

# Investigating the role and challenges of Outreach Work in a busy Public Sex Environment.

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# Introduction

- Evaluation of PSE based outreach work
  - Street Outreach Service
  - Busy Brighton PSE - “The Bushes”
  - Operates from van at night and daytime
  - Sexual health advice, free condoms / lube, referrals, free coffee/tea etc.
  - Paid outreach workers and outreach volunteers
- Role and challenges of PSE based outreach work from the perspective Outreach Workers

# The Outreach Van



# Why Outreach men in PSEs?

- Frankis & Flowers (2001) survey of men who cruise “the Bushes”
  - 27% report serodiscordant / status unknown UAI in the last year
  - 7% report UAI in “the Bushes” in last year
- Of all Bushes users
  - 66% report use of SOS
  - 25% report SOS as their only usual source of condoms
- Regular vs. occasional SOS users *significantly* more likely to report
  - Increased sexual health needs
    - STI in the last year
    - diagnosed with mental health problems
    - received money for sex
    - not Hepatitis A vaccinated

# Sexual Cultures

- Sexual cultures are constellation of social norms, values and appropriate behaviours around sex.
- May be specific to certain groups, places, times
- Explore the sexual culture of “the Bushes”
- Sexual and risk behaviour can understood as shaped, constrained and patterned by the location in which it occurs
- Determine how this impacts upon outreach work therein

# Method

- In-depth semi-structured interviews with
  - Paid outreach workers (n=5)
  - Volunteer outreach workers (n=5)
  - Supplemented with
    - interviews with men who cruise “the Bushes” (n=16)
    - Field notes from observation during outreach sessions
- Interviews transcribed verbatim
- Analysed to identify recurrent themes

# Results:

## Sexual Culture of “the Bushes”

- General
  - Men cruise “the Bushes” primarily for ‘one-off’ sexual encounters
  - Anonymity, little or no verbal communication
  - Attainment of sex prioritised above sexual health
- Specific
  - micro sexual cultures - sexual possibilities of “the Bushes” understood to be spatially varied

# Paths

- Mainly cruising and sex later on at night



# The Temple

- Cruising and group sex



# Alcoves

- Intimate, one-on-one sex



# Patio

- Conversation and social interaction



# Challenges to traditional outreach work

- Little or no verbal communication - difficult to engage men in conversation
- Men go cruising primarily for sex not sexual health advice

# The Role of the Outreach Van

- Capitalises on
  - proximity to the ‘Patio’ (social communication allowed)
  - its location (in heart of PSE so most men cruising will walk past here several times when cruising)
- Creates a new, non-sexual and social locality in the PSE
- Here the pursuit of sexual encounters is largely suspended
- Social interaction and sexual health are prioritised
- Introduce ‘safer sex’ norms

# Challenges to engaging men in sexual health issues

- Social nature of Van can mean that often punters ‘chit-chat’ and don’t engage with sexual health
- Important to recognise the value of ‘chit-chat’ to punters
- Outreach workers use multiple strategies to ensure that discussions do centre around sexual health issues

# “Using props”

- Sex toys
- Articles in ‘Boyz’, ‘Pink Paper’, ‘Gay Times’ etc.
- ‘New’ health education posters

“Oh the classic one ... I use is Boyz magazine. There’s a doctor’s page in there, and there’s the, naked guy picture, in there as well, so if it’s a new guy on the van, and he’s picked up a copy of Boyz I’ll sort of look over his shoulder and sort of say ‘Oh what’s the guy, of the week like’ or something get him to turn the page, um, ‘Do you fancy him, what do you like about him, is he horrible is he nice? Is he your type? What’s your type, is your type down here tonight? Have you met your type already? How many of your type have you met down here? How many are you looking for?’ Brilliant. That’s a tool I use constantly, if they look at the picture and its bland, boring whatever they’ll turn the page and I’ll sort of say ‘Oh well I haven’t read it this week’ even though I’ve probably read it 10 times already with 10 different punters, I’ll sort of say ‘Oh what’s the doctors page like?’ and then we’ll get talking about, something about sexual health or smoking, or, just general men’s health and stuff like that so we’ll have a conversation about that” Outreach Worker

# “Topic of the evening”

- Decided upon by outreach volunteers

“I think that’s why we do it in the office before we leave ... we all get familiar with, roughly, the topic we’re gonna be talking about and how we’re gonna talk about it, it generally only takes a couple of minutes so we’re all familiar with what we’re talking about, so we’re, we’re all comfortable [with it] ... if we feel that there’s no conversation about sexual health then, one of the volunteers will look at one of the other workers or vice versa, and will know instantly that that’s the time to try” Outreach Worker

# “Subtle” approach and “In your face” approach

“Some of the outreach workers can do it to a T where, if the guy’s talking about something that happened on Eastenders, one of the outreach workers will say something about rimming that comes directly from Eastenders. I don't know how we do it but we, we manage to draw it out, um, so guys are really comfortable, we slowly bring bring in this like, you know is rimming safe? Can you get hepatitis A, and, it works”

“I’m quite up-front and will, bring a topic up instantly and be quite, in your face with something. [However, It] might not be appropriate say me suddenly come out with rimming or feltching, whereas one of the other my co-workers will just gradually build it in and sort of say ‘Actually’, you know ‘is feltching safe?’”

# Success of Outreach work

- Introduce elements of other safer sexual cultures within the PSE
  - have done this by creating new PSE locality on fringe of “The Bushes”
  - here, sexual health is prioritised
- Foster peer support networks and peer education
  - Stems from the group discussions on the van,
  - is actively encouraged by outreach workers
  - continues even when van isn't there due to social networks created or at least promoted by the van.

# Summary

- To understand PSE based outreach work, vital to engage with the local sexual culture within which it is embedded.
- Local sexual culture of “the Bushes” places sexual health largely off the agenda and hinders traditional ‘on foot’ outreach
- SOS van provides a novel locality within the PSE where conversation and sexual health are prioritised over the pursuit of sexual partners.
- Though the social nature of the van sometimes hinders a focus on sexual health topics, outreach workers employ a range of techniques to introduce these issues
- Outreach introduces elements of ‘safer sex’ cultures into “the Bushes”, whilst the social nature of the van has created a peer support network amongst the most needy of bushes users

# Service Provision Recommendations

- Outreach van crucial to success of SOS
- Would be transferable to other PSEs depending on local geography
- Understanding the how micro-sexual cultures are spatially located is crucial in determining
  - a) specific local challenges
  - b) which form of outreach is most appropriate
  - c) where outreach can occur