

**MEASURING PROGRESS: A REVIEW OF ONYX - A VOLUNTARY SUPPORT
PROGRAM FOR SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH**

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Measuring Progress: A Review of Onyx- A Voluntary Support Program for Sexually Exploited Youth

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Abstract

Providing the most appropriate and least intrusive care for sexually exploited youth is a very difficult and sensitive task. In March 2006, PLEA Community Services Society of BC (PLEA), with the support of Family Services of Greater Vancouver, implemented the Onyx program designed to address the needs of sexually exploited youth under the age of 19. This program was initiated as the first and last attempt to offer voluntary services to youth. The purpose of this current research is to review how effective Onyx has been at providing services and support to sexually exploited youth during the inaugural ten months of program implementation. In addition, this major paper draws conclusions about whether a voluntary, community-based approach to youth sexual exploitation is the most appropriate strategy of management. The researcher examines data gathered from archival file reviews with information from unstructured interviews with six Onyx staff.

Approval

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Dedication

To the sexually exploited youth who access the programs designed to guide them to a safe place in life, and to those who are still searching for that safe place.

To my mom for being my inspiration and mentor; my sister for always being supportive and encouraging; my husband, Tiarnan, for his unconditional love while putting up with all my ups and downs throughout the past two years; and last, but not least, Bella, our beloved Labrador Retriever.

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Introduction

The sexual exploitation of youth¹ is of growing concern in British Columbia. Historically, Canada has taken a punitive approach by processing youth involved in prostitution through the criminal justice system (Bittle, 2002a). More recently, an alternative approach to prostitution has been adopted whereby youth are no longer considered deviants, but rather victims (Bittle, 2002a). This shift occurred as a result of increasing public awareness of the risk factors and the lifestyle histories of sexually exploited youth (Assistant Deputy Ministers' Report, 2000). This designation has contributed significantly to the development of policies and programs to more appropriately deal with the critical issue of the sexual exploitation of youth.

In 2002, the Safe Care Act of British Columbia was initiated. This legislation was designed to address the needs of youth and to provide protection for those at risk or already involved in prostitution. To date, it has yet to be implemented. The provincial government has taken a neo-liberal approach to the issue and devolved its responsibility to smaller, non-governmental organizations and individuals (Bittle, 2002a). PLEA Community Services Society of British Columbia (PLEA) was one of fifteen agencies who received program funding from the Assistant Deputy Minister to address the issue of child sexual exploitation.

In March 2006, PLEA introduced Onyx, the first voluntary program for sexually exploited youth under the age of 19 in the Vancouver Coastal, Pitt Meadows, Maple Ridge, and the Tri-Cities area. The unique program name, which symbolizes a black stone with protective energy, is designed to assess the needs of youth, develop a safety

¹ For the purposes of this paper, youth are defined as individuals between 12 and 18 years old.

plan, and connect youth to appropriate resources within the community (PLEA brochure, 2006). According to Onyx staff, the program objective is to reduce the harms associated with sexual exploitation.

In British Columbia, there are currently several community-based programs designed to target youth at risk of being sexually exploited. Most of these programs offer prevention information and are designed around a classroom-based setting. Onyx is the only program currently offering services to sexually exploited youth in the Tri-Cities/Ridge Meadows and Vancouver Coastal Regions. It is specifically designed as a wraparound program; targeting youth who are directly involved in the sex-trade and would otherwise become involved with the criminal justice system. By offering referral services to specialized programs within the community, Onyx intends to “provide fast and effective supports for youth who wish to exit the streets” (PLEA, 2006, April Newsletter).

The program is available to youth on a voluntary basis. However, if sexually exploited youth do not access the program, alternative involuntary confinement, similar to secure care in Alberta, may be implemented. In many cases, involuntary confinement is deemed necessary because previous research has established that voluntary programs typically have a difficult time accessing their intended target population, especially in reference to youth (Cusick, 2002). Legislation, such as secure care, was designed to address this issue by involuntarily detaining youth. Sullivan (1986) suggests that lack of education, knowledge of available services, and personal motivation all contribute to establishing barriers for youth to access treatment, services, or programs. It is the goal of

the Onyx program to help youth in need of assistance and minimize the potential barriers to engagement (Campbell, personal communication, March 23, 2006).

While still in its infancy, Onyx hopes to attract youth from all cultural backgrounds with a variety of specific needs. The program is designed to address the needs of youth while building a trusting and positive relationship between the youth and support workers. Hunt (2006) stresses the importance of healthy, long-term relationships for sexually exploited youth with outreach workers and community police. “By creating a stronger presence in the community, building informal relationships and familiarity, and being available, victims may feel more comfortable reporting to the police” (Hunt, 2006: 16).

Over the past several decades, various strategies of control and rehabilitation have been implemented to deal with sexually exploited youth. However, more recently, the provincial government has decided to take a community governance, neo-liberal approach to the issue. PLEA’s Onyx program is an excellent example of this strategy. A non-governmental, non-profit, accredited organization, Onyx is run by trained youth workers in the community to provide services for community members. It “advocate[s] market conditions, activates community partnerships, befriends the family, throws responsibility for the youth sex-trade onto the individual prostitute and focuses on risk situations” (Bittle, 2002a: 329). While it has been acknowledged that success of the program will be difficult to evaluate as the program is still in its infancy, for the time being, “success can be best realized by paying particular attention to the process of engagement” (Powelson, 2006: 16).

After years of waiting for British Columbia to implement voluntary programs targeting this unique and sensitive population of youth, it is critical to understand whether the services provided by Onyx are effective and the degree to which protection to exploited youth is being offered and utilized. “Th[is] interest is driven largely by the demands of various funding organizations which have increasingly insisted that service delivery agencies justify their actions and ultimately their existence” (Charles, Ernst, & Ponzetti, 2003: 5). As mentioned above, if voluntary programs, like Onyx, are found to be ineffective, the government may decide to revisit the possibility of non-voluntary based programming, similar to the secure care facilities found in Alberta and other initiatives in Canada.

Reviewing the Onyx program is also extremely important in order to demonstrate accountability and provide feedback to the stakeholders, including parents, human rights organizations, and government agencies, who have expressed deep concern over sexually exploited youth. This review will provide an assessment as to whether the program objectives are being met, how participation in Onyx affects the lives of youth, and enable recommendations for future improvements of the program.

While the main objective of this major paper is a review of the services provided by Onyx and the short-term outcomes for the small number of youth who have participated in the program, it is extremely important to provide a detailed background to the issue of child sexual exploitation in Canada. Given this, Chapter One provides a detailed examination of the literature on the background trends found among sexually exploited youth. In addition, this chapter notes the historical changes that have taken

place in Canadian policy and legislation, specifically focusing on the philosophical shift of the young prostitute from villain to victim.

While ample literature exists on youth who are sexually exploited, limited research is available on the effectiveness of various programs and strategies to address the needs of these youth. Therefore, Chapter One also includes a review of the existing research on various strategies in British Columbia, Canada, and internationally. By examining these initiatives, critical suggestions are provided to aid in implementing ‘best practices’ for providing services to this unique population of youth.

Chapter Two focuses on the methodology used to gather and analyze the data for this research. The review of Onyx included the assessment of various activities specifically selected by the program delivery personnel to provide protection and services to youth who have accessed the program. This was accomplished by analyzing data that was collected by Onyx over the inaugural 10 month period of the program. A multi-method approach was used to collect the data, including file reviews of the youth who have participated in the program and semi-structured interviews with staff.

Chapter Three examines the results of the data collected through file reviews and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics and cross tabulations were used to analyze the data. This chapter centers on interpreting the research results and establishing conclusions with respect to the benefits and limitations of the Onyx program. Basic demographics were highlighted from the sample population of program participants; however, specific attention was paid to the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. The referral profile, participant needs assessment, and the provisions of services were all examined. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the

short-term program outcomes and whether the program addressed the concerns originally identified by the youth who participated with the program.

The final chapter of this major paper explores the implications of this research and provides recommendations for future programming for this unique population of youth. Chapter Four also discusses the likelihood of involuntary programs continuing to be implemented for sexually exploited youth in British Columbia.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Prostitution is the “exchange of sex for money, gifts, drugs, a place to sleep or other things” (Weber, Boivin, Blais, Haley, & Roy, 2004: 586). According to the World Congress on Commercial and Sexual Exploitation of Children (1996), “commercial sexual exploitation comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third party or persons” (Sinclair, 2004: 20). Existing literature has utilized a large variety of definitions as well as terminology to address the issue at large. This ambiguity has created a large degree of variance among research findings and, therefore, it is important to clearly define prostitution. It is also clear that over time word choice has changed with shifts in philosophy and social perception.

At the time of the writing of this paper, the appropriate language to use when referring to this issue is the ‘sexual exploitation of youth’ or the ‘commercial sexual exploitation of youth’. These terms are distinctly different from youth prostitution because they encompass not only the exchange of sex for a commodity, but also the unjust violation of a young person. Children and youth who engage in this exchange of service are no longer referred to as prostitutes, but victims of sexual abuse, sexually exploited youth, or commercially exploited youth (O’Neill, 2000; Bittle, 2002a). By re-conceptualizing the word, the true responsibility of the act is shifted to those who purchase or profit from children and youth involved in the sex trade (Krawczyk, 2000).

For the purposes of this paper and to remain consistent, sexually exploited youth will be used synonymously with youth prostitution or youth involvement in the sex trade, terms often referred to in the literature from the 1980s and 1990s. This issue is clearly

different from forms of abuse or assault. The sexual exploitation of children and youth may include human trafficking, prostitution, pornography, or the exchange of sex within a dependent relationship. The following definition of sexually exploited youth provided by the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution will be used throughout this paper, "sexual abuse of children and youth under the age of 18 through the exchange of sex for drugs, food, shelter, money or other considerations" (2000:11).

Common Characteristics and Risk Factors of Sexually Exploited Youth

There are no standard characteristics for involvement in sexual exploitation. However, research has identified various common attributes and experiences that relate to a youth's involvement. To begin, the overwhelming majority of sexually exploited youth are female (Weber et al., 2004; Krawczyk, 2000; Busby et al., 2000). Estimates of female youth involved in the sex trade range from 75% to 80% (Calgary Police Commission, 1997; City of Burnaby, 1998; Jesson, 1993; Jiwani et al., 1999; Manitoba Child and Youth Secretariat, 1996; Mathews, 1987 as cited in Krawczyk, 2000). It is difficult to assess how accurate these statistics are due to the stigma attached to sexual exploitation. Many males may find it more difficult to disclose and, therefore, remain unaccounted for (Assistant Deputy Ministers', 2000).

Determining the underlying cause for the unequal balance of females and males involved in sexual exploitation is also difficult. In a report by the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) (2002), a number of factors were seen as influencing the socialization process which, in turn, may negatively affect social attitudes and values towards females. For example, the media commonly portrays females as sexual objects or victims (JIBC, 2002). It is these kind of roles which result in young girls having lower

self-esteem and contribute to self-destructive behavior (JIBC, 2002). In other words, gender roles, power relationships, and attitudes towards sexuality are the primary causes of the sexual exploitation of children and youth (JIBC, 2002).

Numerous studies have reported that initial involvement in sexual exploitation begins at a young age. Badgley (1984) found that over 27% of the sexually exploited females they interviewed were under the age of 16 years old. A similar statistic was identified by Busby et al. (2000) which found that 75% of women entered the sex-trade when they were fifteen years old or younger. In another study, McIntyre (2006) reported that 62% of the men interviewed began involvement in sexual exploitation before they were 18 years old.

Another interesting trend identified in the research was the lack of education among experiential youth. Badgley (1984) concluded that most young people involved in sexual exploitation had no desire to obtain an education. In the Badgley report, the median level of education was grade 10. Schissel and Fedec (1999) also concluded that the lack of educational achievements among sexually exploited youth brought a negative attitude toward education and often restricted youth access to the job market. However, McIntyre (2006) found evidence to the contrary, as her research participants displayed higher levels of completed education. Over 35% of participants in the exclusively male research had graduated from high school. In fact, six of these individuals had entered post-secondary education.

There is widespread acknowledgement that a disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth are believed to be involved in sexual exploitation (Fraser, 1985; Lowman, 1987; Brannigan, Knafa, & Levy 1989; Webber, 1991; Shaver, 1993;

Goulding, 1994; Mayors Task Force, 1996; Boritch, 1997 as cited in Schissel and Fedec, 1999). A detailed report by the Assistant Deputy Minister (2000) identified that in some communities in British Columbia, 14% to 65% of the sexually exploited youth are Aboriginal. Save the Children (2000) found that the proportion of Aboriginal youth involved in sexual exploitation reached as high as 90% in some Canadian communities (JIBC, 2002). In regards to males, McIntyre (2006) found that 54% of the sexually exploited males identified themselves as Aboriginal.

Krawczyk (2000) conducted an extensive study of 150 sexually exploited Aboriginal children and youth from 22 different communities across Canada. This research brought to light a number of startling issues. One of the most prominent issues was that Aboriginal children and youth encountered cultural shame, racism, poverty, and social disadvantages which contributed to their marginalization (Krawczyk, 2000). The intergenerational social issues, cultural oppression, and abuse continue to affect the well being of Aboriginal children and youth today (JIBC, 2002). It is these factors that continue to play a role in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth involved in sexual exploitation and the criminal justice system. While research is limited in this area, it is clear that Aboriginal children and youth are among those groups at the highest risk for sexual exploitation (JIBC, 2002).

By studying youth who are sexually exploited, risk factors have been identified that have directly influenced a youth's involvement in sexual exploitation. For example, there is research linking youth sexual exploitation with running away. In 1988, a Toronto report found that 54% of homeless youth reported being sexually exploited (Johnson et al., 1996 as cited in Cusick, 2002). In Los Angeles, runaways comprised 75% of all youth

known to be involved in sexual exploitation (Cusick, 2002). One interesting discovery reported by McInnes (1994) was that an increasing number of youth from 'solid homes' were being seduced into street life. McInnes (1994) suggested that youth were being lured into sexual exploitation by smooth-talking predators within their communities. Contrary to this finding, Busby et al. (2000) found that a large number of girls were introduced to sexual exploitation by female friends, other youth within a group home, or family members.

A large consensus exists in the literature that most sexually exploited youth have an increased likelihood of previous physical and/or sexual abuse during childhood (Schissel and Fedec, 1999; Silbert and Pines, 1983; Busby et al., 2000; Hwang and Bedford, 2004). In a study conducted by Silbert and Pines (1983), 60% of participants were sexually exploited as juveniles, on average, by two males each. In another study by Busby et al. (2000), 71% of women interviewed had a history of being the victim of abuse as a child. Of those who reported they were abused, 21% were sexually abused, most by family members. Recently, a study conducted by McIntyre (2006) reported that 80% of male research participants who entered the sex-trade during adulthood had a childhood background of sexual violation. As expected, these findings are much higher than the rate in the general population. Specifically, Bagley and Young (1987) found that 73% of youth involved in sexual exploitation had a history of being the victim of sexual abuse compared to 29% in a control group (Assistant Deputy Ministers', 2000).

However, while many reports have acknowledged this experience, there are a number of studies have found evidence to contradict this notion. Badgley (1984) found that the number of youth involved in prostitution that had been sexually abused as

children was proportionate to the number of children not involved in prostitution. West and de Villers (1992) argued that the occurrence of sexual abuse and involvement in sexual exploitation were not directly related. By contrast, they argued that running away from home, living in care, and participating in risky behaviors were more likely associated with sexual exploitation than being the victim of physical or sexual abuse. Krawczyk (2000) noted that Aboriginal children were more likely to be removed from their families than non-Aboriginal children which increased their risk for child exploitation. Furthermore, she states that many Aboriginal youth contended that their 'in-care' experiences led to sexual exploitation.

Another contributing risk factor for sexual exploitation is substance abuse (Badgley, 1984; Busby et al., 2000). In a study conducted by Weber et al. (2004), 51% of sexually exploited participants reported using illegal drugs more than twice per week and one-third reported a history of intravenous drug use. The findings on high rates of drug use among sexually exploited youth have contributed to an interesting debate on whether drug addiction facilitates entry in sexual exploitation as a means of working off drug debts or obtaining the money to support a drug habit, or whether participation in sexual exploitation encourages drug use as a coping strategy (James et al., 1979; Silverman, 1982; Philpot et al., 1989; Millar, 1993 as cited in Cusick, 2002).

Melrose et al. (1999) indicated that pre-prostitution drug use was a frequent trait among youth (Cusick, 2002). They concluded that heroin, crack, and amphetamine use were the most frequently used drugs by sexually exploited youth under the age of 26 years old (Melrose et al., 1999 as cited in Cusick, 2002). These conclusions are contradicted by research suggesting that drug use was a way to deal with the long hours

and late nights associated with sexual exploitation (James et al., 1979; Silverman, 1982; Philpot et al., 1989; Millar, 1993 as cited in Cusick, 2002). The Assistant Deputy Minister's Report (2000) also found evidence that many youth remained involved in prostitution due to drug dependency. However, Schissel and Fedec (1999) concluded that there was a co-determinate relationship between drug use and involvement in sexual exploitation.

While the aforementioned information highlights various characteristics among sexually exploited youth, Busby et al. (2000) suggested that it is a combination of these attributes, such as running away coupled with an abusive family and lack of supportive options, which makes sexual exploitation a viable option for some youth. Another study conducted in Alberta in 2004 reached a similar conclusion. Alberta's Children's Services (2004) found that the majority of their clients living in the care of the Ministry had been sexually abused prior to their involvement in prostitution and were involved in drug and alcohol use. From this research, it appears that it is not only a combination of attributes, but that these factors might accumulate resulting in a snowball effect. In other words, sexual abuse may lead to drug and alcohol use as a coping mechanism.

A number of other factors have been identified as influencing youth involvement in sexual exploitation. Economic factors play a key role in continued involvement. In the Badgley Report (1984), 79% of boys and 66% of girls became involved in prostitution for economic reasons. They also found that 30% of boys and 17% of girls became involved because of their inability to find gainful employment (Sullivan, 1986). Sinclair (2004) suggested two alternative explanations for male youth involvement; male youth are 'escaping' from abuse or other hardships, or they may be 'conditioned' to abuse

(Sinclair, 2004). Conversely, Busby et al. (2000) reported that most young women entered into prostitution to meet their basic needs of shelter, clothing, and food. In a report prepared by Benoit and Millar (2001), financial reasons were found to be the primary motivation for continued involvement in prostitution.

In summary, there is considerable information about the attributes and experiences leading to youth involvement in sexual exploitation. This information is helpful for the development of programs targeting at-risk youth and making informed decisions about what can be done to intervene in the lives of youth before they become entrenched in sexual exploitation. Still, there is a paucity of research on what motivates youth to remain involved in sexual exploitation.

In 2004, Hwang and Bedford conducted an analysis of 33 youth working in what is referred to as “free prostitution” in Taiwan. Their research found that there were four common motivations for continued involvement in prostitution: (1) financial and lifestyle benefits; (2) lack of emotional or social support; (3) drug use; and (4) identity. These findings were consistent with the Assistant Deputy Ministers’ Report which, as mentioned above, found drug dependency to be a dominant reason for continued involvement in sexual exploitation. It was also noted that there is a certain excitement and attraction to the lifestyle, as well as sense of belonging for youth who may not be connected with any family or community.

Addressing the Issue

Until recently, sexually exploited youth were considered the “cast-offs of Canadian society” (Government of Canada, 1986: 117). The academic literature would commonly refer to youth involved in prostitution as a “social problem”, “deviants”, and

“undeserving poor” (Jeffrey, 2004; Bittle, 2002a; Bittle, 2002b). For years, attention and funding was centered upon protecting the public from the “nuisances attributed to the street prostitution trade” (Lowman, 1993: 76). However, over the past thirty years, it has become evident that youth prostitution is in need of a new, less punitive service approach. Determining which strategies are most effective, most attractive to youth, and least expensive in servicing this population continues to be a challenge.

During the mid-1980s, when public and police concern rose over the apparent increase of children and youth involved in prostitution, the Canadian Federal government decided to examine the situation more closely. The government commissioned two detailed reports outlining a number of specific social and legal reforms and recommendations relevant to children and youth involved in prostitution (Sullivan, 1986; Lowman, 1993).

In 1984, The Committee on Sex Offences Against Children and Youth (Badgley Committee) was created “to enquire into the incidence and prevalence in Canada of sex offences against children and youths and to recommend improvements in laws for the protection of young persons from sexual abuse and exploitation” (Lowman, 1993: 57). This was the first time attention was focused exclusively on researching the involvement of youth in the sex-trade. A second committee, the Fraser Committee, was created in 1985 to investigate prostitution and pornography (Government of Canada, 1986).

Over 160 recommendations were formulated as a result of the work of two committees (Government of Canada, 1986). Prior to these committees, most of the existing legislation emphasized the prostitute’s involvement in the act minimizing the customer’s role. Both committees suggested a more balanced approach that focused on

adult customers. During the 1990s, a slight shift was made towards the men involved in the transactions of prostitution, namely customers and pimps. Programs, such as John Schools, were developed to educate customers on sexual exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases (Boddy, 1998).

Recommendations were also made to incorporate strategies for social awareness, public education, health issues, and legislation. In particular, recommendations were made to develop partnerships between various levels of government, community groups, and individuals to effectively manage the issue of youth prostitution (Government of Canada, 1986). Since the introduction of these recommendations, the Canadian government has taken an approach which combined criminal law and social and educational programs (Government of Canada, 1986). Almost ten years later, recommendations continued to be made in support of an integrated neo-liberal approach, whereby the government would facilitate, while community agencies and other individuals took responsibility for addressing the issues.

Staff Sergeant Ross MacInnes (Ret.) (1994) envisioned a similar approach to deal with sexually exploited youth. His strategy involved parents, police, counselors, medical professionals, and lawyers working together to support young people in exiting the sex trade. These team strategies were frequently proposed to effectively assist sexually exploited youth. However, not all service providers and professionals agreed with this general approach.

Legal Response

Historically, Canada's legislation has taken a punitive approach to youth prostitution (Sullivan, 1986; Bittle, 2002a). Evidence of Canada's prostitution legislation

can be traced back to 1759 with the enactment of vagrancy laws designed to remove undesirables from the street (Lowman, 1993). During this time, children were not given any special protection from the law unless the economic interests of their parents were an issue (McLaren, 1986 as cited in Wijnsma-Bil, 2005). The first piece of legislation created specifically to address the issue of youth involved in prostitution was in 1886. Entitled *Offences Against Public Morals and Public Inconvenience*, this piece of legislation “prohibited householders from allowing women under 16 to reside for purposes of prostitution” (Sullivan, 1986: 179). This legislation also prohibited 12 to 16 year olds from being seduced or enticed into prostitution.

For a short period, during the late 1800s, children and women involved in prostitution were subject to a rehabilitative model whereby shelters and houses of refuge were established by charitable organizations (McLaren, 1986; Backhouse, 1985; Backhouse, 1991 as cited in Wijnsma-Bil, 2005). However, this model did not endure because most sex workers returned to prostitution after leaving the shelters primarily due to desperate financial need (Backhouse, 1991 as cited in Wijnsma-Bil, 2005).

By 1972, Canadian vagrancy laws were replaced with section 195.1 of the Canadian Criminal Code which made it an offence to “solicit any person in a public place for the purpose of prostitution” (Lowman, 1993: 62). Several revisions were made to the Criminal Code which resulted in the soliciting law being repealed and replaced with what is known as the communicating law. Under this law, prostitution is not illegal, but the transactions or communication for the purposes of prostitution are illegal, thereby making it almost impossible to legally engage in prostitution (Jeffrey, 2004).

Since the 1980s, a number of concerns with the Canadian law have been identified. For instance, a report by the Government of Canada (1986) identified gender inequalities and an unrealistic timeline for judicial response as substantial challenges, as well as the vague definitions and limited range of sexual activities included in the Canadian legislation.

Nonetheless, the conclusions and recommendations made from the Badgley and Fraser reports have substantially influenced the entire approach to governing youth prostitution. Severe sanctions, such as increases in the maximum sentences for pimps, were introduced in addition to the strengthening of criminal prosecutions for both clients and youth (Sullivan, 1986).

More recently, a shift has occurred with respect to the overall philosophy towards youth involved in prostitution. Youth were no longer considered offenders deserving punishment, but victims in need of assistance and protection (Lowman, 1993; Bramly and Tubman, 1998; Bittle, 2002b; Jeffrey, 2004). Youth prostitution has, therefore, been redefined as child sexual abuse and not a lifestyle choice (Bittle, 2002a; Safe Care of British Columbia's Children: A Discussion Paper, 2004).

Branntigan and Fleischman confirmed this philosophy by writing, "[p]rostitution as delinquency invites suppression by arrest of customers and sellers alike. Prostitution as youthful exploitation invites arrest for customers and protection for the adolescent sellers" (1989: 79). This new sentiment has resulted in changes in policy and programs created to govern youth involved in prostitution. In effect, programs began shifting emphasis from punitive sanctions as a response to attempts to increase positive outcomes for sexually exploited youth (O'Neill, 2001). Rather than youth being detained in

government-operated detention centers, as was the most common response for decades, sexually exploited youth were now becoming the responsibility of community organizations and individuals themselves (Garland, 1996).

According to Bittle (2002a), young prostitutes were no longer punished, but rather protected. This new approach allows for increased initiatives to prevent youth involvement in prostitution, and the development and implementation of harm reduction strategies. O'Neill (2001) suggested another approach altogether by postulating that sexually exploited youth be treated as survivors, rather than victims. This philosophical shift was intended to institute a new attitude toward this population, including policies and programs focusing on the strengths related to surviving.

With respect to changes in legislation following a series of research initiatives and increased public attention, new provisions were made for the consideration of youth in Canadian legislation and community responsabilization strategies were placed on the backburner. In 1986, Bill C-15 was introduced by the Federal government to provide increased protection for victims of child sexual exploitation. As a result of this legislation, there was an increased number of prosecutions and, of those who were convicted, there was also an increase in the severity of sanctions (Brannigan and Fleischman, 1989).

In 1988, section 214 (4) of the Canadian Criminal Code was enacted which made it illegal to purchase or offer to purchase sexual services from a youth under the age of 18 years old (Lowman, 1993). Unfortunately, police found the law to be “unenforceable” because of the difficulty of getting youth to testify (Lowman, 1998 as cited in Jeffrey, 2004). In 1992, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group was created to review

existing legislation and make further recommendations on prostitution policy directly related to youth (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group, 1998 as cited in Bittle, 2002b; Jeffrey, 2004). Once again, there was overwhelming agreement for the need to protect children and youth from sexual abuse and exploitation by predatory adults. Bittle stated that “men associated with the demand aspect of the sex trade have enjoyed relative immunity from the law” (2002a: 12). In effect, according to Bittle, the laws and policies governing prostitution consistently failed to hold male customers and organizers accountable because they were rarely enforced.

The Working Group continued this line of argument and recommended that stricter punishment for abusers be implemented as well as putting in place appropriate social welfare measures for sexually exploited youth (Jeffrey, 2004). Several years later, Bill C-27 was proclaimed which has made it illegal to “seek the services of a person believed to be under 18” (Jeffrey, 2004: 97). It also created procedural safeguards for youth making it easier for them to testify in court.

Currently, there are a growing number of people who contend that the criminal justice system is not the appropriate response to sexually exploited youth. For example, in her literature review, Cusick (2002) cites research conducted by Lee and O’Brien which found “...no evidence that a criminal justice response acts as a deterrent to young people” (1995: 48). Similarly, it was noted by the United Kingdom Magistrates’ Association and the National Association of Probation Officers that criminalizing youth only adds to social isolation and marginalization making it that much more difficult to deliver effective services (Cusick, 2002).

In considering the recommendations from the Badgley committee, Fraser committee, and municipal task forces, such as the F/P/T working group, a number of new strategies were developed and implemented throughout Canada to address the issue of sexual exploitation. In 1996, Manitoba introduced legislation that enabled procurers of sexually exploited youth to be listed on a child abuse registry. This same act also permitted the seizure of vehicles used in the commission of services (Bittle, 2002b).

On February 1, 1999, the Alberta Provincial government enacted the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act (PCHIP). This new legislation, also referred to as secure care, enabled the nonconsensual confinement of children allegedly involved in sexual exploitation in order to provide them protection and support services (Highcrest, 2000). Under the provisions set out in the Act, children can be detained by the police or social service providers and held involuntarily for a 72-hour assessment. During this time, the youth can receive counseling, medical services, and support (Bittle, 2002a; Safe Care for British Columbia's Children: A Discussion Paper, 2004).

In March 2001, several months after PCHIP's introduction, amendments were made permitting the government to extend the period of confinement. This was implemented with the intention of enhancing the security of children in an attempt to break the cycle of involvement in prostitution among youth (Bittle, 2002a). According to the Alberta Children Services (2004), confinement periods of 27 to 47 days provided clients with the highest rate of success.

However, while the underlying intention of confinement was well meaning, there were several unintended consequences to the youth that could be quite negative. For example, in a study by Busby et al. (2000), participants reported that there was the

increase in violence from pimps because there was no money being made during the time the youth were confined. In addition, secure confinement could drive youth away from accessing voluntary services. Cusick (2002) found that when vulnerable youth fear the police because they do not want to be placed in secure care, they may engage in a range of high risk behaviors that place their physical health in danger, such as by making quick decisions about clients or not using condoms for fear of being caught with 'prostitution tools'.

Another major concern regarding the secure care approach was the fact that it lacked the procedural safeguards necessary to protect youth who are detained (Highcrest, 2000). Bittle (2002a) questioned whether the PCHIP went too far and actually violated a youth's civil liberties and rights guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The amendments made in March 2001 attempted to address this issue by providing more direct legal representation than before, thereby ensuring that the rights of the child were protected.

After years of frustration over the inability to intervene in the lives of youth, the government of British Columbia developed a working group to review policy and strategies (Bittle, 2002a). A new secure care approach was devised, similar to Alberta's PCHIP, where youth would be detained for assessment, have access to services, and develop a comprehensive care plan (Safe Care of British Columbia's Children: A Discussion Paper, 2004). However, in considering potential Charter issues, in the context of the PCHIP in Alberta, in addition to a range of other substantial concerns, the proposed legislation for British Columbia was re-examined in an attempt to avoid controversy (Alberta Children's Services, 2004).

In 2002, after careful consideration, the proposed Secure Care Act for B.C. was repealed and replaced with the legislation known as the Safe Care Act (Safe Care for British Columbia's Children: A Discussion Paper, 2004). Still, public concern and criticism focused on the legislation's minimal emphasis on the root causes of youth sexual exploitation and the continued reliance on confinement. Five years later, Safe Care legislation has yet to be officially enacted because of continued skepticism. Regardless of the legislative status, developments have been made within communities across the province to implement voluntary services to youth who have been sexually exploited.

While changes in philosophy have brought changes to policy and programming, the debate continues as to which strategies are the most effective way to approach sexually exploited youth. According to Bittle, "...the introduction of the victimization discourse and secure care has not ended the criminalization of youth involved in the sex trade; it has simply repackaged the concept of punishment under the guise of protection" (2002a: 342).

Sullivan argued that the "principle of the 'least restrictive alternative' is increasingly considered as the least destructive and mostly demonstrably beneficial intervention" (1986: 186). According to Cusick (2002), a harmonization of services is the most recommended approach to servicing at risk or involved sexually exploited youth. Shaw and Butler (1998) argue that a generic program for all youth facing similar challenges, such as drug addiction, homelessness, and involvement in the criminal justice system, should be available. The benefit of this approach is that it would reduce any of the negative attention directed at youth who access 'prostitution services' (Alberta Children Services, 2004).

Cost effectiveness must also be considered when devising appropriate programming. While community-based programs may be allocated a large budget to provide services and accommodate the needs of participants, when compared to the cost of a secure confinement program, such as the protective safe houses found in Alberta, community-based programs are far less expensive. According to Alberta Children Services (2004), an outreach program in Alberta was considered much more cost effective because it connected youth to other community resources and required much less funding. When considering the value of programs in terms of cost effectiveness, however, the amount of expenditures typically does not consider the cost of youth successfully achieving outcomes through program participation. It should also be noted that any success resulting from program participation could potentially reduce the future costs to the provincial government in the areas of health care, criminal justice, and social services (Alberta Children Services, 2004).

Programs and Initiatives

In 1996, the First World Congress on commercially and sexually exploited youth was held in Stockholm, Sweden. Since then, numerous countries across the world have implemented initiatives to address this issue. While a detailed analysis of these programs is beyond the scope and mandate of this paper, a few general approaches will be discussed. One approach in the United Kingdom involves the collaboration of the police, health, social services, education, and other agencies that work with children (Cusick, 2002). Under this service model, programs are designed to meet the needs of the client and can include accommodation arrangements, therapy, education, and leisure activities.

In the United States, a comprehensive program, known as the SAGE Project (Standing Against Global Exploitation), was implemented to help young girls exit prostitution (Barnitz, 1998). This program includes crisis intervention, stabilization, skill building, counseling, mentorship, and reintegration activities. Another successful program in the United States is the Paul and Lisa Program. This program provides street outreach, prevention, and public education programs as well as facilitating a court alternative program (Assistant Deputy Ministry, 2000).

Alberta has utilized a secure care approach to respond to sexually exploited youth, since 1999, in which youth reside in a secure facility with constant supervision. While this strategy has successfully provided services to dozens of youth, it continues to face criticism. Responses from numerous staff and stakeholders are that voluntary-based service would have better results than the current secure care approach (Alberta Children's Services, 2004). Still, the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Report (2000) concluded that there was very little available information on successful programs specifically designed to assist sexually exploited youth. The McCreary Youth Foundation (MYF) attempted to address this gap in the literature by creating several publications listing various programs and resources available throughout British Columbia (Powelson, 2006).

Nonetheless, there is no consistent program policy being utilized by communities in British Columbia, or elsewhere in Canada, to address the issues of sexually exploited youth (Ministry, 2000). For the most part, British Columbia is attempting to assist this population by following a voluntary harm reduction approach (Alberta Children's Services, 2004). This approach does not advocate the complete abstinence from sex-trade

work, but rather providing youth with the education, knowledge, and resource assess to reduce the harms associated with sex-trade work. Examples of this approach include: street nurses; outreach workers; and drop-in centers that provide a variety of services (Busby et al., 2000). McIntyre, a prominent researcher in sexual exploitation in Canada, however, is not an advocate of the harm reduction approach. In her work, *Strolling Away*, she proposes that evaluation of harm reduction approaches must occur in order to examine the benefits of this strategy, especially in comparison to programs that focus on a complete removal from involvement in sexual exploitation (McIntyre, 2002).

Program Participants

Part of the challenge associated with providing services to sexually exploited youth is that only a small proportion of the entire sexually exploited youth population access voluntary services designed to assist them (Cusick, 2002). Instead, McIntyre (2002) concludes that most people who exit the trade do so in the pursuit of a specific, personal goal, such as the birth of a child, finding employment, or having a new relationship. In other words, according to McIntyre, voluntary services are only accessed by those who have made the decision to get help.

In a study conducted by Alberta's Children Services (2004), youth would often access services on a repeat basis without ever completing the program. For example, many would complete the intake process, but not participate. This reflects the dual difficulty of youth recognizing that they need help and the service provider being able to get a young person into a program during that brief period of time when a youth is open to participating in a program or accessing a resource (Bramly and Tubman, 1998; Busby et al., 2000). During consultation with experiential youth, Bramly and Tubman (1998)

found that participants commented that their economic situation and life skill challenges forced them to quickly return to the sex-trade.

In addition to the aforementioned characteristics commonly held by most sexually exploited youth, such as a low level of education, drug use, and a history of victimization, once a youth has completed the intake procedure into a program, research has identified a number of common characteristics among participants. In the Alberta Children's Services (2004) study mentioned above, most clients of protective safe houses had deficient or sporadic eating and sleeping patterns. While these problems can be attributed to working long, late hours, McIntyre (2006) suggested that problems sleeping were also the result of physical changes from drug withdrawal or nightmares. In addition to eating and sleeping disorders, fetal alcohol syndrome and other developmental disorders are disproportionately found in sexually exploited youth (Alberta Children's Services, 2004). Once identified, these characteristics must be addressed in an appropriate and case-specific, sensitive manner.

There are also some characteristics that are commonly held by sexually exploited youth who avoid accessing programs. As discussed above, Sinclair (2004) and the Alberta Children's Services (2004) contend that many youth are in denial that they have an issue. Sinclair (2004) suggested that drug dependency, lack of housing, or fear of a partner or pimp commonly deter youth from accessing services. After interviewing 38 participants in Alberta, McIntyre (2002) argued that most children viewed outreach with suspicion and confusion, fearing child protection or criminal justice involvement because of prior negative experiences. This is particularly true for Aboriginal youth.

Hunt (2006) concluded that the Aboriginal community faces unique cultural challenges to accessing services. In her research, Hunt (2006) found that victims who spoke out about abuse were commonly blamed and ostracized for breaking their silence. Another population not frequently accessing services and often overlooked is young males who are sexually exploited. McIntyre found that most young men “fly under the radar of most service providers” (2006: 90) due to their indiscrete manner and their desire to avoid police contact. According to McIntyre, young men are frustrated with the current services being provided and want access to more specialized services that specifically address their needs. Currently, there is only one program specifically designed for young sexually exploited males in Vancouver (McIntyre, 2006).

Best Practices and Recommendations

Determining which strategies might be most effective at assisting sexually exploited youth continues to be a challenge. With almost no available research on program evaluations or outcomes, it is difficult to establish what types of programs are the most effective and what are the main concerns that need to be addressed. Farley (2004) stressed the importance of providing reliable education to youth on sexuality, pregnancy, and birth control. This fact is confirmed by research conducted in Alberta which found that youth involved in prostitution were at an increased risk for developing serious and life threatening medical conditions (Alberta Children’s Services, 2004). Therefore, the implementation of educational programs uniquely designed to the needs of each individual focusing on health, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases could help combat future risk of exposure and health concerns because, with increased

knowledge, youth may be more empowered to make healthy choices and seek preventative medical attention when necessary.

Sinclair (2006) and Community Against the Sexual Exploitation of Youth (CASEY) (2006) found that demonstrating support and trust for youth, regardless of their actions or decisions, made a positive impact on youth. Youth feel more comfortable and less intimidated when accessing programs if trust is established. When acknowledging the risks youth take entering into a program, staff must be willing to be flexible and adapt appropriately to the youth's needs (Busby et al., 2000; Laye, 2003; CASEY, 2006). This can also be accomplished by having a loosely structured or open program with an underlying framework as guidance (CASEY, 2006).

In a report by Laye (2003), a number of important recommendations were provided by the Justice Institute of British Columbia. The recommendations for program development and implementation included: (1) youth participation; (2) equity of access; (3) relational perspective; (4) collective responsibility; and (5) cultural sensitivity. Laye (2003) also stressed the importance of appropriate language and suggested careful word choice in order to avoid further marginalizing youth. Moreover, in a detailed study by Busby et al. (2000), programs that allowed for the inclusion of youth opinions into program development were more positively received by youth. CASEY (2006) and Bittle (2002a) also acknowledged that by involving youth, their knowledge and experiences are recognized as being beneficial to the education of others in similar circumstances.

Another recommendation involved having appropriate staff. Cusick (2002) recommended having skilled staff that are trusting and respectful, while Laye (2003) and Busby et al. (2000) suggested having staff with first-hand knowledge and experience with

issues of prostitution and addiction as critical to an effective program. Regardless of their personal experience, a common theme in the literature is that the staff should possess the ability to foster positive, supportive relationships with youth (Laye, 2003; Busby et al., 2000).

Challenges

As mentioned above, there is a paucity of evidence-based research on what strategies work (Sinclair, 2004). From the available literature, a number of challenges have been identified as obstacles to effectively providing services to sexually exploited youth. In a collection of local initiatives implemented throughout British Columbia, Powelson (2006) found that developing culturally relevant programs was extremely challenging. Her report recommended that organizations attempting to create culturally-relevant programs be equipped with adequate resources and support to provide appropriate services. Schissel and Fedec (1999) also identified the importance of culturally significant programs noting that “Aboriginal street youth look for Aboriginal faces in helping agencies” (Canada, 1996 as cited in Schissel and Fedec, 1999: 11). Whether service is provided by Aboriginal people or non-Aboriginals, it is clear that supporting Aboriginal communities in designing and delivering their own programs is key to effectively assisting sexually exploited Aboriginal youth (JIBC, 2002).

The Alberta Children’s Services (2004) report concluded that current programs were not reaching all parts of the population in consideration. Male children involved in prostitution through the internet and those youth involved in sex for drugs and shelter were not being reached. Cusick (2002) also acknowledged that it is also extremely challenging to encourage street youth to access services because of their fear of damaging

their 'street' reputation. Another major challenge identified by the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Report (2000) was the inadequate resources and budgets allocated to agencies that provide programming. The lack of funding and resources creates a large barrier to effective, long-term service provision.

An additional significant barrier to accessing programs for sexually exploited youth has to do with the unwritten code of silence around the issue (JIBC, 2002). While sometimes referred to as the world's oldest profession, involvement in sexual exploitation continues to have an extremely negative stigma attached to it and, therefore, it requires a considerable amount of strength and determination to actually access services or programs.

The Future

There are a number of obstacles involved in providing effective services to youth. The most prominent obstacle is the silence and stigma attached to sexual exploitation by changing the attitude of Canadian society (JIBC, 2002). Recognizing gender, culture, and, most importantly, the specific needs of each individual has also been highlighted as critical to providing effective programming.

After years of dealing with youth through criminal sanctions and rehabilitative measures, it was acknowledged by the government of British Columbia that a new strategy was necessary. It would appear that the government is adopting a neo-liberal approach to provide the most appropriate and effective services to sexually exploited youth. In doing so, youth are provided services and resources in the community by the community. While this approach may be the most suitable and least intrusive, research indicates that legislation continues to be unbalanced and the majority of youth involved

in sexual exploitation continue to distrust the police and social service agencies (Cusick, 2002).

Evaluating programs specifically designed to address the needs of sexually exploited youth is necessary in order to have a better understanding of the mechanisms and elements of practice that have been effective in positively changing the lives of sexually exploited youth. By expanding on the evidence-based research conducted to date, it is possible that communities will be better able to develop programs that provide at-risk or sexually exploited youth with a multitude of effective resource and service options to adequately respond to and prevent sexual exploitation.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The methodology used in this current project involved archival file reviews and semi-structured interviews. File reviews were conducted of every youth referred to the program between March 1, 2006 and February 1, 2007. Currently, Onyx staff are required to keep a detailed record of every participant's history, demographic information, risks, and service needs. This information is collected during the referral process. Referral forms are completed by school counselors, social workers, parents and other family members, as well as the youth themselves. Once a referral form is completed and submitted to Onyx, staff develop a strategic plan based on the information captured in the referral form to provide resources and services to youth based on the referral information and a needs assessment checklist which is completed by the youth. Once the referral form is reviewed by an Onyx program coordinator and the youth completes a needs assessment form, a case worker is assigned to the youth and the program staff work with community partners to develop activities and services specific to each youth's needs (see Appendix B and C for examples of the forms used by Onyx).

Upon a youth's discharge from the program, a summary report was completed identifying all of the specific needs that had been met and the goals that had been accomplished as a result of the youth's participation in Onyx. The file records, therefore, provided an excellent source of data for measuring before and after intervention comparisons of short-term outcomes for each participant. If the file remained open at the time of review, monthly reports for every month the youth participated in the program were examined to identify services that had been provided to date.

Once the file reviews were completed, all of the data from the referral form, needs assessment, monthly reports, and discharge reports were entered into the statistical program SPSS for analysis. In total, 65 variables were coded including general demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and whether the participant was in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Based on the nature of the information found in each participant's file, the researcher was also able to identify various trends and needs, as well as assess which program outputs were utilized by participants and how effective these options were deemed to be at achieving short-term outcomes. In addition, comparisons were made between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants in order to determine whether there were any differences in needs assessments, services provided, and outcomes. In total, 57 files were reviewed which represented the entire population of youth referred to Onyx from its inception on until February 1st, 2007.

Participants who were referred to the program on two separate occasions were counted as one file. It should be noted that a variation in recording information was found between the Tri-Cities/Ridge Meadows and Vancouver Coastal files. Tri-Cities/Ridge Meadows discharge reports included information on every service that was provided and all of the goals that were accomplished. Conversely, Vancouver Coastal discharge reports only included a brief summary of why the youth was no longer in the program, and did not include outcome information. Once this difference was identified², the researcher requested additional monthly reports in order to obtain the required information.

² A difference in the recording of information was likely due to the infancy of the program and different paperwork protocols.

At the time of data collection, a number of files were relatively new meaning that the referral had just recently occurred. These files, therefore, lacked information on services provided or outcomes. Still, the information that was available, namely demographic information, reasons for referrals, and needs assessment data, were included when available. There were also a number of files missing needs assessment forms.

In order to ascertain in-depth and comprehensive information about the design, implementation, objectives, and practice of Onyx, a number of one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with all six Onyx staff members and management. Interviews were conducted between February 12, 2007 and February 22, 2007 at the PLEA offices in Vancouver and Tri-Cities. All interviews were done in person with the exception of one interview, which was conducted over the telephone due to an inability for the subject and the interviewer to meet in person because of travel limitations. All interviewees were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose and scope of the research project and informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Interviewees were also required to read and sign a research consent form (see Appendix A and B for a sample of the information sheet and consent form).

In total, the interviews focused on 26 questions (see Appendix C). While several questions required the participant to answer using a close-ended response scale, the majority of the questions were qualitative in nature allowing the respondent to provide detailed answers in their own words. Most of the interviews were at least thirty minutes, but several interviews lasted up to an hour. The researcher manually transcribed notes during the interviews to record responses.

Once completed, the interview information was separated into major themes and analyzed. Direct quotes from the interviews were used in combination with the file review data to better inform the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this major paper. An important benefit of employee and management interviews was that these interviews provided a context through which to consider the file data. Due to consent and confidentiality issues, none of the participating youth were interviewed for this project.

Chapter Three: Results and Discussion

General Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

In this chapter, an analysis and a discussion of the results from the data collected from the file reviews will be undertaken. Of the 57 files reviewed, a majority (60 per cent) were from the Vancouver Coastal Region, while the remaining 40% were from the Tri-Cities/Ridge Meadows Region. All of the demographic information about the participants was obtained from the Onyx referral form that is completed prior to program intake (see Appendix C). While the program is available to both males and females, 93% of participants were female (see Table 1). Therefore, any recommendations made based on these results refer to females involved in sexual exploitation. However, this finding does suggest that Onyx must develop alternative strategies to encourage sexually exploited males to access the service.

TABLE 1: GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

n = 57	
Gender:	
Male	7%
Female	93%
Mean Age	16 Years Old
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	59.6%
Aboriginal	32.7%
Other or Unknown	7.7%
In Care	18.9%

In terms of ethnicity, nearly two-thirds of the youth (59.6 per cent) were Caucasian and one third (32.7 per cent) were Aboriginal (see Table 1). The remaining youth were either of another ethnicity or the ethnicity was not known. Nonetheless, given the geographic areas covered by Onyx, with the exception of an overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in the program (First Call, 1996; McEvoy and Daniluk, 1995; Kingsley,

2000 as cited in Busby, et al., 2000), there is not much other ethnic diversity among the youth who participated in the program. Due to the low number of participants who were either not Caucasian or Aboriginal, ethnicity was recoded as either Aboriginal (32.7 per cent) or non-Aboriginal (67.3 per cent).

The mean age of Onyx participants at the time of their referral was 16 years old with an age range of 13 years old to 19 years old (see Table 1). This mean age was the same for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. These findings appear to be consistent with the research literature which suggests that approximately three quarters of women begin their involvement in prostitution at the age of fifteen or less (Busby et al., 2000).

Data was also collected on whether the youth was in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development as a ward at the time of the referral. The designation 'in care' included youth living in foster care, a group home, or on a Youth Agreement. In this sample, slightly more than four-fifths of sexually exploited youth (81.1 per cent) were not 'in care', but rather living with at least one of their biological parents or with members of their extended families at the time of referral (see Table 1).

Types of Sexual Exploitation

In order to appropriately address the sexual exploitation of program participants, it is necessary to first identify the specific challenges facing each youth. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, this information was obtained from the Onyx referral form. In total, there were eleven different types of sexual exploitation. Of the 57 participants, all but two identified various issues of sexual exploitation. The two participants who did not have any sexual exploitation concerns identified on the referral form may, however, been

referred to the program because they had a number of other issues which put them at risk for sexual exploitation. Table 2 identifies the sexual exploitation issues of the youth referred to Onyx. It should be noted that the total percentage exceeds 100 because youth typically present with more than one sexual exploitation issue.

TABLE 2: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ISSUES IDENTIFIED UPON REFERRAL

Types of Sexual Exploitation	% of Youth (n = 55)
Organized Crime Involvement	5.5%
Street Trade	20.0%
Sex for Drugs	54.5%
Boyfriend/Peer/Gang Supported	32.7%
Indoor Venues(ex. escort services, trick pads)	9.1%
Pimp Involved	7.3%
Sex for Shelter/Food	25.5%
Pornography	5.5%
Family Supported Exploitation	7.3%
Sex for Money	21.8%
Other	32.7%

The most commonly identified type of sexual exploitation was sex for drugs (54.5 per cent) followed by sexual exploitation supported by a boyfriend, peers, or gang (32.7 per cent) and the other category (32.7 per cent). Given that approximately one third of the sample was referred for the program for a reason other than the ten provided, additional options need to be included on the referral form. Several possible additions to the list of categories could include past sexual abuse, sexual assault, and internet sexual exploitation.

In considering the relationship between ethnicity and sexual exploitation issues, there were some differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. With respect to having sex for drugs, nearly two thirds (64.7 per cent) of the Aboriginals in the sample compared to slightly more than half (51.5 per cent) of non-Aboriginals were referred to

Onyx for this reason. Another issue with a substantial difference between Aboriginal youth and non-Aboriginal youth was sex for money. Slightly more than one-third (35.3 per cent) of Aboriginals compared to 12.1% of non-Aboriginals were referred to Onyx, in part, for having or being at risk for having sex for money. Moreover, while only a small proportion of all youth had the issue of pimp involvement indicated on their referral forms, this was much more common among Aboriginal youth (17.6 per cent) compared to non-Aboriginal youth (3 per cent). In effect, sex for money, drugs, and shelter were common among Aboriginal youth referred to Onyx, while sex for drugs was the most common issue for non-Aboriginal youth. However, in considering any of these findings, it is important to keep in mind the small sample size. For example, with reference to pimp involvement, in total, only four youth identified pimps on their referral form.

When analyzing sexual exploitation, it is also important to examine other issues and risk factors that are causally related to exploitation. The referral forms provided information on these related issues. As demonstrated by Table 3, this sample is characterized by a range of risk factors. In total, seven categories were included on the referral form: (1) mental health issues; (2) homeless; (3) criminal behavior; (4) disconnected from family; (5) substance misuse; (6) not in school; and (7) witness protection. Once an issue was highlighted, Onyx staff could focus on providing services to deal with the associated related risks. For instance, if a youth was identified as being disconnected from his or her family, Onyx might refer the family to a parent-teen mediation program or support visitation.

Slightly more than three-quarters of the sample (76.4 per cent) were identified as having a substance use problem. This factor alone contributes to not only being at greater

risk of being sexually exploited, but helps to explain, in part, the large proportion of those who were referred for having sex for drugs or sex for money. Moreover, substance use is frequently present with other issues, such as not being enrolled in school (58.2 per cent), having mental health issues (40 per cent), and being disconnected from family (43.6 per cent).

TABLE 3: RELATED ISSUES OR RISK FACTORS

Risk Factors	% of Cases (n = 55)
Mental Health Issues	40.0%
Homelessness	21.8%
Criminal Behavior	23.6%
Disconnected from Family	43.6%
Substance Misuse	76.4%
Not in School	58.2%
Witness Protection	0

It is also important to note the fact that those referred to the Onyx program presented, in most cases, with not just one risk factor, but a multitude of risk factors in relation to being sexually exploited. Specifically, the average number of risk factors identified on the referral form was 2.5, in addition to being sexually exploited. Identifying and addressing these additional issues is important because it is not always clear whether these issues are present as a result of being sexually exploited or play a role in the youth becoming sexually exploited in the first instance. Understanding the process, at the individual level, is critical for successful treatment because, in those cases where sexual exploitation is a symptom of another problem, not adequately addressing the root causes, but focusing primarily on the sexual exploitation will likely not produce long-lasting benefits.

In terms of a different risk profile based on ethnicity for this sample, it was found that the additional risk factors or issues were quite similar. However, there were some findings worth mentioning. While the rates were extremely high for both groups, particular attention must be focused on substance misuse, especially for Aboriginal youth who are sexually exploited. In this sample, nearly all Aboriginal youth (88.2 per cent) and nearly three quarters (72.7 per cent) of non-Aboriginal youth were flagged as either having a substance use problem or being at risk for a substance problem. Moreover, nearly one-third of Aboriginals (29.4 per cent compared to 18.2 per cent of non-Aboriginals) were identified as either being homeless or at risk for homelessness. There were other issues which were more common among non-Aboriginals. For example, non-Aboriginals were found to be more at risk for criminal behavior (30.3 per cent) compared to their Aboriginal counterparts (17.6 per cent).

In conclusion, participants of Onyx were overwhelmingly female, approximately 16 years old, and either Caucasian or Aboriginal. In addition, the majority of youth referred to the Onyx program face a variety of sexual exploitation issues and a number of other related issues which must be addressed. This general profile does seem to coincide with the existing research on sexually exploited youth in Canada (Assistant Deputy Ministers', 2000; JIBC, 2002; Alberta Children's Services 2004).

Referral Profile

According to the data collected from the closed Onyx files, the mean number of days in the program was 95 with a range of three days to 286 days. The reasons why a youth might only be involved with the program for a few days range from them not being ready to exit the trade, relocating with their family (15 per cent of participant files

indicated that the youth had moved out of province), or entering a treatment program. While the total number of days spent in the program is somewhat instructive, perhaps a more important measure of service provision is the total number of service hours provided by Onyx staff to program participants. This figure does not necessarily refer exclusively to time spent working with the participant, but may include time spent dealing with other related professionals or meetings with the participant's family members. The mean number of hours spent was 32.6 hours per participant with a large range of 2.3 hours to 338.5 hours. At the low end, some youth, once referred and assessed, never participate with the program. At the other extreme, it would appear that some youth took full advantage of the services provided by Onyx.

While there was not a substantial difference in the average number of days that an Aboriginal youth spent in the program (92.2 days) compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (103.7), there was a more important difference in terms of hours of service provided. Specifically, on average, Aboriginal youth received nearly twice as many service hours (49.3 hours) compared to non-Aboriginal youth (25.1 hours). Not only may this reflect the greater risk and sexual exploitation issues facing Aboriginal youth, but this might suggest that Onyx is doing something that specifically appeals to sexually exploited Aboriginal youth because this group, according to the research literature, does not traditionally accept help (Krawczyk, 2000).

In considering the wider implications of these findings to the whole sample, there are a number of factors that affect the amount of service hours spent with a program participant. One of the most obvious factors related to service access is whether the youth were actually aware that they had been referred to the program. Interestingly, in this

sample, slightly more than one-quarter (27.3 per cent) of the youth were not aware that they had been referred to the program at the time of referral. One possible explanation for this is that because these youth often lead very transient, street-entrenched lifestyles, they can be very hard to locate. Another common reason may have to do with the nature of sexual exploitation. In other words, the person making the referral may not be comfortable approaching the youth and discussing the purpose and services available at Onyx, but might still make the referral on behalf of the youth with the expectation that someone from Onyx will contact the young people and provide them with the information.

Another factor which likely affected both the number of days a youth participated with the program and the number of service hours provided is whether the youth voluntarily participated in the program. This is particularly relevant in cases where the youth may have been unaware that a referral to the program was made in the first place. Voluntary participation was measured by examining monthly reports and discharge reports and determining whether the youth involved themselves in program activities.³ As Onyx is a voluntary program, it was important to note that slightly more than two-thirds (68.5 per cent) of the youth voluntarily participated in the program. Advocates of safe care may argue that it is the remaining youth who did not voluntarily participate in programs that the community should be targeting because, although these youth do not want services, they need them. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that there is an unknown number of sexually exploited youth who successfully avoid detection from

³ It should be noted that this determination was made by the researcher, based on information recorded in the participants file.

service providers. As Cusick (2002) noted, many youth are distrustful of adults and avoid detection at all costs.

Client Needs Assessment

Every youth referred to the Onyx program must complete a self-assessment, compulsory needs assessment checklist (See Appendix D). This checklist identifies 13 general needs for which Onyx will attempt to provide services. When identifying a need, youth are given three options to select from; requiring some help, lots of help, or not applicable. Once an issue has been selected, it is identified by Onyx staff as an area of concern that needs to be addressed. For simplicity purposes, when analyzing this data, the three options were collapsed into two categories; wants help and does not want help. Of the 13 needs categories, for the purposes of this research, only those needs that were also scored on monthly reports and discharge reports were analyzed. This removed three needs from further analysis. It should also be noted that the wording differs between the coding sheet and the needs assessment form. For instance, in order to be clear and youth friendly, help with drugs is listed on the needs assessment form, as opposed to substance misuse which is found on the coding sheet. After making this determination, every participant's needs assessment was reviewed and all issues identified by the youth were recorded.

There were 36 files (63.5 per cent of the entire sample) that included completed needs assessment forms. The reason why all participants did not have needs assessment forms was because, in some cases, youth may have been referred to the program without their knowledge or they had moved after they were referred to the program, but before they completed their needs assessment checklist. In other cases, it is possible that Onyx

staff did not have an opportunity to conduct the assessment and place the completed form in the youth's file. Table 4 provides information on the needs assessment of the sample.

In total, there were ten issues that youth could select from on the needs assessment form. Each need is intended to trigger a range of potential service provision options by Onyx staff. If a youth selected the living environment need, staff would focus on finding a safe, secure, comfortable, and affordable living situation for a youth. Whether this meant returning to live with family, moving into a youth agreement contract, or staying at a safe house, Onyx staff would access whatever resources were necessary to meet the needs of the youth. In regards to the second and third categories on the needs assessment, relationship with family and peers, once identified, Onyx staff would focus on rebuilding positive relationships that could support the youth.

If a youth identified an education need, Onyx staff would take steps to enroll the youth in an educational program. Regardless of whether this involved adult learning, distance education, an alternative school, or a skills training program, Onyx staff would consider a myriad of education options designed to find the programs that would be most appropriate for the youth. Vocational needs referred to having staff work with the youth to create a resume, practice interview skills, and providing support with an employment search.

Recreation/leisure involved assisting the youth in participating in healthy activities, such as sports, fitness, crafts, and hobbies. For example, four participants expressed an interest in martial arts and were registered for weekly classes, while others received gym memberships. When young people identified life skills as a need, they might receive support with tasks, such as opening up a bank account, budgeting,

shopping, learning bus routes, or using proper manners. The health and self-care need typically included everything from counseling and medical appointments to proper hygiene.

By including substance misuse as a category, youth were provided with the opportunity to disclose any problems they might have with drug or alcohol misuse. Once identified, Onyx staff focused on building a connection with a community-based drug and alcohol counselor who could make the appropriate referrals to a treatment program. Onyx staff might also utilize detoxification programs or outreach workers.

The final category is criminal justice involvement. By selecting this need category, youth acknowledged their desire for assistance with transportation to and from appointments to court or to see their probation officer. In some cases, Onyx staff could assist in facilitating discussions with the crown counsel and defense counsel if the youth was facing a charge.

TABLE 4: ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Needs Assessment Issue	% of Cases (n = 36)
Living Environment	55.6%
Relationship with Family	52.8%
Relationship with Peers	47.2%
Education	66.7%
Vocation	66.7%
Recreation/Leisure	63.9%
Life Skills	58.3%
Health/Self-Care	61.1%
Substance Misuse	63.9%
Criminal Justice Involvement	30.6%

The most common need among the participants of Onyx were education and vocation (66.7 per cent respectively) followed by recreation/leisure and substance misuse

treatment (63.7 per cent). More importantly, almost all other issues were identified by a majority of youth, with the minor exception of relationship with peers (47.2 per cent) and criminal justice involvement (30.6 per cent). It should be noted that the issue of sexual exploitation was not currently included on the needs assessment checklist. Including this issue in the assessment checklist was important because it allowed for youth to identify their need for assistance in this area. When comparing the needs assessments of Aboriginal participants to non-Aboriginal participants, there were several issues that were different between the two groups. Aboriginal participants were more likely to identify education (80 per cent compared to 65.2 per cent), substance misuse needs (70 per cent compared to 60.9 per cent), and health/self-care needs (70 per cent compared to 56.5 per cent) than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, while non-Aboriginals were more likely to identify needs associated with their peer relationships (52.2 per cent compared to 40 per cent) and vocation issues (69.6 per cent compared to 60 per cent).

TABLE 5: ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST BY ETHNICITY

Needs Assessment Issue	% of Non-Aboriginals (n = 23)	% of Aboriginals (n = 10)
Living Environment	56.5%	60.0%
Relationship with Family	52.2%	50.0%
Relationship with Peers	52.2%	40.0%
Education	65.2%	80.0%
Vocation	69.6%	60.0%
Recreation/Leisure	60.9%	70.0%
Life Skills	60.9%	60.0%
Health/Self-Care	56.5%	70.0%
Substance Misuse	60.9%	70.0%
Criminal Justice Involvement	34.8%	30.0%

Similar to the referral checklist, youth typically did not identify just one need. Instead, the mean number of needs identified by the sample was 5.6 with a range of one to nine needs. Based on the mean number of needs that these youth identified, and the multi-

problem profile of the youth in this sample, there is a need for programs that are designed to address the broad range of issues and concerns related to the lives of sexually exploited youth.

Provision of Services

Once youth have completed the intake process, they meet with Onyx staff to create a service plan to respond to the issues identified either in the referral form or the assessment checklist. The youth and staff develop a strategy that works best for the youth to appropriately address any of their needs and accomplish established goals. One of the benefits to participating in the Onyx program is the flexibility that the program offers. Krawczyk (2000) emphasized that one of the best ways to ensure some degree of program success is to allow participants a role in the development and implementation of their programs. This is an approach that has been adopted by Onyx.

In addition to allowing youth a role in developing their program strategy, all of the services provided to youth are on a one-to-one basis. In this way, staff are able to build trust with individual youths, but also ensure that the individual needs of the youth are being addressed by the program. Of the 57 youth in the sample, more than two-thirds (70.2 per cent) had completed monthly reports in their files indicating that they had received some services from Onyx. The remainder of the sample did not receive any services from the program. The main reasons why a referred youth would not receive any services from Onyx were that they were subsequently admitted to a residential treatment program, they moved away from British Columbia, they were unaware that they had been referred to the program, or they simply refused to participate in the program.

In terms of the services provided, as expected, almost every youth who participated in Onyx received support with their sexual exploitation concerns (92.5 per cent) (see Table 6). In some cases, Onyx staff devoted their efforts to rapport building and dealing with the numerous other needs that the youth had prior to addressing any sexual exploitation concerns which might account for why not all youth received sexual exploitation services. Table 6 also demonstrates the large proportion of youth who received a myriad of services. For example, nearly two-thirds of youth received recreation/leisure services and health/self-care services (62.5 per cent). Moreover, a majority of youth also received life skills and substance misuse services (57.5 per cent), living environment services (52.5 per cent), and education services (50 per cent). It would also appear that, in some cases, youth received more services than they requested. In other words, some youth received, for example life skills services, even though they did not express a need for this type of service, while other needs went unaddressed.

TABLE 6: SERVICES PROVIDED TO ONYX PARTICIPANTS

Services Provided	% of Cases Identifying a Need for a Service Type	% of Cases Provided with Service Type (n = 40)
Living Environment	55.6%	52.5%
Relationship with Family	52.8%	55.0%
Relationship with Peers	47.2%	30.0%
Education	66.7%	50.0%
Vocation	66.7%	40.0%
Recreation/Leisure	63.9%	62.5%
Life Skills	58.3%	57.5%
Health/Self-Care	61.1%	62.5%
Substance Misuse	63.9%	57.5%
Criminal Justice Involvement	30.6%	17.5%
Sexual Exploitation	-	92.5%

However, while some youth may have received additional services, it also appears that youth rarely received all of the services that were identified in their referral or needs

assessment forms. Of the entire sample, a majority (58 per cent) had a completed needs assessment form and monthly reports and/or discharge reports. This allowed for a comparison between the proportion of needs that were assessed and the services provided (see Table 7). The service with the best match between needs and delivery was education (85 per cent). In other words, of all the youth assessed with a need for an education program, nearly all (85 per cent) were provided with some form of education service. It is important to note that none of the services were delivered to 100% of the youth who were assessed with a need for that particular service.

TABLE 7: PROPORTION OF SERVICES PROVIDED TO ONYX PARTICIPANTS BY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Services Provided	% of Cases Provided with Service Type (n = 33)
Living Environment	76.5%
Relationship with Family	55.0%
Relationship with Peers	58.3%
Education	85.0%
Vocation	75.0%
Recreation/Leisure	72.7%
Life Skills	63.6%
Health/Self-Care	60.0%
Substance Misuse	77.8%
Criminal Justice Involvement	42.9%
Sexual Exploitation	76.5%

While more than three quarters of youth who needed substance misuse services (77.8 per cent), living environment services (76.5 per cent), sexual exploitation services (76.5 per cent), and vocation services (75 per cent) received those services, it is troubling that only a slight majority of youth who needed family relationship services (55 per cent) and a minority of those who needed criminal justice services (42.9 per cent) were provided with those services. Rather than a condemnation of how Onyx provides service, it is important to consider the aforementioned point that Onyx frequently provides a

number of services to address a broad range of needs, regardless of the specific needs that a youth might identify. In other words, Onyx utilizes a holistic approach in dealing with sexually exploited youth by delivering many different kinds of services to address a broad range of needs. For example, of those who identified vocational needs on their assessment, three quarters received vocation services. However, in addition, the majority of those who identified a vocational need also received living environment services (64.7 per cent), family relationship services (55 per cent), guidance with peer relationships (58.3 per cent), education services (60 per cent), recreational activities and life skill services (63.6 per cent), health/self-care services (72.0 per cent), and substance misuse services (72.2 per cent). In fact, providing a range of services, independent of the specific assessment checklist was common.

There were a number of important differences between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal participants who identified a need for services related to their family relationship and actually receiving those services. Specifically, less than half of the non-Aboriginals (46.2 per cent) compared to three-fifths of Aboriginal participants (60 per cent) received this identified service. While the lower number of Aboriginals in the sample may make it easier for Onyx staff to respond to the needs of Aboriginal youth, there does appear to be a focus on responding to the family needs of Aboriginals. Similarly, with respect to health and self-care needs, three-quarters of Aboriginal youth compared to half of the non-Aboriginal youth received this identified need.

This pattern, however, does not continue with a number of other identified needs. For example, with respect to peer relationships, while Onyx was able to provide services to the large majority of non-Aboriginal youth who identified peer relationships as a need

(83.3 per cent), only one-quarter of Aboriginal youth who identified this specific need were provided with a peer relationship service. Similarly, when considering vocational needs, Onyx seems to do a better job providing this service type to non-Aboriginal youth who identified this need (81.8 per cent) compared to Aboriginal youth (50 per cent) with this concern.

Again, the one area that Onyx seems to meet the needs of all its clients is education. While all of the Aboriginal youth who identified this service need received programming, nearly all of the non-Aboriginal youth (91.7 per cent) also received this service type. This is extremely important because of the growing body of research consistently concluding that one of the strongest protective factors for most behavioral risk factors is education (Hunt, 2006). Clearly, there is no discernable pattern of service delivery based on ethnicity. There were some services that Aboriginals were more likely to receive, but others that were more commonly delivered to non-Aboriginals. Regardless of ethnicity, it does appear that, even in those cases where identified needs were not directly addressed, all youth typically received other services to address issues not originally identified by the assessment process. The value of this will be discussed in the next chapter.

The fact that the youth in this sample were being provided with a range of services can be determined by simply examining the mean number of needs assessed and comparing that number to the mean number of services provided. On average, youth were provided with 4.9 services and identified 5.6 needs. In effect, youth received one-half a service less than their needs assessment might suggest. It is important to keep in mind that this calculation does not control for the number of service hours provided, but is

simply a rudimentary way of considering needs and service provision. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 6 and 7, this calculation does not consider the degree to which there was a positive correlation with needs and service provision. It must also be acknowledged that while youth are facing a multitude of issues in their lives, when given the opportunity to complete a checklist, they will often select more issues than really need addressed. Moreover, in some cases, Onyx staff likely addressed other issues that might not have been identified by the youth during the needs assessment, but were brought to the attention of the staff as important issues in some other manner, such as by speaking to parents or those who initially referred the youth to the program.

Program Outcomes

Participant discharge reports were reviewed from closed files in order to measure program outcomes. In regards to the files from the Vancouver Coastal Region, monthly reports were referred to in order to ascertain all required outcome data. In total, of the 57 youth in the sample, 16 had completed their participation with Onyx and had outcome reports in their files. The small sample size can be explained by the newness of the program. Also, youth are not admitted to the program for a fixed period of time, such as two months. Instead, youth may continue their involvement with the program as long as they continue to participate.⁴ Currently, youth who participate in the program have open files and their files remain open until the point where additional community supports are in place and the youth no longer need Onyx support. Once this has occurred, young people are discharged from the program. It is at this point that the outcome data is completed by Onyx staff. Given all of these factors, in addition to the small number of

⁴ This policy will likely change once Onyx referrals reach the point where a waiting list is required.

youth originally referred to the program, it was not surprising that so few youth completed the program by the data collection date of this current project.

On average, each youth had 5.6 identified needs and 4.9 different service types provided by Onyx. Among the 16 youth who were discharged, on average, 4.9 needs were identified as having resulted in a positive outcome with a range of 1 to 9 positive outcomes. An outcome was considered positive if there was information in the discharge report or monthly reports of a closed file which provided evidence of a constructive response to a need. For example, a youth who entered the program and was assessed as needing substance misuse services, who then received such a service and was attending counseling or treatment, or was abstaining for all drug and alcohol use at the time of discharge was considered as having a positive outcome for that need.

TABLE 8: ONYX PARTICIPANT OUTCOME RESULTS

Services Provided	% of Cases with Positive Outcomes (n = 16)
Living Environment	62.5%
Relationship with Family	56.3%
Relationship with Peers	18.8%
Education	37.5%
Vocation	37.5%
Recreation/Leisure	43.8%
Life Skills	31.3%
Health/Self-Care	62.5%
Substance Misuse	43.8%
Criminal Justice Involvement	18.8%
Sexual Exploitation	81.3%

The need which had the largest proportion of successful outcomes among discharged participants were services provided to respond to sexual exploitation (81.3 per cent), living environment needs (62.5 per cent) and health and self-care needs (62.5 per cent). Given the mandate and purpose of Onyx, it was not surprising that the largest proportion of positive outcomes was for sexual exploitation. Of concern, however, were

the low positive outcome rates for criminal justice needs (18.8 per cent) and peer relationships (18.8 per cent). Moreover, of the remaining six needs, only one of them (relationship with family) had a positive outcome for the majority of youth who were discharged (56.3 per cent). Given the links established in the research literature between substance use, poor education, and lack of employment opportunities with sexual exploitation, it is somewhat disappointing that there were not a more substantially positive outcome on these measures.

However, Table 8 does not control for the specific needs assessed for each youth. Rather than simply providing a general overview of positive outcomes, a more significant analysis would be to consider the proportion of positive outcomes for those youth who were assessed with that specific need. The findings of that analysis are presented in Table 9. In total, only 13 files (22.8 per cent of the entire sample) contained complete information on both needs assessments and outcomes. The remaining files were either still open or assessments forms were not in the files. It should also be noted that sexual exploitation was not included in this analysis because this issue is currently not on the assessment form. Moreover, as discussed above, it is important to recognize that, in a number of cases, Onyx staff chose to devote attention to needs that were not necessarily selected by the youth on their initial needs assessment form.

TABLE 9: ONYX PARTICIPANT OUTCOME RESULTS

Needs Assessed	% of Cases with Positive Outcomes (n = 13)
Living Environment	62.5%
Relationship with Family	28.6%
Relationship with Peers	66.7%
Education	100.0%
Vocation	83.3%
Recreation/Leisure	100.0%
Life Skills	80.0%
Health/Self-Care	70.0%
Substance Misuse	25.0%
Criminal Justice Involvement	33.3%
Sexual Exploitation	62.5%

As indicated in Table 9 above, with respect to three needs, Onyx staff reported tremendous success. Specifically, among those youth who presented with education or recreation/leisure needs prior to participating with Onyx, all of them, upon discharge, demonstrated positive outcomes. Moreover, the vast majority of youth who were assessed with vocation (83.3 per cent), life skills (80 per cent), and health and self-care needs (70 per cent) had positive outcomes upon discharge.

It is difficult to determine exactly what constituted a positive outcome based on the file information or the degree to which all staff used the same criteria for concluding the presence of a positive outcome. For example, while nearly two-thirds of those with living environment needs (62.5 per cent) had a positive outcome by the time they were discharged from the program, a positive outcome could be defined as youth returning to live with their family, moving into a safe house, or making alternative living arrangements considered by Onyx staff to be improvements over previous arrangements. While not everyone would agree on whether these actions constituted a positive outcome, there is also the question of time. In other words, sufficient time may not have passed to determine whether what appeared to be a positive outcome was in fact a positive outcome

or that a youth continued to do whatever was considered a positive outcome. Given the low sample size and some of these methodological concerns, the findings presented in Tables 8 and 9 must be considered preliminary.

Of concern, nonetheless, is the low proportion of positive outcomes for some of the needs assessed. For example, among those youth assessed with a substance misuse need, only one quarter demonstrated a positive outcome at the time of discharge (see Table 9). In addition, it would appear that the vast majority of youth who presented with a family relationship need or a criminal justice need did not have a positive outcome in these areas.

In sum, even given the low sample size and the relatively short period of time that Onyx has been in operation, there does appear to be a benefit to sexually exploited youth participating in the Onyx program. While this sample is traditionally difficult to access for services, those youth who do participate have many of their identified needs linked to services and have many of the related needs of sexually exploited youth met. Given the large proportion of youth who received services for sexual exploitation and had a positive outcome for that specific need at the time of discharge, it does appear that Onyx is providing some value to these youth.

Staff Perceptions

As discussed in Chapter Two, interviews were conducted with all Onyx staff members. All staff are required to have either completed a college level program related to youth justice with several years of work experience or a bachelor's degree in a related social justice discipline. In analyzing the interview information, several general themes were identified, most of which tended to focus on the benefits of the program and support

of the program policies, partnerships, and evolution. For example, it was unanimously agreed that Onyx fulfills its program objectives and has a positive effect on the lives of participants. When asked about the differences the program was making in the lives of youth, one interviewee stated: “One youth was working the streets in Burnaby, had a significant heroin addiction, and was disconnected from her family. Now, she is working full-time, living back at home, addressing her alcohol and drug concerns, and working on completing grade 12”. Another interviewee remarked, “Whether it is indirectly or directly, the program is making a difference. Whether I go take them to the counselor or tell them about it and they go on their own, it is because of us they make it there”.

In terms of the appropriateness of Onyx management, specifically the appropriateness of a male manager for a program which is predominantly being accessed by sexually exploited females, all of the Onyx staff felt that the staff composition was appropriate and that all members of the team were effective in their positions.

Another general theme involved the need for increased education. It was suggested by one interviewee that this could be accomplished through prevention workshops. Another interviewee suggested early intervention with community groups, parents, schools, and all levels of government in order to better educate society about child and youth sexual exploitation before children become exploited. Providing the community with more information was clearly important as several staff commented on the general lack of understanding of sexual exploitation in the community. “No one still wants to talk about sex”; “it is such a hush, hush topic.” This theme was reiterated throughout the interviews by staff who commented on the need for increased public awareness campaigns about sexual exploitation and the services available to youth both

as a response and for prevention. Among the staff, getting the information out in the community was of particular concern, especially for small communities and among the target population. In addition, dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions about sexually exploited youth, was also acknowledged.

When asked to consider what factors might be hindering program implementation, one staff member commented that the service delivery approach was acting as an impediment.

By offering voluntary services it impedes implementation because sometimes I don't see the kids for a long time and they are not up to good things. A voluntary approach is really good and really bad because we can't make a kid do anything. That being said, if you forced a kid to see you every week it would change the relationship.

Another interviewee suggested that voluntary programs also restrict information sharing which results in serious limitations when trying to involve other community resources. In terms of other factors affecting access, one staff member replied, "Youth can be brought to our attention and refuse services. It could be advantageous for youth to be directed to work with us through MCFD" (Ministry of Children and Family Development). Staff members also spoke about the difficulties associated with working with street entrenched, drug-addicted youth who have no desire to leave the street life.

It was also mentioned that this population of youth may be unaware of the program. It was recommended that more youth-friendly posters and advertising was necessary so that youth would know of the program and perceive it as a viable option for them if when they are ready to change their lifestyle. Perhaps the most significant impediment to assessing the target population is that youth will not admit to being sexually exploited. According to one interviewee: "Kids who party on the weekend, do drugs and drink and have sex with people, don't see it as exploitation".

When asked about whether the program outcomes were meeting the needs of program participants, most staff answered positively. In addition to thinking that the program was valuable to those it served, several staff members commented additionally on the benefit of the flexibility of the program which allowed them to accommodate a wide range of youth needs, rather than focusing exclusively on one or two needs. In fact, two staff members specifically commented on the value of the informal conversations they have with youth. As one interviewee said:

The majority of the good work we are doing is emotional. I don't think that can be quantified. In our case notes, you will never find that there was a three hour conversation. For them to be able to cry and talk to someone for three hours, this is the stuff I would say is the good work that we do.

Chapter Four: Conclusion and Recommendations

The majority of youth (70.2 per cent) who participated in Onyx made the decision to change their lives. They accessed community-based services without being compelled to do so by the criminal justice system. The provision of this service is a new approach in British Columbia to respond to the issue of sexually exploited youth and a distinct change from the punitive approaches of the past. This program review was initiated in an attempt to highlight the progress organizations in British Columbia have made in providing services to sexually exploited youth, while, at the same time, discussing the program's limitations and providing a series of recommendations to improve the provision of services for the future.

The research literature has portrayed the childhood of sexually exploited youth as extremely challenging, characterized by sexual or physical abuse, residential and familial dysfunction, and a lack of education. The findings of this current review are consistent with the research literature. Onyx was intended to reduce the harms associated with sexual exploitation. After reviewing the archival data and considering the information provided in the staff interviews, it appears that Onyx is achieving its stated goals. In many cases, Onyx responded to the needs identified by sexually exploited youth in ways that result in positive outcomes.

Safe-care legislation is a very different approach from the current strategy of dealing with sexually exploited youth. Youth who are referred to and participate in Onyx would not be the same youth who would be sent to a safe-care facility. Safe-care was designed for youth who do not access community programs, avoid contact with

authorities, and participate in high-risk activities, such as sexual exploitation. While the majority of Onyx participants are currently being sexually exploited or have been involved in sexual exploitation in the past, they are maintaining contact with the community and do access services.

Throughout the interviews and file reviews, it was evident that a number of youth were referred to the program, but did not participate because they were not ready to exit the sex-trade or were too street entrenched to become involved in the program. Once again, rather than a general policy for all sexually exploited youth, it would appear that safe care policies might be better suited to those youth who are likely to benefit from non-voluntary confinement programs.

In regards to protection, Onyx has provided sexually exploited youth who access the program many of the supports necessary to keep them safe. This includes food, shelter, clothing, life skills, and transportation services. Also, with the recent addition of one residential bed available only to Onyx participants, if a youth was in physical danger, staff could provide a safe option. While one bed is clearly insufficient to accommodate all the youth in need of safe housing, it is a small step in the right direction.

The results of this review indicated that many of the youth who accessed Onyx exited the program with a number of positive outcomes. It is important, however, to recognize that most youth do not enter the program with only one issue or need. Consistent with the literature on marginalized youth at risk, the majority of Onyx participants bring with them multiple issues and a variety of needs. It should also be mentioned that numerous services are provided to youth to address issues that were not originally identified by the youth at intake. While it is a valuable program

accomplishment that youth receive a range of services that they may not have identified, it is also problematic that not every youth who identified a specific need received a service to address that concern.

One recommendation that was brought forward during the interviews was the need for increased education to make the community better aware of the issues at hand. This could involve classroom presentations, community awareness events, or public forums. By doing so, children would learn about the danger involved with sexual exploitation and the community would have a better understanding and a less stigmatized view of this population. Increased education should also target other social service agencies that work directly with this population of youth, such as the police and social workers. In addition, Onyx should increase its youth-focused advertising to expand this population's knowledge of what programs and resources are offered in their community.

British Columbian stakeholders should also consider implementing an intermediate step of governance prior to safe-care. Youth could be mandated to participate in the Onyx program or other community-based programs. Under this approach, youth would be ordered by the court to maintain contact and participate in Onyx while remaining in the community and securing their personal rights and freedoms. This might result in reaching those youth who do not want to participate in programs, but desperately need support and protection. The ultimate approach to this issue would be to offer both community-based voluntary programs while also having a small safe-care facility to provide protection for those youth who refuse community-based services and are in imminent danger of harming themselves.

By conducting this research, several administrative recommendations were identified. After reviewing files from both regions, a discrepancy was found between Vancouver Coastal and Ridge Meadows/Maple Ridge discharge reports. One region included detailed summaries of outcomes achieved, while the other region only included an explanation for closing the file. Uniform reporting practice across all Onyx regions is recommended in order to maintain a level of standardization and consistency throughout the agency.

Another recommendation that would assist Onyx in identifying the existence of sexually exploited youth and their needs would be to have sexual exploitation explicitly on the needs assessment form which is completed by all participants during their intake into the program. Through adding sexual exploitation to the needs assessment checklist, youth would be able to identify their need for assistance during program intake. This addition is extremely valuable because it provides youth an avenue to disclose sexual exploitation, something that is often very difficult to do. The inclusion of this category would also benefit any future evaluations of Onyx's ability to successfully offer services in those areas identified in the assessment process.

In addition to these recommendations, there are a number of limitations that must be mentioned. Due to the small population of Onyx participants examined in this review, and the gender breakdown of the sample, it is important to keep in mind that the findings cannot be used as a representation of sexually exploited youth in the Tri-Cities/Ridge Meadows and Vancouver Coastal Regions. However, the information gathered can be used to shed light on who is accessing voluntary programs, what the needs profile was of

those who accessed the program, what services are being provided, and the degree to which Onyx contributes to a positive outcome for those needs.

Two substantial issues which must be kept in mind when considering the findings of this review are the method by which information is coded into the files by Onyx staff and the methodology used to conduct the staff interviews. With respect to the file data, outcome information was not recorded by an independent observer, but by the staff responsible for providing the service. While this is not to suggest that positive outcomes were not achieved, it is somewhat problematic that those with a stake in ensuring that the program is viewed positively by the community, the government, and the funders, are the people determining whether the program was successful in providing services and the outcome of the services provided. Related to this point, there does not seem to be an objective, evidence-based criterion for determining positive outcomes. As mentioned in the results chapter, it was up to the individual staff member to determine whether anything done with the youth resulted in a positive outcome. More reliable methods might include having predetermined, evidence-based, and consistent benchmarks that all staff members use to evaluate positive outcomes, have the youth themselves rate their progress, or have an independent evaluation of the program and its participants to determine success.

With respect to the interviews, although all interviewees understood that the information they provided would not be used in a way that individuals could be identified, because the researcher was an employee of the program, participants may have been guarded in their responses or hesitant to speak ill of the program. While there is no

evidence that this happened, it might have been beneficial to have an outsider who did not know or have to work with the participants conduct the interviews.

A major limitation of this current study was not interviewing the youth who participated in the program. While research consistently points to the importance of including youth at the program development stage (Cusick, 2002), as mentioned in the methodology chapter, due to the ethical requirements of obtaining parental or guardian consent to interview the youth who participated in the program, the involvement of youth in this program review was not possible. Nonetheless, obtaining the views of participants would provide invaluable information about the quality and effect of the program.

With no available research to draw comparisons from, this research is the first to review voluntary-based programming for sexually exploited youth. Future analysis could involve examining the differences found between the Vancouver Coastal region and the Ridge Meadows region, as well as an inter-provincial comparison of non-voluntary programs, such as PCHIP, to voluntary programs, such as Onyx. It would also be useful to identify the percentage of sexually exploited youth who are not accessing services and determine if they differ in any significant ways to those who do access voluntary services and what are the specific barriers preventing them from accessing services. In addition, it would be beneficial to evaluate the long-term outcomes of program participants by conducting follow-up surveys, such as every six months for two years.

The results of this review suggest that, after ten months of implementation, Onyx appears to have a positive impact on sexually exploited youth who participated in the program. While some key needs appear to be serviced more than others, generally, program participants received an appropriate amount of support and services dealing with

a variety of basic needs and concerns. Short-term outcomes were achieved and connections were formed with the community to create the potential for longer-term outcome sustainability.

Overall, Onyx has provided the most appropriate and least intrusive care for sexually exploited youth. While research findings point to recommendations to assist in the future development of the program, after such a short period of implementation the program has been successful at meeting its objectives.

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Appendix A: Information Sheet for Interviews

Measuring Progress: A Review of ONYX, A Voluntary Support Program for Sexually Exploited

Information Sheet for Subjects

The aim of this research project is to gain insight as to whether the services provided by Onyx are effective and protection to sexually exploited youth is being offered and utilized. The research will be conducted by collecting data from review of participant files and semi-structured interview with program staff. These interviews will assist in the development of an in-depth understanding of program effectiveness from the position of employee and management stakeholders. Staff will be asked a series of questions pertaining to program objectives, goals and values.

The interview process should take approximately 30 minutes.

The researcher ensures that interview content will be held in confidence. Interview transcripts will not contain the real names of participants. You will be identified throughout the research notes through a code number. You will be asked to sign a consent form and you are guaranteed the right to withdraw from the interview process at any point.

The contact person at the University College of the Fraser Valley's Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice for all matters concerning consent is Dr. Irwin Cohen (604-504-7441 ext. 4324). Any other inquiries concerning the project can be forwarded to Tamar King ([REDACTED]).

Appendix B: Consent Form for Interviews

Measuring Progress: A Review of ONYX, A Voluntary Support Program for Sexually Exploited Youth

Informed Consent by Subjects to Participate In Project

The university and the person conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. The *Information Sheet for Subjects* together with this form and the information they contain are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks, and benefits of the research. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received the *Information Sheet for Subjects* form which describes these procedures, risks, and benefits, that you have had an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in e project.

Having been asked by Tamar King, MA Candidate of the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University College of the Fraser Valley to participate in her research project, I have read the procedures specified in the *Information Sheet for Subjects*.

I understand the procedures to be followed and the risks and benefits of this research described on the *Information Sheet for Subjects* to me taking part.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this project at any time. Furthermore, I understand that once I have completed the interview, my participation in this project is complete.

I also understand that I may register any concerns I might have about the research with Tamar King, the principal researcher, (604) 504-7441 ext 4324 or with Yvon Dandurand, Dean of Research at the University College of the Fraser Valley, (604) 864-4654.

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, by contacting Tamar King, MA Candidate at the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University College of the Fraser Valley, 33844 King Road, Abbotsford, B.C. V2S 7M8.

I have been informed that the research material will be held in confidence by the principal researcher, Tamar King.

I agree to participate in this research project.

NAME (please print): _____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

Appendix C: Referral Form for ONYX

Date of Referral :	
<i>Day / Month / Year</i>	
Referral Source Name:	Office: Phone:
Youth Information	
Name:	DOB: SIN#:
Current Address:	Phone: CARECARD#:
	☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Transgender
Physical Description	
Hair colour:	Eye colour: Height: Weight: Ethnic origin:
Distinguishing marks (tattoos, scars, etc):	
Parent/Guardian:	Relationship: Phone:
Address:	
Social Worker:	Office: Phone:
Sexual Exploitation Issues	
☐ Organized Crime Involvement ☐ Pimp involved	
☐ Street Trade ☐ Sex for Shelter/Food	
☐ Sex for Drugs ☐ Pornography	
☐ Boyfriend/Peer/Gang Supported ☐ Family Supported Exploitation	
☐ Indoor venues (ex: Escort service, Trick pads)	
☐ Other (describe) _____	
Related Issues / Risks	
☐ Mental Health Issues ☐ Substance Misuse	
☐ Homeless ☐ Not in School	
☐ Criminal Behaviour ☐ Witness Protection	
☐ Disconnected from Family	
Is the youth aware of this referral? Yes ☐ No ☐	
Additional Comments:	

Appendix D: Compulsory Needs Assessment


[Intake Form](#)
[Needs Assessment](#)
[Service Plan](#)
[Monthly Report](#)
[Discharge Report](#)
[Discharge and Follow Up Interview](#)
[Incident Report](#)
[All Reports](#)
[Case Notes](#)

Compulsory

PLEA's Worker:

Current Status: Status Date:

Client Assessment

Assessment:

Date of assessment

2007-03-13

Assessment for

Client

Notes

Needs Assessment Compulsory				
	Strength	Some help	Lots of help	N/A
Recreation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Improve your relationship with your family	☐	☐	☐	☐
Set-up for Independent living	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sort out issues or personal problems	☐	☐	☐	☐
School issues	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drug issues	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning new life skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Following my Probation order	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Money/ID/Transportation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health issues	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friends/Peer pressure	☐	☐	☐	☐
Living environment	☐	☐	☐	☐

Submit

[#2941]
Current

Appendix E: Interview Questions

1. What is the name of your position?
2. How long have you been employed with the ONYX program?
3. Do you work directly with youth who have been sexually exploited?
4. What are your thoughts and perceptions about how the ONYX program operates?
5. Do you think that the program is fulfilling its objectives?
6. From your experience, do you think that the ONYX program is making a difference in the lives of those youth who are sexually exploited?
7. In your opinion is the program being implemented as it was intended to be?
8. Are program goals being met?
9. What factors facilitate or impede implementation?
10. If you could change anything about the program structure or strategies what would they be?
11. Is there evidence of a clear added value to utilizing the program?
12. Do the program outcomes meet the needs of the program participants?
13. What does the program cost?
14. Where does program funding come from?
15. Is the value of the program being achieved?
16. Is the program management effective?
17. Are the program managers appropriate?
18. What does Onyx staff do with youth?
19. Are partnership arrangements satisfactory?
20. Is the target population of youth being reached?
21. What “population” of youth are accessing the program?
22. Are the program outcomes sustainable?
23. What other programs are available to sexually exploited youth in this region?
24. In your opinion do you think that by utilizing a voluntary referral process youth are avoiding the program?
25. Why do you think youth ‘drop out’ of the program?
26. Do you have any recommendations or additional comments?