

"Pearl of the Orient"

Hong Kong is known by most as a thriving, vibrant business centre, high rise office buildings, a plethora of banks, shopping malls, designer clothes outlets and expensive living. The other side of this 'Pearl of the Orient' is overcrowded slum areas, drug abuse, crime, teenage prostitution and the general anxiety, insecurity of a culture 'caught between'. In a few short months Hong Kong will cease to cling to the vestige of the British culture and will revert to Chinese rule. Many have left fearing communist changes, but the transition has been promised to be gentle and most now seem hopeful for the future. For the more deprived youth of Hong Kong, such political anxiety passes over their heads.

Within this tapestry of cultures, two organisations are doing excellent work to support and nurture young people. The Hong Kong Council for social services, and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Kowloon which has a flourishing adolescent unit led by Dr Winnie Tse. Hopefully we will hear more of the unit in the future and we hope that Dr Tse and colleagues may be able to attend our conference in 1998. The Council for social services visited Youth Support House in 1994 and I paid a return visit there and to the Hospital in September 1996. The following cases were the basis for some of our discussions - we welcome further comment from readers.

Case 1

Prepared by Wong Yin Yu and Wu Yuk Shan (Chinese YMCA)

Client A is a fourteen year old girl. She has had sex for the past year with many different boy friends. She claims that she is not a casual girl because she only makes love with her boy friend at the time. She only makes love with the ones she really likes. But, she falls in love very easily and quickly, even on the first date.

She had an abortion once. Her mother (a fortune-teller) told her that she would only have one child in her life. After being told this information, she was even more casual with sex. She did not ask her sex partner to use a condom and changed sex partners frequently. She was also very materialistic. If a boy could provide her with more things she would stay with him longer. Otherwise, she would change partner. She is now living with her boy friend and has sex regularly. She depends on her boy friend to support her.

As a social worker, I have discussed with her her attitude towards sex. I have taught her sex education, including details concerning the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Actually, she has a good relationship with me. She agreed with my opinion, but she did not practice safer sex. She needs me to share her feelings, but she does not accept my advice. I do not know what I can do next with this case.

Discussion - This girl is following a pattern of serial monogamy - where she sees herself as not promiscuous because she is only able to perceive the one relationship at a time. When in this relationship she is totally committed and 'in love' perceiving the relationship as her solution to life's problems and completely in denial that she has ever been 'in love' with anyone else. Just as frequently teenage girls see each act of sex as a 'one off' and do not see that they are having sex regularly or frequently - so each sexual encounter can be seen as unique and leaving a girl unable to appreciate the 'continuum' of her behaviour. A poorly developed sense of future time perspective plus denial of responsibility for and consequences of her behaviour conspire to maintain a potentially harmful lifestyle.

The denial is reinforced by 'magical protection' - inherent in the young person's feelings of invincibility and 'it could never happen to me' - but also in this case specifically enhanced by the mother's fortune telling and prophecy of her daughter having only one child. Hence the girl does not see a need for protection either from unwanted pregnancy or from sexually transmitted disease.

By falling headlong into each new relationship the girl is also demonstrating that she has low self worth and sees her only value in a sexual relationship. By approaching relationships in this way she is also setting herself up to inevitably make relationships with a poor prognosis for stability, little depth and constancy - nevertheless she becomes dependant on her men friends and looks to them for material support - a pattern which will ensure disappointment and recurrent let down. Work needs to be done to help her to become more self reliant and self confident, to build on her self worth and help her to see other sources of self value rather than merely sexual attraction and sexual conquest.

HONG KONG STANDARD

Reveal all in new survey
TUESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 1996

Schoolchildren are paying to have sex

By Enoch Wong

ONE in 200 secondary-school students have had sex with a prostitute, a study conducted by Chinese University has revealed.

The study of more than 4,000 secondary-school students was undertaken jointly by the Education Department and Dr Lam Man-ping of the university's Department of Educational Psychology.

from Forms One to Six from 60 schools.

It also contained 200 face-to-face interviews with students, who were asked about their sexual knowledge and experience.

Twenty, or 0.5 per cent of the 4,000 students, claim they had paid for sex with a prostitute.

Of the sample, students had had sex with their boyfriends or girlfriends.

Many youngsters with a partner before marriage put little value on virginity, a survey has found. The study, commissioned by the Education Department, found most youngsters were learning about the value of life from news-visions. Mr Lam regarded divorce and premarital sex as more than half approved of the concept of trial marriage. The study on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of secondary school pupils relating to sex was conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong by



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means of a questionnaire and a structured interview. Some 4,600 secondary school students aged between 12 and 20 were approached from April to July last year and quizzed on their attitudes towards sex. In general, the 1,957 boys and 2,130 girls asked did not believe virginity and chastity were closely tied to happiness in marriage. Secretary Elaine Kung Yee-lin said she had no plans to marry her boyfriend with whom she lives, even though she had believed in marriage when she was younger. "I don't feel like getting married yet. I enjoy the present situation in which both of us have a certain level of independence and freedom," said Miss Kung, 34.

Case 2

Client's Basic Information

The client was a boy of 17 who was studying form 4 at a secondary school. He was living with his father, mother and one younger brother who was mentally retarded.

Nature of the Problem The client had received counselling services from the school social worker for four years because of his problem related to dating girls. Since primary 6 the client has been dating different girls. He has dated 10 girls up to now and revealed that he has had sex with one or two girlfriends. He admitted that the 'ongoing' dating behaviour was due to his fear of loneliness. The client actually wished to maintain a stable relationship with one girl but he did not know how to do this. As a result, each relationship lasted only a short time. He described his relationships with girls as only out of habit and not out of love.

Recently, he had a 'one night stand' with his former girlfriend. However, he disclosed that his feelings were hurt after the relationship. He was further confused with love, sex and affection after this experience.

Service Rendered Through the interviews with the client, effort was made to discuss the differences between love, sex and affection. Workers also helped the client to share and ventilate such feelings as frustration, loneliness and guilt. The Client gradually understood more about his own needs. Emphasis was put on logical thinking about relationships with the opposite sex so that the client might become more rational when he encountered emotional disturbances.

Worker's Assessment

The Client's personality is rather emotional. Moreover, his emotion easily fluctuates by the disturbances created by the unstable love affairs.

However, the client has lost interest in study and other hobbies. He also can not obtain warmth and affection from his family members and peers. Therefore the client had the tendency to compensate for these frustrations by trying to maintain relationships with the opposite sex.

Discussion This boy is unable to distinguish friendship and warmth in a relationship - with a sexual relationship. In general he is shying away from and seems afraid of closeness and true 'intimacy' - which is in effect an emotional matter. He is limiting himself to physical relationships as a defence against emotional involvement.

This 'splitting' of emotional / physical was challenged when he briefly went back to his first girlfriend - and this could explain his being confused and uncomfortable in that situation.

It is likely that his difficulty with closeness and expression of emotion relates to his family of origin where possibly feelings

regarding his handicapped brother were suppressed and not shared within the family circle.

Case 3

prepared by Tsang Wai Hung

Client A was referred by his mother. As described by his mother, the client had behaved strangely in recent years. He often washed his hands for over an hour daily. He always thought that the things in his home were 'dirty' and thus he had to wear gloves when touching things. Recently, he even used toothpaste to clean his hands rather than using soap. His mother claimed that his washing behaviour had affected his daily functioning such as late for school, and so she was extremely worried about her son's behaviour.

Client A described that he had some sex related problem such as masturbation. He had once watched a third-class film in his home. So, his mother was worried that his washing behaviour was connected with his sex related problem.

Discussion - It is important to look at this boy's problems in perspective and not to over react to what might be a normal situation. Although this could be the beginning of an obsessional compulsive disorder it might not be and treating it as an 'illness' can compound this young man's problems as he will then see himself as 'not normal' - a hint of this is seen in the fact that it is the mother who has made the referral and not the boy. Is he worried himself? How did mother know? It would seem unusual for mother and son to discuss masturbation and maybe the mother is rather overdominant and 'suffocating' - certainly this could be explored further. Young people can become anxiety and guilt ridden when experimenting with masturbation and it is often difficult for boys to know 'how much is normal'. Anxiety leading to cleansing rituals and obsessive behaviour can be part of a transient teenage condition which would be expected to resolve with attention to accurate sex education information and reassurance of normality.

Case 4

Prepared by Ng Wai Ngan

Client A is growing up in a single parent family. He is now 14 years old and lives with his mother. In the past six months, he has said he has had frequent masturbation. He even wanted to masturbate during lessons. This disturbed his daily life. Besides, the targets of his masturbation were his mother and his aunt whom he liked. He did not think there was any problem. He said he was only masturbating and he did not do any action to abuse or threaten his mother.

Questions: 1. What is the reason behind his behaviour? 2. Do we need to stop his behaviour? 3. If he continues, would he really sexually abuse his mother?

Discussion - It is often difficult to gauge the degree of 'normality' in a given situation. Is this boy going through a normal process of development part of which involves masturbation - or is he in fact obsessed with masturbatory practices which are worrying him and interfering with his everyday life? He reports wanting to masturbate during lessons - but is not actually putting such fantasies into practice. Looking at the situation from a positive perspective - one could say that it might not be surprising that a boy raised in a female household living with mother might fantasise about her sexually. Perhaps this is a relatively innocent and transient masturbatory fantasy in a boy exploring his developing sexuality.

However this might also have a much more sinister interpretation - and this became more evident when a female worker interviewing the boy described feeling threatened and uncomfortable in his presence. One could be seeing a boy rebelling against the female dominated household without a positive male role figure - who is exerting his 'maleness' in a threatening and dominating manner by making his mother and aunt the focus of his masturbatory fantasies. It is likely that he could enter relationships with other women also from this attitude of control and dominance and hence might well become involved in violent or sadistic sex. He is likely to be abusive to other women who would then 'represent' his mother - but it is unlikely he would abuse his mother in reality.

