

RESOURCEFULNESS OF HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PRACTISE SEX WORK IN PAKISTAN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Background:

Many homeless young people in Pakistan use sex work as a way to generate income, particularly if they have few other options for work. Because it is highly stigmatised, little attention has been paid to the strategies homeless young people use to practise sex work, and what this suggests about their capacities and strengths.

Methods:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 29 homeless young people (aged 16–25 years) from Rawalpindi, Pakistan, including nine cisgender heterosexual men, six cisgender heterosexual women, seven cisgender gay men, and seven transgender heterosexual women.

Results:

Participants sought memberships in street-based peer groups where financial gains were contingent on dancing and sex work. To practise their work successfully, participants learned novel skills and mobilised material resources available to them on the streets. Participants talked about how they acquired and benefitted from skills related to beautification, dancing, communication, and sexual services to achieve the necessary standards for entertainment and sex work. Access to material resources like makeup, clothes, rented rooms, mobile phones and condoms made dancing and sex work possible and safer for participants.

Conclusion:

Participants' improvisation with limited resources on the streets has important implications for policy and programs. Showcasing the resourcefulness and capacities of young people encourages a different way of thinking about them. This potential could be utilised in productive ways if they were given the chance to receive mainstream and technical education, better health support and access to the formal job market.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None