

A Model for Understanding Structure versus Agency in the Participation of Minors in the

Commercial Sex Market

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Research Questions

This analysis contains the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** Do the levels of agency and constraint differ for male and female underage sex workers?
- **Research Question 2:** Do any other characteristics or variables help explain differences in the levels of agency and constraint experienced by underage sex workers?

Background

In 2000, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act defined any sex worker under the age of eighteen as a victim of sex trafficking and exploitation, while requiring evidence of coercion for those eighteen and over for the same charge (U.S. Department of State 2000). This definition makes explicit a common conception concerning CSEC, namely, that their status as participants in the sex economy rests upon a lack of personal and legal agency.

Research on female sex workers often focuses on their victimization, such as childhood sexual abuse and neglect (Cobbina and Oselin 2011; Reid 2011; Widom and Kuhns 1996). Conversely, research on male sex workers often ignores their possible victimization and instead emphasizes their drug use, sexual orientation, and HIV/AIDS status and/or risk (Mimiaga et al. 2009; Simon et al. 2004; Timpson et al. 2007). Where no method for measuring (relative) agency or constraint has been proposed for this population, rigorous means for comparing or evaluating differences between the agency/constraint of male versus female CSEC remains largely speculative.

Approach

We are modeling the decision to leave the life as a polya-type negative binomial process. Imagine a sex worker who wakes up periodically and flips a biased coin until they receive a sufficient number of successful tosses. If the coin lands on tails, an unsuccessful toss, then the tally remains the same, and the sex worker remains "in the life" and continues to flip the coin periodically. If the coin lands on heads, the tally of successful tosses is incremented by one. When the tally of successful tosses reaches a sufficient level, then the sex worker then leaves the life. Our goal is to ascertain how frequently classes of CSEC (e.g. males versus females) toss the coin; what is the respective bias of the coin for each class; and what determines a sufficient number to allow for an individual to leave.

Methods

This analysis uses data from a well-known study conducted in New York City in 2006 by Curtis, Dank and colleagues. The study included interviews with 249 self-identified male, female, and transgender youth who were currently employed in the commercial sex economy.

The number of years that underage sex workers have been employed in the commercial sex economy ("time in the life") was created using two variables. The first asked how old the respondents were when they first started exchanging sex for other things and the second asked how old they were when they entered the life. The number of years in the life was then created by obtaining the average of the two variables.

In our analysis, agency is considered the frequency with which underage sex workers toss biased coins (i.e. "consider leaving the life") within a certain time frame. Those who toss coins more frequently "think about leaving the life" more frequently. In our model, higher frequency indicates more agency. Agency is thus calculated with the following equation: $Agency = F^{-1}$, where $F^{-1} = N/T$.

Constraint is considered the number of times that an underage sex worker must have a successful coin toss before he/she can leave the life, divided by the probability of achieving a successful toss. Those with a higher threshold and lower probability of a successful toss are, in this model, considered to experience greater constraint. Constraint is thus calculated with the following equation: $Constraint = R/P$.

Findings

Figure 1: Time Involved in Sex Work by Gender

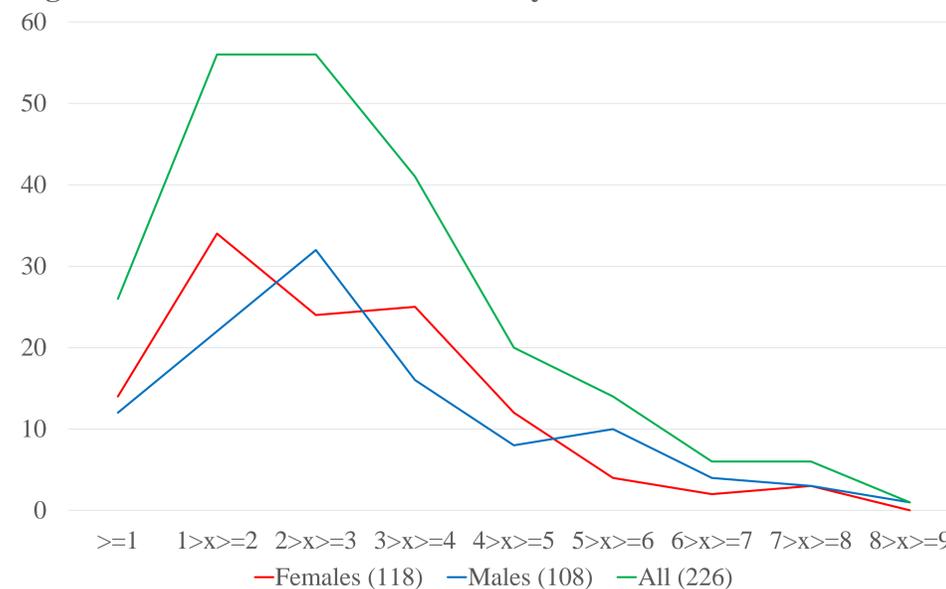
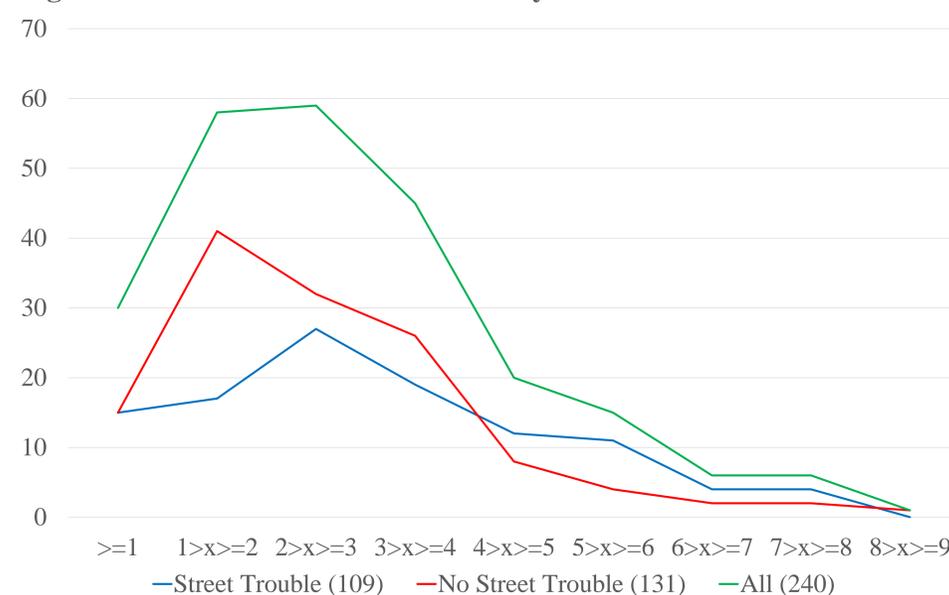


Figure 2: Time Involved in Sex Work by Street Troubles



References

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Table 1: Curve Fitting Results

Variable	T	N	P	R	IRAD
Gender					
Male	18	75	0.109	3.14	0.0938524
Female	16	73	0.111	3.22	0.078917
Residence					
Homeless	18	68	0.11	2.8	0.0917785
Not Homeless	16	73	0.11	3.2	0.0719148
Street Status					
Working Streets	18	82	0.12	3.7	0.0797853
Not Working Streets	16	33	0.19	2.5	0.0571029
Street Troubles					
Street Troubles	16	137	0.05	3.1	0.0946401
No Street Troubles	18	38	0.23	3	0.07979998
Marijuana Use					
Marijuana Use	18	39	0.20	2.9	0.0797783
No Marijuana Use	16	57	0.13	2.9	0.0932996

Table 2: Comparison Results

Variable	Relative Agency	Relative Constraint
Gender (Male/Female)	0.913	0.990
Residence (Homeless/Not Homeless)	0.828	0.875
Street Status (Working Streets/Not Working Streets)	2.209	2.343
Street Troubles (Street Troubles/No Street Troubles)	4.056	4.753
Marijuana Use (Marijuana Use/No Marijuana Use)	0.608	0.650

Table 3: Results Explained

Variable	Results
Gender	Male underage sex workers have less agency and nearly the same amount of constraint as female underage sex workers.
Residence	Homeless underage sex workers have less agency and constraint than underage sex workers who are not homeless.
Street Status	Underage sex workers who are currently working the streets have greater agency and constraint than underage sex workers who are not currently working the streets.
Street Troubles	Underage sex workers who have experienced street troubles have greater agency and constraint than underage sex workers who have not experienced street troubles.
Marijuana Use	Underage sex workers who report marijuana use have less agency and constraint than underage sex workers who do not report marijuana use.

Summary

- There is a difference in the levels of agency and constraint experienced by male and female underage sex workers; however, the difference is quite small, especially when compared to other more pronounced factors, suggesting that the experience of male and female underage sex workers is similar.
- Street status and the experience with street troubles provide better explanations for differences in levels of agency and constraint experienced by underage sex workers.
 - Underage sex workers who are currently working the streets experience greater agency and constraint compared to those who are not currently working the streets.
 - Underage sex workers who have experienced street troubles have greater agency and constraint compared to those who have not experienced street troubles.