Dirty, dirty,' you know. 'They're fucking abuse me blah blah blah.' And so I went down to the street anyway and I started watching them and they'd give me $20 and, yeah, for every job, and $10 and you know, just and hooked me up with smokes, cigarettes, alcohol, and that's how I started. It was like about the first week for my whole pregnancy. Oh no, not my whole pregnancy, sorry, but about halfway through my pregnancy. And then every time that I'd go out with the girls and I'd watch them, like make sure they were all right, and you know, and they'd pay me, like a pimp sort of. (Sally)

Table 2. Reasons for entry into sex work by age of entry[a].

	Age <18 years (N=177)	Age >18 years (N=571)	Comparison across age of entry (df=2) χ^2	p
Pay household expenses (N=748)	65.5 (4.3)	75.0 (2.2)	13.8	0.0002
Pay for social life/going out/luxuries (N=737)	67.5 (4.2)	60.1 (2.4)	7.1	0.008
Saving up (N=733)	38.8 (4.3)	63.2 (2.3)	77.0	<0.0001
Pay for education (N=730)	15.8 (3.1)	26.0 (2.2)	18.6	<0.0001
Support children/family (N=728)	30.3 (4.1)	39.8 (2.4)	11.7	0.0006
Made to work by someone (N= =727)	9.5 (2.2)	2.5 (0.7)	44.7	<0.0001
Exploring sexuality (N=724)	30.3 (4.2)	20.8 (1.9)	15.1	0.0001
Unable to get benefit/parental support (N=724)	35.0 (4.2)	9.5 (1.4)	155.1	<0.0001
No other income (N=732)	52.8 (4.4)	25.4 (2.1)	105.8	<0.0001
Friend was doing it (N=731)	44.7 (4.4)	28.7 (2.1)	36.8	<0.0001
Minding a friend and was asked to join (N=723)	19.6 (3.4)	7.7 (1.2)	51.9	<0.0001
Thought it looked exciting/glamorous (N=724)	40.0 (4.4)	22.8 (2.0)	47.9	<0.0001
Sex workers looked fun to be with (N=717)	43.7 (4.4)	18.0 (1.8)	116.3	<0.0001
Curiosity (N=731)	50.7 (4.5)	49.5 (2.5)	0.2	0.7
Support gambling use (N=725)	8.3 (2.3)	4.7 (1.0)	7.6	0.006
Support for alcohol or other drug use (N=727)	43.5 (4.4)	16.4 (1.7)	135.7	<0.0001
Money (N=755)	94.7 (1.9)	92.4 (1.3)	2.8	0.09
Because its not against the law (N=694)	23.2 (3.8)	27.7 (2.3)	3.0	0.08

[a]Weighted estimates to account for variation in probability of selection and response. Data presented as percentage (standard error).

> I was, like to be quite honest, I was actually quite disgusted, because I couldn't believe my sister would do that. I never thought that she'd go down and she'd do that kind of thing. But then like after, after trying it out myself, you know, I could understand where she was coming from. (Joyce)

Some feminists would contest the notion of 'choice' (Barry 1995), and researchers such as McKeganey argue that the decision to work is made in desperate circumstances and as such cannot be construed as free 'choice' (McKeganey 2006). However, although there are clearly personal biographies that do predispose some people to sex work, many sex workers do exercise a 'conscious choice' when entering the sex industry:

> The appropriateness of referring to 'conscious choice' here might be disputed, but there can be no question that *even* women confronted with relevant poverty, primed by their personal biographies and with peers in sex work can take conscious decisions to enter or not to enter the sex industry; and some women decide to engage in sex work outside the sway of all such predisposing circumstances. (Scambler 1997, p. 113; original emphasis)

It has been argued that the actions and choices made by young people are not open and free but constrained by an individual practical knowledge and understanding of what is possible (Raffo and Reeves 2000). Some participants talked of their mothers who were also

sex workers, and for them the decision to enter the sex industry was non-problematic with little reflection:

S: Oh my mother's, my mother's been a sex worker most of her life as well.
IJ: Yeah.
S: She is too, but she works over in [name of town].
IJ: Yeah.
S: And um [. . .] I don't know, I suppose we grew up with it.
IJ: Yeah. So you've always known that?
S: Yeah, I have pretty much, yeah.
IJ: Yeah. So um (.) so when you started doing sex work when you were a street kid, how was that for you, knowing that your mum was?
S: Mmm, don't know, I mean . . .
IJ: Just felt normal.
S: Oh I don't know, about, I don't know, never really [. . .] never thought about it, never acknowledged it. (Susan)

J: Okay, um my mother worked. Um she's been a sex worker for um [. . .] well ever since I've ever, well, yeah, I think she's always been one, and I didn't find out till I was 14. And I thought well if my mum can do it, it must be okay. So therefore then I started doing it, because mum never told me, you know, not to do it and it was wrong and I shouldn't be doing it. So I just really followed in her footsteps.
IJ: Okay. And so what did your mum, mother think when you started sex working?
J: She's really happy because I was taking home money.
IJ: Oh okay, so she didn't, that was about money?
J: It was about money, and I also then at that time I found out that mum had a drug habit, so it was good for her, because I could go out and make money. And I would never see her ill or anything, so I mean she's still, she's still the same today, and I've never ever seen her ill. (Joan)

Jones (2002) has argued that values and beliefs are passed through family life. Unlike Sally and Joyce who had initial revulsion for the job, Susan and Joan had few qualms. Joan was concerned that she kept her mother 'well' by making sure she had money for drugs, taking on the caring, independent role to her mother's dependent one. This reversal of traditional roles makes transitions to adulthood very different from the norm (Jones 2002). Sally spoke of her mother starting sex work after her and also alluded to the reversal of roles in her family life:

> Oh like my mum is like a sister to me. I'm more of a mum to her than she is to me. . . . I've always been the mum in my family. (Sally)

An economic decision

Research has highlighted many factors precipitating the choice to enter the industry. However, economics plays a key role in entry to the sex industry, and the use sex workers make of their money is explanatory in their continuation of sex work (Brock 1998, O'Neill and Campbell 2006, Weldon 2006, Willman-Navarro 2006). Cusick (2002) noted in her literature review of youth prostitution that for many young people it is the desire to escape poverty combined with the lack of opportunity that underlies the decision to enter the sex industry.

Our survey of sex workers asked about reasons for entry into the sex industry. Participants who were under 18 years of age at entry were more likely than participants who were older than 18 at entry to report that they were unable to get a government benefit or parental support and they had no other source of income (see Table 2). Most countries,

including New Zealand, have benefit policies which are age-related and do not fit with the diversity of transitional experiences for young people (Jones 2002, Webster *et al*. 2006).

For all of the street-based workers interviewed in-depth in this study, money was the key motivation for entry into the industry:

> And then like they were like, 'Oh yeah, I'll give you $200 to suck my dick, blah blah,' you know. And within that two hours I made $450. On the benefit that I was getting, it was like $150, I think, maximum. I'd pay board. So within two hours getting $450, it was like, 'Wow,' you know. And it got me hooked from there. Kind of like a drug, it was like addictive. As soon as I got that money, it was like, you know, I knew that I could get it and it was like, 'Fuck.'(Sally)

> Okay, um I thought it was for me cause I wasn't on a benefit, had no job, so for me I, the friend that I was living with, who was a sex worker, was basically paying for my way, cause I wasn't living at home either. And you know, she was buying my clothes, buying my food, and putting a roof over my head and all the rest of that. And I felt helpless in a lot of ways that I could not help out. But in the role of Cinderella, she saw it as that I was helping her a lot, but to me I thought well I could do a bit more. So when I started working and started getting my own income and started paying my way, it made me feel a bit more independent, and yeah, a bit more powerful in that sense where I could help out and be more of an equal than a dependent with um my flat-mates. And yeah, that's how I really felt anyway. (Kyra)

> This is my life, this is how I live. You know, benefits, I'm on a sickness benefit, which is only $165 a week. That doesn't do nothing. It doesn't get you nothing. There are some places that will pay for, you know, um your rent or your board or you know, something like that. But that's, that's nothing. So I don't, at the end of the day I don't care what anybody else says. I'm a worker, you know, and now I can say, you know, I'm proud of it. Nothing to be ashamed of. (Joyce)

Liminal period

In his paper on nightclubbing as an urban rite of passage, Northcote describes a liminal time between youth and adulthood in which young people engage in 'a period of freedom and hedonistic leisure' before they undertake the roles of adulthood (2006, p. 1). Many young people experience an extended period of emergent adulthood as they transition from school to tertiary education, often staying in the family home or leaving and returning a number of times before taking on the independence of adulthood. The young people in this study made this transition at an earlier age and their period of emergent adulthood was short-lived. They did experience an initial phase of freedom and hedonistic pleasures of drug-taking, alcohol use and socialising, but this period was very short as they also had to support themselves and survive without the ability to fall back on the support of their parents.

> Um it was more friends that were working on the streets and I heard about it and so I thought, 'Oh yeah, money, heaps of drugs and, yeah, alcohol, and, yay, party.' (Sandy)

Survey participants who were under the age of 18 years at the start of sex work were more likely than those over the age of 18 to report that sex workers looked like they were fun to be with (see Table 2). They were just as likely as their older counterparts to report that they were curious about the industry before joining, with nearly half of all survey participants reporting this. Participants in the in-depth interviews also spoke of their curiosity and feeling left out of the fun that their working friends were experiencing:

> Um to be honest, it was just curiosity that sort of got me into the sex work. Um I used, I used to stay with um a friend of mine and she was also a sex worker, and there were 4 of us at that time. And my friend and the other 2 used to come out and go sex work, and I had to sort of

just stay home and be kind of like Cinderella. But every time they used to come home, they used to be smiling, happy, and have a lot to talk about, and I felt like I was missing out on something. So I just sort of, yeah, jumped out on the motorway one night with um another friend, who didn't stay with us, but she was also staying at where I was staying, and yeah, hitched into town with her and that's where it all started. ... Um oh well it was a mixture of um excitement and I was also scared and nervous, um intrigued, yeah. It was a whole lot of um feelings when I first started. (Kyra)

Survival

At a relatively early chronological age these young people had to contend with the need to earn money to ensure their survival. The only way they saw to do this was through working on the streets. There were few other options available to them that would bring in the money that they had grown accustomed to. Yet they did express agency in their decisions to stay on in the sex industry. It was a choice they had made and, as Hyde has argued, they were aware that their survival and continued independence was dependent on themselves (Hyde 2005).

Sandy talked of how she had quickly outgrown the phase of enjoying the job:

Real chilled out, but I've never liked, I used to like, you know, having sex and, you know, doing jobs and stuff. But now I've just I've just fully grown out of that phase.

She sees sex work now as:

Um easy money, easy money, that's all I think. ... Money. I mean I'm still on the streets as of now. ... And the only way to support myself is to work on the streets. Yeah. (Sandy)

S: Oh I mean you've got a whole different inside into a life and whatever, that some people just don't have a clue about. Like um [...] some of the good ones, obviously money.
IJ: Yeah.
S: That's a good point. It's a way of survival.
IJ: Yeah.
S: You know, I mean you've got a drug habit and you um [...] going to be sick, you go out and you do what you've got to do to make money and [...] I mean that's a good point about it.
S: My life is really just sex work, because all I do is go to work, get my drugs and I'm well, sleep during the day, and then get ready, go to work again. It's the same shit every day. (Sarah)

Sex work ceased to be exciting and glamorous but was a job that they tried not to think too much about; a means to survival.

J: When you're doing a job, it's not the fact – you know, the only thing that's going through your mind when you're doing a job is, 'I'm being paid for this. I get money out of this. You know, I get to live. I get to eat, I get to sleep in a warm, safe place.' That's the only thing that goes through your head.
IJ: Yeah.
J: You don't, I never look at them face to face, never. It's, you look like around. You just don't look at them. (Joyce)

Yeah, so I'm stuck again on the street. No, but the first time, um as soon as I left kids and shit, that was my choice to go back on the streets. I couldn't handle it at home, so I left and ran straight to the streets, what I knew best of knowledge. And I got brought up when I was 14 on the streets, yeah. (Sandy)

> I kind of like got used to the idea of the girls working. Like you get your mind around it and like it turned my mind to like, 'Oh it's all right, it's just a job.' ... There's no emotions – well they're all like just about the money. Do the job and it's over. It's a job, and I was like, 'Oh yeah,' you know. And then like after a while I started getting used to that. (Sally)

Addiction

Sex workers do not conform to one single stereotype and the use of alcohol and drugs amongst this population varies. This is evidenced in the differential use of alcohol and drugs within the different sectors and localities of the sex industry (Plant 1997, Sanders 2006). Sex workers in managed indoor venues are less likely to engage in illicit drug use, often because management place restrictions on their use (Plant 1997, Sanders 2006). Some commentators assert that sex workers who use drugs are most often addicted prior to entering the sex industry (Hubbard 1998, Potterat *et al*. 1998, Pyett and Warr 1999, Benoit and Millar 2001). Others, however, have found that many only started taking drugs following their entry into sex work, which in turn tied them into the sex industry as they had to then continue to fund their acquired habit (Pyett and Warr 1999, McKeganey 2006). It has been noted by some commentators that because of the easy availability of drugs in the locations where street sex work takes place, there is a likelihood that those workers, who prior to working had not taken drugs, would eventually start using drugs themselves (May and Hunter 2006).

Forty-two per cent of the survey participants under the age of 18 at the time of entry into sex work reported a need to fund their drug or alcohol use as a reason for entering the industry. Most participants in in-depth interviews who took drugs reported existing drug use at the time of entry into the industry:

> S: Well I had a pretty bad [...] upbringing was pretty unstable, and um then I ended up baby-sitting for some people through a friend of mine, who I met on a hairdressing course, who used drugs intravenously.
> IJ: Yeah.
> S: And I got curious and asked them, if I came up with the money, if they would buy me a pill so I could try it. And I tried it at 14 and I was hooked. And I had nowhere to live, anything, and yeah, basically I was just getting used to make money to support myself as well as them.
> IJ: Yeah.
> S: I was young, naïve and, yeah. (Sarah)

Many acknowledged their escalating drug use, and some participants had had their children taken out of their care because of this. Their drug use presented an obstacle to exiting the industry as they needed the money to maintain an ever increasing expense, but ceasing drug use whilst still working was also problematic as drug use was embedded in the culture of their social networks. They talked of attempting to get off drugs.

> S: Yeah, I mean not to say I'm not going to work, but I won't be working to support a drug habit, and I will only work, you know, every now and again when I need a bit of extra money. Cause I don't have the amount of money which I waste. It just goes up my arm, it's unbelievable. You know, it's about over a couple of grand a week.
> IJ: Mmm. It's hard.
> S: Yeah, $400 a day.
> IJ: Yeah. Um you talked about having a daughter, is it a daughter?
> S: I've got one of each.
> IJ: One of each. So do you see them much or?

S: No, not while I'm like this.
IJ: You don't want to see them like when you're like this?
S: I do want to see them, but not when I'm unreliable and I'm on drugs. I'd rather wait till I've sorted myself out and I can be 100% committed to being at the appointments and stuff, rather than let them down. (Sarah)

Joan talked of how she was planning to go into a rehabilitation programme but spoke of how she would then have to leave the street and cut all ties to her friends on the street as she knew that continuing contact would thwart any attempts she made to get clean.

IJ: So like in every um job you think about quitting. So you've thought about quitting?
J: Yes, and I'm going to quit after Christmas.
IJ: Are you?
J: Yeah.
IJ: How have you come to that decision? What's that about?
J: Um I, I mean I have a drug problem, but I um I'm on DHC continuously, which is um long-acting codeine, and I usually, well I mean when I can – and at the moment I haven't been back to the doctor, so I haven't had my DHC. So I'm out here and I'm buying morphine.
IJ: Yeah.
J: And I don't want to do that. I don't want to have to get up – I've got to that point where I don't want to have to get up and rely on something every day to make myself normal.
IJ: Yeah.
J: So I'm going to just, um I've rung up Alcohol and Drug Centre and I'm going to, I spoke to them about booking into detox and then going on to a residential programme.
IJ: Well great.
J: So then I will be quitting, because I'm just at that point where I need to turn my life around, and I know I can do it, because I'm just, you know, I've had enough and I want to do it. I want to make changes. I can't do that if I'm still working, you know.
IJ: Yeah. So do you think that um sex work for you has come hand in hand with your addictions?
J: Yes, yes, most certainly.
IJ: Yeah. So um so am I right in saying that um [. . .] that if you didn't have that addiction, you don't think you'd be sex working?
J: I wouldn't be, no, not at all, because, no, I wouldn't be, because I wouldn't have a habit to support, um and I don't think I could come out here and not um, I don't think I could come out here straight basically.
J: Yeah, and I mean that then goes for like the two girls that I am closest to out here now, um all ties will be severed, because, you know, I just can't put myself at risk, and I don't want to, cause I would have gone too far to go back. (Joan)

Street family

As Joan indicated, leaving the street would mean having to sever ties with others on the street and would entail a complete change of social network. This would not be an easy task as, in friends on the street, many participants experienced the nurture and support that they had not experienced in their family homes. Most of the street-based participants forged an identity of belonging or community similar to that articulated by Hollands in his study of youth cultures in the night-time economy (Hollands 2002). This is not unique to this study as others have also found that young street people find in their peers a sense of emotional support, safety and camaraderie (Auerswald and Eyre 2002, Kidd 2003). Living on the streets becomes a way of life and they form strong allegiances to their street family (Auerswald and Eyre 2002).

Um another good point would be um [. . .] feeling like you belong somewhere. Like most of the girls out there have had similar lifestyles. . . . And you know, you um [. . .] you just have that

bond, which um, yeah, like a lot of people don't, yeah can't see or don't know what they've been through. People are too quick to judge these days. Like they're not bad people and [. . .] you know, we're not all rebels. (Sarah)

Meeting different women, I've seen their backgrounds and meeting different friends and the loyal ones, you know. Like most of my loyalest friends are out here. My bestest friend ever come out here. It's like since I've been working and I told her and she's even been out here. But, you know, my truest friends are the ones out here, the ones that will look after you if anything happens. . . . And they've got your back and you know there's nothing to worry about. And that if you go missing, you know, everybody will be looking for you. You know, it's like a family, it's a lifestyle. (Sally)

K: And just, yeah, the kind of feeling I got that it was more like um a family unit and I was getting adopted into a family and, you know, like all families, they all have protocols, so.
IC: So you have a network that looks after each other as well?
K: Yeah, like I said, it's like that family unit and yeah, if we see one girl's had too much, that's it, we phone a taxi. . . . so it goes to show that that unity's been there. Watching each other and caring for each other has always been out there. So yeah. (Kyra)

So my family and my friends and [. . .] you just learn to, you know, I don't get through life without my friends, cause you just can't. It's hard to go through working if people that don't understand and don't understand why you do it and how you do it and how go through it. People just don't understand. (Joyce)

Discussion

For the young people in this study, the period of adolescence was extremely short-lived. Many had left their homes to live on the streets at the age of 14 years. At this stage they transitioned into emerging adulthood, characterised by transitory residence, secondary homelessness, non-attendance of school, financial independence and engagement in multiple risk-taking behaviours (Benoit *et al*. 2008) and many had children before the age of 18 years. Benoit *et al.* found that the street youth in their Canadian study, who were all from disadvantaged, unstable homes, displayed all of the sociological markers of emergent adulthood, but at a much younger chronological age than young people in their control group of middle-class youth from the same geographical area (Benoit *et al*. 2008). They argue that unlike their middle-class peers, however, and similar to the participants in this study, they experienced this early transition into emerging adulthood without the 'safety net' of social support and financial resources.

Researchers have highlighted the importance of social resources in young people's successful transitions to adulthood (Raffo and Reeves 2000, Thomson *et al.* 2003, Jones 2005). They have examined these types of resources as forms of capital (social, cultural and economic). Social resources are important during young people's transitions to adulthood as they can affect their beliefs, behaviours and outcomes (Jones 2005). Yet young people do not usually have control over access to these resources. Research outlines how parents play a crucial role in building and facilitating social resources in young people's lives (Mayall 2001, Edwards *et al.* 2003, Devine 2004). Those without parental support have to rely on other sources of resource provision (Jones 2005), such as friends and the state. The young people in this study gained few resources from their family networks yet spoke of strong social networks with peers on the street. Participants acquired social capital, resources gained through their social networks, through their peers on the street, where they gained much emotional support but few material resources. Participants articulated the loyalty experienced between their peers, which fulfilled a very supportive role in their lives. Yet as Webster *et al.* (2006) has argued, these same supportive networks served to marginalise,

constrain and entrap them on the street. Participant's descriptions of their resources gained through their social networks fits with Putnam's description of 'bonding social capital', which is based on tight bonds and solidarity, yet can create rigid group norms (Putnam 2000, p. 23). Studies in disadvantaged communities in the north of England (Webster *et al.* 2004) have found that bonding social capital can help people manage their day-to-day lives, yet diminishes social networks, restricts access to wider support, long-term education and employment opportunities. Researchers (Jones 2005) suggest the need for people in deprived communities to build 'bridging' social capital (links to new resource rich social networks), yet this can be difficult and at the cost of disassociating with bonding social networks (Johnston *et al.* 2000, Thomson *et al*. 2003).

For the participants in this study to leave the street would mean having to sever ties with their entire social network and, without the back-up support of an alternative network, this would be an unlikely event. Almost all the young people who participated in the in-depth interviews were drug users. This was part of their identity and part of the culture of the street. Although many spoke of intending to come off drugs, again this would be a difficult task as it would mean breaking away from the social network. Demographic characteristics amongst many sex workers, such as being young, unmarried, poorly educated and from working-class backgrounds, are in themselves factors associated with alcohol and illicit drug use (Plant 1997). Focusing efforts on treating young people on the street for drug use is unlikely to be effective given the underlying problem of social exclusion (Seddon 2000). There is a contention that it may be less stigmatising if the focus of health professionals and policy-makers was not on the risk behaviours of these young people but on the structural causes to their entry into sex work (Seddon 2000, Cusick 2002, Benoit et al. 2008). This research has highlighted the importance of young people's access to resource rich social networks, and the difficulties disadvantaged young people have in accessing such social networks. As Raffo and Reeves (2000, p, 165) state:

> The opportunities for individuals to upgrade their social capital, and hence their learning opportunities, in order to meet changing structural demands is dependant on the level of risk that individuals have to deal with and also on the quantity and quality of access to appropriate culturally embedded material and symbolic resources.

Without social resources to support them, prospects of acquiring inclusive employment and lifestyle options may be few for marginalised young people.

There is an important role for policy-makers to develop holistic, multi-sectorial policies for young people. Jones (2002) critiques what she calls 'haphazard' policy formulation of 'youth', with various aged-based frameworks developed in different policy contexts. In the New Zealand context, the youth labour market collapsed in the 1990s and the welfare options for young people have narrowed to encourage families to take responsibility for their young members. Welfare benefits for young people have reduced, as the stated policy goal is that every young person should be in education, training or employment (Higgins and Nairn 2006). Policy-makers currently see education as the key to solving many of the problems of social exclusion and have focused much of their efforts into educating young people and pushing them into employment. Opportunities for young school-leavers are fewer, with many traditional options, which used to offer on the job training, now requiring prior course work. Many students are dropping out of courses as they struggle to postpone the economic independence that a job provides (Jones 2002, Webster *et al*. 2006). Higgins (2002) has described these developments as an 'extended linear' model of transition, with extended levels of childhood dependency that 'establish the expectation that the family is financer and provider of 'home' for individuals well into their young

adult lives' (Higgins and Nairn 2006, p. 210). Yet this extension of dependence creates a division between young people who have a source of support and those who, through contextual reasons, have to support themselves through work. Unsupported transitions carry high degrees of risk and young people's choices can be compromised. As jobs for untrained young people are limited, tend to be poorly paid and unrewarding, some young people then seek alternative careers, such as sex work, utilising their existing networks and resources.

The young people in this study articulated the need to survive and make money and their inability to gain financial support through either their parents or the government. The weekly allowance available through the Independent Youth Benefit is insufficient to meet their needs and the provision of enrolment in courses or other training to be able to obtain this sum is a deterrent to accessing this. In addition, this benefit is only available for those young people who are 16–17 years of age. Many of the young people in this study came onto the street at a younger age and were not eligible for any government support. Young people under 18 years are also unable to sign tenancy agreements and this plays a part in their transient lifestyle, moving accommodation from friend to friend, earning money to pay for a motel room and sometimes sleeping on the street. Such age-specific policies are designed to benefit some but not all, and many vulnerable youth fall through the cracks. Not all young people are on normative transitions through adolescence and emergent adulthood and policies need to be sensitive to these variations in youth (Jones 2002). At 14 or 15 years of age, some young people have surpassed all the markers of adolescence – as was evident from the findings of this study. With no other means of support and the unavailability of other viable job options, they had little recourse but to enter the sex industry as a means of survival. It should be recognised that early childhood experiences are most often significant in the lifecourse through youth and adulthood (Jones 2002, Webster *et al*. 2006). Supportive interventions in childhood and a holistic approach, with multi-sectorial policies from health, family, housing, and labour market spheres combining to support these vulnerable young people, would foster long-term benefits.

References

Abel, G., Fitzgerald, L. and Brunton, C., 2007. *The impact of the Prostitution Reform Act on the health and safety practices of sex workers*. Report to the Prostitution Law Review Committee. University of Otago, Christchurch.

Arnett, J., 2006. Emerging adulthood in Europe: a response to Bynner. *Journal of youth studies*, 9 (1), 111–123.

Auerswald, C. and Eyre, S., 2002. Youth homelessness in San Francisco: a life cycle approach. *Social science and medicine*, 54 (10), 1497–1512.

Barry, K., 1995. *The prostitution of sexuality: the global exploitation of women*. New York: New York University Press.

Baum, F., 1995. Researching public health: behind the qualitative-quantitative methodological debate. *Social science and medicine*, 40 (4), 459–468.

Benoit, C., Jansson, M., Hallgrimsdottir, H. and Roth, E., 2008. Street youth's life course transitions. *Comparative social research*, 25 (1), 329–357.

Benoit, C., Jansson, M., Millar, A., and Phillips, R., 2005. Community–academic research on hard-to-reach populations: benefits and challenges. *Qualitative health research*, 15 (2), 263–282.

Benoit, C. and Millar, A., 2001. *Dispelling myths and understanding realities: working conditions, health status, and exiting experiences of sex workers*. British Columbia: University of Victoria.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3 (2), 77–101.

Brock, D., 1998. *Making work, making trouble*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Bynner, J., 2005. Rethinking the youth phase of the life-course: the case for emerging adulthood? *Journal of youth studies*, 8 (4), 367–384.

Cusick, L., 2002. Youth prostitution: a literature review. *Child abuse review*, 11 (4), 230–251.
Denner, J., Cooper, C., Lopez, E., and Dunbar, N., 1999. Beyond 'Giving Science Away': how university–community partnerships inform youth programs, research and policy. *Social policy report: Society for research in child development*, 13 (1), 1–20.
Devine, F., 2004. *Class practices: how parents help their children get good jobs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Edwards, R., Franklin, J. and Holland, J., 2003. *Families and social capital: exploring the issues*. London: South Bank University, Families and social capital ESRC research working paper no. 1.
Gillies, V., 2005. Meeting parents needs? Discourses of 'support' and 'inclusion' in family policy. *Critical social policy*, 25 (1), 70–90.
Higgins, J., 2002. Young people and transitions policies in New Zealand. *Social journal of New Zealand*, 18 (1), 44–60.
Higgins, J. and Nairn, K., 2006. 'In transition': choice and the children of New Zealand's economic reforms. *British journal of the sociology of education*, 27 (2), 207–220.
Hollands, R., 2002. Divisions in the dark: youth cultures, transitions and segmented consumption spaces in the night-time economy. *Journal of youth studies*, 5 (2), 153–171.
Holloway, I. and Todres, L., 2003. The status of method: flexibility, consistency and coherence. *Qualitative research*, 3 (3), 345–357.
Hubbard, P., 1998. Sexuality, immorality and the city: red-light districts and the marginalisation of female street prostitutes. *Gender, place and cuture*, 5 (1), 55–72.
Hyde, J., 2005. From home to street: understanding young people's transitions into homelessness. *Journal of adolescence*, 28 (2), 171–183.
Johnston, L., *et al.*, 2000. *Snakes and ladders: young people, transitions and alternative careers*. Bristol: Policy Press and Family Policy Studies Centre.
Jones, G., 2002. *The youth divide: diverging paths to adulthood*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
Jones, G., 2005. *The thinking and bahaviour of young adults (aged 16–25): literature review for the Social Exclusion Unit*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
Kalton, G., 1983. *Introduction to Survey Sampling*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Kidd, S., 2003. Street youth: coping and interventions. *Child and adolescent social work journal*, 20 (4), 235–261.
Kish, L., 1965. *Survey sampling*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
Liamputtong, P., 2007. *Researching the vulnerable: a guide to sensitive research methods*. London: Sage.
Marshall, H. and Stenner, P., 2004. Friends and lovers. *In:* J. Roche, S. Tucker, R. Thomson and R. Flynn, eds. *Youth and society*. London: Sage, 184–190.
May, T. and Hunter, G., 2006. Sex work and problem drug use in the UK: the links, problems and possible solutions. *In:* R. Campbell and M. O'Neill, eds. *Sex work now*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan, 169–189.
Mayall, B., 2001. Understanding childhoods: a London study. *In:* L. Alanen and B. Mayall, eds. *Conceptualising child–adult relationships*. London: Routledge/Falmer, 114–128.
McKeganey, N., 2006. Street prostitution in Scotland: the views of working women. *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, 13 (2), 151–166.
Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002. *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa: action for child and youth development*. Wellington: Ministry of Youth Affairs.
Nadon, S., Koverola, C., and Schludermann, E., 1998. Antecedents to prostitution: childhood victimisation. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 13 (2), 206–221.
Northcote, J., 2006. Nightclubbing and the search for identity: making the transition from childhood to adulthood in an urban milieu. *Journal of youth studies*, 9 (1), 1–16.
O'Neill, M., 1997. Prostitute women now. *In* G. Scambler and A. Scambler, eds. *Rethinking prostitution: purchasing sex in the 1990s*. London: Routledge, 3–28.
O'Neill, M. and Campbell, R., 2006. Street sex work and local communities: creating discursive spaces for *genuine* consultation and inclusion. *In:* R. Campbell and M. O'Neill, eds. *Sex work now*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan.
Plant, M., 1997. Alcohol, drugs and social milieu. *In:* G. Scambler and A. Scambler, eds. *Rethinking prostitution: purchasing sex in the 1990s*. London: Routledge, 164–179.
Potterat, J., Rothenberg, R., Muth, S., Darrow, W., and Phillips-Plummer, L., 1998. Pathways to prostitution: the chronology of sexual and drug abuse milestones. *The Journal of sex research*, 35 (4), 333–340.

Putnam, R., 2000. *Bowling alone*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
Pyett, P. and Warr, D., 1999. Women at risk in sex work: strategies for survival. *Journal of sociology*, 35 (2), 183–197.
Raffo, C. and Reeves, M., 2000. Youth transitions and social exclusion: developments in social capital theory. *Journal of youth studies*, 3 (2), 147–166.
Sanders, T., 2006. Behind the personal ads: the indoor sex markets in Britain. *In:* R. Campbell and M. O'Neill, eds. *Sex work now.* Cullompton, Devon: Willan, 92–115.
Scambler, G., 1997. Conspicuous and inconspicuous sex work: the neglect of the ordinary and mundane. *In:* G. Scambler and A. Scambler, eds. *Rethinking prostitution: purchasing sex in the 1990s.* London: Routledge, 105–120.
Seddon, T., 2000. Explaining the drug-crime link: theoretical, policy and research issues. *Journal of social policy*, 29, 95–107.
Shaw, I. and Butler, I., 1998. Understanding young people and prostitution: a foundation for practice? *British journal of social work*, 28, 177–196.
Thomson, R., Henderson, S., and Holland, J., 2003. Making the most of what you've got? Resources, values and inequalities in young women's transitions to adulthood. *Educational review*, 55 (1), 33–46.
Valentine, G. and Skelton, T., 2007. Re-defining 'norms': D/deaf young people's transitions to independence. *The sociological review*, 55 (1), 104–123.
Wahab, S. and Sloan, L., 2004. Ethical dilemmas in sex work research. *Research for sex work*, 7 (1), 3–5.
Webster, C., MacDonald, R., Shildrick, T. and Simpson, M., 2006. *Social exclusion, young adults and extended youth transitions* [online]. Available from: http//www.bctrust.org.uk/pdf/social-exclusion-young-adults.pdf [Accessed 4 July 2008].
Webster, C., *et al.*, 2004. *Poor transitions: social exclusion and young adults.* Bristol: Policy Press.
Weldon, J., 2006. Show me the money: a sex worker reflects on research into the sex industry. *Research for sex work*, 9 (1), 12–15.
Willman-Navarro, A., 2006. Money and sex: what economics should be doing for sex work research. *Research for sex work*, 9 (1), 18–21.