

Initial findings

DECEMBER 2012

Sexualisation, nuisance and safety

Sexual Entertainment Venues and managing risk

In the last decade, venues where the live display of nudity is regularly offered have opened across England and Wales. This ESRC-funded research collected evidence of the impacts of such venues on surrounding businesses and residents. Some of the key findings were:

- There are 241 licensed premises regularly offering lap dancing or striptease in England and Wales. Nearly half (43%) of those applying for a Sexual Entertainment Venue (SEV) license have received no formal objections.
- A survey of residents in towns and cities with lap dance clubs suggests that around one in five were not aware there was an SEV operating in their town or city. Fewer than one in ten identified an SEV as a particular source of local nuisance, and in some locations this was considerably lower.
- Women, those over 40, those who have lived in their current home for over 5 years and those with children are most likely to argue there are too many lap dance clubs in their town. Women, those with children and the over 40s are least likely to suggest that striptease is harmless entertainment and most likely to suggest it attracts criminal elements and promotes sexism.
- Around one in ten in our survey suggested there is no suitable location for lap dancing clubs. Very few believe clubs are suitable near schools, though the majority (55%) regard town and city centres as appropriate locations.
- Walk-along events were used to gauge the impact SEVs had on the night-time economy in four case study locations. These suggested that SEVs were not the most significant source of fear or anxiety for participants, with most instances of antisocial and rowdy behavior being associated with other venues, notably pubs.
- Women were more likely than men to pass comment on SEVs and express unease or anxiety about them. None argued that SEVs were a major source of antisocial behavior, or were able to cite any instances of harassment, noise or violence associated with such clubs: concerns appeared to coalesce around the normalization of male-oriented sexual entertainment and the encouragement of sexist attitudes among younger people. This suggests moral anxiety and disgust, rather than fear, may underpin many objections about SEVs.
- SEVs which were discrete in terms of their signage, naming and exterior appearance appeared to generate least comment or concern. Sexist imagery and names were objected to by many of our participants.

Background

The emergence of lap dance and striptease clubs since the late 1990s has prompted significant debate, with the opening of such clubs routinely opposed by local resident and business groups as well as those arguing such clubs represent a pernicious and damaging 'sexualisation' of society. One consequence was that the *Policing and Crime Act 2009* contained new adoptive powers allowing for the tighter regulation of such clubs, adding the category of Sexual Entertainment Venue to the list of sex establishments controlled by the *Local Government (Miscellaneous Powers) Act 1982*. Under the terms of this legislation, any premise where a live display of nudity is provided to a paying audience 'solely or principally for the purposes of sexual stimulation' on more than 'eleven occasions...within the period of 12 months' (Section 27, schedule 2A) needs to be licensed in the same manner as a sex shop or sex cinema. Moreover, a license may be refused simply if the local authority determines that '...the number of sex establishments, or of sex establishments of a particular kind, in the relevant locality at the time the application is determined is equal to or exceeds the number which the authority consider is appropriate for that locality' (Home Office, 2010: 10). Given the definition of a 'locality' is left to the local authority, the new powers give authorities a high degree of control over SEVs.

Around 30 of 327 licensing authorities in England appeared not to have adopted the new powers for regulating lap dance clubs as of 1 September 2012. These included some rural and largely remote local authorities with no tradition of sex establishments (e.g. Ashfield, Cotswolds, Craven, Rossendale, Richmondshire) but include some local authorities where lap dance clubs remain open (and licensed under the 2003 Licensing Act). These include Bolton, Bradford, Charnwood, Derby, Kirklees, Norwich, Southampton and Swindon. Some local authorities that have not adopted the powers previously had lap-dancing clubs but do not have any currently (e.g. Bury, Bridgend, Cannock).

In most cases where the new powers have been adopted, policies have been drawn up to guide SEV applications. Most state that each application will be considered on its merits, but stress there is a presumption against clubs in the vicinity of particular land-uses (e.g. shops, family housing, education facilities, transport hubs, historic districts and 'areas in transition'). Some local authorities have suggested there are no suitable locations for new SEVs: these include Enfield, St Albans, Haringey, Harrow, Richmond on Thames, Tower Hamlets, Havant, Havering, North Tyneside, the City of London, Wellingborough, Winchester, and Hackney.

There is no national database of the number of premises that applied to put on striptease before the introduction of the *Policing and Crime Act 2009*. It has been estimated that there were around 200 clubs in 2000, rising to 300-350 by 2007. Our analysis suggests there are now 241 premises offering striptease or similar entertainment on more than 11 occasions per year. Of these, 198 have an SEV license, 5 have made an application on which a decision is pending and 38 operate on a 2003 Licensing Act license. 43% of SEV applications have not been opposed, though in some cases local opposition has been considerable: around one in ten applications receives upwards of 30 objections.

As of 1 November 2012, 16 SEV applications had been refused: *Saints & Sinners* and *The Pad* (Bedford); *Lounge@30* (Bristol); *Angels*, *Baby Blue* and *Panache* (Leicester); *Dazzle* (Ealing); *Piano Bar* (Twickenham, Richmond); *Pandoras* (South Bucks); *Kiss* (Newquay); *Shades* (Warwick) (refused twice); *Thirst Lodge* (Oxford) (refused once, not renewed once) and *Tantric Blue & 87 Bank Street* (Maidstone). There is no statistical relationship between the level of public opposition and the likelihood of license refusal. It should be noted that the current economic downturn, and the costs of applying under the new licensing regime, is also having some impact on the overall number of clubs, with three clubs previously issued an SEV license closing in 2012.

Aims

To date, there has been no academic research on the impacts of lap dancing clubs on the communities in which they are located. The purpose of this research was therefore to explore how local authorities can best achieve the aims of licensing - i.e. maximizing public safety, minimizing public nuisance, and reducing crime and disorder - in relation to SEVs. More widely, the aim is to explore whether SEVs have a place in England and Wales. The specific aims were:

1. To examine local residents' perceptions of Sexual Entertainment Venues in four case study locations selected to be representative of different styles and settings of clubs.
2. To explore the ways that SEVs change peoples' experience of the night-time city, paying particular attention to questions of gender.
3. To contribute to emerging academic and popular understandings of the anxieties that surround adult entertainment as it becomes more visible in the night-time economy of British towns and cities.

Methods

An online survey was completed by 941 adult respondents recruited from four case study locations with different histories of sexual entertainment. 68% were female; 40% had children under 18 living in their household; 48% lived in a home that was owned or mortgaged. 87% described themselves as white British or white English and 61% claimed no religion. 46% were aged 25-39 but only 13 respondents (1.4%) were over 65.

From the survey, 46 respondents were recruited for evening walk-along events which were audio-taped and photographed. Respondents were asked to speak about their feelings about different parts of the town, with routes chosen to ensure some SEVs would be visible. Semantic rating scales were used to explore their feelings about different locations. The walk-along events were mixed gender, and included participants from a variety of age groups.

Results

Our survey found that 22% of respondents who lived in towns with one or more SEVs present were unaware of these premises. One in four of those who were aware of such premises had visited a lap dance venue: of the rest, most had become aware of a venue by seeing on the street rather than reading about it in the media.

One in five respondents identified a venue in their town that they thought caused particular nuisance: 65% of these were pubs or clubs, 20% take-aways or off-licenses and 15% SEVs. Pubs were most likely to be associated with noise, take-aways with littering and lap dance venues with crime and antisocial behaviour. This implies only around 3% of our respondents felt that an SEV was a source of particular nuisance. This can be contrasted with another UK survey (n=1875) where 57% of respondents felt clusters of sex premises would have detrimental effects on the vibrancy and vitality of their local high street (cf. 36% for fast food outlets and 19% for pubs/bars) (Local Government Association, 2012).

Overall, 83% of people think SEVs are unsuitable near Schools or Nurseries, 46% near Universities/Colleges, 65% near religious facilities, and 45% near shops. Only 3% think SEVs are suitable in residential areas, 10% in rural areas, and 15% in industrial areas, though the majority (55%) feel town centres are suitable. Around 1 in 10 claim there are no suitable locations for SEVs. This group is most likely to regard SEVs as promoting sexism, and least likely to regard it as harmless entertainment. This group is most likely to report avoiding walking past SEVs at night. However, this group does not have an over-representation of people with children in the household, even though this was the population most likely to report nuisance from SEVs.

The implication here is that SEVs are not regarded as a significant source of nuisance by the majority, but that a significant minority feel such clubs are inappropriate because they promote sexism, crime and encourage antisocial behavior. This group appears to harbor concerns that SEVs might encourage and normalize particularly negative attitudes

towards women. Perceptions of SEVs therefore appear to be strongly shaped by gender, though men living with children in their household, and those over 40, also appears significantly more likely to be opposed to lap dance venues. Religion and ethnicity made no significant difference to attitudes to SEVs.

Around one in three of our respondents claimed to feel reasonably or very unsafe walking in the city at night. This group was significantly more likely to say there were too many SEVs in their town than those who felt safe, and more likely than any other group to say they would avoid walking past a lap dance club at night. Women were significantly over-represented in this group, suggesting the presence of SEVs in the night-time city may have gendered effects. This was explored in our guided walks, which suggested women were more likely to note, and comment on, the presence of SEVs in their local towns than men. Here, unease about SEVs appeared more related to questions of class, morality and disgust than fear, with SEVs contribution to antisocial behavior and rowdy behavior deemed marginal, and in some cases insignificant, compared with other venues.

Notably, SEVs that had discrete signage, were well-kept and did not overtly sexualize the public realm appeared least likely to provoke unease among participants in our walk-along events, who were concerned about the impact of advertising on children.

Conclusions

Opposition to SEVs appears mainly based on perceptions that clubs normalize sexism and promote anti-social behavior rather than any direct experience of crime. Those who have children in their home appear significantly more likely to describe existing SEVs as a source of nuisance, while women are most likely to argue for fewer SEVs.

However, not all clubs are perceived to have similar impacts on their locality, and some communities seem more accepting of SEVs. Some clubs are judged to be better managed, and some locations as more suitable. This implies the need for considering each application on a case-by-case basis. Irrespective, current approaches based on excluding SEVs from residential areas or near schools appear to be widely supported. However, few regard SEVs as a major threat to children's safety, suggesting concern is primarily about the normalization of particular attitudes towards women among young(er) people.

The implications here is that licensing needs to take seriously its commitment to Gender Equity and Equality, and that objections based on grounds of sexism and morality might be considered when determining licensing applications given these might have implications for the appearance and naming of clubs (noting most people first become aware of lap dancing clubs in their city by seeing them on their streets).

How to get further information

Outputs and summaries of the research findings are available online at:
<https://researchoutcomes.rcuk.ac.uk/grants/ES.J002755.1/details>

Please contact P.Hubbard@kent.ac.uk for further details of the methods and findings.

