

Research Article

Understanding Male Sex Work: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Though male sex work is a global phenomenon, systematic reviews on this topic are scant. Our understanding of scholars' perspectives on this topic remains unclear. The article reviews past and recent social science research on male sex work. First, this article provides a brief history of male sex workers and their society, demonstrating that their relationships have varied through times ranging from tolerable to contentious. Secondly, scholars' perspectives on male sex work and discussion on how these discourses shape the conceptualization of male sex work are provided. Thirdly, this review provides dominant legal and social responses to this topic. Lastly, this article discusses on how emerging technologies shape and influence new conditions to understand on this topic.

Keywords

- Male sex work
- Social work
- Perspectives
- Technology

INTRODUCTION

Male sex work (MSW) is a globalized phenomenon, existing in almost all countries and expanding rigorously into the digital world. In the United States, male sex workers are noted to solicit sex on the streets of Sans Francisco [1]. In Peru, male sex workers of different classes venture into urban and suburban spaces to solicit sex [2]. In Mainland China, male sex workers or "money boys" enter the business to escape the harsh factory labor conditions [3]. In Europe, male sex workers in Prague are confronted with the harsh and unrealistic depiction of their lives in tabloids and news media [4]. Digitally, male sex work or male-to-male pornography accounts for more than one-third of the \$2.5 billion adult industry [5]. In short [6], summarized three important aspects of the current state of male sex work: male sex work is global phenomenon, existing in all countries; there is a strong and increasing demand for male sex work in various areas of the world; and the existence and the conditions of male sex work changes with and influence the traditional notion of masculinity. While there are numerous research and systematic reviews conducted on male sex work in other disciplines such as public health and criminology, this review finds that there is scant research and systematic reviews have been conducted on male sex work in social work. Consequently, our understanding of scholars' perspectives on this topic remains unclear.

The purpose of this review is to offer social work researchers and practitioners a general understanding of the topic. Just as the roles of public health agents, it is well accepted within the social work field that the roles of social workers are to provide care and advocate for vulnerable populations. As social workers are becoming increasingly involved in providing essential services to male sex workers, review on male sex work in research is critical

in informing and guiding the development of evidence-based services and practices.

This literature review investigates the phenomenon of MSW in the current research literature, varying from public health to sociology to criminology research. This paper is intended to enrich our understanding of contemporary perspectives towards MSW. This review is structured as follows. First, the review aims to illustrate a brief history of MSW and its dynamic definitions in research. Second, it aims to critically review various perspectives on MSW in research. Third, this paper aims to present a brief summary of relevant theories invoked to understand different pathways to become a male sex worker. Fourth, this article connects the relationship between legal and social responses to the perception of MSW. And lastly, this review discusses emerging technology and its influence on the conditions of this topic.

Defining male sex work

The great challenge of defining male sex work is that there is no one agreed-upon definition, due to changing understanding and attitudes towards this social phenomenon. According to common understanding, Oxford Dictionary defines *prostitution* [7] as "the practice or occupation of engaging in sexual activity with someone for payment" and "the unworthy or corrupt use of one's talents for personal or financial gain" and whereas, a *prostitute* [8] is "a person, in particular a woman, who engages in sexual activity for payment" [7]. In layman terms, *prostitution* [7] is defined in a negative way, where talents are misused. Additionally, a *prostitute* [8] assumes a prototype of a woman, conveying that women are the sole purveyors of sexual services [9]. Yet, men in history have engaged in the selling of their bodies just as women [9,10]. Recently, scholars have attempted to remove negative connotation associated with the selling of

sex and tried to reframe the definition without placing value-based judgment. Scholars have used “sex work” in replacement of “prostitution” [7]. The section below attempts to capture a portion of the process of defining male sex work in research.

Steering away from the value-based definition of “prostitution” and heading towards a more neutral definition, [11] define male sex work as “the adult exchange of direct physical contact sexual services for monetary gain” However, it is noted that compensation for sex services is not always monetary, but there are alternative ways of compensating male sex workers. Beyond the monetary compensation, scholars have attempted to add other dimensions to the definition such as: support of livelihood necessities (i.e. food, shelter, etc.) [12], and other items of monetary values (i.e. drugs, clothes, cosmetics, luxury goods, overseas vacation, drugs, etc [5]. Additionally, to distinguish MSW from other forms of sexual relationships with benefits such as marriage [13], the dimension of “hired” service or employment is added to the definition. Taking into considerations of multi-dimensional forms of compensation in male sex work industry, scholars [14,15], define male sex worker as a person who is hired to provide sexual services with monetary compensation and/or other valuable items. Morrison and Whitehead [16], argue that this definition is most fitting to define MSW because it assumes that sex work is a legitimate form of employment, without the elements moral degradation. The dynamic definition of “male sex work” is defined based on the understanding and attitudes towards the topic, changing from moral-based definition to a more neutral, work-based definition. The reason for the dynamic definition of MSW may be influenced by shifting perspectives on this topic, which is discussed in the later sections.

Brief history of male prostitution

In history, the conditions of male sex work are dependent on the degree of cultural acceptance afforded on prostitution and sexual interactions between two men [10]. Male sex work appeared in literature as early as in 346 BCE, in the city-state of Athens and across cultures in the days of the Samurais in Japan, pre-industrial Europe and colonial America [10]. Today, male sex work exists globally and is continuously changing through the modern day era with the advent of the internet [6].

In the ancient Greece, sexual relationships between males were tolerated. While restricted to certain socio-sexual codes, it was permissive for younger male citizens to exchange sex with an older male for education and mentorship as long as they followed the gender norms [10]. Young males or “pais” often performed the feminine role while older males or “erastes” performed the passionate and masculine roles [10]. With the fall of the Greek empire in first century BCE, male sex work continued to exist in the Roman Empire. During the rule of the Romans, male sex workers were classified into two groups: slaves/former slaves and freed imperial Roman males [10]. Slaves and former slaves were coerced into selling sex with other men for survival purposes while free Romans voluntarily engaged in sex work for education and mentorship, just as the Greeks [10]. Male sex work continued to be tolerated for several hundred years, until Christian doctrine established itself and imposed its canon laws, which prohibited any non-procreative sex; thus, effectively outlawing homosexuality and male sex work [10]. As such, male

sex workers moved from public spaces to become hidden within bathhouses in the Middle Ages [9].

In Japan, same-sex relationships were classified by the caste-system. Between top-caste males, a similar system of pederasty as followed by the Grecians and the Romans existed [10]. Younger males engaged in sexual relationships with older males in exchange for apprenticeships, such as relationships between samurai warriors and their apprentices [10]. Distinctively, however, sexual relationships between samurai warriors and their apprentices’ goal were to achieve *ikiji* or “shared masculine pride” [10]. On other hands in less desirable relationships, *kabuki wakashu* or male actors/prostitutes of lower caste were also available to offer transactional sex to top-caste samurai warriors, without regards to achieve *ikiji* [10]. In early modern Japan, same-sex relationships and sex work were legal [10].

In pre-industrial Europe, male sex work continued to exist, although stigmatized, feared and punished [10]. In Italy, young unemployed men or *bardassass* old their bodies for sex and as art objects for artists [10]. In Paris in the 1700s, sodomy and prostitution were illegal and punishable by imprisonment [10]. Despite punitive laws established against prostitution, by the 18th century, male sex work was established all over European cities [10].

In colonial America, the earliest citation of male sex work was between men who exchanged sexual services for food. John Smith noted starving colonists could trade “love” for food [10]. Later in the late 1800s America, male sex workers were present to trade in bars and beer halls [10].

In modern days era, prior to the establishment of sexology and homosexual/heterosexual framework in the 19th century, male sex workers performed the passive roles in sexual services to their dominant, active clients [16,17]. Male sex workers who performed the passive roles were regarded as distasteful, while their clients who presume the active roles were considered to be acceptable [9]. Chauncey [18] explains: “the predominant form of male prostitution seems to have involved fairies selling sex to men who, despite the declaration of desire made by their willingness to pay for the encounters, identified themselves as normal”. Consequently, the clients retained their status as masculine and heterosexual men while male prostitutes did not have to question or challenge their homosexual desires and actions because they deemed their actions as “prostitution” or sex work [9].

In the early 20th century, the emergence of sexology began the movement to measure and examines sex, sexuality, and sexual practices [16]. For example, Kinsey’s reports on human sexuality consolidated homosexuality as an identity [9]. At this point, male sex workers were associated with homosexuality and posed as moral concerns because of their engagement in sexually deviant acts [9,18]. As male-to-male or “homosexual” intercourse seeped into the imagination of the public, male sex work became to be perceived similarly to their female counterparts as sexual deviants and their presence was contested [9]. Additionally, by the 1950s and 1960s, the socio-sexual construction of the “adolescence” identity began to substantiate [9]. Males in their “adolescence” stage emerge as a topic of concerns as this is a period where young boys were perceived to develop their

sexuality and any disruptions in this development would result in abnormal sexual functioning [19]. Male sex workers were associated with runaways and delinquent youth, who were lured into prostitution by older, homosexual clients [9]. Young boys who entered sex work were viewed as victims of circumstances, where social welfare services and laws were used to prevent young, straight men from being lured by homosexual pervers into prostitution [9]. This influenced the way the public responded to MSW phenomenon, shifting their responses to social welfare services and medical interventions to correct their socio-economic conditions as well as potential sexual perversion [19]. The intention was to prevent young, straights from “falling” into the pitfall of homosexuality and “by defining homosexual desire as a treatable disease, and by characterizing male sex workers as homosexuals motivated by poverty, the public discourses surrounding male prostitution was kept decidedly within the moorings of preventing public harms

By the 1990s, the focus on male prostitution shifted from preventing youth from delinquency and sex work into focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention [20]. The emergence of HIV/AIDS epidemic, which focused on the risky sexual behaviors, drug use, and homosexual intercourse, transition the framing of male sex work to focus on HIV/AIDS as public health concerns [9,19]. Research on MSW published during this era focuses on associations between male sex workers and their sexual and drugs behaviors as well as the prevalence of HIV/AIDS amongst male sex workers [20]. Male sex workers were deemed as a “vector of disease” whose behaviors warrant attention because they were bridges of transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus to not only their clients but also the female partners of their clients [20].

In more recent years, the image of homosexuals is more visible and accepted in society. This shift occurs simultaneously with the changing nature of masculinity. Male bodies are more sexualized and commoditized in recent years in magazines, advertisements, and other sources of media [21]. This changes the narrative of men as consumer and female as the supplier of sexuality. The emergence of technology allows MSW to be even more visible, by advertising their profiles and soliciting sex work virtually [22]. Additionally, the internet also provides a space where the public has an unprecedented access to information on MSW. The conversations about MSW are less about deviance or delinquency but more about purchasing and consumption. In the age of the internet, MSW also proliferated through other features such as male pornography, which comprises for more than billions of dollars in the pornography industry [5]. Changing notion of masculinity and normalization of prostitution began to shift a new public perception of male prostitution in the public view, although it is argued that their presence is still contested in many different areas of the world.

In summary, from the review of history, the relationship of MSW and their society varied across time and space. Particularly, the narratives of male sex work situate distinctively from their female counterparts because while the discussion of female sex work has been centered on trafficking and exploitation, the narratives of male sex workers, who are perceived as dominant in society, have been shifting from focusing on passive sex workers and their active clients, to protecting youth from

perverts, and to public health concerns as “vectors of disease”. Moreover, it is significant to note that presence of male sex workers raises important questions about and challenges the traditional relationships between masculinity, sexuality, and commercialization of sex.

Perspectives on male sex work

As male sex workers situate between the two junctions of societal taboos: homosexuality and prostitution [20], the discussion on this phenomenon is diverse and contentious. Social scientists, including social workers, represent, contribute to, and adopt the variety of these perspectives. The following section presents dominant perspectives on male sex work in the social science field.

Psycho-socio-logical Perspective: Scott et al., summarize early research on male sex work as bidirectional: sociological which focuses on delinquency and homosexuality and the other is sociopathological, where male sex workers can be clinically understood and treated. This early approach frames male sex workers as socially unfit and psychologically ill beings [22].

Male sex workers considered to be psychopathological because they are believed/ found to have many negative personality characteristics such as “laziness, intellectual dullness, immaturity, inability to relate to others” and tend to possess psychosocial characteristics such as “paranoid, mistrustful, hopeless, lonely, and isolated” [23]. Additionally, in this perspective, male sex workers are also perceived as psychologically deficient. Therefore, their engagement in sex work is perceived as one’s fulfillment of psychological needs, belonging, and power. For example, Cates [24], demonstrates that young males sought after sex work to seek “hostile-dependent” relationships with older males to fulfill their sense of belonging and need for nurturing, which they identified as lacking their life. Similarly, Allen [25], posits young males were motivated to provide sex work to older males for a secured, stable foundation and even for opportunities to “schooling, travel, vocational training, and possible introductions to prospective employers”. Others have identified that they engaged in sex work as a way to “thrill-seek” [24]. As such, engaging in sex work is considered to be a highly “emotional” decision for some sex workers [24]. Consequently, in this perspective, male sex workers were perceived as people with negative personality traits and who were psychologically desperate.

Beyond the psychological aspect, early research on MSW also follows a sociological viewpoint [5,22,26,27]. Coomb [26], reviewed early social science research and concluded that a male sex worker “is unemployed, a drifter, has a poor work record and possesses neither vocation skill nor adequate education; he is a drop-out, comes from a broken home, had parents who were poor models, and a home-life in which there is little warmth but much rejection. The male prostitute also has a strong dislike for authority and is usually of low to average intelligence”. Similarly, Minichiello et al. [6], came to similar conclusions, stating that in social science research the depiction of a male sex work is “youthful; poorly educated with a low to average intelligence; immature and lazy; isolated and alienated; possessing a poor work history and few vocational skills; raised in a poor

socioeconomic circumstances, characterized by a disorganized familial environment; heterosexual with a hyper-masculine appearance or traits; alcohol or drug dependent; hostile and aggressive to himself, family, and society; incapable of forming stable relations with others; and highly transient, sexually promiscuous and virile, having been initiated into sexual activity at an early age”[5].

In the process of this review, the author of this article also shares similar conclusions. Males involved in sex work are generally having a vulnerable background, for example: poor education and family setback [26], childhood physical and sexual abuse [12,28], early experiences with sexual intercourse [28], and high reports of substance use [12,28,30,31]. They are also desperate for money [32-35], and lack occupational skills [28,33].

Reviews of social science literature from different decade show that the focus of research remains largely on psycho-social characteristics of male sex workers. The focus on the psychosocial characteristics of male sex workers frame male sex workers as social misfits, who are in desperate needs of money, which in return perpetuate the narratives that male sex workers are pathologized and deficit human beings, while ignoring structural factors as well as the diversity of experiences amongst male sex workers [5]. After all, male sex workers are not a homogeneous group [6].

Public health perspective: With the emergence of HIV/AIDS epidemic and the public health era, male sex workers are being viewed as vectors of disease and of public health concerns [6]. Ample research in public health shows that male sex workers experience a higher rate of HIV/AIDS than the general male population [36,37]. This is well-documented in many countries globally such as China [38,39], USA [40], Vietnam [32], Thailand [41], Nigeria [42], Nepal [43], and India [44]. Male sex workers engage in risky sexual behaviors practices [37,45]. These include a high number of sex partners, low condom usage, low education on HIV/AIDS transmittance, unprotected sex with non-pay partners, high alcohol and drug users, and risky sexual environment [37,45]. For example, Estcourt et al. [46], focus on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, and risk behaviors in male commercial sex workers in Sydney. In Russia, Baral et al. [47], conduct studies on sociodemographic, prevalence of HIV/AIDS, and expressed concerns for condoms use. Similarly, in China, Kong researches condoms use amongst male sex workers in China. Kong [38], expresses concerns that male sex workers are still at risk of HIV/AIDS infections due to “insufficient AIDS knowledge and preventive measures resulting in cultural myths; dire financial straits; pleasure-seeking at work due to sexual ambivalent condom use with regular orientation clients due to blurred work/friendship boundaries and trusting non-commercial intimate partners”. Research in public health is mainly concerned with HIV/AIDS prevalence and the construction of socio-demographics of male sex workers and their sexual practices. The goals are to curtail HIV/AIDS amongst this population and stop it from spreading to the general public.

Furthermore, research on male sex work in public health is also focusing on interventions to curtail the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The fear is that male sex workers and their clients are having unprotected sex with men and women outside of their

commercial transaction [38,45]. For example, Lau et al. [48], highlight that there is emerging public health challenge with HIV/AIDS epidemic amongst male who have sex with male in China, particularly amongst male sex workers, who could pose as a bridge of HIV/AIDS transmission into the female general population, thus posing a public threat. This situates male sex workers as a bridge of HIV/AIDS into the general public [49,50]. This fear shifted public health researchers into researching intervention methods to prevent this epidemic from spreading to the general public. For example, Geibel, King’ola, Temmerman, & Luchters [51], conduct a study on the impact of peer outreach on HIV/AIDS knowledge and prevention behaviors of male sex workers in Kenya and Ballester-Arnal et al. [35], argue for programs to target the heterogeneous characteristics of sex workers, especially examining the roles of the internet in the HIV/AIDS prevention program, as sex workers are becoming less visible on the streets.

HIV/AIDS phenomenon has been prescribed significantly as male sex workers’ problems and as their core characteristics. Yet, there are competing claims against this view. Weinberg, Worth, & Williams [51], discover that there are no significant differences between male sex workers and non-MSW counterparts in relation to HIV/AIDS status. While that Oldenburg et al. [37], show that while the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is high amongst male sex workers, they also varied with geographic regions and with different severity. In fact, Prestage et al. [52], assert that the relationship between sex work and HIV/AIDS infection are not empirically supported, but rather are due to other factors outside of sex work, such as geographic regions, condition of work, and other outside of sex work may indirectly facilitate to the varying prevalence and degree of HIV/AIDS amongst this group.

Dennis [54], points out that the research on HIV/AIDS and its danger is distinctively different from female and male sex workers. While there is a fear that HIV/AIDS is a threat to female sex workers’ well-beings, there is a lesser concern on the threats of HIV/AIDS to the male sex workers’ well-beings, but more of a concern of the possibilities that male sex workers will infect the general public with the disease [54]. Summary from this perspective, there is a heavy focus on HIV/AIDS prevalence, demographics, sexual behaviors, condom usage behaviors, and paths of transmission. The paths of transmission are identified as from male sex workers to heterosexual or bisexual clients, who will infect their partners or sex workers, will infect their own partners (who practice unprotected sex to differentiate selling and intimate sexual practices). The focus of this perspective maintains that male sex work is a public health threat riddled with HIV/AIDS, through their risky sexual practices and is a potential threat to the general public, serving as bridges of transmissions. These perspective centers, as the previous perspective, on the characteristics and shortcomings of individuals, which further pathologizes the individuals and fails to address the structural factors and conditions which may produce and proliferate this phenomenon.

Criminological perspective: Beyond being viewed as a public health threat, male sex work is also viewed a potential criminal activity [55-57]. Criminological perspective attempts to understand individuals and social contexts, which produce a crime and devise intervention methods to prevent crimes from

happening. Multiple criminology theories have been used to understand and conceptualize male sex work such as rational choice theory and routine activities theory. Rational choice theory has been used to understand-the decision making process of offenders in order to prevent a crime from being committed [56]. For example, Leclerc et al. [56], create crime script to understand the crime-commission process in child sexual abuse and Cornish [56], create crime-commission script track for sexual abuse of male children by stranger offenders in public place and in residential institutions.

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) is used to understand the occurrence of sex work [55,57]. Cohen & Felson's [58], RAT suggests that instead of hyper-focusing on the actions of the individuals (internal and external motivations), a crime occurs when there is a convergence of three factors: the motivated offender, a suitable target, and a capable guardian in a particular time and space. Motivated offender is defined as "anybody who for any reason might commit a crime"; a suitable target is defined as any person or object likely to be taken or attacked by the offender" and capable guardian is defined as "neighbors, friends, relatives, bystanders, or owner of the property targeted" [57,59]. Felson [59], further divides guardianship into four levels which are: personal level, assigned level, diffused level and general level. They propose that on a micro-level, a crime occurs when there are minimum elements converge at a certain time and space. One the structural level, societal context shapes and influences the convergence of the elements and the occurrence of crimes [60]. Based on this theory, it can be suggested that a suitable target is defined as a person who wants to engage in sex work or the sex workers themselves. The motivated offender is assumed to be the client and/or external motivations. In the absence of capable guardians, males make an entry into sex work, thus falling as victims of their clients.

While the strength of the criminological perspective is identifying factors leading to criminal activities and its prevention, this perspective adopts a similar stance, as the previous perspective, where sex workers are viewed as victims and that their presence maintains a social disorder. In other words, this perspective seeks to eradicate or prevent sex work, a criminal act, from occurring. Consequently, research related to sex work in criminology has been associated with child sexual abuse [56], and minors who involve in the illegal selling of sex [55,57]. Yet this perspective does not take into serious considerations of some groups of sex workers who engage in sex work as adults, voluntarily and intentionally. Consequently, like other perspectives, this viewpoint also fails to fully capture the diversity and the landscape of the male sex work industry.

Feminist Perspective: Feminists, since the 1970s, have had animated debate on how sex work should be perceived. The debate on this topic amongst feminists can be categorized into two major sides: the anti-sex feminists [61-65], who perceive sex work as the ultimate form of exploitation, degradation and subordination of women while the pro-sex feminists who adopt an empowerment approach and perceive sex work as sexual exploration [17,66-70]. Anti-sex feminist viewpoint dictates that sex work in general, especially for women, are inherently oppressive, where people are forced into the selling of their

bodies in order to survive [60-64]. In short, anti-sex feminists view sex work as the ultimate form male domination over women's body and the ultimate form of women's subordination, degradation and victimization [71].

To contrast anti-sex feminists' criticisms on the issues of coercion, Sanders [72] posits that there is a distinction between human trafficking and voluntary migrant sex workers. Sanders [72], suggests that migrant sex workers enter European cities, knowingly, that they will engage in the sex industry. Sanders [72], posits that the sex industry, which is not regulated, is a source of economic opportunities for women who do not know the city well. Sanders [72], concedes that while the discourse of "choice" must be considered in the constraints of the conditions, under which those choices can be made, she persists that women are making decisions on how to earn their money [72]. Moreover [70], Weitzer, suggests that people who left their mainstream job to pursue sex work enjoyed increased freedom and money.

Counteracting the narrative of violence and degradation, Sanders [73], presents that the sexual script between commercial and non-commercial sex are not drastically different from each other and states that commercial sex male sexual script as "traditional romance, courtship rituals, modes and meanings of modes and meanings of communication, sexual familiarity, mutual satisfaction and emotional intimacies found in "ordinary" relationships". It can be suggested that sex work (while not legally or contractually protected as other forms of labor) is not as "corruptive, abusive or an expression of male hostility" to sex workers, just as anti-sex feminists have suggested. Rather, commercial sex exchange between clients and sex workers are courteous, emotional, and mutual [73].

In fact, Jackson [69], criticizes the anti-sex feminists' viewpoint on sex workers as passive victims. Instead, pro-sex feminists pose sex work as an opportunity for sexual exploration [68], Comte and as a form of labor [74]. Additionally, pro-sex feminists also demand a deeper investigation on the bigger institution and social forces, which produce gender and income inequality [69].

More recent research on feminist approach on MSW has been through the empowerment perspective and on shifting the narratives towards labor framework. For example, Moore [75], argues for viewing young male sex workers as survivors of their circumstances, in societal conditions which deny legitimate economic subsistence. Furthermore, Lankenau et al. [34], posit that choosing careers as sex workers demonstrate the creativity and resiliency of young male sex workers. Combining their street capital and street competencies, young male sex workers are able to adapt to their challenging life conditions and create a career in which they could maintain their livelihood and build a client-based network resource of income, in addition to avoiding arrests [34].

While the feminist perspective offers a structural way to perceive male sex workers, it still falters into dichotomized viewpoints: gender exploitation vs. choice. Chapkis [76], criticizes that dichotomized way of viewing sex work amongst feminist are too simplistic and that it ignores diversity issues such as gender economic inequalities as well as the diversity of workers

in the industry. In fact, Sanders, O'Neill, & Pitcher [77], suggest that feminists have failed to problematize male sex workers and transgendered workers with such rigor as they have with female sex workers; thus effectively leaving them out of the theoretical frameworks to understanding sex work. Consequently, the exclusion of other forms of sex workers (e.g. male sex workers, transgender sex workers, etc.) who contribute significantly to the sex industry effectively makes feminists' conceptualization of sex work incomplete and partial. In fact, scholars posit that research on male sex workers is critical to challenging the passive/victim narrative, representation of gender, and power dynamics in involving in and performing sex work [68,69,71].

Sex workers' perspective: Departing from the deficit/empowerment perspectives which view sex work as a social contestation or sexual exploration, the conceptualization of sex work as a legitimate form of work emerged [14,78]. Minchello et al., suggest that not all sex work is oppressive and in fact, there are different types of sex workers whose multitude of experiences depart from being the passive victims of sexual exploitation. More research being produced to substantiate this claim by linking to the commercialization of sex work, professional values of sex workers, structural organization of sex work, and hierarchy of professionalism. According to Zheng [35], applicants to brothels must report a number of physical attributes (i.e. ages, heights, weights, penis size) and only the applicants who meet criteria are accepted as "money boys". Additionally, Cameron et al. [79], conduct an economic research in measuring the values of male sex workers' physical attributes such as age, ethnicity, physical, masculine demeanor, penis size endowment. In their findings, they discover that in mainstream services, youth and attractive physique are two important attributes. In kinky sexual services, masculine, older men are more desirable and marketable Cameron et al. [79]. By framing these physical attributes in terms of economic values, the shift of sex work as a legitimate form of work is being presented.

Additionally, male sex workers are challenging the notion that they are social deviants and social problems by voicing their opinions on their reality. In Prague, they are reframing their narratives by stating that the problems they face are not the same presented in tabloids such as violence, HIV/AIDS, or drug overdoses [80]. Rather, they are more worried about the ability to keep their job or finding a suitable job to maintain their lives [80]. The reframing of the major problems confronting male sex workers reveals the discrepancy in terms of societal and researchers' perceptions of their problems versus their real problems: maintaining livelihood – like many of their non-MSW counterparts.

Moreover, sex workers are presenting their work as a professional job by displaying their professional values and the desires to move up the hierarchy levels of sex work. Sex workers frame themselves as skillful workers who provide quality service to their clients and reject the victim perspective [33]. Sanders [73], posits that sex work is beyond providing physical services to the clients, but also meeting their emotional needs. These skills are garnered through experiences and training to maintain a level of professional service delivered to meet the clients' emotional, physical, and sexual beings [33]. In return, male sex workers

are benefiting from the financial rewards, job satisfaction, flexibility and freedom, pleasure, adherence to condom usage [33]. Luckenbill [81], conducts a research on the deviant career mobility which studies the mobility of sex workers, where the findings show that most of the respondents express the desires and working towards from street hustling, to eventually enter the escort sex work, which is deemed as the most professional and salary reward. Zheng [35], also endorses the viewpoint that male sex workers do strive to climb up the social orders by working hard to move up within the sex work professional orders.

Lastly, sex work conditions becoming more of a professional business with the development of agencies such as brothels and escort services [6]. Agencies serve as a protective factor by providing spaces where sex workers can communicate, screen clients, provided with condoms, etc [82]. Professionalization of sex work (i.e. agency development, the hierarchy of skills and physical attributes, development of professional values) shifts the views of sex workers away from the characterization as a stigmatized social phenomenon into a rational business choice.

While the work perspective presents a strong argument for the choices of male sex workers to participate or continue their work in the profession, some scholars point out the difficulty in shaping this narrative. Unlike other professions which require entering into a private estate or meeting with the clients such as real estate agents, plumbers, or sale personnel, sex work can solicit violence (i.e. beat, rape, murder) if the customer is unhappy with the service [77]. Connell Davidson argues that there are moral doctrines which defend violence against mainstream workers, violence against sex work can be seemingly morally justified. Consequently, this narrative of sex workers fails to address the presenting tensions between sex workers and their society.

An emerging perspective: the polymorphous perspective: Within the frameworks of criminology, public health and deviance narrative, homosexuality and sex work are deemed as a public health threat and a moral threat to society, which require control and maintenance [5]. These perspectives assume that men who enter sex work are deficit beings. Weitzer [71], criticizes this monolithic view on sex work, where research findings are over generalized and sweeping in making claims, without regards to time, space, gender, and different typologies of sex work [71]. For example, a host of other types of male sex work such as escort services brothels, bar and massage parlors are ignored and under-researched [71]. In other extreme cases, a whole class of sex work, male sex work, is almost largely ignored feminists in the theorizing process. Feminist researchers also make the assumption that they try to criticize, which deem male as the main purchaser and women as the main suppliers, where male exploits and female submit. This assumption is also based on the heteronormative framework, which does not account for other forms of sexuality to manifest [71]. Weitzer advocates that studies on male sex workers would help to illuminate new details to the argument of sex workers' objectification, exploitation, and victimization. While different in their ways of viewing sex work, these perspectives significantly stay one-dimensional in their focus and approach and in return, they all fail to capture the constellations of experiences of sex workers and the social contexts where sex work is conducted [71]. Consequently, this

translates to misinformed perceptions and services (i.e. social and public health interventions) to address diverse needs and varying experiences of subgroups of male sex workers.

Criticizing previous research on sex work phenomenon as monolithic and essentialist and as motivated to fulfilling certain political or societal viewpoint, Weitzer proposes a more multi-dimensional perspective or “polymorphous” perspective to research this topic. Sanders and Campbell argue that sex work debate cannot be grounded in binary discussions of viewing sex workers as victims or agents of will, rather it should be viewed through multitudes of experiences. As noted by Weitzer [83], this perspective does not ignore the oppressive and exploitive conditions that some sex worker face rather it is “sensitive to complexities and to structural conditions resulting in the uneven distribution of agency and subordination” [83]. Ultimately, this perspective attempts to view sex work phenomenon as a “constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations, and worker experiences exist within the arena of paid sexual services and performances” [83].

This perspective has been evident in more recent research which strives to offer knowledge about sex work beyond the oppressive or the empowerment perspectives. For example, MacPhail et al. [84], research on the influence of technology on the normalization of MSW in the 21st century. Nureña et al. [85], investigate commercial sex work amongst men and male-born trans-people in three Peruvian cities, highlighting their diverse characteristics, patterns and sociocultural aspects. Leichtentritt and Arad [86], study the pathways to sex work amongst male-to-female transsexuals. Chu [87], explores the process of becoming a client of sex work. These work pose as challenges to previous researchers and scholars who adopted the one-dimensional viewpoints of writing and conceptualizing about MSW by treating variables like “victimization, exploitation, choice, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and other dimensions” as constants in the dynamic context of “type of sex work, geographical location, and other structural and organizational conditions”.

Ultimately, the author of this article adopts [83], “polymorphous” perspective as the most theoretically sound framework to conduct research and perceive sex work. Through this perspective, researchers on sex work are encouraged to look at multi-dimensions of sex work to understand how sex work is organized and experienced by all actors involved, in their perspective social contexts. In this way, scholars can begin to tackle the monolithic and one-dimension way of understanding sex work.

PATHWAYS TO MALE SEX WORK

For having a comprehensive view of MSW, an understanding of the different pathways to male sex work among is important. The popular narratives of entry for men who enter sex work has been that they are lured into selling sex by older, homosexual men. For example, Coombs suggests that entry into sex work has been associated with early homosexual seduction followed by immediate rewards with the development of sex work in males. While early experiences of homosexual seduction are a possible point of entry for some male sex workers, the initiation into sex work are varied, and often different from stereotypes.

Some scholars have attempted to delineate factors which may contribute to a person entering sex work. Some researchers contend that males enter sex work mainly for economic reasons. For example, West & de Villers [88], based on his work with street workers, suggested that most enter sex work out of an economic decision. The street sex workers identified that they were familiar with gay sex market place and they knew that they could make fast money via selling sex [88]. Similarly, in China, male sex workers entered the “money boy” business as a way to escape the long hours at the factory and chase the neoliberalism lifestyle [89]. Some identified that they entered sex work because they know of people who are in the circle, which introduced them to the work [88]. Some cite that entering sex work because they lack alternative options, which offer decent living wages [88]. Moreover, some scholars have focused on background characteristics as important factors for entry into sex work. Avais et al. [27], find that family setback, no work experience, and poor education play a critical role in entering male sex work. McCabe et al. [28], confirm findings from other researcher that male street sex workers are comparatively low level of education; are from single parent homes which are socially and economically deprived; have early experience of illicit opiates; have suffered neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; have run away from home, been homeless; and are addicted to drugs. Others cite that they enter sex work as a way to “thrill-seeking” [24].

Instead of focusing on “risk” factors alone, Weisberg [90], focuses on different subcultures of youth, combining with these factors, to explain entries to sex work. Weisberg [90], theorizes that male youth who enter sex work have undergone, similar to their female counterparts, problematic family backgrounds and their involvement with the justice and social service system. However, unlike their female counterparts, they do not experience coercion in entering sex work through pimps and violence. Male youth enter sex work through two subcultures frameworks. Peer delinquent are usually low-class and heterosexual boys who enter sex work as a form of survival to make money while homosexual and bisexual youth, who are usually from middle-class, enter sex work as an opportunity for exploration and sense of community from spending time in their gay borhoods. Weisberg [90], however, attempts to connect sexual abuse, neglect, and runaway behaviors as predisposing factors to sex work.

Allen [25], attempts to summarize different factors leading to sex work, including: “1) an early introduction to and acceptance of sexual experiences, (2) an awareness of prostitution as a social phenomenon (3) proximity to at least a limited subculture where activity as a prostitute is accepted, or even encouraged, (4) a sufficient psychic interest and/or arousal to permit a homosexual experience, and (5) money.” Allen [25], also highlights that causative factors are difficult to pinpoint, however, there is a certain group of youth who are at high risks to enter sexual work which is runaway youth who turn to sex work for survival [25].

It is debatable to conclude that male sex workers come from a vulnerable background and undesirable personal qualities. Controversies and inconsistencies are found among literature.

Simon et al. [23], discover that while male sex workers are indeed more “suspicious, mistrustful, hopelessness, lonely and isolated”, these psychological symptoms may derive from

experiences of stigma and harassment rather than pre-disposing factors of engaging in sex work [23]. In regards to childhood abuse, [91], that childhood abuse is a not predisposing factor contributing to youth involving in sex work. In fact, Earls and David [92], demonstrate that male sex workers do not view their childhood abuse experience as “traumatic”. Moreover, contrary to homelessness as a predisposing factor to sex work, McCabe et al. [28], state that none of the participants in their sample cited homelessness as a reason why they enter sex work. In terms of educational attainment, Earls and David [92], discover that the both groups of male sex workers and non-MSW male counterparts had the same level of education. In regards to male sex workers’ sexuality, male sex workers are assumed to be homosexuals because of their engagement in homosexual intercourse. Yet evidence on male sex workers reveals that their sexuality is varied and ambiguous. McCabe et al. [28], find that 10 out of 12 male sex workers identified as heterosexual. Toledo [41], reports that majority of the male sex workers in their sample are heterosexual or bisexual. Therefore, it is criticized that there are those who possess these “risk” factors and never enter sex work. Consequently, pathways to sex work cannot just consist of risk factors or cannot focus on individuals’ characteristics to predict the likelihood of a person entering sex work.

Instead, scholars [34,93], have attempted to understand entering sex work more of a pathway, which consist of risk factors as well as contextual conditions. Lankenau et al. [93], state that entering sex work mark period of crisis for young men, who experience homelessness, failed relationships with family or significant others, unemployment and drug habits contribute to entering sex work. Additionally, interactions with older males who offered emotional and financial support create a pathway coupled with impending needs for shelter, money, and drugs create openness for sex work [93]. Lankenau et al., summarize that pathways to street economy is characterized by the accumulation of street capital and transforming this capital into street competencies, while noting that this relationship is not always linear as many do not enter sex work. Similarly, Luckenbill [93], also argues for the considerations of the contextual conditions in influencing one’s decision to entering sex work. Luckenbill [93], rejects the idea of coercion and trickery that older man uses force or deception to lure troubled young males into sex work. Luckenbill [92], delineates two paths to sex work where one is one of financial desperation and one of the advantages of money and pleasure. “Defensive” involvement when a boy is in need of money, while there are limited prospects for job and no possibilities of returning home. There is a moment of “drifting” where the boy is living day to day on the street. Through association with an older male, from peers, or from the prospective customer who knows about sex work, boys turn to sex work and acceptance that sex work is a good way to make money and an acceptable form of survival. Adventurous involvement where life conditions are in comfort. In daily living, boy meets a prospective customer who proposes to pay for sex. Boys accept the selling of sex is an acceptable way to gain money and to satisfy sexual pleasure. Our pathways studies allow us a comprehensive understanding of how people enter the sex industry. In summary, people enter into the sex industry through interactions of risk factors, personal characteristics and

contextual conditions. However, it is important to note that there is no single way of entry into sex work.

RESPONSES TO MALE SEX WORK

As demonstrated, perspectives on male sex work are contentious and diverse. Responses to male sex work are contingent on the perception of male sex workers. When sex work is viewed as dangerous to society, whether posing as a public health threat or as sexual deviants, responses to this phenomenon is through social control and regulation [8,93]. When sex workers are viewed as destitute beings or victims, they are benefited with social services [8,93]. When male sex work is viewed as a rational choice for economic opportunities or “work”, sex workers demand that their choice is respected and that some advocate for basic labor rights, which are afforded to other professions [94]. This section below aims to illustrate how these perspectives manifest and influence policies and practices, as responses to male sex work phenomenon (Table 1).

Legal responses to sex work are complex. They can be summarized into four constructs: criminalization, partial criminalization, decriminalization, and legalization [98,99]. Sanders and Campbell note that the legal responses towards sex work are reflexive of theoretical tensions between scholars and activists who maintain that sex work is an oppressive or rational choice and personal decision for sex workers. Criminalization of selling and purchasing of sex is illegal and could result in legal punishments [5]. Many parts of the world today, sex work is illegal. Notably in the United States (except for Nevada), sex work is considered to be a crime. Solicitation or purchasing of sex could result in fine and imprisonment [5]. This type of legal responses supports the assumption, driving by decades of anti-sex feminist and Christian groups, that sex work is immoral, degrading and harmful to women, and an act of violence [100]. Moreover, Kingston [96], argues that criminalization also based on the assumptions that men who purchase are sexual exploiters and abusers of women. The ultimate goal of criminalization is to eradicate the existence of selling of sex in the society. Sanders [73], posits that in fact, the demonization of sex work will drive sex work underground where, sex workers cannot be in control of their work environment, reducing accountability and increasing the vulnerability of sex workers to be abused. Thus, in order for mutual and health commercial relationships to exist, Sanders [73], argues that criminalization policies must be eradicated.

Partial criminalization refers to policies which criminalize the buying of sex and criminalize a variety of conducts relate to sex work [96]. A typical example would be United Kingdom’s, where on the April of 2010 issued The Policing and Crime Act 2009 (PCA), which effectively criminalizes not the selling but the purchase of sex [96]. Additionally, persistent solicitations of sex work such as kerb-crawling or driving around in a car to solicit sex work where the goal is to eradicate sex work by criminalizing the demands for it [96]. Kingston argues that criminalization of purchasing of sex made sex workers more vulnerable to exploitation. In fact, partial decriminalization practices in Sweden influenced many women to fall into the hands of pimps and made it hard to police to criminalize pimps and traffickers [96]. Ultimately, criminalization of clients, too, drives sex work to go underground [96].

Table 1: Legal responses to sex work.

Model	Explanation
Criminalization	The system most common in the majority of countries where selling and purchasing of sex are illegal and punishable by laws. This system is prominent in these policies, which view sex work as immoral, degrading, dangerous and an act of violence [77].
Partial Criminalization	This system does not encourage the selling of sex. It criminalizes the purchasing of sex and variable of “objectable” conduct, which often associated with the selling of sex [96]. A typical example is the UK, kerb-crawling (persistent soliciting sex via vehicles) and Sweden where the purchasing of sex is illegal. The system is aiming to eradicate sex work through decreasing and criminalizing the demand for it [96].
Decriminalization	The system does not criminalize the selling and the purchasing of sex, through voluntary participation. New Zealand, in 2003, implemented the Prostitution Reform Act which decriminalizes transactional sex work [77,97]. This model adopts human-rights approach and harm reduction framework [77,96].
Legalization	This system removes all laws which criminalizes sex work and regulate the profession such as governmental vetting, registration of business, licensing of workers, and health requirements, zoning, and etc [95]. The Netherlands, in 2000, legalized sex work where it is viewed as a legitimate form of employment [77]. This system adopts the libertarian ethical approach, where voluntary work with mutual benefits is victimless [77]. Supporters of this model requests for the same rights and privileges afforded to regular workers [95].

Decriminalization is another legal attempt to response to sex work. Decriminalization is referred to the removal of all laws that criminalize the selling and the purchasing of sex [97]. Decriminalization principles operate on the human-rights and harm reduction framework, including incorporating sex workers in the policy making process [97]. A typical example is New Zealand, which on June 2003, passed the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) which remove all criminalization of sex work [97]. PRA aims to safeguards the human rights of sex workers and protect them from exploration as well as promoting social welfare, health, and safety to sex workers [97]. The impact so far demonstrates that PRA has been effective in challenging exploitative practice in the sex industry, provide a greater geographic flexibility where sex workers could work, and increased the scope for safer sex practices [96]. Despite the effort, there are challenges also confronting decriminalization effort. Sex workers are noted to still reluctant to report adverse experiences to police officers [96]. Although interactions between police officers have been more positive, increasing prevalence of police officers and interactions with workers are noted to interfere with their work [95]. Sex workers also noted to still have lack alternative to sustainable income [96, 100].

Legalization is defined as the regulation of sex work, by establishing state-specified guidelines and the “recognition as work” so that the sex workers afforded the rights and protections available to other occupations [94]. A typical example is the Netherlands. In 2000, the Dutch Ministry of Justice passed laws which aimed to legalize organizations who facilitate voluntary sex work and punish organizations which support involuntary sex work through violence, coercion and fraud [5]. The main purpose of this move is to legitimize sex work as a form of employment and to abolish the black market of sex trading. Daley [101], analyses poor legalization practices in Spain and argues that while legalization can improve the working conditions for sex workers, however, poor legalization has documented to influence an influx of sex trafficking into the country. This leads to further violence and exploitation of sex workers [101]. Additionally, legalization of sex work still does not positively influence the stigma associated with sex work. Sex workers are

still noted to experience stigma, in seeking for legal and social support [96]. Legal responses to sex work remain largely on the prototype of women as the seller of sex and men are the consumers of their sex services. Male sex workers are still left out at targeted policy. Stoddard [94], make an argument for a gender-neutral policy which must take into consideration that men are involved in transactional sex. Stoddard argues that sweeping generalization between sex and gender differences continue to pervade that women are still the main purveyors of sex, men are the main consumers, and women need the protection of help than men while men who sell sex need the same protections or enforcement as women have.

While criminalization policies are prevalent in most societies, Sanders and Campbell argue that criminalization policies, in fact are detrimental to sex workers, as they drive sex workers into underground economy, where they are not in control of their environment and exposed to victimization and violence and criticize that global governance of commercial sex is more concerned with ideologies, which enter round morality of commercial sex, or generalizations about harms of the institution of sex work, rather than sex workers’ rights and well-beings. In fact, decriminalization of sex work would be the start of providing sex workers with basic labor and human rights [98]. Brents et al. [102], demonstrate that legalization of sex work in Nevada provided a safe, secure and respectful space for sex work to conduct their business [99]. In fact, Sanders and Soothill [103], argue that policies, or regulations, should be the last resort to regulating the sex work industry.

Like legal responses, social and medical responses to male sex work have varied. When male sex workers are being viewed as deficit beings, social and medical intervention were staged to provide services to correct the sexual perversion of homosexual males and to prevent children from entering sex work due to their life circumstances [5,94]. For example, during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, male sex workers were viewed as public health concerns [80]. As such, responses to male sex workers were closely associated with HIV/AIDS prevention and risky sexual behaviors reduction [6]. In hope, public health officials

could curtail this epidemic amongst male sex workers and reduce the risk of spreading it to the general public [6]. Clinical responses have been focused on re-education and social service centers for sex workers and their clients. For example, the “John Schools” program was created in San Francisco to re-educate men who purchase sex [102]. The purpose of the program allows arrested offender a chance to get out of court and educate them on health, legal and moral issues regarding purchasing of sex work. Lastly, the recipients of the program get to witness former sex workers (females) who tell the stories of victimization, degradation and subordination of women [102]. These social service programs have been criticized as ineffective because one-day training cannot change accumulated behaviors and it serves as loopholes out of the laws [101], however, note that there are other programs such as Dignity House, PRIDE, SAGE, and HIPS which based on harm re-education model provide mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, education, and legal advocacy training for sex workers. They acknowledge that path of exiting sex work is not desirable or viable for some sex workers [101].

A review of legal and social responses to sex work still significantly focus on maintaining the view that sex workers are victims or threats, who must be regulated and controlled and that sex workers are still in the prototype of a woman. This analysis of responses is closely related to Wahab’s [102] review of social work responses to sex work over the past centuries. Wahab [102], states that the three main constructs which influenced social work responses to sex work by the notion that sex workers (presumed as a woman) needed to be protected from men’s desire, competing class values and fears of deviant sexual practices, and social control (from fear of HIV/AIDS). Wahab [104], explains further that much of the organized efforts by social workers responding to sex work still focus on individual sex workers and their characters, rather than the social forces which enable this phenomenon to occur. In particular, social workers have focused their effort on female sex workers, instead of male sex workers. As demonstrated in earlier sections, males have been selling sex and are deserving of social work attention, in terms of inclusion in legal advocacy efforts and social service program designs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper aims to fill the knowledge in understanding scholars’ perspectives on male sex work, within social science research and through the lens of a social work researcher. This paper achieves this objective by reviewing and presenting multiple perspectives, through which male sex work is viewed. Based on the review of the literature, while research on male sex workers have been viewed in multiple perspectives, the dominant perspectives (e.g. psychological, public health, feminist, criminology) have viewed these issues through a single, essentialist and monolithic way while ignoring hosts of other issues and challenges on this population are yet to be discovered [6]. Consequently, these perceptions of male sex work narratives are limited and do not fully capture the comprehensive narratives of male sex workers.

Based on the review of literature, research on male sex workers are still in deficit and required more attention. One

possible reason why there is a lack of multi-dimensional research on male sex work beyond research on deviance and HIV/AIDS is a genuine fear and discomfort of heterosexual researchers who are profoundly discomfort over the fact men and boys are engaging in homosexual intercourse [54]. While female sex workers, who assumingly in heterosexual relationships, male sex workers are engaging in sexual practices beyond the comprehension and even the interests of heterosexual scholars. Consequently, Dennis [54] summarizes the framing of current research on male sex work in social science as less of “why do men and boys have sex for money?” but instead more of “why do men and boys have sex with men?”. Advancing Dennis’s assertion [54], the author of this article suggests that research on male sex work would be beneficial to the field because knowledge on male sex work would add a new dimension to understanding the complexities of the sex industry. The presence of male sex workers helps to challenge the heteronormative culture of researching and advance critical thoughts about how gender, sexuality, and sexual intercourse play out, as male sex workers and male bodies are commodified and present in mainstream media (e.g. magazine, the internet, etc) [5].

Lastly, there is also a need for researchers to understand the roles of technology, particularly the internet, have on the conditions of male sex work. Technology advancement has impacts on people’s every facet of living, and no exception on the sex industry. It also has implications on social responses and measures to handle MSW. The internet opens up a new, digital realm where male sex workers can operate their business, market their assets, and create a clientele network. Notably, the internet has open spaces where sex work interactions can take place and expanded commercial sex work across geographical regions [30]. Clients can shop and interact with sex workers online. Minichiello, Scott and Callender [6], call this phenomenon “McDonaldisation”, where clients can shift through profiles of sex workers and make their decision of preferences based on physical appearance, sexual roles, age. For example, in the UK, Male sex workers can advertise their profiles on sites like Gaydar online and clients can select, interact, and arrange a meeting with male sex workers [22]. The moving of sex work online forum has provided sex workers with many advantages. Male sex workers do not have to roam the street to solicit sex, which making their crime “invisible” to the laws and reduces the stigmatization of street solicitation [103]. Sex workers are also reported to have higher safety because they can arrange their meeting online, negotiate prices, escape third party profit sharing, reduce violence, and provide anonymity and privacy [104]. Ultimately, the internet provides sex workers with flexibility and autonomy, privacy and anonymity, and reduction of harassment from police and stigmatization from the street solicitation.

Moreover shifting of virtual online sex work creates a virtual environment where commercial sex selling is more open and visible [84]. However, while there are many benefits, the setbacks of online commercial sex work cause a social isolation and a loss of social community, where sex workers are removing themselves from the physical space [22,30]. MacPhail et al. [104], suggest that with the shifting of selling of sex from street-based to online-based, the conversation on male sex workers is no longer about deviance, crime or deranged social phenomenon but an

economic one about the commercial shopping of sex based on sexual preferences and sexualities. However, scholars have found that the internet also imposes negatively on the community of sex workers. Notably, Niccolai et al. [30], suggest the internet remove the community aspect of sex work, where sex workers are less likely to interact with each other, thus contributing negatively to their subjective well-being.

Additionally, the internet also creates an interesting discussion for the laws and policies as many laws and policies have not updated to regular the internet. For example, in United Kingdom's, Ashford [103], finds that in order to effectively implement laws and policies, there needs to be consideration of the technology and how it provides a new space for sex work. For example, Ashford shows that the Coordinated Prostitution Strategy outlined in the 2006 UK government report, the first two aims mention explicitly to challenge and to reduce street sex work. Ashford [103], argues that in order to impose a ban on sex work just as the intent is then the embrace of the internet must be done by the UK government.

Public health officials are increasingly trying to reinvent strategies and plan to cope with the emerging roles of technology and sexual health practices [103]. The internet is noted to remove sex workers from the streets, where most of the HIV/AIDs such as condom dispensing are done. This warrants social work concerns because social workers and social work researchers have not been up-to-date in producing research and practices to curtail or to influence this work. Social workers are present in almost of these spaces, yet our voices have been silenced on this topic.

In summary, understanding male sex work phenomenon cannot be viewed through a single, monolithic perspective. Earlier perspectives, which dominated a significant portion of research on male sex work, have focused on depicting the narratives of male sex work as psychologically and sociologically desperate and unstable, as oppressive and degraded beings, or as vectors of transmitted disease, especially HIV/AIDS. These perspectives overwhelmingly create the image of male sex workers as anthologized, deviant, and deficient human beings, who are in need of support and socially and legally controlled. Yet, emerging research demonstrates that these narratives of male sex workers are changing, particularly with new empirical evidence. Male sex workers are vocally shaping their narratives by resituating their concerns and image as counter-narratives to the dominant narratives painted for them and frame their work as a rational career choice. Additionally, new conditions are shaping and changing the realities in which this phenomenon exist, such as the proliferation of the internet, technology and mobile apps. Consequently, this topic cannot be understood with just focusing on the individuals or social contexts alone, but rather the combination and the interaction of these factors and environment. It is critical to recognize the constellations of experiences and variety to contexts in order to best address this social phenomenon.

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