



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

the student sex work

PROJECT

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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The Student Sex Work Project

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'What are you going to order?'

'I might get a salad actually'

'Going for a salad in McDonalds is like going to a prostitute for a hug!'

“ And so I didn't have a salad. I had a burger. I should have had a salad really because she couldn't have been more wrong. I've been a prostitute for four years now. I've lost count of the amount of times men have turned up at my door not wanting sex. I've had men come because they want to ask questions about how they should be with their first girlfriends, I've had men come because they're lonely. Yes, some have even come because they want a hug. I would have agreed with that saying until I became a prostitute. And that's just it, once you become a prostitute nothing else matters really. It doesn't matter I'm a student. It doesn't matter that I volunteer every week. It doesn't matter that the entire reason I am a prostitute is so I can afford to study, so that in a couple of years time I will be qualified to help you when you need help. What I've come to realise is that when you're a prostitute; you're just that - a prostitute. People don't understand the amount of other skills being 'just a prostitute' requires. I've had men hysterically crying in my house over various problems in their lives, I've had a man talk to me about the shame of having one of his testicles removed because of cancer. I've had countless men tell me things which have ended with 'I've never told anyone that before'. Actually being a prostitute is far more than simply having sex with somebody. I'm not just a prostitute. My name is Holly. I'm a student. I like baking, volunteering, running and well all of those every day things that people with normal jobs like to do. ”

(Holly - A Project Member)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Student Sex Work Project is a three year project led by Swansea University in partnership with Terrence Higgins Trust, University of South Wales, National Union of Students Cymru and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. The project is funded by the Big Lottery Innovation Fund; we are very grateful to the Big Lottery for funding this project.

The project carried out extensive research and also provided e-health services and support for students who are engaged in the sex industry. Furthermore the project provided sexual health information to the broader student population. As such this innovative project has made an important contribution to advancing knowledge and understanding of student sex work in Wales and across the UK while providing vital support and information for students at the same time.

The service provision element of the project included online sexual health information, an online forum for student sex worker project members, net-reach support as well as one to one counselling for project members who are engaged in occupations in the sex industry. This would not have been possible without:

- The specialist knowledge of Terrence Higgins Trust in reaching out to young people on important sexual health matters;
- The assistance of our fantastic project volunteers who undertook intensive training to provide net-reach support with such careful consideration and empathy;
- The expertise of our project Sexologist Sam Geuens, who supported our project members by providing one to one counselling where appropriate or necessary.

We thank you for all your enthusiasm, dedication, care and hard work.

The project's research strategy would also not have been possible without the 6,773 students who took the time to complete our very long questionnaire and particularly those students who shared with us their opinions, views and experiences about their occupations within the sex industry. We thank you all.

We also thank our seven amazing peer researchers who took on a variety of research roles within the project - we thank each of them for their incredible insight, hard work and commitment to the project.

The success of The Student Sex Work Project has been the result of so many individuals who have dedicated their valuable time to the project. Throughout its lifetime we have been unbelievably lucky to have the support of over 60 volunteers who have helped us in so many ways, but perhaps most notably in marketing the project, designing the website, assisting with net-reach support (as already noted), and reaching out to students to promote the project at University Freshers Fayres across Wales. We thank each and every one of them.

We have also been blessed with the support of key individuals, agencies and service providers who have worked very closely with the project over the last three years. We are particularly grateful for the ongoing commitment and dedication to the project from those people who attended the project's yearly policy group meetings, who shared their experiences and who supported us in the development of guidance and training packages. Especially, we would like to offer our sincere thanks to John Cowley for his unwavering support in these endeavours.

We would also like to thank our external project evaluators Dr Teela Sanders and Rosie Campbell who have carried out an ongoing evaluation of the project sharing with us their knowledge and expertise along the way.

This report contains information that will be particularly valuable to Higher Education service providers, stakeholder organisations, front line professionals as well as policy makers.

THE STUDENT SEX WORK PROJECT TEAM

Peer Researchers. Participatory Action Research lay at the heart of this project. As founders of the project, Dr Tracey Sagar and Debbie Jones wanted to ensure that the voices of student sex workers were not simply represented in the project work but that student sex workers had the opportunity to become part of the project team to develop, steer and deliver the project. Seven students who were engaged in occupations in the sex industry were trained in research skills and took up positions as peer researchers with the project. Although individual peer researchers are not named here (the project is committed to participant anonymity) we acknowledge their extraordinary contribution to this project.

Dr Tracey Sagar, Associate Professor of Criminology, Centre for Criminal Justice and Criminology at Swansea University led the project's innovation and engagement strategy and provided strategic research direction and expertise as Principal Investigator.

Debbie Jones, Lecturer and Senior Researcher with the Centre for Criminal Justice and Criminology at Swansea University led the development of the project's innovative and creative methodological framework and managed all elements of the project.

Jo Bowring, Project Assistant with Terrence Higgins Trust, led student volunteering, provided sexual health information for the website, developed net-reach protocols and safeguards and took the lead with the project's communications strategy.

Dr Katrien Symons joined the project in July 2014. As the project's Research Assistant, Katrien analysed data and assisted in the distribution of the research results.

Dr Jacky Tyrrie was a Research Assistant for the project between August 2012 and August 2014. Whilst with the project Jacky took the lead with the distribution of the student survey and its initial analysis.

Dr Billie Lister and **Gemma Morgan** were seconded to the project from Terrence Higgins Trust as Project Assistants for several months. Their role involved coordinating student

volunteering and net-reach support. **Emma Brooks** was involved with the collection and initial analysis of the qualitative data and provided net-reach support. **Lorraine Galatowicz** provided valuable safety advice and support to project members.

Sam Geuens is a clinical sexologist who combines counselling work with lecturing at PXL University College in Belgium. Sam brought to the project his expertise in net-reach support, clinical counselling and the development of training and online training support mechanisms for stakeholder agencies.

Professor Chris Morris worked with the project research team and carried out interviews with student sex workers. Chris creatively transferred student testimonies to film and led the production of the 'Fog of Sex', a social documentary that sheds light on student experiences within the sex industry; the film also provides a valuable training tool for stakeholder agencies.

National Union of Students Cymru provided invaluable support in engaging students across Wales and the UK. We are particularly grateful to the Union for assisting the project with Welsh translation and we are very thankful to all representatives who worked closely with the project to ensure its success.

Professor Roger Tarling provided expertise and advice in relation to the quantitative elements of the project and **Dr Ron Roberts** contributed to the project's publication strategy.

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (Integrated Sexual Health clinic), **Stewart Attridge** and **Sandra Smith**, provided sexual health support and advice to the project.

Tackling stereotyping and stigma towards a process of social inclusion for student sex workers was a key challenge for The Student Sex Work Project.

At the project's last Freshers Fayres campaign across Wales in September/October 2014 the project team fed back to students some key findings from the research. 1687 students completed a short questionnaire:

86% indicated they were more aware of the stigma sex workers can face

90% indicated that they would be more likely to challenge stigma against sex workers

We hope that the findings of The Student Sex Work Project documented in this report will take forward this process even further.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Student Sex Work Project was carried out over a three year period (June 2012 - June 2015). The project brought together key partners and agencies/organisations to work with student sex workers to enhance understanding on student involvement in the sex industry and to develop e-health services for student sex workers, as well as guidance and training for Higher Education (HE) and external stakeholders where appropriate. Furthermore, in reaching student sex workers, the project also targeted the broader student population and provided sexual health information to this cohort. The Student Sex Work Project thus clearly entailed far more than the acquisition of new knowledge.

This report however focuses on the research element of the project only. It is anticipated that the project's experiences of service provision will be incorporated into future guidance and training packages.

The project had **two key research aims:**

1. To generate new knowledge on student sex work across Wales specifically and the remainder of the UK generally. Particularly, we were interested in the extent and characteristics of students' engagement in the sex industry as well as their motivations, experiences and needs;
2. To consider the need for policy, guidance and training to encourage the provision of appropriate assistance and support for student sex workers (through services such as student wellbeing and student support within HE in Wales).

Sex work is defined in terms of 'the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation' (Weitzer 2010:1) and thus refers to a wide range of possible activities. Throughout the report distinction is made between direct sex work (popularly understood as 'prostitution') and indirect sex work (sexual services that do not involve a direct and intimate contact with a client such as erotic dancing, webcam services, porn acting, glamour modelling). In addition organisational and auxiliary roles within the sex industry are also taken into account (such as escort manager or receptionist in a parlour) when measuring the overall extent of students' involvement in the sex industry as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a multi methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, and was underpinned by a peer-informed, Action Research methodology. A crucial element of the project involved the training of seven peer researchers (students that work or have worked in the sex industry) who assisted with the development of the website, the development of research instruments, data collection, data analysis and interpretation of data.

Another key element of the project was the opportunity for students who work in the sex industry to become a project member. Membership requests were made via the project's website. In total over 80 such membership requests were received; 22 students became project members. The project members had access to a Forum (where members could discuss any topic with each other), Net-reach (a chat service where project members could have conversations with a member of staff or project volunteer) and online one on one counselling with a sexologist. The information retrieved on the forum and net-reach conversations was also used for research purposes.

Overall ethical approval for the study was granted by the College of Law Research Ethics board at Swansea University.

Data collection to achieve research aim 1

- **The student sex survey** is a large cross-sectional online survey. Initially promotion of the survey focused on Wales but was then extended to the rest of the UK. In total 10,991 respondents accessed the survey of which 6,773 represented the final sample after data cleaning. The survey contained questions on issues such as students' attitudes towards the sex industry, students' consideration of taking up sex work and students' involvement in the sex industry.
- **Qualitative data collection with students engaged in the sex industry:**
 - Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were performed with student sex workers. Eight students (one male and seven female) participated in the interviews.
 - Information was retrieved from the online forum for project members. In total 10 project members posted either a question or issue for discussion or provided a response to a post. There were a total of 25 topics and 163 comments.

- Information was retrieved from the net-reach conversations. Ten project members made use of the net-reach tool (2 male and 8 female). The number of different net-reach conversations per member ranged from 1 to 45.

Data collection to achieve research aim 2

- Freedom of Information Requests were sent out to all Welsh universities. The purpose of the requests was to establish whether any HE institution had a specific policy in relation to students' participation in the sex industry. All responded.
- A case study was conducted in one Welsh university. This involved the distribution of a short online questionnaire among all staff. The questions focused on staff perceptions of sex work, experiences of sex work disclosure and responses or actions taken to disclosures. The number of responses totalled 133 of which 106 worked in roles where they had contact with students.
- Personal interviews with staff from university support services and Student Union representatives from across Wales. The interviews were semi-structured, focussing on perceptions of sex work, experiences of disclosure and responses to disclosure. In total 31 people were interviewed from a variety of support and Student Union roles and representation was achieved from all Welsh universities.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analysed using data analysis software package SPSS. Qualitative interviews were coded thematically using the qualitative analysis software NVIVO.

FINDINGS

Research aim 1: Students' involvement in the sex industry and their lived experiences

- Almost 5% of students have ever worked in the sex industry.
- One in five students have ever considered such engagement.
- Male students are more likely to have engaged in a commercial sexual activity as compared to female students.
- Students who engage in sex work do this on an irregular basis and the money that is made from it is likely to be low, mostly spent on daily living expenses.

- Those who perform direct sex work are doing the work on a more regular basis and generate a higher income as compared to those who perform indirect sex work.
- Student sex workers' motivations are centred on the need to generate money in a flexible way but a substantial group of student sex workers are also driven by more intrinsic reasons related to anticipated pleasure.
- About one in four student sex workers do not always feel safe while working, and this is more so for those involved in direct sex work.
- Student sex workers fear stigmatisation and the most important negative aspect of sex work is the need to keep involvement in sex work a secret.
- A substantial group of student sex workers have contacted support services (particularly student counselling) and a smaller group expressed the need for more support; especially online services.

Research aim 2: HE responses and staff perceptions

- Universities do not include student sex work specifically in their policies.
- Sex workers disclose their involvement in the sex industry to academic staff at HE institutions.
- Some staff are concerned about the reputation of the university and professionalism.
- Staff are unaware or unsure about available support.
- Staff are unaware or unsure about what aspects of sex work are legal and illegal, while their perceptions of illegality might impact on how they followed up a disclosure.
- The majority of staff want university policy or guidance available - preferably online - which includes mainly information about the law and services available.
- A significant minority of staff want training on the issue, while some would like training to be available if and when they need it.

DISCUSSION

- Sex work is not a gendered occupation and the presence of a male and transgender sex worker population needs to be acknowledged.
- Sex work is not one experience and student sex workers have varying motivations and experiences, as well as potential needs. Therefore students who work in the sex industry require an individualised approach that takes into account the personal experiences and needs of the student.

- Students engaged in the sex industry are accessing support services within HE institutions and therefore these services need to have an understanding of the issue and they need to be equipped to meet the needs of these students.
- Safety is a worry for some sex workers and HE institutions and support services need to be aware of how to deal with a potential situation of victimisation as well as encouraging student sex workers to report violence to the police.
- Students engaged in the sex industry face institutionalised stigma and prejudice which hinders their health and wellbeing as well as social inclusion. It is important therefore that HE institutions take a non-judgemental stance towards students who take up employment in the sex industry.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- HE institutions must recognise the presence of students who work in the sex industry.
- The stereotypes and misunderstandings about student sex work need to be challenged.
- HE institutions should take an explicit non-exclusionary stance towards students who work in the sex industry and matters of reputation should not be given preference over the protection and wellbeing of students who work in the industry.
- Student Unions should work with HE institutions to protect all students from stigmatisation and discrimination, including those who work in the sex industry.
- Continued efforts are needed to locate and help students who suffer financial hardship.
- HE staff need to feel confident in dealing with student sex work which requires guidance and training. Also HE policy could be helpful in this regard.
- At university level, a coordinated approach towards student sex work is recommended.
- More efforts need to be undertaken to reach student sex workers through online channels and to offer student sex workers the tools to communicate with each other.

1 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 DEFINITION OF TERMS

It is not straightforward to define the 'sex industry' or indeed which occupations fall within the term 'sex work'. Our project adopted a broad description of sex work as advocated by Weitzer (2010: 1) in terms of 'the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation'. This way, the term 'sex work' is used as an umbrella term for a wide range of behaviours that imply varying levels of intimacy. Furthermore, the sex industry as a whole not only includes sex workers but also those who hold organisational and auxiliary roles within the industry. Three broad categories of activities are distinguished:

- **Direct sex work**, referring to what is commonly understood as 'prostitution' in terms of selling sexual services that involve direct and intimate contact with a client (prostitution; escorting; selling sexual services independently; selling sexual services in a brothel, massage parlour or sauna; a professional dominant or submissive);
- **Indirect sex work**, referring to sexual services that do not involve direct contact with a client (acting in the porn industry; selling sex on chat phone lines; selling sexual services on the internet or webcam; erotic dancing; stripping; glamour modelling; naked butler);
- **Organisational and auxiliary roles**, referring to activities that organise commercial sexual activities or that provide some sort of support to such activities (escort agency manager; pimp; madam or manager in a brothel, sauna or massage parlour; driver for sex workers; receptionist in a brothel, sauna or massage parlour).

1.2 IMPETUS FOR THE PROJECT

"A few of my friends know what I do; there are only a handful that know. I think they are very accepting, they know I am a free spirit and I'll do what I want. I don't care so much about what other people think but I think it's quite taboo as in say like they have a stereotype of what a working girl is, they expect a drug problem or some really messed up issues. I feel society, I don't know, I don't think it is as bad as it used to be, but there are still some people that straight away, you

can see the look has changed in them, they think you are scum of the earth."

(Lila - A project member who works as an escort)

The following observations were fundamental to the inception of this project:

A dearth of research in relation to students who are engaged in the sex industry. The idea that students engage in the sex industry whilst studying at university had not been fully explored globally, within the UK, or at any level within Wales. However, some small scale research had been carried out in England suggesting that one in ten students could be engaged in some form of sex work, and that over 20% of students might be prepared to engage in sex work to pay for their studies (Roberts et al. 2007).

Also research carried out by Sanders and Hardy (2013) confirmed that links existed between lap dancing and student sex work, with approximately one third of their sample of erotic dancers identifying as students. Furthermore, Sagar et al.'s (2011) research with indoor sex workers drew attention to the existence of a student sex worker population in Cardiff with 20% of 30 participants identifying as students and data collated from escort managers suggesting that up to 80% of employees were students.

A lack of information regarding the motivations and needs of students who are working in the sex industry. While (small-scale) research pointed to students working in the sex industry there was very little information regarding their motivations, experiences and needs (emotional, physical, sexual, and financial).

Particularly in this context the propensity for students in debt to undertake sex work was an issue gaining momentum in the UK. Mandatory university grants were abolished in the UK in the 1990s leaving many students with little option but to take out long-term loans to meet their financial needs. This in turn led to an increase in student debt as well as a growing concern that poverty could be a key factor in students entering sex work. Financial stress was already known to impact negatively on students causing psychological distress, adversely impacting on health and impaired examination performance (Roberts and Zelenyanszki 2002; Andrews and Wilding 2004; National Union of Students 2004). However, little evidence existed

as to the emotional support for example that student sex workers might need.

Sex workers' reluctance to disclose their occupations to services due to fears of stigmatisation and prejudice from professionals. Research over many years has highlighted the reluctance of sex workers to disclose their occupations to a whole variety of services and professionals; fears of stigma and judgement can mean that sex workers do not access any services at all (see, Sagar et al. 2011). This is also particularly problematic given that sex work is overwhelmingly kept a secret from family and friends rendering sex workers socially isolated with a lack of support networks.

A lack of specialist sex work services. In Wales there are less than a handful of services that are either specialist or which provide any kind of service to assist sex workers. Furthermore, this assistance is focused predominantly on street based workers while street based sex work only makes up approximately 10% of the overall sex work market. Research carried out by Sagar and Jones in partnership with Gibran UK revealed that the majority of sex work in Wales is in fact facilitated through the internet, yet there were no services making use of technology to reach this significant cohort (Sagar et al. 2014).

A lack of policy acknowledgement in Wales within HE that students in Wales may be involved in the sex industry. As an invisible population, it was considered highly likely that student sex workers could be falling through service provision gaps in Wales - particularly we were concerned that student support services within HE institutions in Wales may not be tailored to meet the needs of student sex workers. Indeed research by Cusick et al. (2009) into UK HE policies provided some indication as to the extent of this problem. They found an overall lack of policy on student involvement with commercial sex and an inclination for HE institutions to understand student sex work in terms of 'misconduct' and 'bringing the institution into disrepute'. Cusick et al. strongly argued that sex workers needed to be supported and protected under HE anti-discrimination, harassment and bullying policies and not subjected to punitive institutional policies.

Sex worker voices missing from policy in the UK. Governments are often criticised for failing to include the views and opinions of sex workers (or 'prostitutes' as referred to by consecutive governments) in policy

development in England and Wales (see for example, O'Neill 2007). The project believed that the voices of sex workers are pivotal to establishing more effective services.

1.3 AIMS OF THE PROJECT

In response to the issues outlined above, it was clear that there was not only a need for more knowledge on student sex work, but that concrete actions needed to be undertaken to reach this hidden and stigmatised population, to improve their wellbeing and social inclusion, and to actively involve students who work in the sex industry. While this report focuses on the research part of the project only, this section briefly sets out the aims of the project as a whole, including:

- Carry out research on students' attitudes towards the sex industry, the scale and characteristics of students' engagement in the sex industry, and student sex workers' motivations, experiences and needs;
- Carry out research on the approach of HE institutions in Wales to student sex work and the levels of available support provided by HE institutions in order to ascertain the need (if any) for developing policies, guidance and training;
- Develop a non-judgemental, anonymous and inclusive e-health service for students who work in the sex industry that would provide vital information, guidance and support;
- Increase awareness on the issue of student sex work among students, HE institutions and society as a whole in order to reduce stigmatisation of student sex workers.

1.3.1 Service provision and raising awareness

First, while the focus of the project went to students who work in the sex industry, the project also provided services to the general student population. An **e-health website** was set up (thestudentsexworkproject.co.uk) which provides information on sexual health matters in general and on the sex industry in particular. The website also contains links to sexual health service providers, regular blog posts on topics related to the sex industry, and relevant news items. In order to make the project (and website) known to students, intensive communication campaigns were implemented across Wales which involved annual face-to-face contact with students at Freshers Fayres together with the distribution of information leaflets providing signposting to the project website and a sustained social media campaign

through Facebook and Twitter. Note that also with regard to the accomplishment of the research aims of the project, **all** students were targeted and invited to take part to an online survey (over 10,000 began the survey). Also, the website's 60,000 unique visitors and over 120,000 page views stand as testimony to the success of the project's innovative communication and engagement strategies.

Second, for students who work in the sex industry, **several online service provision tools** were set up in order to reach out to this isolated group, to improve their access to sexual health services, and to offer specialised advice and information on physical and mental wellbeing. Therefore the student first had to become a project member and membership requests could be made via the project's website. In total over 80 such membership requests were received and eventually 22 students became a project member. The project required that members provide their student identification number. This was considered essential to protect the integrity and confidentiality of the site. However, it is highly likely that this requirement did prevent student sex workers joining the project (given the fears of being 'outed'). Project members had access to three online tools:

- A forum which was only open to project members and staff and where members could discuss any topic they wanted;
- Net-reach: a chat service which could be accessed through the project's website and where project members could discuss any topic they liked with a member of staff or project volunteer;
- Online one to one counselling with a certified sexologist.

Third, in order to improve awareness on the issue of student sex work, a **film** was produced in the format of a social documentary, which was based on personal interviews with students who work in the sex industry. Video diaries were also recorded by some of these students. It is anticipated that both the film and video diaries will raise awareness of the complexities of student sex work.

Finally, based on the research results, **training packages** are being developed that will be directed at HE institutional staff and other stakeholder organisations.

1.3.2 Research aims

The project had two key research aims. The first research aim was to generate new knowledge on student sex work across Wales specifically and the rest of the UK generally. Particularly, we were interested in the extent and characteristics of student engagement in the sex industry as well as the motivations, experiences and needs of student sex workers. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How many students are engaged in various occupations in the sex industry?
2. How many students have considered taking up occupations in the sex industry?
3. With what regularity are students engaged in the sex industry?
4. What are students' attitudes towards the sex industry?
5. What are students' motivations for working in the sex industry?
6. What are the negative aspects of working in the sex industry and are there safety issues?
7. What are the positive aspects of working in the sex industry?
8. Do students who work in the sex industry express a need for support?

The second research aim was to consider the need for policy, guidance and training to encourage the provision of appropriate assistance and support for student sex workers (through services such as student wellbeing and student support within HE in Wales). To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do HE institutions in Wales respond to student sex work?
2. What is HE staff's understanding of the law and regulation with regard to the sex industry?
3. What are HE staff's experiences with students' disclosure of working in the sex industry?
4. Are HE staff aware of the needs of students who work in the sex industry and how do they or would they respond to disclosure?
5. How do HE staff perceive the need for policy, guidance and training regarding the issue of student sex work?

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report is organised into the following sections:

Section 2. Methodology: This section provides an outline of the methodological framework of the project and a description of the data that were used to achieve the research aims.

Section 3. Findings on research aim 1: This section reports on the scope and characteristics of students' involvement in the sex industry and provides ***the most significant empirical description of student sex work on a national level in the UK to date.***

Section 4. Findings on research aim 2: This section reports on the policies in HE institutions in Wales with regard to student sex work as well as the knowledge and experiences of university staff. The data ***provide the first***

empirical evidence of the need to raise awareness about student sex work within HE in Wales as well as the need to take guidance and training forward.

Section 5. Discussion: This section provides further discussion on the most pertinent issues arising out of the project and particularly focuses on the necessity to tackle sex worker stereotyping, stigma and safety.

Section 6. Key recommendations: Drawing on conclusions from the Student Sex Work Project, this section documents substantive recommendations for Wales and the UK.

2 | METHODOLOGY

The Student Sex Work Project was not a pure research project as it also aimed to achieve positive change in terms of increased social inclusion of students involved in the sex industry and an improved access to sexual health and other services for this group. In response to the issues outlined in the former section, a framework was set up whereby the acquisition of new knowledge (through research) was combined with service provision. As such, TSSWP is an example of **Action Research** which is, as phrased by O'Neill (2001:47) as 'A combination of experience and commitment. Certainly, a combination of experience and commitment allows us to see and shape the relationship between knowledge and social change.'

A characteristic for Action Research is the utmost inclusion of the voices of the 'study participants' themselves, in this case the student sex worker. Previous Action Research with sex work communities have utilised the skills, experience and interpretations of peer researchers to provide the insiders' view of phenomena that can be misrepresented by 'outsider' researchers (van der Meulen 2011). Throughout the lifetime of the project we worked with **seven peer researchers** who worked as part of the project team and who were involved not only in setting research questions and collating research but also in a wide range of activities including: the design and updating of the project website; support at events such as Freshers Fayres; reviews of scripts and final edit of the project film; the development of training packages; and providing support to other project members through net-reach. Below is a post from a project member who shared her excitement of becoming a peer researcher on the forum for members only:

“ Hey guys, so after being part of the project for a while, I have decided to become a peer researcher. I've never done anything like this before but I'm really excited to be involved. I think it's a good opportunity. I'm hoping to gain a few things from it. I've never helped out in anything like this before and I hope my contributions will be helpful. Not only that but I'll finally have something for my CV! I'm also looking forward to working as part of a team because there isn't much teamwork in sex work for me. It'll be a change. **”**

2.1 DATA USED TO ACHIEVE RESEARCH AIM 1

2.1.1 The Student Sex Survey

An online survey was designed that included the following issues:

- The attitudes and opinions of all students in relation to student engagement in the sex industry;
- The number of students who had taken part in or considered taking up occupations in the sex industry;
- The motivations of those that had taken part or considered taking part;
- The experiences and identified needs of those who had taken part;
- Information on financial and employment circumstances that included sex work where appropriate;
- Information on where students turn to for support and advice;
- Demographic details.

The survey was administered and hosted by Survey Monkey and piloted before distribution. A cross-sectional design was employed and participation in the survey was on a voluntary basis (thus respondents were not sampled). Initially promotion of the survey focused on Wales but was then extended to the rest of the UK. The survey was incentivised. Participants were offered the opportunity to enter a randomly selected prize draw which consisted of Supermarket vouchers and condoms. The following recruitment methods were utilised:

- An email to 6,000 students on the National Union of Students Extra database in Wales;
- Three strategic campaigns in Welsh universities which included promotion of the survey at Fresher's Fayres in 2012 and 2013;
- An online social media (Facebook and Twitter) promotion campaign;
- An online survey link emailed to students through Student Unions at Welsh universities;
- Promotion to UK students via the commercial student engagement company Student Beans.

Data collection took place from November 2012 to November 2013. In all 10,991 respondents started the survey of which 4,218 were either invalid or dropped out early, resulting in a final dataset of 6,773 respondents. The age ranged from 16 to 66 (mean age was 21.51); 32.4% was male, 66.4% female, 0.4% categorised themselves as transgender and 0.7% did not specify their gender. As shown in Figure 1, respondents came from HE institutions

in England (47.7%), Wales (48.0%), Scotland (3.6%) and Northern Ireland (0.6%). Most respondents had UK nationality (19.3% Welsh, 2.8% Scottish, 1.6% Northern Irish and 65.2% English) but also other EU students (5.9%) and non-EU students (5.1%) were represented. Most respondents (89.1%) were studying on an undergraduate program, 10.8% studied on a postgraduate course and 0.1% did a combination of both.

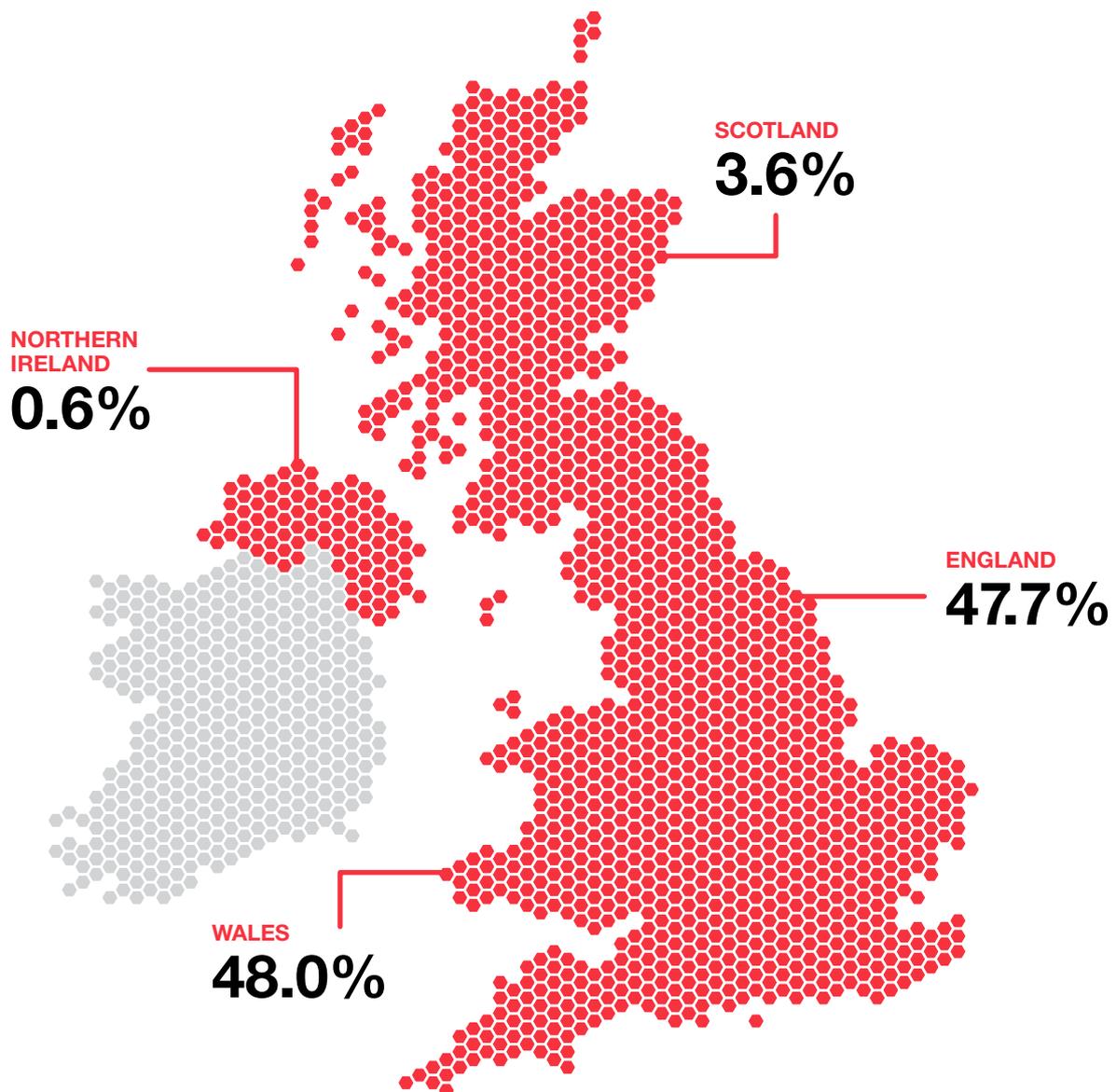


Figure 1. Survey participation across the UK

2.1.2 Qualitative data collection with students engaged in the sex industry

The purpose of the qualitative data collection with students engaged in the sex industry was to provide a more in-depth understanding of the diversity in the experiences of students working in the sex industry. This phase of the project sought to understand routes into the sex industry, the conditions of the work, the impact of the work on the student's social life, intimate relationships, health and safety. The qualitative data stemmed from three sources:

- **Personal interviews with student sex workers:** Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with students who identified as working in the sex industry. Some of the interviews also formed the basis for the script that was developed for the film. Eight students participated, of which seven were female and one was male.
- **Information retrieved from the online forum:** The forum on the project's website was only open to project staff and project members. Project members were able to post topics of 'discussion' and other members or staff then responded. In total 10 members of the project posted either a question/issue for discussion or provided a response to a post. There were a total of 25 topics and 163 comments. The most popular topics (with the most comments) were getting tested for STD's/HIV, working conditions (with a focus on the conditions in brothels), the dangers involved in doing 'outcalls' and 'incalls', sex work and the law, body image (and what clients want), the impact of doing sex work on wellbeing, and how to stay anonymous and safe.
- **Information retrieved from the net-reach conversations** (chat conversations between project members and staff/volunteers via the net-reach facility): In total, ten project members (eight female and two male) accessed net-reach. The number of different net-reach conversations per member ranged from 1 to 45.

2.2 DATA USED TO ACHIEVE RESEARCH AIM 2

2.2.1 Freedom of Information Requests

We wanted to know if any university in Wales had a specific policy in relation to student participation in the sex industry. The most efficient and effective way of finding out this information was through applications to all HE institutions across Wales under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (2000). Responses were received from all HE institutions in Wales. The request asked the institutions to provide information on the following areas:

- The existence of policies at the HE institution in relation to supporting students involved in the sex industry;
- The processes carried out by a member of staff if a student was to disclose working in the sex industry;
- The procedures undertaken if a student was to be discovered working in the sex industry.

2.2.2 A university case study

A short survey, administered by 'Survey Monkey', was sent out to staff at one HE institution in Wales. All University staff were invited to take part in the survey via an all staff email which outlined the aims of the case study. Participation was via a self-selecting sampling framework. Overall, there were 138 responses from staff. Following the cleaning of the data the total number of responses was 133. Of the 133 respondents, 106 worked in roles where they had contact with students (79.7%). The case study sought to:

- Ascertain perceptions of sex work, in particular with regards to the law;
- Ascertain if, and in what context, students have disclosed their sex industry occupations to university staff;
- Determine, where a disclosure has been made, how staff responded to the disclosure and what action(s), if any, were taken;
- Draw upon empirical evidence to develop clear guidance and referral processes to support services as and when required.

2.2.3 Personal interviews with university staff

Semi-structured interviews took place with university staff from across Wales (only including staff employed at student support services and elected Student Union officers). The questions that were utilised evolved from workshops with professionals at the outset of the project in September 2012. The questions were also reviewed and amended in light of suggestions from peer researchers. The interviews retrieved information on:

- Perceptions of sex work, in particular with regards to the law;
- If and in what context students have disclosed their sex industry occupations;
- Where a disclosure has been made, what action(s), if any, were taken;
- The perceived needs of students who work in the sex industry;
- What university staff would need in order to respond to a (potential) disclosure.

Participants were identified via targeted sampling through searching of university websites and contact with Student Unions. Respondents were recruited from all Welsh universities, as shown in the table 1.

Participants held varying occupations within the universities: Counsellor (3), Financial Advisor (1), Head of Counselling Services (1), Head of Student Support (4), Nurse (3), Senior Counsellor (1), Support Service Staff (1), Elected Student Union officers (17).

Table 1. Number of respondents interviewed per University	
Aberystwyth	1
Bangor University	3
Cardiff Metropolitan University	3
Cardiff University	5
Glyndwr	1
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama	2
South Wales University - Glamorgan	2
South Wales University - Newport	2
Swansea Metropolitan	2
Swansea University	4
University of Wales Trinity St. David - Carmarthen	2
University of Wales Trinity St. David - Lampeter	4
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	31

2.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analysed using data analysis software package SPSS. Qualitative data were coded thematically using qualitative analysis software NVIVO.

2.4 ETHICAL APPROVAL

Overall ethical approval for the study was granted by the College of Law Research Ethics board at Swansea University. Permission to conduct the study with staff and service users from Cardiff and Vale University Health Board was granted by the South West Wales Research and Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was also sought from the University of South Wales in relation to the development of the website, an element of the project that they had overall responsibility for.

The ethical dilemmas involved in researching sex work and the personal ethical obligations of those carrying out the research were made clear during training delivered by Swansea University to peer researchers and field workers/volunteers employed on the project.

2.5 CONSENT AND ANONYMITY

Informed consent was obtained from all research participants. During the large-scale 'Student Sex Survey' this was a box that had to be ticked before completion of the survey began. In terms of the personal interviews with university staff, agreement was obtained through written consent prior to the interview. During the face-to-face interviews with student sex workers consent was obtained orally and recorded digitally.

As for net-reach conversations and forum posts, participants in these circumstances were also members of the project. As conditions of membership through the project website participants were informed of their rights to take part and withdraw at any time and had to tick a box to show they fully understood that this was a research study. During net-reach conversations this was reinforced by the researcher when appropriate.

For reasons of anonymity, all information that might reveal any identity (real names as well as sex worker persona names, university courses, or locations) was anonymised.

3 | FINDINGS ON RESEARCH AIM 1: STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SEX INDUSTRY AND THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES

3.1 STUDENTS' ACTUAL AND CONSIDERED INVOLVEMENT IN THE SEX INDUSTRY

The study found that 4.8% of the respondents had ever been involved in the sex industry in some capacity (thus covering all the types of activities including direct sex work, indirect sex work and organisational/auxiliary roles). This figure was higher for male than female respondents, with 5.0% of the male respondents reporting involvement against 3.4% of the female respondents. Activities referring to indirect sex work were the most common whereas organisational and auxiliary roles were rare.

About one in five respondents (21.9%) indicated that they had ever considered working in the sex industry. This figure was slightly lower for male than female respondents (18.5% for male against 23.6% for female respondents). Again, activities referring to indirect sex work were the most 'popular'.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the level of actual and considered involvement in the sex industry and this is distinguished between male and female respondents. Those respondents that are transgender or who did not indicate their gender were left out because their numbers were too low to meaningfully interpret. Note that some respondents were involved in different types of sex work, and therefore the percentages in the figure exceed the overall percentages of actual and considered engagement which are described above.

Taken together, the sex industry is present in the lives of students; some will engage in activities that are part of the sex industry while others will only consider doing so. Figure 4 visualizes the estimated number of students that are working or have worked in the sex industry in some capacity and the estimated number of students that have considered taking up any activity in the sex industry and this is for each group of hundred students.

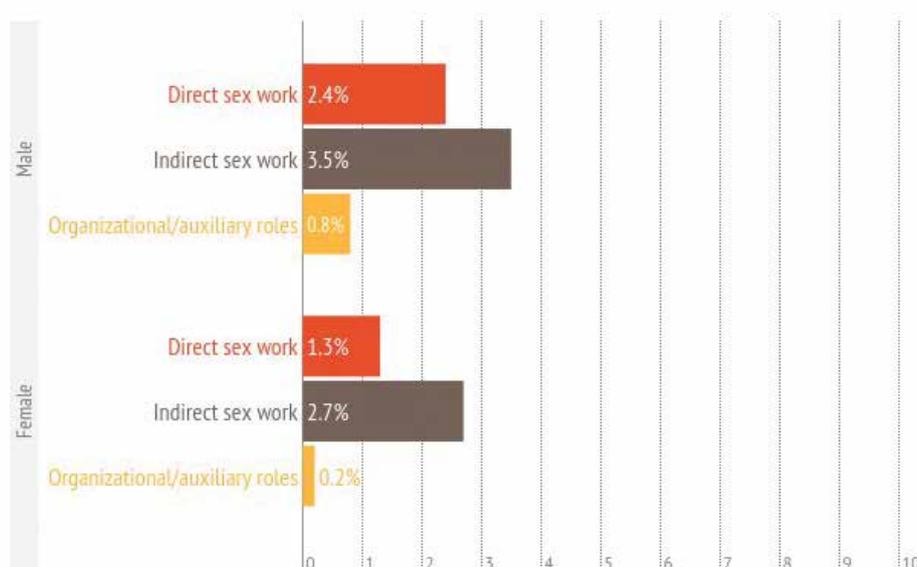


Figure 2. Involvement in the sex industry according to type of activity

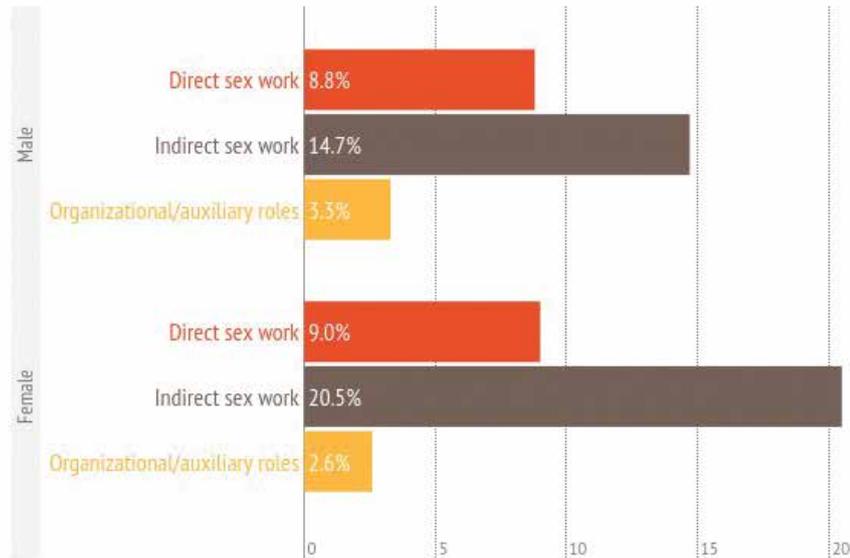


Figure 3. Consideration of involvement in according to type of activity

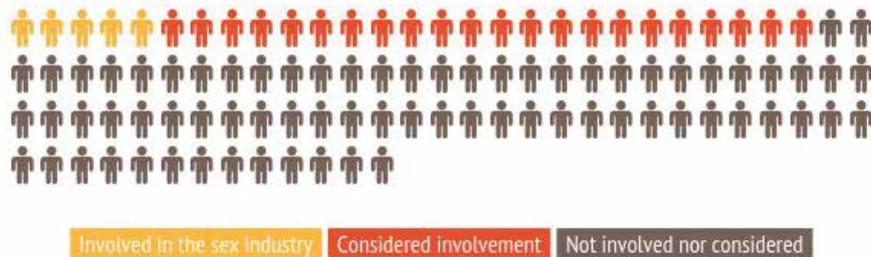


Figure 4. Estimated actual and considered involvement in the sex industry per 100 students

3.2 REGULARITY OF INVOLVEMENT AND DIFFICULTIES IN EXITING THE SEX INDUSTRY

Respondents who had worked in the sex industry (only considering those involved in direct and indirect sex work) generally did this on an irregular basis and involvement tended to be short-term with low monthly incomes generated from it. Three quarters of the respondents (76.6%) who indicated that they had ever worked in the sex industry were no longer doing so at the moment of completing the

survey. This means that the actual number of students involved in the sex industry at one given moment will be lower than the estimated number of 4.8% because this figure refers to lifetime involvement.

The total duration of involvement was rather short with about half of the respondents (54.0 %) being involved for less than six months. Also about half of the respondents (54.1%) who worked in the industry (current as well as previous involvement) did this for less than five hours per week.

The money that was generated through working in the sex industry varied greatly. Half of the respondents (51.3%) made less than £300 per month and a minority of 13.4% earned more than £1000. Those involved in direct sex work were more likely to do the work for longer, for more hours per week and to make substantially more money from it when compared to those involved in indirect sex work.

The respondents who no longer worked in the sex industry were asked whether they found it easy or difficult to leave the industry. Figure 5 shows to what extent respondents felt that it was easy or hard to step out. Leaving the sex industry was generally felt to be easy but this was less for those engaged in direct sex work as compared to indirect sex work.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

The personal interviews with student sex workers provide more in-depth information about the difficulties that may occur when leaving the sex industry. Even where stepping into the industry was initially a choice, some respondents noted that it did not feel as such anymore after some time or they felt like it had become addictive. The reasons for this were multiple. For example, 'being a sex worker' might

become such an important part of their life that it becomes difficult to imagine otherwise. Working in the sex industry might also close certain doors and limit future opportunities. Respondents explained:

- R7-Female student and independent sex worker (prostitution): *This work is quite addictive. I don't like it but some perks make it a bit hard to stop.*

[TSSWP: What do you find addictive about the work?] *As sleezy as it is, I like it when guys come in and leave happy. I feel like I've actually helped them in a way. Plus the work isn't always doom and gloom. I like it sometimes. And it's money for having no skill whatsoever.*

- **[TSSWP: So do you feel you can stop if you wanted to?]** *A project member on net-reach who provides webcam services and escorting: I don't, not sure why. It's very trapping.*

[TSSWP: Do you think you can explain why it feels like it traps you?] *Well society doesn't accept me and so I feel very segregated. I have a very large gap in employment history if I was to get a normal job. I do feel comfort with the other girls.*

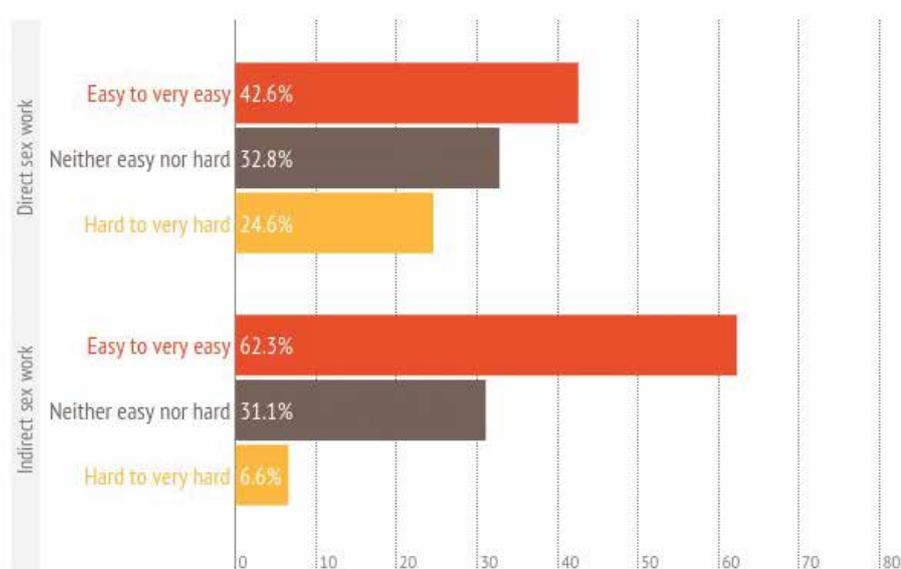


Figure 5. Experienced easiness of leaving the sex industry according to type of activity the respondent was involved in

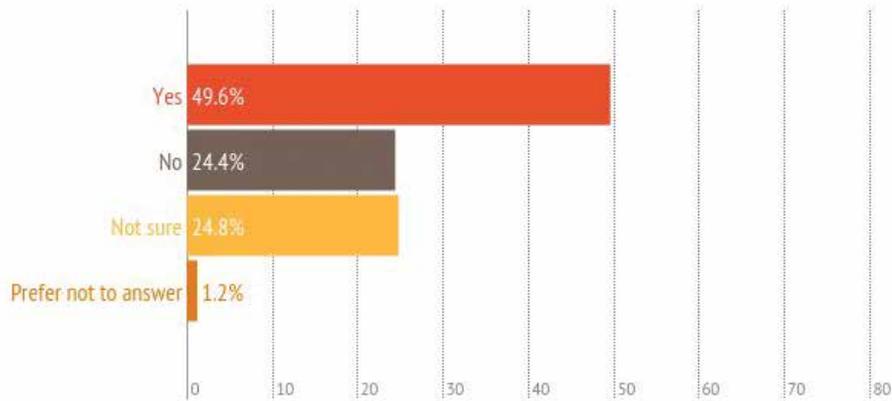


Figure 6. **Should people be allowed to buy and sell sex?**

3.3 STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SEX INDUSTRY

Understanding the ways in which students look at the sex industry is important in order to understand the social context in which student sex workers operate. The survey included questions that measured the extent in which students believe that the sex industry is an acceptable part of society. Figure 6 shows that about half of the respondents (49.6%) believed that 'consenting adults should be allowed to buy and sell sex'. One quarter did not agree with this statement and another quarter was not sure.

Overall, male respondents were more accepting as compared to female respondents, with 59.1% of the male respondents indicating that consenting adults should be allowed to buy and sell sex against 45.0% of the female respondents.

The believed acceptability of commercial sexual activities depended on the specific type of activity it involved. Figure 7 shows more in detail per activity how many respondents agreed that it is an acceptable way of making money (questioned in terms of 'Should people be allowed to earn a living from [activity presented]'). It shows that indirect sex work (thus selling sexual services that do not involve a direct intimate contact with a client) was accepted by the vast majority of the respondents but selling direct sexual services ('prostitution') was less accepted. Also organisational roles were not commonly accepted as a way of making money.

Reflections from the personal interviews

The results presented above suggest that student sex workers find themselves in a rather hostile environment

in which they might not find support among their fellow students. Especially those students who engage in direct sex work are at risk of social disapproval. The personal interviews with student sex workers confirmed that prejudice and stigma are important parts of their lives. But, rather than accepting the negative societal attitudes towards the sex industry they felt that people are uninformed and prejudiced. For some, the fear for stigmatisation led to a need for secrecy, as they feared that exposure would jeopardise their daily relationships with other people. Other respondents accepted the fact that not everybody approves or supports their decision to work in the sex industry. Some examples from the interviews illustrate this:

- R7-Female student and independent sex worker (prostitution): *When I come to university now or when I go out with my friends they see me as this really cool person who does all this cool stuff. If I told them that I worked in sex work not one of them would talk to me at all, because, oh my gosh no way.*
- R2-Male student who acted in a porn movie: *My friends had mixed views, most of them were positive. Like it's another crazy thing you're doing. It's pretty fun, some people are like "it's all porn so it's disgusting", but a lot of people just have a prejudice against the sex industry.*
- R8-Female student who works as a porn actress: *I can understand how people think it's degrading (...) I do understand that people would look down on me for what I do. (...) But at the end of the day it's just a means to an end, it's just exploiting what I've got and make money like that.*

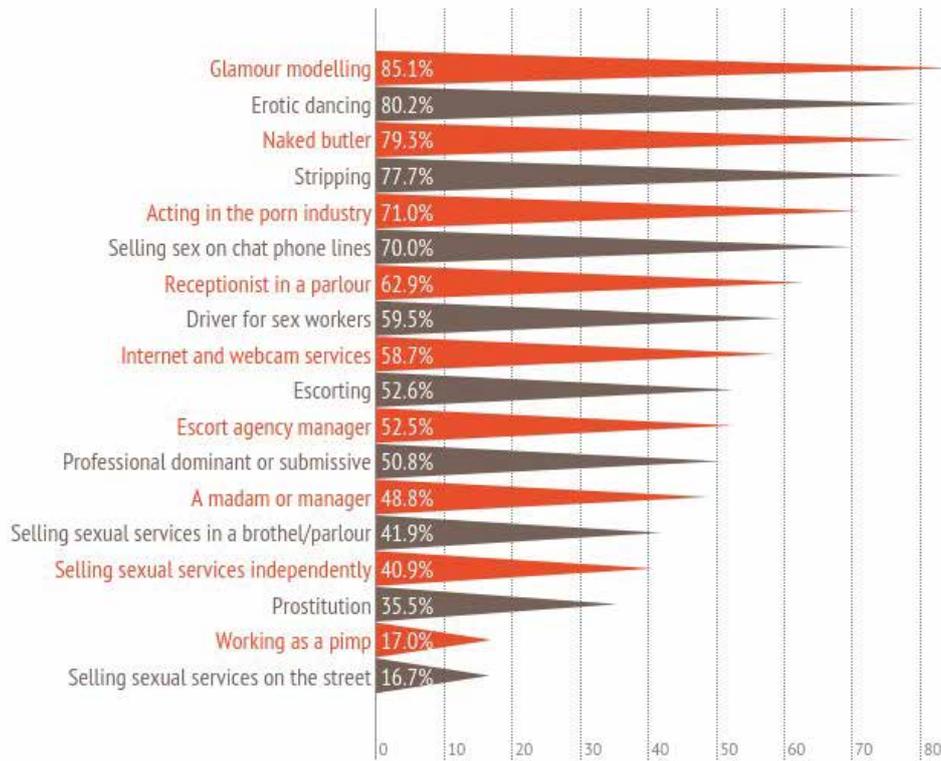


Figure 7. Perceived acceptability of different types of activities related to the sex industry

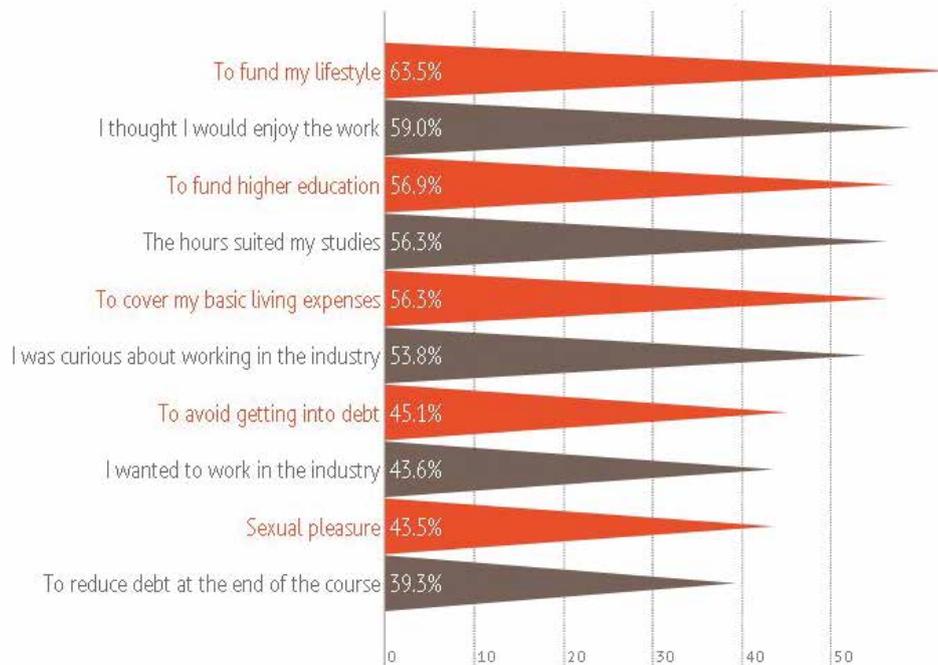


Figure 8. Ten most important reasons for working in the sex industry

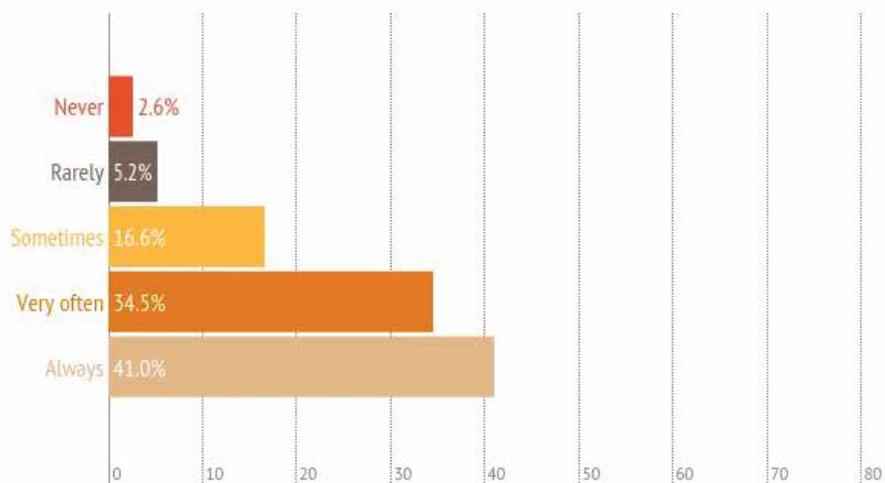


Figure 9. How often did the respondent feel safe while working?

3.4 STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONS FOR WORKING IN THE SEX INDUSTRY

Students who worked in the sex industry were asked to indicate what motivated them to do the work. Figure 8 shows the ten reasons that were noted the most often (only considering those involved in direct or indirect sex work). The figure shows that economic considerations loom large in students' motivations to take up this kind of work. In the respondents' eyes, the money from sex work enables them to avoid debt and to cover basic living expenses. Furthermore the work is considered to be highly flexible whereas this might be less the case for more traditional jobs. In addition to practical considerations, a substantial number of respondents reported an intrinsic interest for working in the sex industry (with expectations of enjoyment and sexual pleasure). The feeling of being forced into sex work was mentioned by 14.3% of the respondents and thus was not among the ten most important reasons.

Reflections from the personal interviews

The personal interviews with student sex workers confirmed that financial and practical reasons are very important in a student's decision to work in the sex industry. While anticipated enjoyment and excitement about the work were also identified, most attention went to needing money, and needing it urgently. This was in combination with not having any family to fall back on for support. The money that was made by working in the sex industry was mainly used for covering basic living expenses which were not covered by a student loan.

Most respondents acknowledged that they could have accessed the 'regular' job market but felt this was not a feasible option to them. Respondents explained that working for a minimum wage would require excessive amounts of time (to make the amount of money that was needed) which would not leave enough time to spend on their studies. Working in the sex industry was also considered a good option because of its flexibility. Work in the sex industry is generally not contractual and thus it is easy to put the work on hold where it is necessary to prioritise study time.

- R7-Female student and independent sex worker (prostitution): *A part time job is not gonna... I'd have to work extortionate hours to be able to, especially when I was 21 at £4.98 an hour as minimum wage. It's just not feasible, especially with halls 'cos it's too expensive. I wish someone had told me that before I got involved in like contracts and stuff at university.*
- R1-Mature female student who works for an escort agency: *My college work is number one priority. I have declined stuff in the past because of deadlines. Or if I am asked to do an outcall in [name city], I couldn't the other week because of a presentation. [Name escort manager] was like 'can't you do it whilst you travel?' but I was like 'no because I need the internet and to do prep.'*

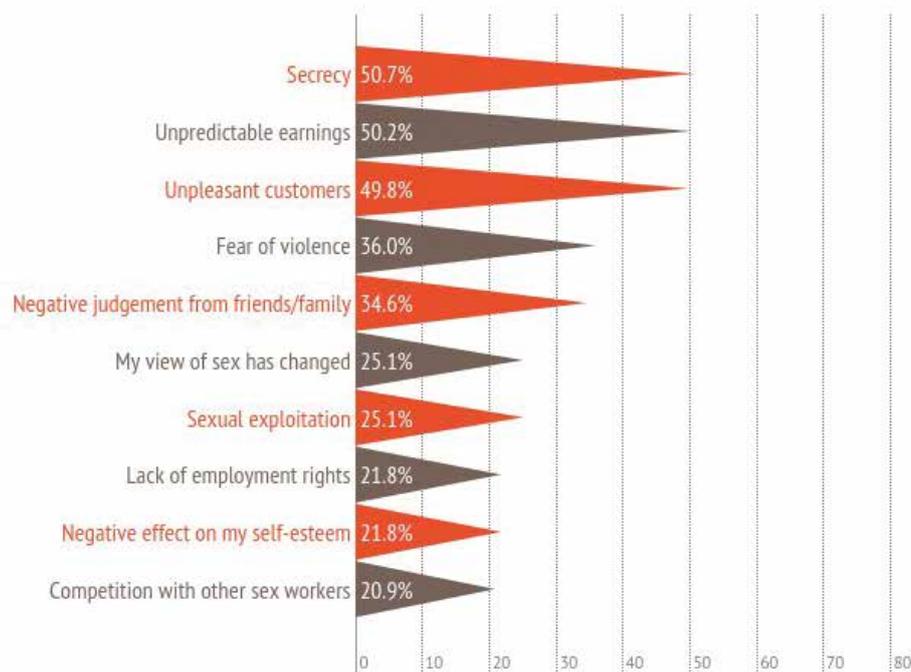


Figure 10. **Negative aspects of working in the sex industry**

3.5 SAFETY ISSUES AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF DOING SEX WORK

While the overall majority of the students who work in the sex industry felt safe in their work, a substantial minority reported a lack of safety. Figure 9 shows the results for the question ‘how often do you feel safe in your work environment?’ going from never to always. The majority of the respondents indicated feeling safe ‘very often’ or ‘always’ (75.5% for both categories combined). Alternatively this means that almost one in four of the students who work in the sex industry do not tend to feel safe when working.

Respondents were presented with a list of 21 possible negative aspects and they were asked to tick those that were applicable to their personal experience. Figure 10 presents the ten most noted negative aspects. Secrecy, unpredictable earnings and unpleasant customers were clearly the most common. The fear of violence came fourth.

Furthermore some differences were found between those engaged in direct and indirect sex work. The fear of violence was noted twice as often among those engaged in direct sex work as compared to those engaged in indirect sex work (48.5% against 24.5% for both groups respectively). Also the item ‘my view of sex has changed’ was mentioned almost twice as much by those engaged in direct sex work as compared to those engaged in indirect sex work (33.7%

against 17.3% for both groups respectively). For the other negative aspects there were no differences according to the type of sex work involved in.

Reflections from the personal interviews

Staying safe from harm was a recurring theme during the personal interviews with student sex workers. Almost all respondents had been exposed to some sort of verbal or physical aggression. The ways in which the respondents protected themselves differed according to which segment of the industry they worked in. Especially those who worked independently were strongly aware of the dangers involved and would take safety measures such as carrying a knife or installing panic buttons. Working in a parlour was considered to be safer as compared to working independently. However, much depends on the parlour’s policy and commitment to keeping the sex workers safe. The following examples illustrate these issues:

- R7-Female student who works as an independent sex worker (prostitution): *I always have in the back of my mind that my rules is what I should do and this is what happens when you are here, but I’m also aware that a lot of guys that come in are probably twice my size and I don’t want to piss them off because if I do I’m in this house on my own, in this flat, and if it goes wrong there’s no one like there for me.*

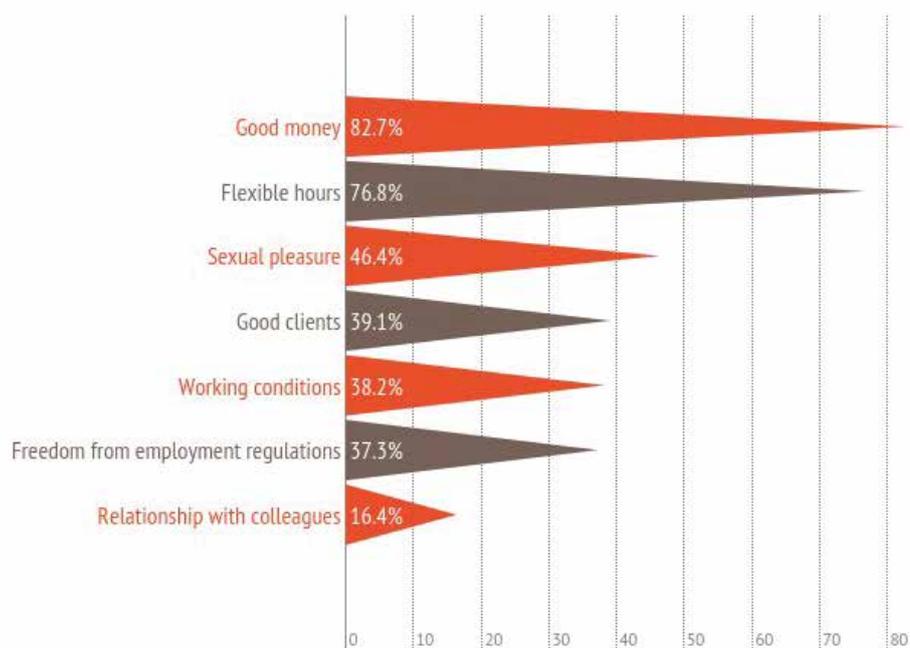


Figure 11. **Positive aspects of working in the sex industry**

- Project member on net-reach talks about carrying a knife with her when doing car meetings: *I have never had to use it... and really don't think I would unless I actually thought I was gonna die. I only carry it as an emergency back-up but really have no intention of using it. 'Cuz yeah I realize it could get used on me... So I wouldn't use it unless I had no other option and the alternative would be worse.*

The conditions in which the respondents were working as well as the relations they maintained with the employer, management and other colleagues were very important in their ability to keep safe. But at the same time such working conditions and relationships on the job could be a source of distress. For example the working conditions can be felt as denigrating and lacking respect. Several respondents mentioned having left a job because they felt like they were not being treated in the way they wanted to be treated. While working in a parlour was indicated as being safer, there were also clear downsides to it in terms of how it is organised and how much money is taken by the management. The quotes below illustrate how the organisation of the work itself and the relationships on the job affected the respondents in their health and wellbeing.

- R7-Female student who works as an independent sex worker (prostitution) talks about her former experience with working in a parlour: *A parlour is a lot more safe but a parlour makes me feel even more like shit especially when a guy doesn't chose you and you just have to ok*

sit down. Cos' I'm not used to that. (...) I'm not really used to the whole like coming in and being chosen. That's the way it is really and like if I'm not chosen I feel like crying and going oh my god no! (...) It's a bit like there is a pecking order really and then this girl would go first and this girl would go last.

- R6-Female student who worked as a lap dancer: *The management takes house fees and commission off the women but not doing anything to maintain the establishment. You know I mean there was, often the pipes were knackered and there was often smelly shit from the club, it was that bad. The ceiling was about to fall in apparently and he wasn't getting, he wasn't dealing with it, there was no attention to health and safety whatsoever. So it was that kind of thing that I thought was exploitative.*

The need for secrecy was also commonly mentioned as a negative aspect of working in the sex industry. Some respondents ended up leading a 'double life' which in itself caused distress: on the one hand distress about having to lie all the time and on the other hand distress about being 'exposed'. For sex workers, the people that know their real identity ideally do not come across their sex worker persona, and vice versa.

- R7-Female student who works as an independent sex worker (prostitution): *For my whole life now it has turned into, I think that's my problem with it, it's turned into a giant secret like I have to be careful what I say, I have to*

be careful where I am. I have been recognised by guys I have been with and they have walked past me and even innocently have said "hello Sharon" and I've been with my friend like one of my best friends said "why do people call you Sharon all the time?" (...) When this happens 3 or 4 times people are like "what is that girl doing?"

3.6 POSITIVE ASPECTS OF DOING SEX WORK

To measure the positive aspects of working in the sex industry respondents were presented with a list of seven positive aspects and they were asked to tick those aspects that were applicable to them. Figure 11 shows the positive aspects of doing sex work in order of importance. Good money and flexible hours were the positive aspects that were noted most, but also sexual pleasure was important for almost half of the respondents.

Furthermore it was found that those performing direct sex work were more likely to indicate 'good money' and 'sexual pleasure' as positive aspects whereas those performing indirect sex work were more likely to indicate the 'working conditions' as positive aspects.

Reflections from the personal interviews

The survey showed that the positive aspects of sex work were centred around its flexibility and opportunities for making money. The personal interviews with student sex workers pointed to additional positive aspects, such as the enjoyment of doing the work itself as well as positive effects on one's self-image. While the contact with clients can be a source of potential danger, it was also a potential source of enjoyment for some respondents. The quotes below illustrate this:

- R1-Mature female student who works for an escort agency: *In the parlour, I am so ashamed to admit this, but it is like £40 for half an hour. So you get £20 for half an hour. And every tom dick and harry can afford that if they want to get laid. Makes me heave when I think about it, but with this clientele [working as an escort], because the hourly rate is that much higher, not being a snob but only a certain percentage can afford those rates. So your clientele is going to be a certain type. I haven't had any problems. Everybody has been lovely, really nice. They get you presents and stuff, it is mad.*
- R4-Female student who worked in a topless bar, provided webcam services and worked as a life model: *With life modelling people are looking really intently at you to get the details and I think it is really flattering 'cos you look like some kind of Greek goddess.*

3.7 STUDENT SEX WORKERS' SUPPORT NEEDS

Respondents were asked to indicate from a range of student support services whether or not they ever made use of these services. Respondents who worked in the sex industry indicated to have accessed counselling services in university more often as compared to students who did not work in the sex industry. This is visualised in figure 12. For other types of support services, such as housing and health, there were no important differences between both groups of students.

Respondents that worked in the sex industry were asked whether they had ever contacted a professional service in connection with their work. While half of those engaged in direct sex work indicated that they had done so, this was only a quarter of those engaged in indirect sex work (as visualised in figure 13). There was no difference between male and female student sex workers.

The professional support that was the most commonly used was a (local) sexual health clinic (27.8%), secondly a GP, nurse or hospital service (10.9%) and thirdly a university based sexual health clinic (5.6%). In addition to professional support, about one out of five respondents (19.7%) indicated to have turned to friends in connection to their work while seeking parental support was very rare (only mentioned by 2.1%).

Respondents were asked whether they were in need for more support, and if so, what type of support they would prefer. The need for support was expressed more by those engaged in direct sex work as compared to those engaged in indirect sex work (as visualised in figure 14).

Among those who expressed a need of more support, online services and information was the most popular type of service provision that they would prefer and this was indicated by 21.0%. 'health services' were second most popular (mentioned by 17.7%) and 'outreach workers' came third (13.3%).

Reflections from the personal interviews

The need for support was mainly discussed through the net-reach conversations as this was a tool that was especially developed to provide student sex workers with anonymous online support. Also the forum on the project website was noted as being helpful in terms of finding support with other student sex workers as well as the feeling that they 'are not alone'. The examples below are from such conversations on net-reach.

- Project member: *It is really lonely and that's why I like the forums, 'cos there's like some other girls or boys, whatever, come on and even if I don't reply and I read what they say and they are having difficult times, or*

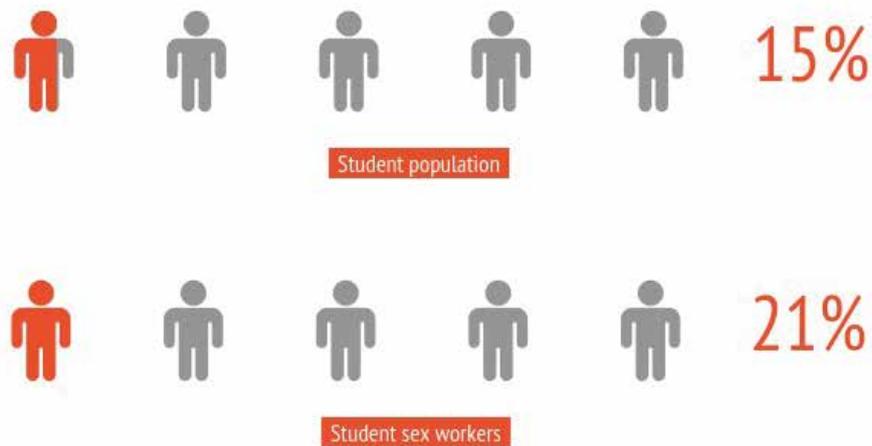


Figure 12. **Proportion of students that made use of University counselling services**

whatever, at least I know I'm not the only person in like the whole UK that's doing this like.

- Project member: *I find it really helpful [the forum on the project website] cuz' I feel like no one in my real life would understand, and most of my friends would probably think I'm nasty or something if I told them what I did. (...) I'm glad you have the forum set up because I think there needs to be a place where people can talk about stuff that they wouldn't talk about normally.*

3.8 SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS

The sex industry is present in the lives of students across the UK, albeit most students who engage in the sex industry do this on a rather irregular and short-term basis. Sex work may become a temporary, quick solution to an urgent money problem but it may also be seen as something that can be pleasurable and exciting. The biggest challenge for student sex workers is related to dealing with the stigmatisation and managing secrecy. Safety and dealing with unpleasant clients are also important negative aspects of the work while having good clients is an important reason for liking the work. Students engaged in direct sex work are in need of more specialised support.

The key findings are the following:

- Almost 5% of the students have ever engaged in a commercial sexual activity.

- One in five students has ever considered such engagement.
- Male students are more likely to ever have engaged in a commercial sexual activity as compared to female students.
- Students who engage in sex work do this on an irregular basis and the money that is made from it is likely to be low, mostly spent on daily living expenses.
- Those who perform direct sex work are doing the work on a more regular basis and generate a higher income as compared to those who perform indirect sex work.
- Student sex workers' motivations are centred around the need for generating money in a flexible way that is combinable with university studies but a substantial group of student sex workers are also driven by anticipated pleasure.
- About one in four student sex workers do not always feel safe while working, and this is more so for those involved in direct sex work.
- Student sex workers fear stigmatisation and the most important negative aspect of undertaking sex work is the need to keep engagement in the industry a secret.
- A substantial group of student sex workers has contacted support services in relation to their work and a smaller group expresses the need for more support; especially online services would be welcome.

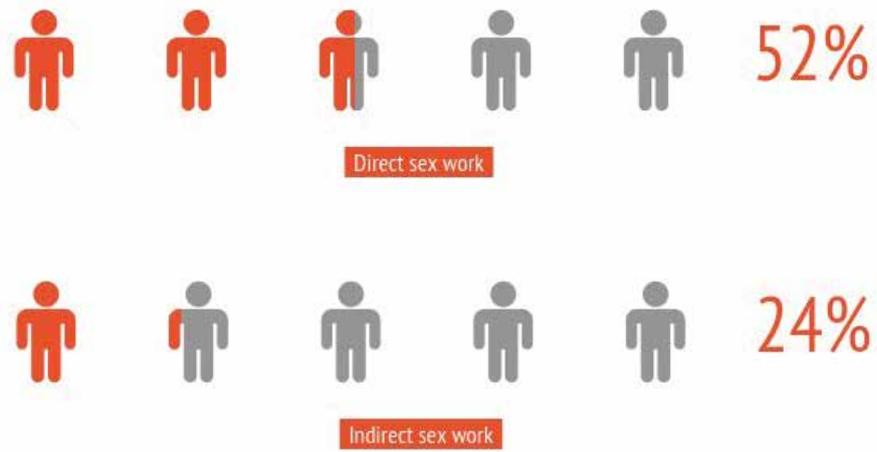


Figure 13. **Proportion of sex workers that ever contacted a professional in relation to their work**

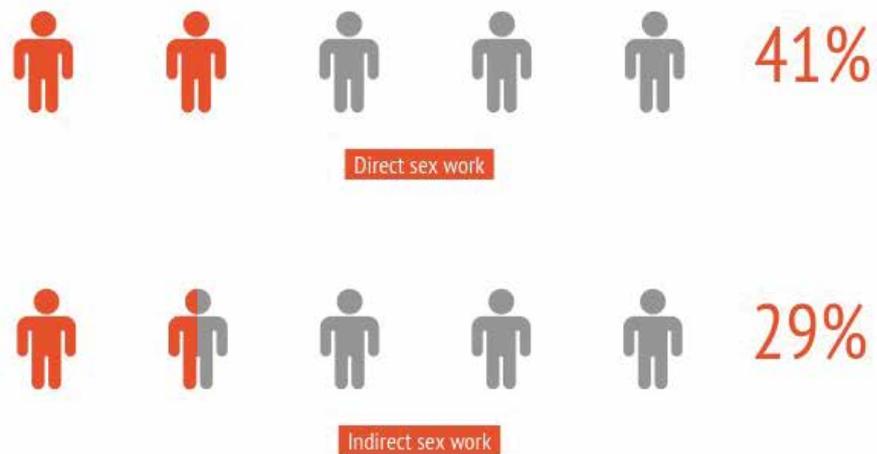


Figure 14. **Proportion of sex workers that expressed a need for support**

This post on the project members' forum serves as a good illustration of the importance of using research results with care, avoiding large generalisations, and respecting the individuality of each student sex worker:

“ *I don't like it when people describe sex workers as if they know the truth about them. There is no 'truth'.... everyone's truth is going to be different....you can dig and dig all you like but at the end of the day all you'll find is a bunch of people with different stories and different ways in which they perceive those stories. Some like it, some don't, some are not sure, some do it for drugs, some do it cuz they need the money, some do it cuz they enjoy it, sometimes it's a combination of all those things and more, some are forced, some choose it, some are forced and then choose it, some hate it, some feel empowered, some flit between the two....I could go on.* **”**

4 | FINDINGS ON RESEARCH AIM 2: HIGHER EDUCATION RESPONSES AND STAFF PERCEPTIONS

This section discusses the findings of the second research aim, to consider the need for policy, guidance and training to encourage the provision of appropriate assistance and support for student sex workers.

4.1 HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND STUDENT SEX WORK

As discussed in the methodology section, clarification on HE policies on student sex work was achieved by sending a Freedom of Information Request to all universities in Wales.

First, **no university in Wales has a specific policy in place regarding student sex work.** Four universities referred to their policy of offering individualised, 'tailored' support for all students and to provide equal access to existing health, wellbeing and support services. Reference was also made to existing working relationships with support services outside the university. One university stated that there is no need for any policy given that student sex work 'is not an issue' (quote) in the university.

Second, **universities have no specific formal processes in place that staff can carry out if a student was to disclose working in the sex industry.** Six universities mentioned that appropriate action would be undertaken depending on the needs of the student, and referred to the existing formal referral processes to available services (e.g. financing, sexual health or counselling). There was one university in which staff had been given training on the subject and collaborated with 'Women's aid'. One university limited its response to providing a link to the university's student support centre, suggesting that regular protocols for service provision would apply.

Third, **universities have no procedures in place if it was discovered that a student was working in the sex industry.** Again, most universities would treat such a case in much the same way as any other situation, meaning that they would take on a personal approach and take appropriate action (e.g. look at opportunities for financial aid or emotional support). One university referred to collaborations with the police and a rape crisis centre,

suggesting that student sex work was mainly interpreted in terms of sexual assault. Two universities indicated that they would take action against the student in case the university's reputation would be put at stake, particularly when the student's behaviour would be subject to some sort of 'police or legal investigation'. It was also mentioned that a 'suitability for practice enquiry' might be undertaken in case the program followed was accredited by a professional body. One university limited its response to providing a link to the university's policy on student conduct and discipline.

4.2 STAFF UNDERSTANDINGS OF LAW AND REGULATION

More than one third of the respondents who took part in the case study (an online survey among staff in one university) expressed the view that the perceived illegality of an activity would affect how they would respond to a student (36.8%) as well as what they would do in terms of follow-up (42.6%).

The respondents were asked for a series of activities related to the sex industry whether they believed that activity was legal or illegal. Figure 15 shows for each activity the percentage of the respondents that believed it was legal. Selling sex on the street was largely known to be illegal while working as a stripper was clearly known to be legal. There was a lack of clarity about selling sex in a private place (e.g. a privately owned apartment). Although selling sex in a private place is legal, under 30% of the respondents thought it was. Also selling sex through an online webcam is a legal activity but this was not perceived by all respondents as such. A minority of the respondents also felt that selling sex from a brothel is an illegal activity which it is not; it is brothel keeping which is the illegal activity.

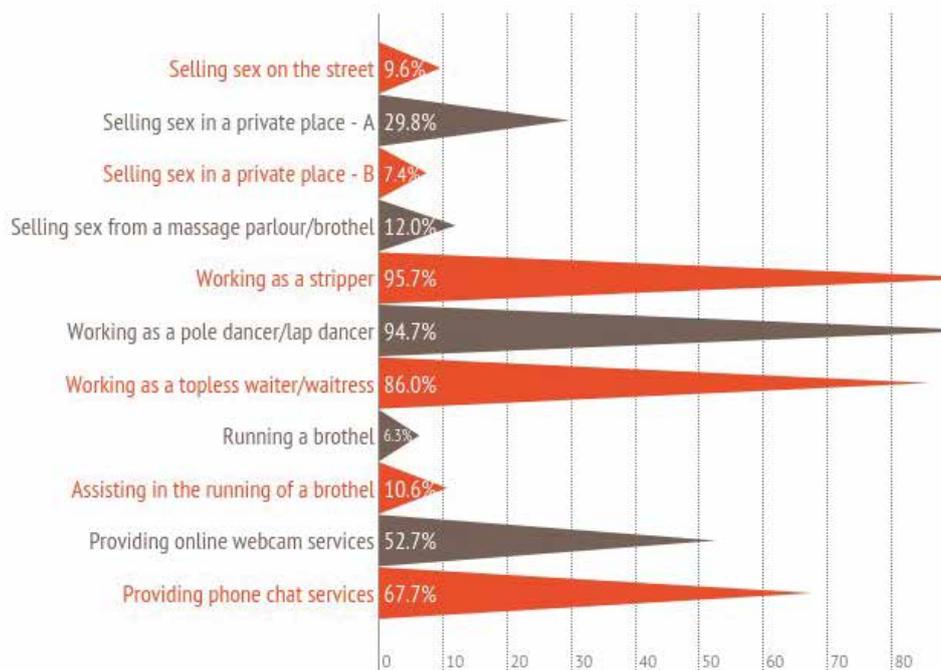


Figure 15. **Perceived legality of different activities related to the sex industry (1) (2)**

(1) 'Selling sex in a private place - A' refers to an independent sex worker who sells sex in a house, apartment, ... while 'selling sex in a private place - B' refers to the same situation but where there is at least one other person selling services under the same roof.

(2) Illegal activities are the following: Selling sex on the street; Selling sex in a private place - B; Running a brothel; Assisting in the running of a brothel.

4.3 DISCLOSURE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE SEX INDUSTRY

Of the 106 members of staff that participated in the university case study - and who had a role that involved direct student contact - 12.3% (13 respondents) reported having received at least one disclosure of sex work from a student. The most common form of activity disclosed was erotic dancing, which includes pole dancing and lap dancing (7 students). Other types of activities mentioned included prostitution and selling sexual services in a massage parlour, brothel or sauna (4 students), escorting (3 students), stripping (2 students), glamour modelling (4 students), being a naked butler (2 students), being a professional dominant or submissive (1 student), acting as a receptionist in a brothel, sauna or massage parlour (1 student), and a driver for sex workers (1 student). In addition to actual disclosure, several of the staff members indicated to have had 'hunches' about students being involved in the sex industry.

Also during the personal interviews with university staff it was discussed that there had been suspicions about certain students being involved in the sex industry. Some staff were concerned that the issue of stigmatisation would prevent students disclosing to them. For example, there was a concern that students might feel that they could not disclose to a support service as it might become general knowledge on their academic record. The quotes below illustrate these issues:

- Head of Student Support: *There have been quite a few cases where we, you know, looking through bank statements and looking at income expenditure reports, income and expenditures don't add up and... you make a judgement I suppose, and the wondering comes in.*
- Head of Student Support: *Our mission statement is focussed on the non-judgement nature that you get when you come here. It is very much student-centred, so we aren't going to judge what the student may or*

may not be doing... The worry you get with students is that the thing they'll tell you will end up on their academic record, which is a mythical thing which doesn't exist anyway. There is just no way that could happen."

4.4 AWARENESS ON STUDENT SEX WORKERS' NEEDS AND RESPONSES TO DISCLOSURE

4.4.1 Awareness on student sex workers' needs and appropriate support services

Five out of the thirteen respondents from the university case study who experienced a disclosure confirmed that they did not know where to look for support or guidance. Also the personal interviews with student support staff and Student Union officers showed that service provision for student sex workers was not something they had thought through already. There tended to be an assumption that the main support need of student sex workers might be sexual health and safety more in general. Another common need which respondents felt would be key was emotional or wellbeing support. Overall, staff suggested that they would follow an individualised approach and signpost the student to the most appropriate support service. As the quotes below illustrate, it was a common feeling that the needs of student sex workers might vary greatly based on individual circumstances and on the individual context.

- Head of Student Support: *There would actually be a journey that we would want to engage the student in, with regards to the presenting issue, the underlying issues and the resolution to all of that, and the underlying issues can be several... Financial, emotional, legal, whatever. Um, those services we provide are based around dealing with people as individuals and finding for them a support package and a resolution which works for them as an individual.*
- Student Union Officer: *They might be absolutely fine, it depends what their reasons were for getting in to it. Potentially like emotional support or, just someone to talk to I think is important. Because it might be a case where they don't talk to anyone about it and so having a confidential space where they know it's not going to get back to anyone, I think it's really important.*

4.4.2 Responses to disclosure

The university case study and personal interviews with university staff showed that disclosures were dealt with very differently, from a 'doing nothing' approach to warning the student that if they did not cease, there would be some form

of disciplinary action. Also practical advice on sexual health and on counselling was offered and referrals had been made to student support services, the GUM clinic and a Drugs Project. The quotes below illustrate the very different types of responses. The first two responses show a main concern for the university's reputation and that of the student's chosen profession, while the last two focus on student wellbeing.

- University Case Study (answer to an open-ended question in the survey): *I was concerned as the student was training to be a health care professional and there would seem to be a conflict of interest here between needing the money and being a role model for society. Following discussions about this with the student and with other staff in the college the student decided not to continue with this work.*
- University Case Study (answer to an open-ended question in the survey): *The student was advised that posing for pictures while scantily clad could put herself at risk and bring the reputation of both the university and the profession for which she was being trained into disrepute. She was advised that if she continued to post pictures on Facebook that she must not add anything that could link her to the university or her chosen profession.*
- University Case Study (answer to an open-ended question in the survey): *I provided my personal work contact details so that she did not have to deal with multiple members of staff regarding her situation.*
- Head of Student Support: *It was a chat around the 'do you really want to do this? Are you doing it purely because of the money side or is it something you want to do? How are you keeping yourself safe? Who knows you're going?' So we were talking around safety and why she was doing it and were there any other alternatives because it was purely for the money.*

4.5 THE PERCEIVED NEED FOR POLICY, GUIDANCE AND TRAINING

4.5.1 Need for policy, information and support

Respondents of the university case study were asked what they would need were a student to disclose involvement in sex work. Figure 16 shows how many respondents felt that different types of information and support would be useful. The majority of staff reported that they would look

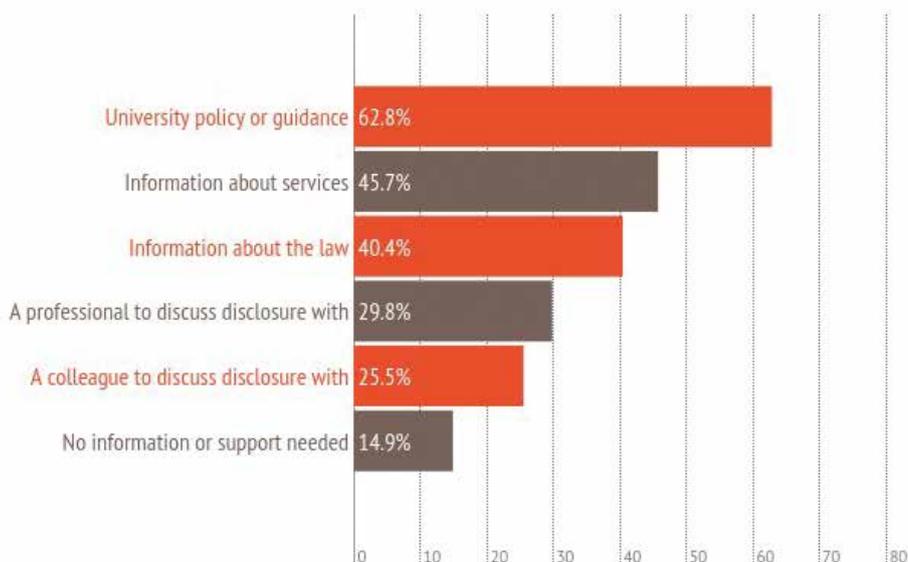


Figure 16. **What would be needed in case of disclosure?**

for university policy or guidance around the topic. Given that universities have policies on many aspects of university life, including employment outside of study, this would indeed seem a sensible place to start when responding to a student's disclosure. As discussed earlier, however, currently no university in Wales (and to our knowledge in the UK) has a policy on student sex work. Only a minority of staff reported that they did not require any further information or support.

The need for a university policy regarding the issue of student sex work was also discussed in the personal interviews with university staff. As illustrated by the quotes below, there were different views as to what such policy should look like and to what extent a specific policy for student sex work would be useful. Policy appeared to be deemed useful mainly in terms of having some guidance but the policy itself should not be too explicit or restrictive.

- Student Union Officer: *If a student came to me for harassment advice or their personal tutor or someone of the Students' Union; without policy or without guidance you'd be kind of stumped.*
- Student Union Officer: *I think it's that kind of situation that might not happen very often but it would be really useful to know what to do in that situation or to quickly find out what to do in that situation. Anyone that gets that disclosure you've got a real range [of responses] especially because of the moral issues. What will be said to that student [on disclosure] you want to make sure that it's not 'that's disgusting!' can you imagine?*

- Student counsellor: *I don't like policy, I prefer guidelines because I like to have the ability to make my own inferences. Policies are too restricting.*
- Head of counselling services: *I feel this should be covered by bigger robust policies. We should not have a policy for everything, it should all be covered.*

4.5.2 Need for guidance and training

While a higher education policy can go some way in guiding staff in their response to student sex work - and this being preferred by the majority of the respondents - the desirability of more practical, concrete guidance and training was questioned as well. The data from the university case study showed that one third of the respondents (37.2%) felt that they would benefit from specific guidance or training concerning the issue. A further 17.0% reported that they would be open to such training if a student were to disclose to them or if they were to become aware of it as a more common issue. This is somewhat worrisome because ideally staff would know how to respond at the moment of disclosure itself rather than after the event. It can be expected that some of those who answered 'no' to training and guidance may view the subject differently if they realised that student sex work is more widespread than their current perception.

To understand what this specific training or guidance should best look like, respondents were asked to indicate from four types of initiatives which they would find useful (only asked to those respondents who thought that training or guidance

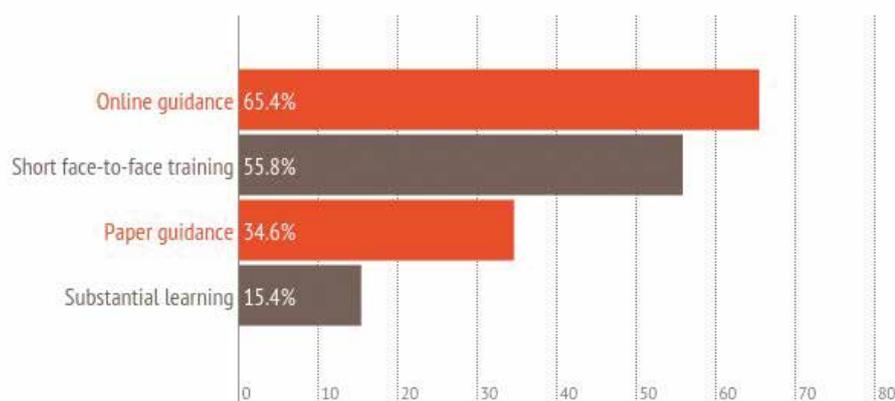


Figure 17. **What type of training or guidance would be useful?**

was necessary). The results presented in figure 17 show that 'online guidance' was selected the most often, followed by (short) face-to-face training. A more intense training that would involve substantial learning but would also demand more time was the least popular.

The quotes below, stemming from the interviews with university staff, further illustrate how guidance and training in the HE institution is believed to have a potential positive impact on how staff can respond to the issue.

- Head of Student Support: *It's all awareness, if you don't know then how can you help them? What does sex work mean? What sort of support are they likely to need? Would they be offended of somebody said 'why are you doing that?'*
- Head of Student Support: *I can't promise that every single member of staff will react in the right and same way but they certainly should know about being non-judgemental and student centred.*
- Financial advisor: *We had some excellent training about the support that's available locally to students who have been victims of sexual assault and it really, amongst the whole department, raised the issue and we became more aware and more comfortable in discussing it amongst ourselves, of being confident about knowing what to do if that comes through the door or we get that phone call, and even just dealing with students who perhaps do disclose something... so given the sort of response to that and the positive response that we had amongst the staff about that, then absolutely it would be really, really useful.*

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS

This section discussed the ways in which HE institutions deal with students who work in the sex industry by focusing on HE policies regarding the issue as well as on the experiences, awareness and understanding of university staff. It can be concluded that there is a need to raise awareness and enhance understanding about student sex work and to offer assistance and support where students disclose their sex work occupations. Especially considering many university staff's role includes the pastoral care of students, awareness of student sex work could be considered an important issue.

The following key findings emerged:

- Universities do not include student sex work specifically in their policies.
- Sex workers are known to disclose to academic staff at HE institutions.
- Some staff are concerned about the reputation of the university and professionalism.
- Staff are unaware or unsure about available support.
- Staff are unaware or unsure about what aspects of sex work are legal and illegal, while their perceptions of illegality might impact on how they followed up a disclosure.
- The majority of staff want university policy or guidance available - preferably online - which includes information about the law and services available.
- A significant minority of the staff wanted training on the issue, while some wanted training to be available if and when they need it.

A project member reflects on what The Student Sex Work Project has meant for her:



When I think about The Student Sex Work Project I still think of them with relief. Relief that is still with me three years on. Relief that will stay with me forever actually. That's probably quite a bold statement to make but it's true. Before I started speaking to the project I was working in absolute isolation. Not one person knew what I was doing. I was so ashamed and the course I am studying meant there was just no way I could get support. Before I spoke to the project I was struggling. I was struggling with my safety in particular. With the help of the project I was able to stop the abuse I'd been receiving from a client for over a year. I don't even want to think where I would be now if I hadn't have been able to turn to them. I just don't know where else I would have gone. I don't know what would have happened.

And it's not just my safety that has improved. To be able to talk to people who know that you're a prostitute but still treat you like a normal person. That was a really big thing for me. I never felt judged and there aren't many days where I don't think about the respect I was given. I felt like my voice was important. That the people in the project were listening to me and what I was saying. I was never told to stop or told what to do. I was in control. That is a really empowering feeling when my work so often feels the opposite.

The project has really helped to break down the stigma of sex work. I mean stigma takes a long time to break but the project has certainly made conversation at my university. That conversation creates awareness and awareness creates more understanding. It's a good feeling.

I really hope that someone takes notice of the results of the project. I really hope that universities have more awareness towards sex work as a result of this. I hope that this project will change things. I hope it will create awareness. I hope it will create awareness that some students are working in sex work, whatever kind of sex work that is, and those students don't deserve to be denied support due to stigma.

I never thought that sending an e-mail to the project would change things so much. Actually it has and I can cope now.



5.1 SEX WORK IS NOT A GENDERED OCCUPATION

Although small scale research has for some time now pointed to a student sex work population, our data demonstrates conclusively that students are engaged in the sex industry. Thus it is important that student services at Higher Education (HE) institutions as well as public health bodies throughout Wales recognise this.

The importance of the research however goes much further than simply identifying a student sex work population. A key finding is the significant cohort of male workers. Indeed 5.0% of the male students that took part in our large-scale online survey reported to work or to have worked in the sex industry while this was only 3.4% for the female respondents.

The findings are also supported by those of the 'Sex Work Research Wales' project undertaken by Sagar and Jones in partnership with Gibran UK between 2010-2014 which highlighted that upwards of 40% of all sex workers advertising services through the internet in Wales were male and transgender workers (Sagar et al. 2014).

This raises questions about policy and practice in England and Wales, the UK and beyond which alludes to sex work as a gendered occupation and which seeks to develop services that are tailored overwhelmingly for female workers. Academics for many years have outlined the dangers of a gendered sex work perspective and the dangers that flow from this such as stereotyping (see for example, Whowell 2010). It is vital that all service providers across Wales are aware of female, male and transgender workers and that male and transgender workers do not fall through service provision gaps.

5.2 SEX WORK IS NOT ONE EXPERIENCE

The data reported makes it quite clear that students have different motivations for taking up occupations in the sex industry, and whilst employed in the sex industry they also have different experiences.

For the majority of students sex work is very transient part time work. Sex work can complement studying - some find the hours flexible and conducive to studying. And while

the majority of students are driven by financial need, some students enter the industry out of curiosity and some engage in a variety of occupations for pleasure.

In summary, there is no set pattern to engagement and no 'one' experience but the data clearly suggest that the majority of students who work in the industry share a desire to earn money to pay for every day expenses.

The data also make it clear that for a significant number of student sex workers, sex work is embarked upon to assist with HE fees and/or to avoid/reduce mounting student debt. Thus, as long as students are expected to contribute high amounts of money to their education, and considering the rising cost of student living, it is unlikely that the number of students who turn to sex work will go down.

5.3 STUDENTS ENGAGED IN THE SEX INDUSTRY ARE ACCESSING SUPPORT SERVICES

HE institutions should ensure, given the complexities of sex work, that they are aware of the myriad of issues associated with occupations in the sex industry and that appropriate support is available.

Acknowledging the different motivations and needs of students engaged in the sex industry is very important and makes the need to raise awareness about the dangers of stereotyping amongst policy makers and service providers a pressing one.

It should not be assumed that all students who engage in the sex industry experience problems that negatively impact on their well-being and/or their studies. However, the data indicates that students who engage in sex work do access student counselling support services more than students who are not engaged in sex work. And, very importantly, given the social isolation sex workers can find themselves facing (due to social stigma and consequentially the propensity to keep sex work a secret) it is vital that services approach students who disclose their occupations without prejudice.

In this respect it is a pleasing finding that HE services are keen to provide a non-judgemental service. However, data

also suggest that there is a need for awareness raising, guidance and training to ensure that services are fully equipped to meet the needs of students who are engaged in the sex industry.

5.4 SAFETY IS A WORRY FOR SOME SEX WORKERS

The data clearly suggest that although coercion into the sex industry is minimal it is still a problem for some sex workers. Furthermore, the data confirm that some student sex workers do worry about their safety.

While great strides have been made by some academic researchers to secure better working conditions for dancers in lap dancing clubs for example (Sanders and Hardy 2013), it remains arguable that policy and practice in the UK does not focus sufficiently on keeping sex workers safe (female, male and transgender) while they are engaged in occupations in the sex industry (see for example, Kinnell 2008; Whowell 2010; Sagar and Jones, 2014).

Furthermore, while research suggests that those who work off street are at less risk of violence (for example, Church et al. 2001; Sanders and Campbell 2007; Sagar and Jones 2014), violence does take place off street and in this context those who work independently (alone) are particularly at risk.

During the lifetime of the project disclosures of violence were made to the project team by project members and this included verbal intimidation, physical and sexual assault, and rape. Thus services and institutions need to be aware that on occasion it may be necessary to provide emergency student accommodation as well as following existing supportive protocols and practices that are in place for all students who suffer physical and sexual assaults.

In the specific context of sex work, there are established reporting procedures for sex work related violence through the National Ugly Mugs Scheme. University staff need to be aware of such procedures and work with students who have suffered violence to offer support and to encourage them to report such incidents.

5.5 STUDENTS ENGAGED IN THE SEX INDUSTRY FACE INSTITUTIONALISED STIGMA AND PREJUDICE

"I have always had huge support from all of my family, the place I had the most resistance was the Students Union at my own university... I was contacted first by someone

saying they didn't want to me to be associated with the University (a national paper had run a story on me studying at university).

A few weeks later I was in a magazine and again the University was directly quoted. I had the Women's Officer contacting me, stating she would report me to the Dean should I keep stating which University I was at. This was obviously quite a shock to me, I had been afraid of letting teachers know, but the fact that a fellow student would be prepared to purposely jeopardise my place was quite a shock." -Tina - Project member who works as a glamour model

It is lamentable that some HE institutions and a wide range of professions stigmatise and judge students who may make a rational decision to take up occupations in the sex industry to support themselves. Indeed, judging a student who for whatever reason works in the sex industry is arguably archaic, particularly given the social and economic mainstreaming (normalisation) of many sex work occupations such as lap dancing (Brents and Sanders 2010).

It should also be remembered that the majority of students who took part in the project were engaged in legal occupations in the sex industry. However, whether occupations are legal or illegal, all remain highly stigmatised. This stigma can have serious consequences for students who are studying or training to enter a wide range of professions.

As the data in this report demonstrate, HE institutions remain concerned about student occupations within the sex industry and behaviour that could be deemed to bring the reputation of the university into disrepute. Likewise, a range of professions continue to implement professional codes of practice that may render a student engaged in a sex industry occupation 'unfit for practice'.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council Guidance on Professional conduct for example demands that students not only possess the skills, knowledge and good health to carry out nursing and midwifery safely and effectively, but also that the student possesses 'good character'. Students are reminded at clause 53: *'...your behaviour and conduct inside and outside of the university and clinical placement, including your personal life, may impact on your fitness to practice and ability to complete your programme'*. Further clause 54 demands that students *'uphold the reputation of your chosen profession at all times'*.

The great irony here of course is that research has made links for many years between sex work and the caring professions (Sanders 2005). Also, sex worker testimonies

indicate that sex workers sometimes see themselves as sexual health educators and therapeutic counsellors (Sanders 2006). There is also a growing acceptance of sex workers who work specifically with disabled clients (see for example, TLC 2008).

Perhaps the greatest paradox in the context of the nursing profession is that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) supports the decriminalisation of sex work (the removal of laws that criminalise the selling of sex) and has done since 1995 (The Guardian 2005). Back in 1995 the College highlighted the need to rid sex workers of stigma, shame and victimisation - social conditions that prevent workers from accessing health services (The Independent 1995).

We believe that a disclosure of sex work should not automatically give rise to social disapproval or be presumed to negatively impact on a profession (see also, Cusick et al. 2009) and we point out here the injustice of pigeonholing 'good' moral behaviour and 'bad' immoral behaviour as precursors for fitness for practice.

One of the topics that was discussed elaborately on the project members' forum was the fear of having an STD/HIV and barriers to getting tested. These two quotes are examples of how project members experienced these issues:

“ I've been unsafe with a fair few clients, mainly not by choice because some idiots think it's funny taking the condom off, but also by choice for more money. To be honest, I don't really care, it's just that I know that if I ever want to be in a relationship then I need to know if I am clean. But to be honest I don't see that ever happening anyway because I don't see how anyone would wanna be with someone who is dirty or infected. I wouldn't be able to lie either, I would have to tell them. So no chance really. Damn this is depressing.

The health advisor was fine I guess but something she said really pissed me off, it was along the lines of 'what made you think being a sex worker was what you wanted to do in life?' - said in a sarcastic tone. Bitch. Haha. I just ignored her. But really, what is the point in asking that question? I don't buy that the health advisor was just trying to make sure I wasn't in a vulnerable position.... I know what she said and the tone she said it in, and it was incredibly bitchy/judgemental. I'm assuming that her reaction is not a typical one but I certainly am not ever gonna speak to her again, or any other health advisor. I'll stick to the doctors and nurses thanks... never had a problem with them. And it's not like the health advisor was able to tell me anything I didn't already know anyway... I'm not stupid you know. ”

6 | KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. HE institutions must recognise that there are students who work in the sex industry. Without such acknowledgement, no efforts can be undertaken to address student sex workers' needs.
2. The stereotypes and misunderstandings with regards to student sex work need to be challenged, especially within HE institutions. This includes awareness on the following issues:
 - Both male, female and transgender students can be involved in the sex industry;
 - Student sex workers' motivations as well as experiences are very diverse;
 - Many activities related to the sex industry are legal;
 - Some student sex workers might need support while others do not;
 - Labour conditions, violence and secrecy are major concerns for student sex workers.
3. HE institutions should take an explicit non-exclusionary stance towards students who work in the sex industry. The university can play an important role in protecting student sex workers from falling victim to stigmatisation and discrimination in much the same way as they protect students from minority groups. This way, HE institutions can become an inclusive and safe place for all students.
4. HE institutions should counter balance fears regarding their reputation against the risks of discriminating against the student. It is perhaps time for professions to re-consider what is in fact a 'good role model' for society; particularly given the normalisation of the sex industry within society.
5. Student Unions should provide non-discriminatory support for students regardless of their status as sex workers and advocate on their behalf in relation to their rights and needs. They should work with HE institutions to protect them from stigmatisation from the academic or student community.
6. Financial hardship is a principal motivating factor for students to pick up work in the sex industry. Continued efforts need to be made to locate those students who do not succeed in getting the financial support that they need within the existing administrative protocols.
7. Students who are in need of a regular income may experience difficulties in finding a job that is sufficiently lucrative and flexible. The current system in which young people's labour is rewarded less than the labour of older employees could be criticised for being exploitative. Therefore where students opt to take up more lucrative employment in the sex industry they should not be judged.
8. HE staff need to feel confident in dealing with any student disclosure of working in the sex industry. This requires guidance and training, particularly focusing on:
 - The diversity of occupations within the sex industry;
 - The legalities of sex work;
 - Stereotyping and stigma;
 - The needs of student sex workers;
 - Anti-discrimination protections and available student support;
 - Appropriate protocols in case a student experienced sexual violence and assault.
9. At a university level a coordinated approach needs to be adopted and this includes:
 - Availability of training for academic staff, support staff and Student Union representatives;
 - Emergency accommodation to be available for students who need immediate support;
 - Collaboration with police where necessary;
 - The positioning of at least one person at each HE institution who is knowledgeable of sex work related issues, who is able to provide advice and assist students where appropriate to report incidents of violence through the national Ugly Mugs Reporting Scheme.
10. More effort needs to be undertaken to reach student sex workers through online channels and to offer student sex workers the tools to communicate with each other.

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PROJECT