

**THE EXPERIENCE OF VULNERABILITY,
CONNECTIVITY AND RESILIENCE IN MALES WHO
ENGAGE IN STREET-BASED SEX WORK:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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Myths, above all myths of freedom for self-determination, are not to be preserved artificially but to be made fruitful in their potency, through critical illumination.

Hans Küng, *My struggle for freedom: Memoirs*

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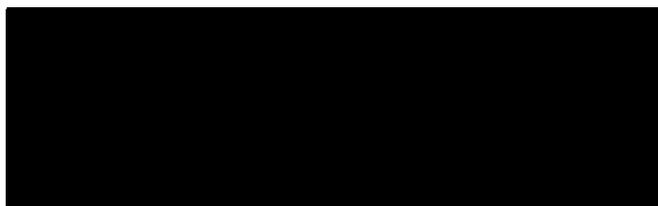
ABSTRACT

The literature on male prostitution or sex work paints a variable and complex picture that is often closely related to broader cultural movements — both permissive and punitive. Early research focussed on causal or associated pathological aspects of prostitution. More recent research has focussed on sex work as a vector of disease, on harm minimisation, and on the concrete sexual practices of male sex workers. To date, little research has focussed on the experiencing person and on relationships within and around the phenomenon of *street-based male sex work* (SMSW). This qualitative study provides empirical data in the form of in-depth interviews that explore the experiences of males, aged between 17 and 34. They have gravitated to, and engage in SMSW, at a location in Sydney known as *The Wall*. Interviews were analysed using a variant form of grounded theory. The analysis revealed a number of interrelated themes, some of which are developed across three chapters. The first analysis chapter explores the complex narratives of four young men: their history, identity, sex work experience, aspirations, vulnerability and resilience. The analysis then picks up on a significant emergent theme: relationships in the lives of those who work *The Wall*. Finally, and paradoxically, the emergent theme of education is explored. The findings of this study highlight the fact that, notwithstanding prior trauma, abuse and abandonment, these negative events and their vulnerability rarely quench the resilience that emerges through the relationships they encounter. Recommendations are made for psychosocial intervention with young people marginalised from social support. Areas for further research investigation are briefly identified.

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



David Andrew Leary

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- Leary, D. A. (2000, 25-27 June). *Searching for the unspoken conversations of vulnerability and resilience: Rethinking the psychosocial health of young male sex workers*. Paper presented at the 3rd Pacific Rim NZAAHD Conference on Resiliency: Successful connections, Lincoln University, Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand.
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