

The Case for Informationally Based Social Inclusion for Sex Workers: A South African Exploratory Study

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The ultimate aim of any library or information service is to meet the needs of its community. The return to basics in library and information services provision in the 1970s and 1980s led to the development of community librarianship which promised to deliver a more egalitarian and appropriately targeted public library. The return to basics also brought a multiplicity of studies on information use in the context of specific communities. The information needs of sex workers as a community are generally unexplored. This article examines the needs of this largely high earning but marginalised

group in the context of informationally based social exclusion. Using the qualitative critical incident approach to assessing information seeking behaviour a survey of sex workers' information needs and use of information channels was carried out in Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi, South Africa and the results are presented here. Potential information channels are identified and the actual information channels used by the sex workers are discussed giving the sex workers' perceptions of their adequacy. Suggestions are made about appropriate library and information provision.

Introduction and definition of terms

The ultimate aim of any library or information service is to meet the needs of its community (Kaniki 2001, 190). This is not always achieved or achieved without some members of the community being excluded from provision. Kaniki comments how the return to basics in library and information services provision in the 1970s and 1980s led to the development of community librarianship which promised to deliver in Black and Muddiman's words (1997, 1) a "rejuvenated, egalitarian and a more relevant public library." The return to basics has also brought a "multiplicity of studies on information use in the context of specific communities" (Kaniki 2001, 188). The term use implies a response to need, which Dervin (1980) sees as a state that arises within a person thereby suggesting some kind of gap that requires filling. As Kaniki (2001, 188) suggests, general needs may be physiological, psychologi-

cal, social and economic. This article concerns itself with the information needs of a community of sex workers who form part of the larger community of Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Information is defined by Kaniki (1989, 191) as "ideas, facts, imaginative works of the mind and data of value potentially useful in decision making, question answering, problem solving etc." He adds that in our daily life

every person is faced with decision making situations or problem solving situations or questions. These may either be abstract, cognitive or real. They may be mental or physical or both. However, because of one's experience or acquired knowledge, which is an accumulation of information with specific application, some of these situational problems, decision making processes or questions become 'normal'. In other words, a person would either have developed ready solutions to such 'normal problems' or have ideas as to how to solve or seek assistance or solutions to such 'problems' (Kaniki 2001, 191).

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He continues that there are, however, several situations or instances in which a person or groups of persons encounter problems, decision-making and, or, question answering situations but do not have ready 'solutions' for them: "in other words the person or community experiences or develops a gap, or is in a state of lacking some commodity, which must be filled" (Kaniki 2001, 191). The process of seeking information and the degree to which the seeker satisfies the need depends upon the level of information literacy or information seeking, searching and use, knowledge and skills an individual possesses (Kaniki 2001, 191–2). In earlier studies, Faibisoff and Ely (1979) and Krikelas (1983) drew on a psychological explanation to describe a state of information need. Kaniki (2001, 192) explains, "this state of uncertainty requires information as a stimulus to create a change in one's level or degree of uncertainty." He defines information need as "the state of lack of a desirable requisite or commodity (namely information) necessary to deal with a situation, as an individual (or as a member of a given community) sees fit." In order to meet such information need, the level and nature of uncertainty needs to be assessed. This assessment requires information literacy on the part of the information seeker and skill from the information professional. The appropriateness the information provided in response to a need depends on the extent to which it resolves the given need and here the seeker is the judge.

A need for information can be recognised or unrecognised, expressed or unexpressed. Some information needs may be recognised by the information seeker him/herself or by the information expert in engaging with the seeker. The former and the latter may have to "work together towards 'disentangling' and establishing the actual need" (Kaniki 2001, 192). Very little, if any, research has been done on the information needs of, and access to information for, sex workers. Workers in the industry lack ready access to information (Luiz and Roets 2000, 31), especially health information. The discussion of sex workers and access to health information, however, is a sensitive area with the need to avoid blaming sex workers for spreading disease emphasised, for example, in the "Guidelines to authors" (2002) of the journal *Research for sex work*. In the South African context, however, Leggett (2001, 108)

points out that "sex workers are a group requiring special attention with regard to HIV issues as victims of the disease" and that their criminalised status has kept them "marginalised and discourages them from participation in health care programmes."

Marcus (2002, 94), HIV/AIDS Advisor to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) based in Pretoria, South Africa, points out that "in contemporary, modern societies there are few commonly agreed public social mechanisms to collectively regulate the normal organisation of sex." In such a context, "the constitution and the law as well as a culture of rights and equality play a particularly important role in efforts to protect individuals and groups in the society who are particularly vulnerable in existing power dynamics". Linking her discussion to the HIV/AIDS epidemic she argues that

there are many contradictory responses and countervailing tendencies that make the social context of the epidemic complex and confusing, even destructive. Without a strategy that actively defends and proactively builds social tolerance and inclusiveness, equality, citizenship (and its entitlements) and human rights the prospect of a democratic and a stable future is remote, even bleak. (Marcus 2002, 94)

In this context Marcus (2002, 94) argues that the HIV/AIDS epidemic requires "a reflective, flexible, *information-based* responsiveness in a terrain that is fast moving both in terms of its impacts on societies and in terms of the growing medical and social scientific knowledge and social experience bases that have developed to try to manage and contain its effects".

For the author a motivation for this study was to come to some appreciation of sex workers' own "understanding of their lives" (Zatz 1997, 287) and to explore their own view of their information needs. Another was to determine whether, from the potential users' perspective, sex workers use channels like public libraries and information agencies as sources of information. The study has been given impetus by a recent South African court ruling that sex work is not illegal.

It is not possible to specify unambiguously what sex work is but Posel's (1993, 1) observation of a 'cash nexus' which influences many male-female and same sex interactions is helpful. There

is no clearly demarcated conceptual boundary that separates sex work from other sexual and gender interactions. This article uses the definition of sex work "as representing the explicit sale of sexual services for monetary payment" (Posel 1993, 1). While there are many forms of transactional sex, with same sex services on offer to men and women, the industry provides primarily for men: "women are overwhelmingly the sellers of sex and men the buyers" (Luiz and Roets 2000, 24).

In investigating the information needs of sex workers, this study builds on other library and information studies based in social concern, mainly those from the 1970s when community information services were at their peak. Bundy (1977, 41), University of Maryland professor, argued for putting "the expertise of the law into the hands of the people" and the involvement of the University Law Clinic trainees in this information needs assessment was based on recognition of the high incidence of legal needs among those of various geographic and vocational communities targeted by community information services. The article also draws on the more recent literature of social exclusion such as that of Kerslake and Kinnell (1998) and the County of Oxford Integrated Network (COIN 2000) cited below.

The context of informationally based social exclusion

A County of Oxford Integrated Network and University of Guelph, Ontario, case study on the accessibility and transformation of information and communication technology (ICT) connectivity quotes Castells (1999 *in* County of Oxford Integrated Network 2000) who points to "a fourth world of social exclusion beyond poverty" and tries to show "a systematic relationship between the rise of informational, global capitalism, under current conditions, and the extraordinary growth of social exclusion and human despair." Castells argues that "the world is composed of people ... who have lost value for the dominant interests in informational capitalism." Some have lost value because they make little contribution as either producers or consumers and others, Castells specifically refers to sex workers here, "because, in order to survive, they sold their bodies and their souls ..." (Castells 1999 *in* County of Oxford Integrated Network 2000). Addressing this in-

formationally based social exclusion in a review of the literature on public libraries, Kerslake and Kinnell (1998, 1) examine "the actual, and potential for, social impact and effectiveness of public library initiatives." In doing so they draw together international evidence "demonstrating that public libraries have a vigorous impact on many aspects of society." They review various potentially marginalised groups, pointing out, for instance, that "people with disabilities may also be disabled by social attitudes" (Kerslake and Kinnell 1998, 3). This article extends the scope of those potentially excluded to a group which Leggett (1999, 157) sees as "highly vulnerable to marginalization", that is, sex workers. He maintains that "a socially-excluded class creates alternative worldviews in which mainstream values are inverted" with the excluded attempting initially to justify behaviour in mainstream terms. The inversion of values can "lead the marginalized into the socially damaging and self-destructive behaviours often associated with the urban poor and increasingly seen in South Africa" (Leggett 1999, 157).

As supplementary to the literature of library and information studies Leggett's (1999) study was highly relevant. He interviewed 45 female street and agency sex workers in the Durban central business district. In spite of earning an income six times the national average the sex workers exhibited many of the signs of poverty. Leggett (1999, 157) suggests that poverty can persist in situations in which absolute resources are sufficient and argues that "the poverty experience is rooted in a sense of material insecurity that follows the poor, regardless of present conditions". He adds that HIV/AIDS disproportionately impacts on poorer communities. Identified as an especially vulnerable group are sex workers who use substances as they are seen to be potentially less responsive to health-care messages and less inclined to enforce safer sex practices (Abdool Karim et al. 1995). In recent research Leggett (2001) found that the sex workers least likely to use drugs were the poorest black women who are also most susceptible to HIV/AIDS. Hence hard drug users were actually less likely to be HIV positive than non-users.

Sex workers share a sense of exclusion from the mainstream and "like other 'poor' people throughout the world, experience a sense of vulnerability that prevents them from thinking realistically

in the long term. They are caught in a lifestyle where every moment is a struggle for survival, where there is no time for reflection and no strength to plan" (Leggett 1999, 166). Leggett (1999, 157) argues cogently that "unless all members of a community see themselves as capable of participation in mainstream society, many of the problems associated with poverty will persist." This statement together with the vulnerability of the group to HIV/AIDS constitutes a powerful argument for addressing the information needs of sex workers, for acting on Marcus's observation (2002, 94) of the need for "information-based responsiveness" and for working towards, not only rights and entitlements for sex workers but for effective management of the epidemic. The current study, while focusing on mostly female agency sex workers, gives the Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi sex workers' perceptions of their critical information needs, describes the information channels used by the sex workers and poses some challenges for information provision to this group.

Research methods

This study drew on contemporary literature and newspaper reports and on a survey. Information needs have been seen to be embedded in behaviour or patterns of seeking and using information, hence the study of information seeking behaviour and information. One of the techniques which have been developed is the anomalous state of knowledge (ASK) approach (Kaniki 2001, 195). This is a qualitative approach which examines how people or communities seek information concerning situations about which their knowledge is incomplete. Fisher and Oulton (1999, 116) point out that this approach has been used in a number of instances in library and information management but that current knowledge of the method and its potential applications seem more limited than the method deserves, particularly in Britain. Insight into the information needs of the population in this study was gained from a survey using the critical incident or ASK approach (Kaniki 2001, 195).

The critical situations may be problem situations, decision-making or question answering situations. Respondents are asked why and how they seek information and through this process

various common situations or the critical tasks of a community are identified. The initial questions are broad to enable the respondent's unprompted selection of a particular area of need. For this reason the information seeking situations described below appear as general rather than immediately information related in the first instance. The ASK approach was used in the study to enable the identification of areas of concern to sex workers, that is their critical information seeking situations. Through the use of content analysis the critical instances or situations were grouped together and quantified and thus measured to determine their levels of significance within the limitations of a small sample.

Criticism of the ASK approach revolves around its dependence on the respondent's ability to remember the critical instances, however, as Kaniki (2001, 195) argues, people will often remember what they consider to be critical to them. He raises a second criticism that the ASK approach does not follow up on the use made of the information obtained. The best way to assess the information required and the value of the information provided is by measuring use made of the information and the impact made by its provision (Soergel 1976; Blom 1983; Dalton 1992; Kaniki 2001). The current study, as an exploratory one, did not assess impact. Respondents were asked, however, about the extent to which they were satisfied with the result of the information seeking behaviour. A follow up study has been embarked on.

The field workers, eight final year Law students at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi, conducted the interviews as part of their community service. The students were given the option not to participate in the research if they had objections to it. A survey was devised using the literature and knowledge of the respective fields as a guide. The survey was discussed with the students and they were trained in conducting interviews. After a pre-test, modifications were made to the sequencing of the questions and overall guiding within the interview schedule.

The broad categories of sex worker interviewed were those who work in agencies and on the streets. By scanning the local newspaper advertisements six main agencies were identified in Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi and these were approached. In addition certain streets were visited

to locate street sex workers. Interviews were conducted in August 2000 with a small fortuitous sample of 35 sex workers who were willing to be interviewed.

This investigation, like other similar ones (Posel 1992) was hampered by the paucity of official statistics on the sex market in South Africa. Difficulties were encountered with obtaining statistics on the size of the population and access to sex workers. The latter in turn limited the number of respondents who were drawn mainly from urban agencies. The study also focused primarily on female sex workers serving male clients.

Personal background of the interviewees

Fairer-Wessels (1990) in a study of urban black women in Mamelodi, in then apartheid South Africa, points out that the general approach to studying information user behaviour is to bring the socio-cultural and personal characteristics of users as well as the relevant contextual variables into relation with the information needs and the information seeking and using behaviour of the respondents. In this section these variables are identified.

Age, gender, educational level and other vocational experience

The majority of the sex workers was female and 19 to 29 years of age. Age patterns resembled those reflected in the literature on sex work in South Africa with none of the 35 respondents, however, claiming to be younger than 16. The oldest in the current study was 49. Only one respondent was male. The sex workers' educational levels ranged from Grade 7 to fifteen years of education and/or training. The majority had Grade 11, which is slightly lower than British O levels. Post school qualifications were varied and included diplomas and technikon certificates. More than half the respondents in this study had other vocational experience.

Family and relationships

The vast majority of the sex workers was not married with five being divorced and one widowed. This finding echoes Stander's (1990, 33) study and a 2001 Hillbrow study (Macfarlane and Dan-

iels 2001, 6). Most respondents in the present study, 71%, did not have children.

Race as a factor, entry into sex work, length of time in the industry and the work venue

In South Africa a severe dichotomy exists in the sex work industry between elite and ordinary sex workers and this often has racial overtones (Luiz and Roets 2000, 28). The current research did not identify respondents by race but the indication from fieldworker observations is that all the street sex worker respondents were black women. In the current study the most common reasons given for being a sex worker (and respondents could give more than one), was that the respondents could not get other work (65%) or that the money was good (62%). The potential earnings of a sex worker compare well with the earnings in most professional occupations (Posel 1993, 20–21) but despite the advantages of sex work many women do not see themselves continuing with this work indefinitely (Posel 1993, 22). The vast majority (91%) in the current study did not intend staying in sex work. For many, however, alternative employment is not forthcoming and they become trapped in this work (Posel 1993, 222). The length of time in sex work in the current study ranged from one month to seven years. The majority (71%) had been in the industry for less than three and a half years with only two having worked for six or seven years.

The literature and the findings of the survey suggest that the category of venue from which the sex worker plies his/her trade could be an important factor in determining the nature of work circumstances, benefits, certainty of payment and safety and hence the information needs arising from these issues. The majority of sex workers in the current study, 71%, worked for an agency.

The sex workers' information seeking behaviour

Fairer-Wessels (1990) revealed that the urban black women in her study were often not consciously aware of their needs. Her study differed from the current one in that it focused on matters of everyday concern outside the work situation while the current study includes the occupational context. The study was similar to the current one

in its concern about the women's almost fatalistic acceptance of their unresolved needs as being something they just have to live with and this issue is discussed below.

Information seeking situations

Fisher and Oulton (1999, 117) point out that the use of the critical incident approach in library use studies is a way of focusing the respondent's mind and of providing data on a specific occurrence. It is hence a more useful approach than seeking generalised accounts of library use in their view. In this study in reporting on the areas of particular concern to them, their critical instances requiring information seeking behaviour, most of sex workers, 77%, experienced a problem with stress. A major cause was anxiety about the family, especially the well being of children. Children were most frequently cited in Leggett's study (1999, 161) when the women were asked to name what was best in their lives. Supporting children was a source of anxiety in the current study.

Critical instances were related to income and budgeting, planning for the future, health (including HIV/AIDS), childcare and family, work place issues and security. Illness in a situation in which sick leave and medical aid are rare represents a loss of income and casts uncertainty over future income generation in a job in which having a pension is uncommon. Apart from planning for the future all of the sex worker's areas of need overlap with the findings in Fairer-Wessels' (1990) study. This finding suggests that the sex workers shared common needs with other urban women of a decade earlier from another province. Forbes' survey of domestic workers (1999, 12) conducted in the same city as the current study also raised instances which were common to the sex workers, namely those relating to income, health, work place issues and unemployment.

Frequency of occurrence of critical situations and whether or not an attempt had been made to obtain information

Asked whether the critical situation was experienced often, sometimes or whether this was the first time it had been experienced, the majority (54%) responded that it was experienced sometimes. Of those who responded to the ques-

tion about having a specific problem, 31% had tried to solve it by seeking information with 17% not trying to do so. For the latter, those who gave reasons echoed Fairer-Wessels' (1990) findings, saying that nothing could be done (in the instance of a client dying) and that there was no time to worry about the problem (violence by a client). The situation of not taking action in response to needs, according to Fairer-Wessels (1990, 363), is because the need has become "so entwined" with the women's daily life that they do not experience it as a problem. While the illiterate women in her study were seen as being especially likely to just live with the situation, Fairer-Wessels argues that the urban black women generally were unaware of their needs and did not articulate them. They did not see the problems as anything that could be solved because they had not learnt to identify problems, search for alternative solutions and attempt to solve them. They merely lived with, and experienced, the situation. Such respondents would fall into Kaniki's (2001, 192) category of those who encounter problems but are not sufficiently information literate to address them. They experience a state of lacking information but are unable to propel themselves towards finding a solution. Neither do they have ready access to the information intermediaries who could assist in addressing the lack.

Information channels provided for sex workers and some available channels for health information

There is very little, if any, research done in the area of access to information for sex workers as noted above. Education and training is available for sex workers from nongovernmental organisations in South Africa. Access to these various resources for sex workers is difficult because of factors such as sex workers' mobility and their hours of work not coinciding with hours of service. In this section the information channels provided for sex workers specifically are reviewed and some available channels for health information are described.

Information channels provided for sex workers

The Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) serves the sex work population of

Cape Town, South Africa and deals with a range of social issues affecting sex workers' access to mainstream services in the region (Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce 2000; AIDS Action Group 2002). SWEAT offers a variety of services that resemble those of a community information outreach initiative. They offer support and counselling, crisis intervention, referral services and on site workshops on safer sex. They also produce a monthly newsletter and easy to read pictorial written guides about safer sex. An information line and telephone counselling are other services as well as nightly outreach by peer fieldworkers and professional support staff. SWEAT provides a useful example of an attempt to deal in a person-to-person manner with some of the barriers to use experienced by sex workers. A current British example of an apparently effective information service is found in the Sheffield Working Women's Opportunities Project (SWWOP 2001, 1–2) which provides evening street based outreach sessions. Their mobile 'Johnny van' provides hot drinks, biscuits, condoms, company and notably, information and advice.

There is a also great deal of information available to sex workers on the World Wide Web, for instance, the extremely useful Prostitutes' Education Network (PENET n.d.) which provides information on a variety of issues in sex work as well as links to sex workers' rights organisations and websites. None of the sex workers in the study, however, indicated that they use the Internet or World Wide Web. Information services specific to health information are discussed next.

The available channels for health information

Luiz and Roets (2000, 27, 31) deal to some extent with problems in access to health information pointing out that most sex workers in South Africa do not have access to information via health-care programmes. They lack knowledge about the underlying causes of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Lower ranking prostitutes, from shebeens or taverns in particular, demonstrated a high level of ignorance regarding the medical aspects of infection (Luiz and Roets 2000, 31–32). Luiz and Roets (2000, 28) contend that sex workers tend to be highly illiterate socially and with respect to STDs and this makes awareness and education programmes hard to implement. In the

current study, however, 80% of the workers recognised the health risks attached to sex work. The high proportion of agency-based workers who were interviewed possibly explains this substantial percentage.

Luiz and Roets (2000, 27), in identifying barriers to information provision about health, provide extremely useful pointers for information provision more generally in the future. The distances between sex workers' places of operation and health care nodes are a barrier to access. The sex worker loses income while away from the job seeking assistance. Another barrier is the social stigma attached to sex work and the discriminatory attitudes of health care workers. The cost entailed in such information service provision is also a factor. Most of the existing health care programmes targeting sex workers do provide basic STD education but sex workers who operate in 'unstructured' ways and whose level of mobility between outlets is high are difficult to reach. Another problem is that sex workers operate mainly at night while most healthcare services are available during the day when the workers rest.

A recent article in the *Daily mail and guardian* (69% of Carletonville's sex workers are HIV+ 2002) gives insight into informal information networks. A study conducted by the London School of Economics, states that "despite many obstacles to condom use among sex workers, the study found that, even in poor conditions, women had resources that could be used by HIV/AIDS prevention programmes." The women had support groups and networks among themselves and the study suggested that "community-based sexual health promotion programmes were better able to reach these women through these networks."

Potentially there are many avenues for improved information delivery, for instance, there is the example of Information and Documentation Center of the African AIDS Research Network in Dakar, Senegal which has become a POPulation information onLINE (POPLINE) Support Center. POPLINE is the world's largest database on population, family planning and related issues, now available on the World Wide Web at the URL: <http://www.popline.org>. Through its Digital Services, POPLINE provides authoritative, accurate and up-to-date information in electronic formats for less developed countries' (LDC) health professionals and policy makers. The Population

Information Program distributes a POPLINE CD-ROM to selected sites in these LDCs (POPLINE Digital Services 2002).

The Dakar Center organised a training workshop in Dakar, Senegal in February 2000 which involved librarians and researchers (POPLINE workshops in Senegal 2000). POPLINE could have a great impact in South Africa where more than twenty organisations currently use the POPLINE CD-ROM. Anne Compton, Chief of POPLINE Digital Services has worked with the staff of the South African National Population Unit (NPU) of the Department of Welfare in Pretoria. It is hoped that the NPU will become the POPLINE Support Center for these organisations (POPLINE support centers: South Africa 2000). The example of the Dakar workshop suggests the feasibility of including librarians in the training programmes.

The Aids Counselling Care Education Palliative Training (ACCEPT) skilfully uses techniques drawn from indigenous communication systems to communicate its message. ACCEPT trains groups of sex workers in the Hillbrow area in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The trained group members are then a source of information to fellow sex workers who are difficult to reach by traditional education methods. In addition community meetings are held for the general community in hotels, shebeens, churches and community centres. To overcome the poor reception of the health messages ACCEPT captures the attention of the audience through the use of song and drama (Edwards 2000, 4). In another recent initiative SIDA has commenced issuing the *HIV/AIDS red letter* (2002) which is an occasional newsletter providing briefings on the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Information channels used by the sex workers and their perceptions of the channels' adequacy

In this section the information channels used by sex workers are described. While interpersonal sources of information were used and the conventional media to some extent, no mention at all was made of libraries or information centres as sources of information. Possible reasons are the sex workers' perceptions of their own exclusion

or service provider attitudes to sex workers, or both of these. These reasons require further exploration. The Internet and World Wide Web which offer a rich store of appropriate information were not mentioned as channels either.

Use of interpersonal channels and own experience

The most commonly used "channels" of information for problem solving in the current study were those closest to hand: co-workers, the media and the sex workers' own experience. In the survey the sex workers were able to give more than one response. Of those who did respond and 31% did not, nearly half (46%) gave interpersonal sources as their information channels. Co-workers (20%), friends, relatives, and neighbours (9%) and bosses (7%) were named as sources. Their own experience was relied on by 9%.

Personal contacts are an important source of information for information seekers from many occupational groups. Lamoral (2001, 184) in an audit of the sources favoured by well-educated users of the Institute for Commercial Forestry Research (ICFR) Library attached to the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi found that personal contacts ranked as the second preferred information source. Lamoral comments in a way that is useful in planning services to the sex worker group, too, that this preference indicates the need to personalise the information services provided. She quotes Maguire and Kench (1981 in Lamoral 2001, 184) who state that "the preferred means of receiving information is person to person."

Personal contacts, especially face-to-face communication, were used by rural women in the Tanga region of Tanzania who had low levels of education and poor access generally to information sources (Kiondo 1999). Forbes (1999) found that the most heavily used information source was also personal communication with relatives, friends, employers, co-workers and the police serving as sources. She comments that these workers sought information from "the providers they knew best whether or not these were the best source of information". Fairer-Wessels (1990, 365), however, points out the inadequacy of personal sources. She argues that for the urban women in her study the information outlets were largely inaccessible and inadequate for these

women, as library services and stock were not attuned to their needs.

What seems to be crucial is that personal sources are a favoured information channel even when access to a range of sources is available. If, however, personal sources are used it is important that the source or person has expertise in the relevant area as in the case of the ICFR clientele. In the situations of the poorly educated women cited above this did not appear to be the case. The sex workers in the current study, while enjoying a higher level of education, did not appear to have ready access to expert sources or where such sources existed, did not use them. The use of interpersonal sources of information in the current study requires further exploration in view of the modest level of satisfaction expressed with the outcome of information seeking reported below.

Use of the media

Nearly a quarter (23%) of the respondents used the media. The channels used appeared to be readily available, namely, newspapers used by 11% and radio and television used by 6% each. In Fairer-Wessels' 1990 study of urban women the media were not widely used as a source of information as many women preferred interpersonal sources despite the inadequacy of the latter.

Sex workers perceptions of the adequacy of the channels used

Those satisfied with the outcome of attempts to solve problems totalled 37%. The 20% who were not satisfied saw their situation as unchanged. Most of the respondents (43%) did not report on their satisfaction or lack thereof.

Other critical issues raised by the sex workers

The sex workers were asked whether there was anything they wanted to add. Responses to this question included legalising sex work, the need for job creation by government and struggling to get a job in spite of having diploma qualifications. Other responses concerned not having unemployment insurance and worker's compensation earlier in the sex workers' work life. A third gave insight into kindness within the group saying:

"we comfort each other in times of sadness." Another expressed hope about stopping sex work at an early age, aiming to "just make money and get out" while a colleague said that it was hard to get out and that they "always come back." It is clear that there is an urgent need for an information and support service that assists sex workers move back into mainstream employment and society. A recent non library example is found in the Scottish Executive's funding of 1.1 million and 700,000 pounds respectively, of the Glasgow Base and Routes out of Prostitution Social Inclusion Partnership as part of an initiative to tackle homelessness in Scotland (Scottish Executive 2000).

With one exception the sex workers supported the legalisation of sex work. A Pretoria High Court judgement in August 2001, following an appeal by three workers in the sex industry, declared legislation forbidding a woman to have sex for reward with a man to whom she is not married unconstitutional. The judges, however, found legislation forbidding the keeping of a brothel constitutional (Judges: sex work not illegal 2001, 1). Until the Constitutional Court makes a decision on this judgement no one can be arrested in terms of this section. The Sex Workers Education Advocacy Trust is campaigning for decriminalisation. In a decriminalised situation, sex workers would have rights (Sex work – is this the Rubicon? 2001, 7). One crucial right in terms of the 1994 South African constitution and the Bill of Rights would be the right to information.

Once legalised the industry would be like any other and would have to comply with existing labour legislation, common law and trading by-laws, observing in fact "the rules and regulations we all have to abide by in daily life" (De Villiers 2001, 24). De Villiers, Acting Director of the Women's Legal Centre in Cape Town, comments on the problems for indoor sex workers employed in brothels and here the question hinges on whether the sex workers are employees. If they were they would be covered by existing legislation. Employers could also apply workplace health and safety laws in such a way as to ensure protection against HIV/AIDS, STDs, violence from clients and exploitation. This article argues that sex workers should have access to information, training and other resources that could enhance their control over their work lives and their own safety (Zatz 1997, 317).

Observations on the potential role of information intermediaries

While noting the popularity of personal contacts as information sources one must also take cognisance of the inadequacy of interpersonal sources in certain circumstances in which other options are inaccessible and the personal sources lack accurate, relevant and current information. Fairer-Wessels (1990, 365) suggested that the problem of inappropriate service could be eased by establishing locally-based community information depots staffed by locals who are in touch with the needs of the community, "someone they can talk to" and accessible with regard to service hours. A similar situation is seen to operate in the case of the sex workers. The potential role of information providers as mooted by Kerslake and Kinnell (1998) is relevant here as is SWEAT's service and SWWOP's 'Johnny van' with its information and advice at appropriate hours in accessible locations. ACCEPT's use of traditional media is noteworthy. Further exploration, however, is needed concerning appropriate models of provision.

Conclusion

In the interim information provision such as that mooted by Fairer-Wessels (1990) and offered by SWEAT and SWWOP are needed to bring sex workers closer to adequate and personalised library and information provision. Since the survey was conducted, possibly because of it, some sex workers have approached the Law Clinic for legal information. The otherwise heavy reliance of sex workers on interpersonal channels for information provision, in view of the complexity and urgency of their expressed problems and the modest level of satisfaction recorded with the outcome of their information seeking, requires action and further research. The sex workers non-use of channels such as public libraries, information centres and the World Wide Web requires investigation. Finally what is needed is a more finely nuanced view of sex workers as people (Rickard and Storr 2001) and this, too, should contribute to more adequate information provision for this group.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the interviewees, the University Law Clinic and the field workers for their participation, the University of Natal Research Fund for funding and colleagues, Jenny Aitchison, Barbara Gentil, and Athol Leach, for comments on the paper.

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Editorial history:

Paper received 11 February 2002;

Final version received 13 May 2002;

Accepted 22 May 2002.