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Reaching out to female street sex workers in Cardiff: Findings from 'engagement events'.



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On behalf of Cardiff Sex Worker Forum

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Forward

Cardiff Sex Worker Forum came together in 2008. The aims of The Forum include the provision of more effective services to meet the needs of street sex workers in the Cardiff area. While there are pockets of good practice, prior to the launch of The Forum there was negligible multi-agency coordination of services. Furthermore, although a variety of agencies and front line service providers independently strove to meet the needs of sex workers; little was known about the problems sex workers face in Cardiff from the perspective of sex workers themselves. This report presents the findings from three 'engagement events' that were held with sex workers in Cardiff during December 2009 and May 2010. Its findings and recommendations provide an important stepping stone to assist The Forum towards strategic 'informed' policy development providing for coordinated and inclusive services for street sex workers in Cardiff.

Acknowledgements

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Firstly, and most importantly, admiration and thanks must go to the 17 women who spoke honestly, courageously and openly about their lives and experiences in an attempt to help 'outsiders' understand the complexity of their individual situations.

The Forum would also like to express thanks to the Neighbourhood Management Tasking Group who agreed to provide a small amount of money to pay for the women's time during the 'engagement event' and the local Church group who provided small gifts to the women all of which were gratefully received.

A special thank you is also extended to Safer Wales StreetLife and their volunteers who facilitated the event through use of their vehicle and support of their staff. The staff at Safer Wales StreetLife have worked hard to build up trusting relationships with sex workers and this allowed the researchers to conduct the interviews with the women.

In the same vein, thank you to Jill Cole and Peter Clark who gave their time and who shared their extensive knowledge of 'sex work' in Cardiff to support the event.

Lastly, whilst it is recognised that the regulation of street sex work is an ongoing issue for the police, gratitude is extended to South Wales Police for their understanding of the necessity to conduct the engagement events in order to develop an inclusive multi-agency strategic response.

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1. Introduction

This document reports the findings of three 'engagement events' held with female street sex workers in Cardiff between December 2009 and May 2010. The purpose of the 'engagement events' was twofold: firstly, to engage with street sex workers and inform them of the existence and purpose of Cardiff Sex Worker Forum (The Forum) and secondly, to provide a better understanding of the specific needs and service provision requirements of street sex workers in Cardiff. The research was conducted by Dr Tracey Sagar and Debbie Jones (Swansea University) on a voluntary basis on behalf of The Forum.

1.1 Background information

The Forum is a multi-agency collaboration with representatives from the following organisations: South Wales Police; Safer Wales StreetLife; Cardiff and Vale University Health Board; Terrence Higgins Trust, Cymru; The Wallich, Safer Capital Substance Misuse Action Team, Drug Intervention Project (DIP); Housing & Neighbourhood Renewal Outreach Services; South Wales Probation Services; Cardiff City Council; The Centre of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Swansea University. The Forum has been in existence since the latter quarter of 2008 and has developed strategically since that time. The aims and objectives of The Forum are:

- To monitor, review and challenge current service provision for sex workers in Cardiff so that services are able to undertake the complexities involved in supporting and helping sex workers appropriately.
- To constantly explore better and improved ways of delivering services and to provide appropriate support and assistance to Cardiff Sex Workers looking specifically at: -
 - (i) Developing services that enable men and women to leave prostitution;

- (ii) Improving access to current services used by sex workers, for example health care & substance misuse services.

- To raise awareness and champion the needs of sex workers in a variety of arena's and to represent these needs at the appropriate strategic partnerships.

- To promote non-judgemental attitudes towards sex workers across all service providers.

- To bring professionals together to share good practice and strengthen relationships and improve partnership working.

The Forum is the first multi-agency collaboration to formally address the issues of sex work in Cardiff, the capital of Wales. Prior to the creation of The Forum, services for street sex workers had been delivered by individual agencies and the regulation of workers was the responsibility of South Wales Police. Consequently, the holistic approach recommended by the Home Office (2006) document, *A Co-ordinated Prostitution Strategy*, was not evident prior to the existence of The Forum.

Indeed, in terms of research, policy and strategic development at the local level, in relation to sex work, Wales lags behind England and Scotland. For example, in 1998-2002 Dr Tracey Sagar's research in Cardiff revealed that multi-agency work with regard to street sex workers was minimal (Sagar, 2002). Furthermore, residential action via officially sanctioned Street Watch programmes which aimed to drive women out of targeted areas were simply displacing sex workers to adjacent areas of the community (Sagar, 2005). It is true to say that until The Forum first came together in 2008 sex workers lay outside of any multi-agency strategy, despite street sex work remaining a high priority for residents in the most affected areas of Cardiff as highlighted at Partners and Community Together meetings in Grangetown and Splott.

The disaffection of the community towards sex workers who are anxious to resolve the nuisances associated with street sex work has led to research in the Cardiff area focusing mainly on the regulatory control of street sex workers; for example, currently Debbie Jones' doctoral thesis focuses on multi-agency partnership working and mechanisms of regulatory control in Cardiff. However, little research has focused on important aspects of sex work such as levels of service provision, routes into sex work, the physical and mental health of sex workers, addiction problems, safety or levels of violence experienced by sex workers etc. One notable exception being a report by Louise Matts (a former coordinator of Safer Wales StreetLife) and Dr Tom Hall (Cardiff University), *An Overview of Street Sex Work in Cardiff. Young People and their entry into Street Sex Work- The Perpetual Cycle "I Worms my way Back"* in 2007.

The report by Matts and Hall was based on interviews with twelve female street sex workers. The purpose of the research was,

'to gain a better understanding of the circumstances, needs and priorities of young women involved in street prostitution in Cardiff...[to] inform the provision of immediate services to an exceedingly vulnerable group of young people and [to] assist in the development of support strategies for those looking to exit' (Matts and Hall, 2007:2).

The research highlighted six broad themes: working practices; entering street sex work; risks to young people; support needs; wider support needs; and leaving street sex work. The authors made the following recommendations:

- ✚ A coordinated response incorporating specialist services that are equipped to respond to the multiple needs presented by the women which were most likely to involve drug intervention (with access to fast track services), mental health and social care support services.
- ✚ Support the women's health and emotional well-being through the development of a drop in centre to provide the basic level of support

such as a hot meal, relaxation and have access to therapeutic practices.

- ✚ Positive links with the Police where women can disclose information confidentially to the police.
- ✚ Access to mainstream housing and independent living.
- ✚ Harm reduction and preventative work for children and young people.

This 2007 (unpublished) report provided much needed information for front line workers in the Cardiff area; it facilitated a better understanding in particular of why young women entered sex work. Unfortunately, however, the report told us little about service needs and importantly, it provided little information regarding the safety of sex workers on the streets. The 2009-2010 Engagement Events undertaken by the Cardiff Sex Worker Forum provided an opportunity to fill this gap in knowledge.

2. The Engagement Event

1.2 Definitional Issues

Before discussing the purpose and process of the 'engagement event' it is necessary to define what the term 'engagement event' means.

Although the primary aim of the events was to 'reach out' to sex workers: to let sex workers know of The Forum existence and to spread the word that there is support; the events also provided an opportunity to gather information to enable The Forum to ascertain a much needed clearer picture regarding the overall needs, safety and wellbeing of street sex workers. Thus it is important to note that the 'engagement events' fulfilled a dual purpose. As both a 'reaching out' event and a data gathering exercise towards the

development of more effective policy the events fall firmly within the definition of applied social research.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

In 'engaging' with sex workers, there were several important issues that needed to be addressed.

Firstly, it was fundamentally important to The Forum members to ensure that the 'voices' of the sex workers were represented without the risk of exploitation or tokenism. A firmly held belief of some knowledgeable members of The Forum was that the experiences of the women were individualistic and that these views should be accurately accounted for.

Secondly, as previously indicated, The Forum believed that the women should be informed about its existence and purpose and that in order for policy development and strategic accountability to progress a basic understanding of the demographics of the street sex workers and their experiences of service provision should be explored.

Accordingly, there was unanimous agreement that although there was no funding available for a comprehensive research proposal, a group of select volunteers from The Forum with expertise in engagement with sex workers and research should form a subgroup to facilitate the 'engagement event'. This group consisted of the chair and representatives from Swansea University, Safer Wales StreetLife, Terrence Higgins Trust, HANAR and DIP.

3. Methodology

3.1 Funding

Although The Forum is made up of an alliance of statutory bodies, third sector organisations and an academic institution, the individual representation of such organisations is voluntary and The Forum lacks specific funding. Thus

The Forum has to apply to established funding groups on a needs basis. This being so, the 'engagement events' were managed without formal funding. However, the Chair secured £200.00 to remunerate the women for the time spent with the researchers during the event.

Each respondent was paid £10 for participation in the event, and at two events which took place at Christmas time in 2009 sex worker participants were also given a small Christmas gift which was provided by a local church group.

3.2 Ethics

As already noted, the engagement events did not initially set out to become a piece of ongoing research, however the data gathering exercise falls within the definition of 'research'. Thus, ethical considerations are of paramount importance.

Dr Tracey Sagar and Debbie Jones from Swansea University followed Swansea University's ethical practices and procedures, both are members of the British Society of Criminology (BSC) and both abided by the ethical code of the BSC.

It has already been noted that the subgroup considered that it was important to pay the women who engaged in the event for time spent with the researchers. The group recognised however that the payment of sex workers for participation in research has on occasion been the source of disagreement. Such unease has focused on the notion that women who sell their bodies as a commodity are always vulnerable to exploitation and that paying women who sell sex to partake in research is also akin in some circumstances to exploitation (O'Neill, 1996; Jones, 2010). A further argument put forward by those opposed to paying for participation, is that as there is a strong association with street sex work and addiction to drugs and or alcohol (Home Office, 2006; Litchfield *et al*, 2010), the money paid to the women would be used to 'feed' their 'habit' and this should not be condoned.

However, more recently some studies have offered payment by way of vouchers or in monetary terms (Bellis *et al*, 2007: Mai, 2009). Following lengthy consideration the subgroup decided to offer payment as an incentive to participate thus allowing the women to make choices for themselves.

Small flyers were produced and given to the women by Safer Wales StreetLife prior to the events stipulating the date and purpose of the events.

Informed consent was sought from the participants. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the event at anytime or refuse to answer any question. Anonymity and confidentiality which is a paramount consideration when researching sex work (Shaver, 2005), was also extended to the respondents.

The short interviews took place inside the Safer Wales StreetLife van and with the exception of one occasion with only the researcher and respondent present.

The interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and some additional notes were written down by the researcher (this was particularly useful where there was disturbance caused by background noise).

3.3 Methods and Research design

Despite the visibility of street sex work it has been well documented that researching such groups can be difficult (Sanders, 2006). Such difficulties include: the gaining of trust of workers; identifying representative samples; and given the often chaotic lifestyles of street sex workers, identifying appropriate and creative methods of engagement (Sanders *et al*, 2009)

In considering such issues the subgroup decided to offer the sex workers the opportunity to engage by taking the event to them. The event was therefore planned around the working patterns of sex workers and advertised to them through Safer Wales StreetLife. The events took place within three outreach

sessions. This involved utilising the Safer Wales StreetLife vehicle and a number of established volunteers from The Forum and engaging with sex workers on the street directly. In this way the sex workers still received condoms and refreshments but also had the opportunity to take part in the event. Undertaking the research in this way also meant that the researchers could build on the trusting relationship Safer Wales StreetLife established with them.

Safer Wales StreetLife work with female sex workers. Thus the 'engagement event' was targeted at female workers. This does not mean that the events would not have extended to incorporate male sex workers – however, on the nights the engagement events took place only women were found to be working the streets in the areas where the Safer Wales StreetLife van parked up. Engaging male sex workers is however, an important consideration for The Forum at a future date.

Researching sex work is more often than not associated with a qualitative methodology (Sanders *et al*, 2009). In this instance it was decided that as there would only be a short period of time to interview the women on the Safer Wales StreetLife vehicle semi structured interviews would be used. As two researchers would be conducting the interviews it was necessary to ensure that both researchers were briefed before the event and debriefed after. This ensured that the interviews were conducted consistently and emerging themes discussed.

3.4 Sample

Gaining an accurate numerical measurement of those engaged in sex work has been identified as problematic given its hidden, secretive nature (Cusick *et al*, 2009). In Cardiff this is no different.

Anecdotal information provided by Safer Wales StreetLife suggests that there are approximately forty six female street sex workers known to them. This does not mean however, that these numbers of women are working at any

one time. In statistical terms, given the small available population in Cardiff, to gain a representative sample, all of the women would have to be interviewed. This was not possible on this occasion.

The respondents were self selecting in that the interviewees had been made aware of the 'engagement event' via the use of flyers handed out by Safer Wales StreetLife.

The women who took part made use of Safer Wales StreetLife's services as they usually did and then stepped into the van to answer a series of short semi-structured questions.

17 women were interviewed in total. Therefore given the small sample it must be stressed that the findings are not statistically significant and importantly, they can not be generalised to the wider sex work population throughout Wales.

The research findings do however present a baseline and snap shot of some of the sex workers views in Cardiff and once triangulated with the knowledge of service providers and the findings from the study by Matts and Hall (2007), can be considered as accurate at that time.

3.5 Data Analysis

As with some other qualitative enquires the data was analysed through the process of coding. The data was organised and coded as it emerged during the research process. Accordingly it was an organic, reflexive process (Davies, 2008). In this respect, coding is an inductive process which many commentators associate with a grounded theory framework of analysis (Bryman, 2004; Davies, 2008). Once coded, the concepts were then categorised into themes (Charmaz, 2000). As such coding should not be mistaken as 'the' analysis of the data in itself but as a way of making important analytical links or tags with other concepts as they appear (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The data was categorised into the following six themes: demographics; addiction, service provision and improvements to services; social support and social inclusion; violence against sex workers; policing; and other.

4. Findings

The sex workers who took part in the engagement event were asked several short semi-structured questions which were designed to answer some specific questions regarding demographics and service provision (for example age and place of residence/work) but also questions were asked to enable respondents to talk about their personal experiences such as: “can you tell me how we can improve services?” and “is there anything you think that we have overlooked or anything you would like to add?”

The findings are as follows:

4.1 Demographics

1. All the respondents were white.
2. Respondents were aged between 28 and 48.
3. 16 out of 17 respondents lived in the locality within which they worked.
4. 1 sex worker travelled to Cardiff daily from Swansea.

The demographic data above suggests that despite widespread fears in the UK regarding migrant and trafficked sex workers that street sex work in Cardiff continues to be taken up predominantly by local white women.

5. 14 out of 17 sex workers had children.

This finding has important implications regarding sex workers as members of the community with children attending local schools etc. Although three respondents explained that children were cared for by their mums. Another explained that her child was in care. Another was fighting for access to see her children.

6. 5 sex workers began working before the age of 18. The majority of sex workers began selling sex over the age of 21.

Interestingly, this finding suggests that most sex workers in participating in the event began selling sex as adults. 4 sex workers had worked 'on and off' for many years. These sex workers had returned to the streets after several years out of the industry – to earn much needed extra income.

4.2 Addiction, service provision & improvements to services

1. 12 out of 17 sex workers were 'using' at the time of interview. The majority of users were heroin/crack addicts. 2 sex workers said they just used 'gear' and did not specify heroin or crack.

2. 5 sex workers were taking/had been taking methadone for heroin/crack addictions at the time of interview.

3. 1 sex worker was on a waiting list for drug addiction treatment with the Cardiff Addictions Unit.

Researchers have to be very careful about the reliability and validity of data. While several respondents claimed to be on methadone and not currently using, it was clear to the researchers that some of these respondents were either under the influence of alcohol or using. In any event, the findings reflect Home Office statistics (Home Office, 2006) in that the vast majority of street sex workers are addicted to A class drugs.

4. The majority of sex workers were accessing services other than Safer Wales StreetLife including: the Woman's Turnaround project delivered by Safer Wales, DIP/ Kaleidoscope, Inroads, Cardiff Addictions Unit.

5. 5 sex workers were not accessing any other services than the Safer Wales StreetLife van.

6. The majority of respondents spoke of the Safer Wales StreetLife van as a valuable service with comments ranging from 'the volunteers are lovely' to 'they are very 'supportive'. In particular, the 'necessity' of the Safer Wales StreetLife van can be illustrated by the following statement of one sex worker:

"on days that I don't eat I wait all day for the van".

Clearly, as well as supplying condoms and refreshments Safer Wales StreetLife also provides an essential 'support service' for sex workers. One sex worker came out to see the van simply to tell the workers that she was still 'clean' – she was obviously very proud and wanted to share this information with 'supportive' Safer Wales StreetLife workers.

7. 2 sex workers spoke of the need to see the Safer Wales StreetLife van out every day or at least on a more regular basis.

From the perspective of these sex workers there is a need for a more expansive service provision. Another sex worker also said that she wanted access to enable her to get hold of emergency condoms over the weekend. Given that street sex work is linked to drug and alcohol misuse and also to risky sexual practises, it is important that sex workers have access to free condoms on a daily basis.

8. 3 sex workers spoke of how being seen by the van made them feel 'safer'. One respondent stated:

"it means a lot to be seen"

another,

"once you are seen – someone knows that you are out there"

This finding ties into the levels of violence sex workers face in their daily lives and the need to try and keep safe. Indeed, one sex worker suggested that Safer Wales StreetLife begin to make lists of girls who are seen so that at least someone is alerted when a girl goes missing. Another sex worker explained that the women try and keep an eye out for each other but that this was not enough. The interviews took place before the recent murders in Bradford and thus it cannot be said that the safety concerns of the women had been heightened by the murders of sex workers in Yorkshire.

9. 1 sex worker spoke of the need for more preventive work to stop young girls falling into prostitution:

“I know that there are girls as young as 14 out there”

The respondent clearly did not see sex work as an attractive occupation and wanted to prevent other young girls falling in to the industry.

10. 2 sex workers in particular asked for a mobile needle exchange service.

This service was previously provided by Inroads but had been withdrawn at the time of the research.

11. 1 sex worker wanted to see improvements with regard to accessing help with benefits and housing and generally getting access to people who could help.

12. 1 sex worker simply wanted a, ‘place to go’ to get the right support while another spoke of her need to have someone to talk to other than ‘key’ workers such as probation workers.

The above responses clearly indicate that there is a need to establish a drop in centre or at the very least outreach services that can provide a one stop shop to enable sex workers to access a variety of services to meet their varying needs. This is particularly pressing given the findings below which indicate that sex workers have little social support.

4.3 Social support and social inclusion

1. Only 3 sex workers had contact with their families. 1 of the 3 only had contact with her grandma. Another had some contact with her family but they lived in the Midlands. The other sex worker had maintained contact with her mother who at the time of interview provided primary care for her children.
2. 5 sex workers had partners. 2 sex workers explained that their partners knew that they were selling sex.
3. 5 sex workers spoke of having friends. However 2 of the respondents distinguished between non working friends and working friends – both referred to the latter as ‘associates’ and not real friends. Another explained that although she had friends they lived in crack houses and so she tried to stay away from them. Similarly, another respondent spoke of trying to hang around with friends who ‘did not use’. One respondent referred to Safer Wales StreetLife as providing her social support.

The data indicates that sex workers have weak social networks to support them. It was clear that apart from partners, sex workers kept their occupation secret. This finding is consistent within other sex work research (see: Sanders, 2008).

Data revealed that none of the respondents had ongoing support from family, partners and friends simultaneously. Several sex workers spoke of how family support had ‘stopped’. 3 respondents spoke of having no support at all – from anyone.

These findings could be important in the context of a sex workers ability to rehabilitate and abstain from drug use (see: Sagar, 2010). Research indicates that people who maintain strong relationships with family do better throughout rehabilitative treatment (McSweeney et.al. 2007). Indeed, (as already noted) 1 sex worker who was interviewed had come out that night with the sole purpose of telling the Safer Wales StreetLife team that she was still clean.

This respondent was the only sex worker who had maintained an ongoing relationship with her mother.

Furthermore, although friends can provide much needed social support it was apparent from the responses that friends were separated into non working and working friends. The data obtained from 2 sex worker interviews (noted above) indicated that abstinence from drug use was dependent on separation with old social friendship networks. Another respondent explained that her friends were drug users and so they could not support her.

If social support and strong social networks are important in terms of drug rehabilitation and abstinence from drug use it is clear from the data that much more research needs to be carried out into the social networks of sex workers. This is particularly important given the new legal reforms under the Police and Crime Act 2009: s17 engagement orders which steer, by court order, sex workers into the hands of welfare and sex worker agencies to identify sex workers who are believed to be addicted to A class drugs (a claim that is substantiated by the research findings in Cardiff). Accordingly, it follows that routes out of sex work are likely to focus on drug rehabilitation (see: Sagar, 2010). If social support is lacking, however, then this needs to be acknowledged in policy and service provision to ensure that if necessary the gap can be filled as far as possible by service providers.

4.4 Violence against sex workers

1. The majority of sex workers interviewed had been violently assaulted. 9 sex workers spoke of how they had been attacked 'several times'.

2. 2 sex workers in particular spoke of recent incidents where they had been violently attacked at knife point and where the punter actually paid after and even paid more money. Both said that the punter was white and middle-aged and 'looked normal'. These incidents were reported to the Safer Wales StreetLife staff so that the information could be passed on to the police. Speaking of one of the attacks, the sex worker stated

“I even played along to keep safe”.

3. Another sex worker told of how she was currently being stalked by a 50 year old man who was ringing her all the time and sending her threatening text messages.

4. A sex worker showed the researcher a recent knife cut to her throat which had been done by a punter who had wanted his money back.

5. Another sex worker explained that she had been attacked three times – the worst attack was two years ago when she had her head ‘smashed in’ with a rock. She was taken to hospital and so the incident was reported to the police – the perpetrator was not found.

6. One sex worker told the researcher that she had also been attacked several times. The last time a couple of months ago when a punter tried to drag her into his car, she screamed and he punched her repeatedly in the face. She showed the researcher her missing molar teeth that had been knocked out. She said that she had been covered in blood and that if she had not been working locally (just by the Magic Roundabout) that she would have been taken and she would be dead.

In addition to the horrific testimonies of sex workers noted above, the women spoke of many ‘incidents’. Worryingly, none of the violent attacks or incidents had been reported to the police. When asked why they were not reported, sex workers explained that they did not believe that anything would be done. In the words of one sex worker,

“the police look at you as if you deserve it”.

Clearly steps need to be taken to build up relationships of trust with the police, sex workers need to have confidence to report any attack with the belief that the police will take them seriously and be proactive.

7. Finally, it is important to note that sex workers are not only subject to abuse at the hands of punters but also that they can be abused by members of the community. One sex worker told the researcher that young men in the area repeatedly attacked her with bricks and stones.

Again, such incidences bring forth the importance of improving community cohesion, where sex workers are able to build up social networks of support within the community – enabling them to feel part of the community and to be better equipped to deal with this kind of victimisation. And, of course, to feel that they are able to report ‘all’ kinds of violence to the police.

It is clear from the events in Ipswich and more recently in Bradford that sex workers are not safe when working the streets. This is a fact that is well known to policy makers. Yet, the reality is that sex workers appear to hold what Hilary Kinnell has referred to as a ‘throwaway’ status (O’Neill, 2007).

However in Wales, violence against women is taken seriously. Unfortunately, the ‘Right to be Safe’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010) strategy to tackle all violence against women talks only of women who are ‘fleeing’ prostitution or trafficking – it does not extend to the violence sex workers are experiencing in their everyday lives. As one sex worker who had not been subjected to violence expressed:

“you hear such awful things happen to the girls”

Keeping sex workers safe is a priority for The Forum and it is an issue that needs to be incorporated into a wider pan Wales strategic framework.

4.5 Policing

1. 11 out of the 17 sex workers had not been arrested for prostitution offences within the last 12 months at the time of interview. However, one prostitute explained that she had been arrested for shoplifting to get money to buy drugs for a friend.

2. 1 sex worker explained that she had been taken to the station and then let go. Another said that she had been stopped lots of times and eventually prosecuted and fined and referred by court order to DIP.

3. 1 sex worker said that she felt picked on by the police – she had recently been arrested and locked up from 8 pm until 12 that night. She had been arrested and fined. She explained that she had to keep working to pay off the fine and her rent arrears.

4. One sex worker had been arrested in the Midlands but had no arrests in Cardiff.

Clearly, the police have been monitoring the red light areas of Cardiff but have not been actively prosecuting the women working those areas. The data also suggests that the women have been kept away from court as much as possible which is to be welcomed given the – ‘revolving door syndrome’ as noted in point 3 above.

However, the data also suggests that some sex workers can feel picked on and distrust the police – again this is reflected in the lack of reporting to the police the violence that is suffered by sex workers.

4.6 Other

1. Although respondents were not asked specific questions on their health and general wellbeing at the engagement events it was apparent to the researchers that the vast majority of respondents had poor physical and mental health. Several sex workers looked dangerously underweight. Many of the respondents spoke quite openly about a variety of health issues including depression, anxiety and chest problems associated with drug use.

2. Other issues that were raised included the need to make it safer for women working the streets. When asked what could be done to improve services, 4 sex workers replied that anything that can make it safer would be welcome.

The importance of women's safety cannot be underestimated. Not only are women's lives at risk, but a strategic response is necessary to prevent women taking matters into their own hands. For example, one sex worker who had been arrested for shoplifting had also been charged for carrying a flick knife. She had explained to the police – as she did to the researcher – that she needed the knife for safety reasons.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings set out in section four of this report point to sex workers in the Cardiff area as a socially marginalised group who are in need of coordinated services which respond to a whole variety of needs – including services to support general wellbeing and mental health.

Perhaps the most significant and important finding is the neglected safety of sex workers.

There needs to be recognition in policy that women are local and members of the community. Sex work is often a contested issue within the community (and as noted previously, sex work has been a Partners and Community Together Meeting priority in at least two areas of Cardiff for several years). Therefore, it is important to assess the levels of community disaffection towards sex workers within the most problematic areas of Cardiff.

Further, towards reducing community disaffection towards sex workers it is vital that sex workers are incorporated into community cohesion strategies and work – particularly this is necessary to facilitate social inclusion.

The engagement events represent an important step towards this but there is much more work to be done.

Our recommendations are as follows:

1. Assess levels of disaffection towards sex workers in the community
2. Make good use of outreach workers to represent sex workers as members of the community within policy development and the development of safety strategies
3. Take violence against sex workers by clients seriously and prosecute proactively
4. Take violence against sex workers by members of the community seriously and prosecute proactively
5. Make strategic inroads into facilitating women reporting violence – in particular build up trustful relationships between sex workers and law enforcement agencies
6. Work towards policy development that is able to address not just housing and addiction but which also provides assistance to sex workers who have physical and mental health needs.
7. Work towards the recognition of violence against street sex workers within the Welsh Assembly Governments (2010), Violence Against Women Strategy – *'The Right to be Safe'*.
8. Continue the 'engagement' data collection process. A wealth of useful data was derived from just 17 interviews and this will prove very important as The Forum strives towards developing effective policy. In order to ensure that policy in Cardiff meets the needs of all street sex workers and keeps pace with other areas of the UK, there is a need to continue to engage with sex workers and collate this vital data.

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