

THE TAVISTOCK AND PORTMAN NHS TRUST

TAVISTOCK POLICY SEMINARS

'CONNECTING PUBLIC POLICY AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS'

Young People and Sexual Exploitation: are we developing child-centred policy and practice?

Jenny Pearce, Middlesex University. Co-ordinator of the National Working Group on Young People and Sexual Exploitation

Sue Jago, Home Office. Author of *Paying the Price* - a consultation paper on Prostitution

Joanna Phoenix, University of Bath

Thursday 20 January 2005, 6 - 8pm

Venue: The Tavistock Centre

This seminar aims to involve practitioners and policy makers from a range of different settings (social work, sexual health, youth work and connexions, drugs and alcohol projects, police and youth offending teams) in discussion about how young people may perceive and understand relationships deemed to be sexually exploitative. It will explore how this child-centred understanding of relationships can inform policy and look at ways of opening up and working with young people's risk-taking, sexualised behaviour in a way that can listen to, rather than silence, their voice.

The DOH (2000) guidance document, *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution*, states that young people exploited through prostitution are victims of abuse, recognising that many young people 'at risk' can be coerced, enticed or forced into selling or exchanging sex for favours. *Paying the Price* (2004), the HO consultation paper on prostitution, endorses this view that sexually exploited young people are victims and that adult perpetrators of abuse are criminal offenders.

Despite this, there are two contradictions that we hope the seminar will be able to explore. First, both documents have the caveat that despite being recognised as vulnerable victims of abuse, young people who voluntarily return to selling sex can be treated as perpetrators of crimes and arrested for offences relating to prostitution. Although rarely used, this contradiction reflects a more general, often desperate concern to 'do something' as a last resort for adolescents whose behaviour appears to be out of their and our control. Second, some of the stories presented by young people themselves can challenge an uncritical acceptance of the child as victim. When faced with what may appear to be impossible situations, some young people can show remarkable forms of resistance and resilience in their transitions to adulthood, feeling that they are exerting control over their circumstances by swapping or selling sex as a means of survival or escape from hostile circumstances. In this seminar we will explore some of these contradictions.

PROGRAMME

Seminars will begin at 6pm with the main presentations. There will be a short break for refreshments at 6.45pm after which the seminar will resume with an open dialogue and end with brief commentaries from the speakers.

CONTACT

Marie Pearlman,
The Tavistock Centre,
120 Belsize Lane,
London,
NW3 5BA.
Tel: 020 7447 3811.
email: mpearlman@tavi-port.nhs.uk