



Lived Experience of Male Sex Workers (MSWs) in Cape Town.

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The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaborative project.



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Aim of Study

- ❑ To gain insight
- ❑ Give a voice to the experiences of MSWs in Cape Town.
- ❑ Contribute to diverse representations of their experiences in academic discourse.

Literature Review

- ❑ Gap in the literature regarding MSWs
- ❑ Contradictory studies
- ❑ Experience stigma and violence which is a result from their work being illegal
- ❑ Stigmatisation by the police, healthcare providers and their communities.
- ❑ Violence is experienced differently depending on the MSWs positionality

- ❑ Sex work is also described as empowering.
- ❑ Categorization of MSWs
 - Socio-economic demographics
 - Working environments
 - Reasons of entry into this trade.
- ❑ No intersectional analysis of MSWs experiences

Theoretical Framework

- Research taking an intersectional approach
- Argues that in order to get a holistic picture of someone's experience, you must take into account all the oppressive and privileged systems.
- They include race, class and gender that intersect to influence that experience (Collins, 2000).
- It is argued that an intersectional analysis is essential in critically capturing the experience of sex workers (Wojciki & Malala, 2001).

Research Questions

- **Main Research Question**
- What stories do male sex workers tell to describe their experiences of being male sex workers in Cape Town?
- **Sub-Questions:**
- What stories do MSW's tell to describe their difficulties and advantages of sex work?
- How has their experiences been shaped by their intersectional oppressions (race, class, gender, sexual orientation)

Methodology:

- **Design:** Qualitative Research
 - Understands human nature and their subjective experiences
 - Allows for first-person accounts and explorations of how experiences are shaped.
- **Participants:**
 - Collaborated with SWEAT, 16 MSWs participated in the project.
 - They were 18 and over, were all MSW and were part of the creative space (discussion space for MSWs).
 - Each participant received R40 and refreshments for their time.

Continued

- **Data Collection:**
 - Used Focus Groups and Interviews.
 - The focus group was used as it offers reliable data on shared perspectives,
 - Allows for the exploring of issues relevant to the person-in-context as it allows participants to challenge, co-construct, react, and contribute to stories told (Wilkinson, 1998). Used to determine which questions to ask in the interviews.
 - Each participant also had a individual interview with the researcher and were asked to have another interview. These interviews were used to enhance the data and elicit a deeper level of details.

Continued

- **Data Analysis:**
 - The data was analysed using a thematic narrative analysis
- **Ethical Consideration:**
 - An informed consent was distributed to each participant
 - Risks expected were minimal
 - Potential benefits they got were monetary compensation, a space to share experiences and they got to learn from others experiences and creating new knowledge about themselves.

Narrative themes

- Narratives of identity, rejection and the complexity of being a sex worker
- Narratives of challenges: Being black, a man, a father, a prisoner
- Narratives of Resistance

Narratives of identity, rejection and complexity of being a sex worker

Being a male sex worker, a job predominantly known by society as a 'women's job' has caused a lot of internal conflict for these men. They try hard to perform their masculine identity throughout their narratives and reclaim their manhood.

S: In the gang it sounded like you could get anybody and do anything and you said you felt like a man (interrupted by M)

M: Ja, ja

S: And do you still like a man now that you a sex worker?

M: No

M: You must talk things out like a man, sort things out like a man, you don't need to take out a gun to shoot someone...but now I must go out at night and make sex for money, that is not my dream, you see. My dream is I want to have a family, house, and car, go work for them, come and say Honey, I am home

S: And you still see yourself

L: As a straight man, yaah. I'm a real man (hahaha) I can show you if you want me too

S: No you don't need to show me

- They faced rejection from family, friends and communities for either challenging heteronormativity (by becoming gay) or doing something that is considered immoral, a sin, a women's job (becoming a MSW)

Z: ...but when it comes to family, should the family discover that you doing this oh my God, and the community around you people all saying these stuff, there's that stigma that follows us, for me let me not generalize for me as a gay person. There are those guys who are my friends and doesn't have a problem with it for me being a sex worker, sometimes they ask me those nasty questions, Z you a teacher, you qualified why do keep on doing this shit and I tell them you know what guys, you don't feel the pain that I felt and you don't know why I chose to do this

S: What would happen if your family found out?

Z: ooohoooo, I can't even imagine. I don't even want to think about it because they kicked me out when they discovered that I'm gay. It was a long long story, the whole family didn't even want to talk to me.

S: And your children don't know?

L: Hahaar (No)

S: And would you tell them

L: They don't know man, why must I tell them. Why must I open up wounds if it's alright closed? You see.

S: ok and your family do they know?

L: I don't really associate with family and that stuff

- Being a sex worker is complex because one does not have a fixed identity, it is fluid. One is not just a seller but also a buyer, a pimp. Clients also expect them to be an adviser, psychologist.
- **L: Ja you get more money by doing it yourself and sometimes I pimp too**

S: So you have other workers working for you

L: Ja

S: Are you still a pimp?

L: Ja I still do it

S: So when you go there are you being a client?

D: I can be a client, I can also be a buyer it depends with what I see there

S: So you go there to find people?

D: I can find , I can also be found

- **Z...And he asked me to advise him, he had a problem with the wife and kids. I said oh my goodness, this person I don't even know where to start, I don't but I tried. I said you know what with your kids you need to sit them down and say you know what, I was talking shit (laughs) but your wife, I think you need to professional help like a marriage counselor and weerah, "but my wife is" I said no, you know what speak to your wife...but he listened to me...I was talking a whole lot of shit but it worked...then he came back and I told him you know what I'm not a social worker, I studied psychology a little bit but I'm not a psychologist**

Narratives of Contrast: Being black, a man, a father, a prisoner

Intersectionality says that our experiences will be influenced by our positionality. We can either be privileged or put at a disadvantage by our positionality.

Being a man gave them certain privileges:

D: I think there's a great difference because with males, males seem to benefit more than women.

S: Benefit with what now?

D: Financially, because their rates are higher compared to women's

S: Why do you think men can ask for more money?

D: I think men are just greedy, you know women, they will reason and go with any price but with men they stick to their set amount.

S: Do you think FSW's and MSW's are treated the same by the police?

D: No, they treat men so much better

S: And why do you think you get treated better?

D: No because the police, especially the South African police don't want to believe that there are male sex workers, they don't. They only think that sex work is for women

- While being a man protected you against violence, made you richer it also gets you searched more often by the police. Especially if you black, as they think you a criminal. Being black also results in you earning less.

D: I remember one day I was walking in Gordon's Bay I was going to Somerset. I love walking a lot, so I'm walking and I saw three young ladies, girls in fact coming but now as I am approaching they jumped to the other side .The minute I passed a bit then they just took off their shoes and started running, wow, I don't think you would ever wanted to see me in that state. I ran after them, I was so angry...and the cops saw me chasing them and thought I wanted to rob them.

Z:But when it comes to pay you see some of my fellow white sex workers when it comes to charge, I think the difference is only there, because they can just charge whatever amount. But for me I charge this money where I say okay this person mustn't look down on me because I am black so white on white if he says R2000, then they give it but with me I cannot ask for so much, because they say that this person doesn't deserve that much. That the problem.

D: You find a white man who is on the streets right and you find a black man who is not on the streets, the one who is gonna get more respect will be the white man, do you understand.

D: Yes, that is true. Yes it happens. Being different because of your colour the same way, only. When you are black, mostly it's not easy especially I found it's not easy in the Western Cape.

- One also experiences life differently because of your age, prison life or father.

L: ...the 17 of the third month I came out of prison from my punishment. So I was just like any ordinary guy, but things never went my way. Wherever I go and I throw out the word prison, a door closed in my face you see

M: my past messed my whole life up, with prison now I can't go look for work because there's checks and stuff, see your files and stuff you know. Some places they see tattoos and you can't work with a long sleeve, you must have. Sometimes I don't want to walk down in the streets with you know, because some people see the tattoo, they scared man

Z: ...now if I'm seventy and doing this then who is gonna come to me, cause they need younger ones. The more older you get, you need young. With us it like that, with clients that I'm doing it with they gay. So with, in gay life the more you older, you need the younger ones, it's like that

S: And what do you do with the money?

L: What do I do, I have a family that I have to dress, I have to pay school fees, and I have to put food on the table stuff like that.

Narratives of Resistance

- Many participants reclaimed the title of sex worker and gave narratives of loving it and positive accounts of the profession. They resisted against stories of negativity associated with the profession.

D: “I Loved sex, or I love it a lot”

S: So what brought you into the profession?

L: I do it for the money, its work. It brings in the income and puts food on the table

S: Then there is something keeping you in sex work and you don’t just do it for the money

L: No I do it for the love of it

Z: Sex work is good in terms of making good money

S: So you all about condom use

L: Yaah

L: You know what my wife is breast-feeding my baby nuh, in order for me to sleep around with different people I don't know nuh, then I mos don't love my children , my baby you see

The idea that everyone in a relationship is a sex worker came up as a opposing view that only certain people do it.

S: So people in relationships, would you say they sex workers? Because you in a relationship and you calling yourself a sex worker...

D: You know being a sex worker is having something given in return for sex. For example the husband goes to work there are other chores he does not attend to and the women attends to those chores. There I will say to it that there is sex work there you understand. One or the other should be sex worker, you understand.

Reflexivity

- Insider privilege: Black, working class , Christian Researcher from the Retreat (a predominantly working –lower class coloured area)
- Outsider: woman, researcher from UCT

One participant said that because I was a UCT researcher, I was up there but knowing that I was a Christian brought me down to his level.

Another was critical of me being a coloured with “white” mannerisms, being a women, and not speaking Afrikaans calling me a “wannabe coloured”

Conclusion

- Analysis in ongoing...
- When given the opportunity to represent themselves, male sex workers In Cape Town decided tell stories of
 - their identity, their rejection and complex job descriptions
 - their challenges that are influenced by their different positionality
 - their resistance to negative stories about sex work

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