

Women buying sex- Where is the evidence?

Background

Media representations in Western countries, through television series such as 'Gigolo' and 'Hung' suggest that women are purchasing commercial sex in increasing numbers. A review of the scholarly literature was conducted to assess the extent of research knowledge on women who buy sex.

Method

A systematic search of the published research literature was conducted through four databases (Psych INFO, PubMed, Sociological Abstracts, and ProQuest Sciences), to capture papers from the perspective of different disciplines. The key words used for the literature search were ('women or female') AND ('buy sex', 'clients of sex', 'consumers of sex', 'sex or romance tourism', 'male sex worker*'). Eligible publications include qualitative and quantitative empirical studies, literature reviews, and conceptual discussion papers. After eliminating papers on female sex workers, male clients, and male sex workers without details of female clients, 18 papers were eligible for inclusion. Empirical research on female sex tourism was reported in 12 papers (10 qualitative studies, one quantitative study, and one mixed methods study) and two further papers were discussions of female sex tourism research. Other papers reported a meta-analysis of research on clients of the sex industry, a textual analysis of female sexual consumerism in the Hung series, a qualitative study of erotic dancing for women and a quantitative survey of women who buy sex toy products.

Results

Most published research on women buying sex were concerned with buying sex away from home, termed as sex tourism. These studies typically position women who buy sex abroad as

indulging in romantic fantasies or behaving in ways that they would not do so in their regular settings.

Conclusion

Research about female sex tourism is available but there is a lack of broader research into the prevalence, motivations and settings in which women buy sex. It remains unclear to what extent women buy sex in non-tourism settings.

Submitted:

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For my bio:

Hilary has a background in nursing and counselling. She a Masters of Health Science via Coursework in Sexual Health and is working as a Sex Therapist in Canberra, Australia.

Hilary has completed Masters of Applied Science research project about men who buy sex at University of Sydney. She is currently a PhD student at University of New South Wales researching women who buy sex. Hilary is affiliated with National Centre in HIV Social Research and the Australian Society of Sexologists.