

SUMMARY REPORT

BEYOND GENDER: AN EXAMINATION OF EXPLOITATION IN SEX WORK.

Please note that as survey respondents could skip any questions they wished and they could also tick as many boxes as were relevant to them, percentages will not always total 100. In most cases I will provide the percentage followed by the number of respondents in brackets (as n=).

Geographic Location

54.3% (n=239) of the survey respondents were resident in the UK. Respondents in the US, Canada, Australia, Western Europe and New Zealand made up a further 42.5% (n=187). Only around 3.2% (n=14) came from outside of this group of countries.

Gender

Of the 483 survey responses, 61.8% (n=298) of respondents were female, 32.2% (n=155) were male, and 4.6% (n=22) were transwomen. One respondent reported as a transman and 6 respondents reported as 'other'. Of this 6, 2 responses were from couples who escorted together and answered jointly, the other 4 were genetic males who were either transvestites or were in the process of gender transition. For the purpose of brevity however, throughout the remainder of this report, where gendered comparisons are made, I will refer only to the 3 gender groups: male, female and transgender.

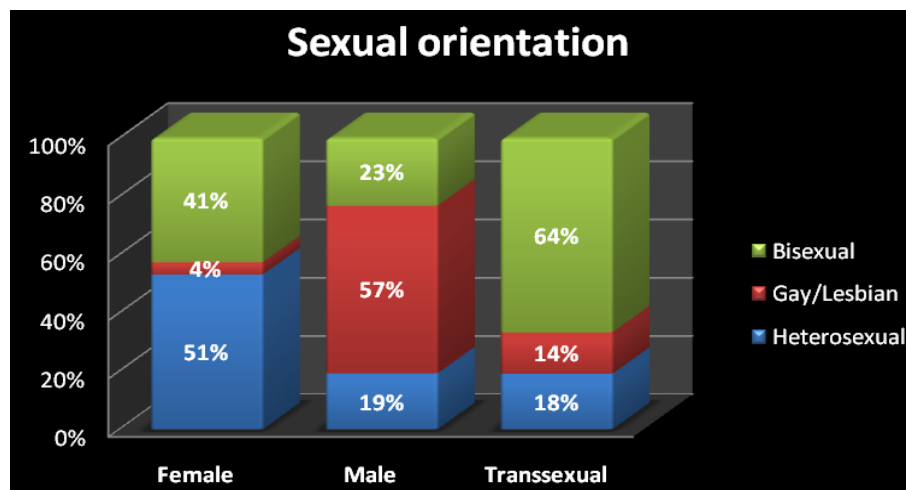


Figure 1: Sexual orientation by percentage

Indication of reported sexual orientation is shown above in figure 1. While most respondents indicated one of the three options, 2.9% (n=14) ticked 'other' offering explanations in the text box such as 'gay for pay', "bi-curious", "mainly straight", and "work = bi / personal = straight". This latter term was only specified by 1 participant. However, in retrospect, it was probably a more accurate description of other female respondents, who, having reported as bisexual, later clarified in their interview that this was only an identity that they related to within the context of sex work.

Respondents were also asked about the gender of their clients. Of the 155 male respondents, 80.3% (n=123) serviced all or mainly male clients. Of the 32 remaining men, 27 serviced only or mainly female clients with 5 reporting that they either services couples or an otherwise equal numbers of male and female clients. With regard to transgendered respondents, 96% serviced all or mainly male clients. Of the 298 female respondents, over 96% (n=285) serviced either all male or mainly male clients. Of those remaining women (13 in total), 6 serviced only female clients and 3 serviced mainly female clients. The other four, who all reported as lesbian or bisexual, chose not to comment.

Age and Length of Time in Sex Work

The ages reported by participants revealed that the men were on average younger than the women, and the transgendered participants were on average older, with no transgendered participants under 18 and only 1 under 25. Only 1 woman and 2 men were under 18. The mode for women was late 30s whereas for men it was early 20s. A summary of the ages of participants is shown below in Figure 2.

Age	Female	Male	Transwomen
< 18	0.3	1.4	0.0
18-25	14.8	23.8	4.5
26-30	21.6	21.0	22.7
31-35	19.9	20.3	31.8
36-40	24.4	14.7	13.6
41+	18.9	18.9	27.3

Figure 2: Age in percentage at time of survey

As can be seen in Figure 2., almost a fifth of both male and female participants, and almost a third of transwomen, were over 41 years of age. Closely related to age at the time of survey is the length of time that respondents had, at the point of survey completion, worked in the sex industry.. The category most frequently indicated by both men and women was 3-5 years. More men, proportionately, had worked in the sex industry for over 21 years.

Income and Education

Respondents were asked about additional sources of income and here, 69.6 % (n=206) of women reported that escort work was their main source of income. This was similar for transgendered participants at 63.6% (n=14), and for men the figure drops to 43.8% (n=67). This reinforces the notion that escort work is less often a full time role for men, albeit that it is still the sole income for almost half of the male respondents. Second, in terms of educational qualifications, male respondents rated slightly higher levels of academic qualifications. For example, 35.3 % (54) of men held bachelor's degrees, whereas for women, this was 32.9% (n=98). Overall, more than a third of respondents were degree-educated, with over 18% (n=88) holding post graduate qualifications. Conversely, overall, only 6.5% (n=31) reported that they had no formal educational qualifications.

Interviews

Respondents putting themselves forward as prospective interviewees were asked to indicate their preferred method of interview, such as face-to-face or online. Online interviews were carried out using either instant messaging or via email. A second group of interviews were conducted by telephone, with or without the use of webcams. All other interviews were conducted in person. Figure 3 below shows a summary of those interviews broken down by methods and gender.

	Female	Male	Transwomen	Total
Face-to-Face	36	10	5	51
Telephone	6	4	2	12
Online	28	15	2	45
Total	70	29	9	108

Figure 3: Number of interviews by methods and gender

As can be seen in the above table, overall, men had a greater tendency to choose online methods, whereas women preferred in-person interviews, but there was quite a mix, as well as an assortment of reasons why that method was chosen.

Gender and Motivation

In terms of financial motivation, survey respondents were asked to indicate what escort work meant to them financially. The results from this question are summarised in figure 4 below.

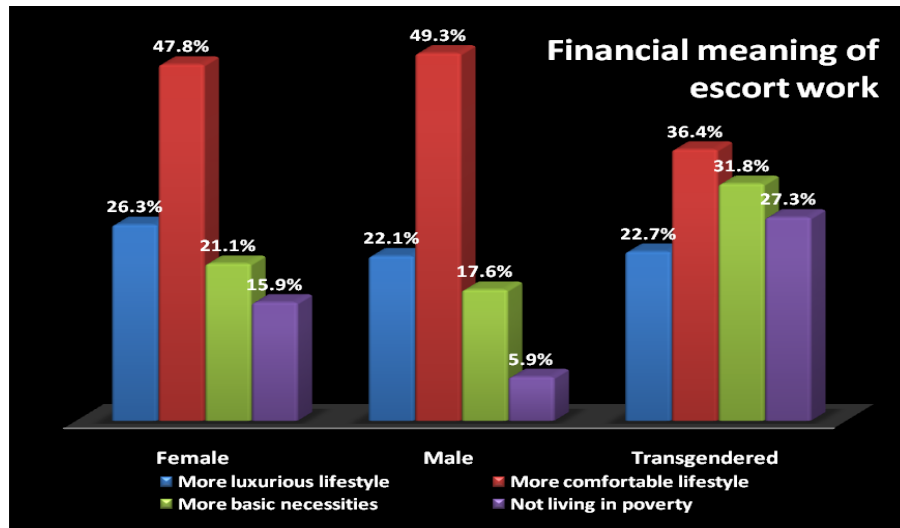


Figure 4: The financial meaning of escort work

As this shows, overall, almost half indicated that escort work provided a more comfortable lifestyle, and this is also the option most selected by each gender group. The second-most indicated, for both men and women, was a ‘more luxurious lifestyle’ (except for transwomen, for whom the next most populous answer for them was that it provided more basic necessities). The option selected least by men and women was ‘not living in poverty’. Because terms like basic, comfort, and luxury are open to interpretation, almost a third of the women, and some men, clarified their answers by citing the particular expenses that escort work had funded, such as holidays, paying for private schooling for children etc.

One point of note here is that proportionally, more transgendered participants reported that escort work had been a response to poverty, and for over half, escort work provided a basic rather than extravagant lifestyle. Of the 6 who indicated that escort work meant ‘not living in poverty’, 3 cited the particular economic issues for transwomen, such as the medical costs of sex reassignment surgery, and 4 reported having experienced discrimination in the workplace. However, this still represents only around a third of transgendered participants overall.

Respondents were also asked: “How did you first become involved in escort work?” This was answered by 331 respondents in total. Overall, from the survey and interview data, a multitude of reasons emerged in response to the question of how men and women became involved in sex work. In terms of economic motivation, of the 108 interviewees, 57% (n=62) cited money as at least *part* of their explanation. This differed little by gender. It is also worth noting that 38% (n=178) of respondents reported that they had used escort work to fund their education.

As well as thinking about initial motivation for recruitment into the sex industry, the survey also asked respondents what they liked about escort work. The responses to the selections indicated by respondents, comparable by gender, are shown below as figure 5.

	Female	Male	Transgendered
The money	93.4%	83.0%	86.4%
The lifestyle	46.0%	38.5%	40.9%
Meeting people	67.6%	66.7%	59.1%
The sex	49.8%	74.8%	59.1%
Flexibility of working hours	75.3%	51.9%	50.0%
Being part of the escort community	27.5%	17.8%	0.0%
The independence	72.5%	46.7%	4.5%

Figure 5: Which of the following do you like about escort work?

There were several differences in terms of how men and women answered this question. For example, one of the most commonly reported factors for female participants was that flexibility and independence were important to them. As can be seen from the graph, over three quarters of the female participants rated flexible working hours (75.3% n=217) as something that they like about the escort role, whereas for men, this dropped to just over half (51.9% n=70). This contrast is similarly reflected in the number who indicated that it was the ‘independence’ that they liked. This is probably not surprising given the demands of childcare that often fall upon women rather than men. In some cases the indication was that fewer working hours meant more time to dedicate to parenthood, including attending school meetings or being home out of school hours. The other benefit of escort work mentioned by many participants with children was that because earnings from sex work tended to be higher than they could otherwise earn, they were also able to afford family holidays or finance a further/higher education for older children.

However, it is also important to highlight that an appreciation of flexible working hours and independence were factors that were valuable to women generally, not only mothers. The benefits of greater independence and flexible working hours were not just about the demands of parenting - they were often about time provided for other, non parenting-related pursuits. These included other business interests, studying, and artistic or sporting pastimes. Although some men similarly valued their personal time in this way, it was female participants who mentioned freedom and independence most frequently.

Plans to stop escort work

In terms of participants’ longer term plans, respondents were asked: ‘How much longer do you plan to do escort work for?’ The options offered range from less than 3 months to ‘I have no plans to stop escort work’. For women, ‘I have no plans to stop escort work’ was joint first choice of answer along with ‘one-five more years (both were indicated equally by 35.3% (n=101). In contrast, only 3.2% (n=9) indicated that they planned to stop in less than three months.

For males in contrast, the top answer was ‘one-five more years’ at 43.4% (n=59), followed by ‘I have no plans to stop escort work at 35.3 % (n48). Only 4.4% (n=6) of male participants indicated that they planned to stop in under three months. The answers for trans women was similar to that of the male participants at 40.9% (n=9) indicating that they planned to stop in between one and five years time, while no transwomen indicated that they had plans to stop in under three months. This suggests that few participants had any plans to cease sex work in the near future if at all.

Client relationships

Respondents were asked to choose, from 3 statements, how power is played out in commercial sex transactions. The results are provided below as figure 6 below.

	Females	Males	Transgendered
Paying for sex puts the client in a position of power over the escort	6.8%	15.8%	31.8%
Paying for sex puts the client in a vulnerable position in relation to the escort	26.2%	33.8%	13.6%
Commercial sexual transactions are relationships of equality	54.5%	44.4%	40.9%
None of the above	15.1%	12.8%	22.7%

Figure 6: Which of the following statements would you say best explains how power is played out in commercial sexual transactions?

The responses to this question show that regardless of gender, the majority of respondents perceive commercial sex as a relationship of equality; as escorts, they neither have power over, nor are submissive to, their clients. Of those that indicated otherwise, the next most commonly-indicated answer was that paying for sex put the client in a vulnerable position in relation to the escort. Only a small proportion of respondents, particularly female respondents, felt that power resided with the paying client. For men it was a little more varied, with more, proportionally, indicating that there was a power imbalance one way or another. Although otherwise similar, for transgendered respondents, the proportion who felt that the client was in a position of power was somewhat higher.

Accepting that notions of power and control are interrelated, insofar as a lack of power would suggest a related reduction in the ability to demonstrate control, a second question that feeds in to the theme of power relations was a question about who normally took overall control of the escort encounter. The results to this are shown below as figure 7.

	Females	Males	Transgendered
You always do	54.6%	24.6%	27.3%
You usually do	24.1%	26.1%	22.7%
Your client does	0.7%	8.2%	4.5%
It varies greatly	22.3%	45.5%	54.5%

Figure 7: In your escort interactions, who normally takes overall control of the encounter?

As figure 13 shows, while over half of the women reported that they always took control of meetings with clients, men were far less likely to do so. Of the 281 female respondents who answered this question, only 2 women said that their client took overall control. Of the 79% of women (n=222) who reported feeling either always or usually in control, many said they controlled everything both prior to and during the meeting, whether subtly or overtly. In contrast, both male and transgendered participants more frequently reported that control varied greatly.

Threatening behaviour

Respondents were asked: ‘Have you ever felt physically threatened in any way as a result of your work?’ In response to this, 25% of women and 18.7% of men said that they had, at some point, felt physically threatened. For transsexual women this increased to 45.5%.

Respondents were also asked about other types of threat (i.e. non-physical). 30% of women and 23% of men indicated feeling threatened, and again, for transsexual participants, this was

substantially higher, with half of all transgendered participants reporting having felt threatened. It was clear from the comments provided in response to this question that the type of threat being reported, in almost all cases, was the threat of being publicly exposed as a sex worker.

Respect

Two survey questions addressed the topic of respect: the first asked: ‘Do you feel that, in the main, your clients treat you respectfully?’ The results are shown below as figure 8.

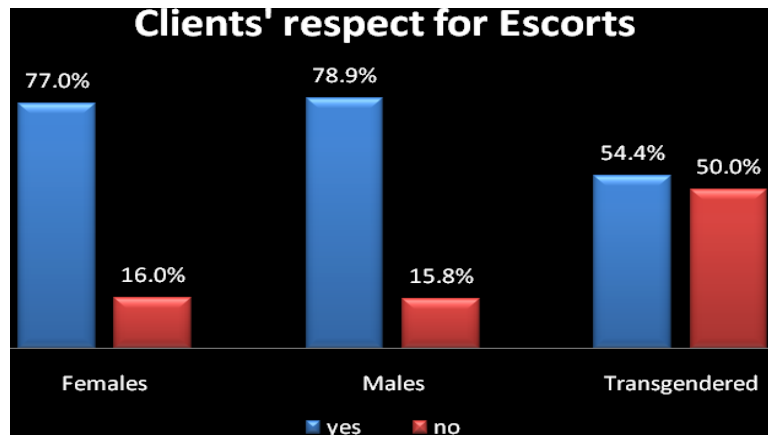


Figure 8: Do you feel that, in the main, your clients treat you respectfully?

As figure 8 shows, the overwhelming answer to this was ‘yes’, male and female escorts did feel that they were treated respectfully. Only 15 respondents, said ‘no’ to this question: 3 women, 1 man and 11 transsexual women. Transgendered respondents are over-represented here, and several transwomen added that, unlike the male and female participants, they often felt ‘used’ or ‘unfairly criticised’, by their clients.

The second question on respect asked: ‘Do you feel genuine respect for the majority of your clients?’ The responses are shown below as figure 9.

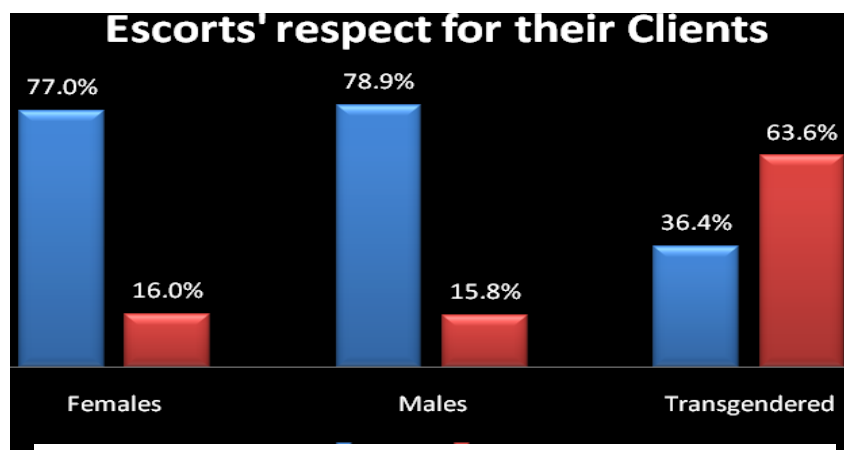


Figure 9: Do you feel genuine respect for the majority of your clients?’

Overall, three-quarters of all respondents reported positively. As before, this differed little between men and women; however, again, far fewer transgendered respondents reported that they respected their clients.

Self-confidence

The topic of self-confidence is addressed by survey question 29: ‘What impact, if any, has working as an escort had on you in terms of your self-confidence?’ The results are shown below in figure 10.

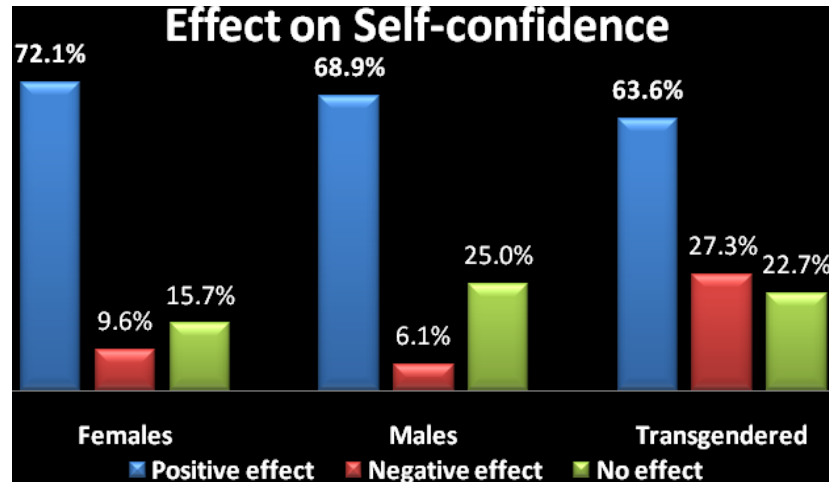
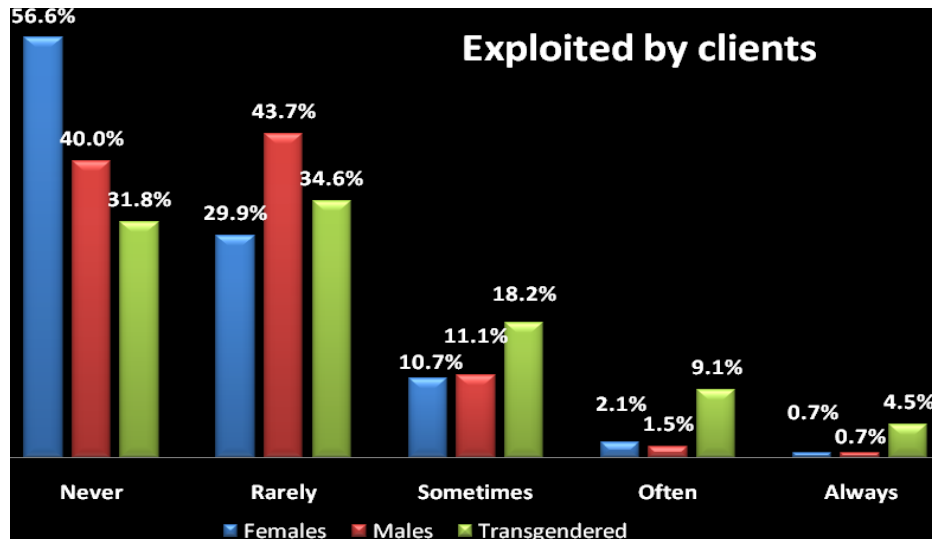


Figure 10: What impact, if any, has working as an escort had on you in terms of your self-confidence?

As figure 10 shows, many more respondents indicated that escort work had positively affected their self-confidence, and this was particularly pronounced for females. This was not, however, an indication that men were more frequently negatively affected; instead, more men reported that it had had no effect at all. The additional comments to this question showed that where escort work reportedly had ‘no effect on self confidence’, this was largely because the respondents had always had a high level of self-confidence, and moreover, they argued, without it you would be unlikely to consider escort work.

Exploitation by Clients

Drawing on the survey data, the first point to highlight, is that in terms of exploitation specifically by clients, levels were very low for both men and women. The results of the question: How often does escort work leave you feeling exploited by a client? are shown below in figure 11.



A **Figure 11: How often does escort work leave you feeling exploited by a client?**

1. For example, women more frequently reported that they never feel exploited by clients than the male participants. However, once the results of 'never' and 'rarely' are combined, the difference between men and women is negligible at 86.5% for women versus 83.7% for men. In other words, although fewer men said 'never', more men, in proportion to women, said 'rarely', and the most significant point is that for neither men nor women was exploitation commonly experienced.

For transgendered participants, this combined figure drops to 66.4%, indicating that far fewer transgendered participants were able to dismiss notions of exploitation in the way that most other escorts did. Furthermore, the kind of exploitation that transgendered participants talked about was often violent, or at least physically threatening in nature; 40.9% (n=9) referred to incidences of physical violence or threats of violence that had occurred in the context of their work.

In terms of reported violent or dangerous incidents, this question was addressed directly. The results show that transgendered participants suffered, by far, the most violence, at 40.9%, with men and other women experiencing only 6.7% and 15.7% respectively.

Exploited by 'others'

Respondents were asked about exploitation by people other than clients. The results of this are shown in figure 12 below:

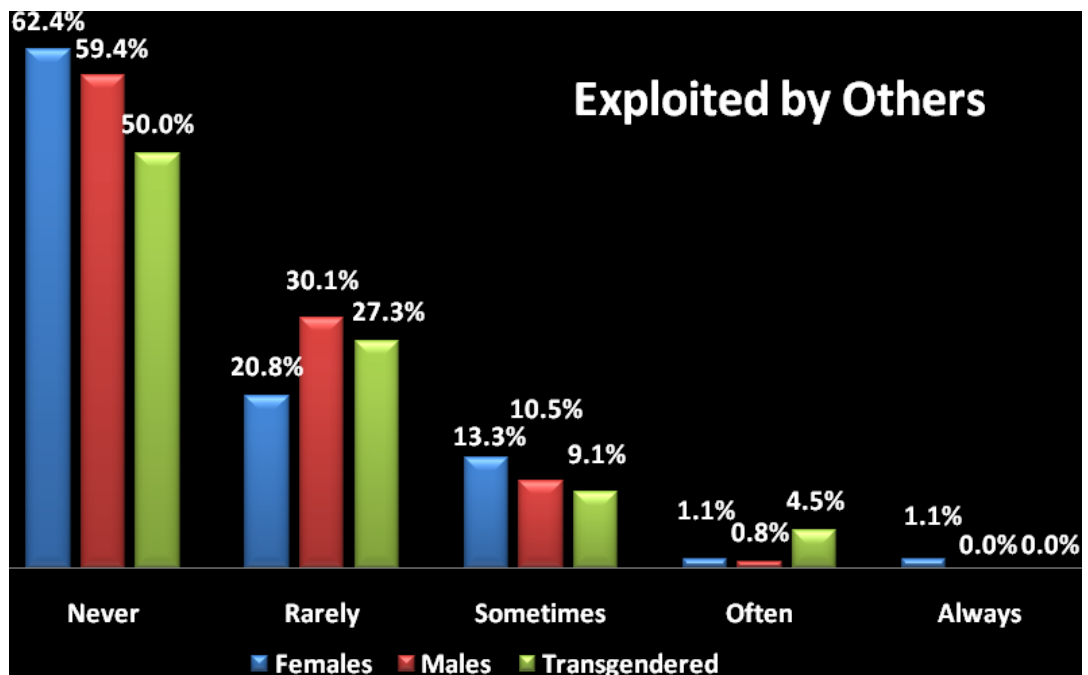


Figure 12: How often do you feel exploited by other people in the escorting business?

As figure 12 shows, once the results of ‘never’ and ‘rarely’ are combined, there is little difference between males and females. The responses indicate that exploitation is not a common occurrence, with very few participants indicating that exploitation occurs ‘often’ or ‘always’. Of those that did report feeling exploited by others, the most commonly cited ‘other’ were third party sex work organisers, such as agencies and parlours. Over 40% (n=44), of interviewees reported that they had felt exploited by third parties. Some of these complaints related to agencies charging excessively high fees for doing very little, whereas others related to more serious or unscrupulous behaviour.

Two other ways in which participants felt that they were exploited in the course of their work, was in terms of being overcharged for goods and services, such as newspaper advertising, and by landlords who try to charge sex workers rental rates far above market value, on account of the work that they do.

Escorts as Exploitative

The survey asked whether respondents ever felt that they were exploiting their clients at all. 26.9% (n=76) of women reported that they did feel that they exploited their clients. The figures for men were slightly higher at 31.3% (n=42), and for transgendered participants, 36.4% (n=8). Altogether 130 survey respondents reported that they felt they sometimes exploited their clients; however, the most frequently reported explanation, by far, was that participants were aware, and concerned, that some clients could not afford their services or that they were taking advantage of people’s loneliness.

Respondents as consumers of sexual services

Within the survey data, there were two questions on the topic of respondents as consumers of commercial sex. The first question asked respondents whether they have ever paid for sex, and the second asked whether they were likely to do so in the future. The results, by gender, are provided below as figures 13 and 14.

	Female	Male	Transwomen
Yes	14.2%	45.2%	50%
No	82.9%	25.9%	50%

Figure 13: Have you ever paid anyone else for sexual services

	Female	Male	Transwomen
Yes	30%	45.2%	40.9%
No	46.4%	25.9%	31.8%
Maybe	21.4%	21.4%	22.7%

Figure 14: Do you think there are any circumstances under which you would pay for the service of a sex worker?

Narrative data shows a variety of reasons for hiring sex workers. Sometimes this was for purely sexual pleasure; sometimes it was to treat a partner (for example to make up threesome), and sometimes participants mentioned trying something new or acting out a fantasy.

Escort work and choice

Arguments that sex work is inherently exploitative tend to depend heavily on the assumption that sex work is only ever undertaken by those with little choice. Most participants in this study, male and female, argued that they engaged in sex work from a position of choice: both about whether to engage in sex work, and under what conditions. Female escorts in particular reported experiencing an advantage, insofar as, with a larger pool of clients to draw from, they often had more choice about who to accept as clients. Women did typically earn more per hour than male sex workers, due to the higher demand for their services. This demand enabled women to be more selective, which placed them in what they felt was a more powerful position. For male escorts, although they often felt that they had ample choice, power relationships were reportedly more variable. For example, men more frequently acquiesced to sexual acts with which they were less than comfortable; for women this was rare. However, overall, very few participants reported feeling in any way coerced, dominated or oppressed.

Although the notion of choice is somewhat contestable, especially when choices are constrained by pre-existing factors such as poverty, problematic backgrounds, substance dependency and coercion, in my analysis of such typical pre-existing characteristics, I found very low levels of vulnerability. Again, there was little difference by gender, and I reject the notion that all sex workers' lives are necessarily linked to problematic psychological or social factors; for these escorts, there was very little evidence of vulnerability resulting from childhood abuse, substance dependency or coercive influences.

Law and Vulnerability to Exploitation

One of my primary concerns in this research was to explore how law impacts upon sex workers in terms of their vulnerability to exploitation. I sought to assess whether the current legal approach serves to exacerbate sex workers' vulnerability to exploitation. It is difficult to gauge how effective the law has been in terms of protecting sex workers from exploitation. As documented above, for these sex workers, levels of exploitation were reported to be very low; this could be taken to suggest that the current legal status and strategy on prostitution does offer some protection. For example, because the selling of sex is not in itself illegal, sex workers can, technically at least, work within the law and draw upon the police for protection the same as any other citizen can.

44 interviewees were asked about how confident they felt about using the police as a resource in the event of being a victim of crime at work. Of these, only 12 participants said that they would feel confident taking their complaint up with the police; 32 participants said that they would not feel that they could do so. There was no noticeable difference by gender.

Interviewees were also asked what, if anything, law, and the criminal justice system more widely, meant to them, both in the context of their work and also whether, as a result of their work, law affected them in their private lives. Although as escorts most participants work within the law, frustration about the lack of clarity regarding the legality of sex work was mentioned by 21% of those with whom this was discussed (n=23) participants, with 12 making reference to how it was a 'grey area'. Women who were new to the industry sometimes found it difficult to know how best to work without committing an offence. Furthermore, not all sex workers prefer to work alone; for reasons of safety and the sharing of costs, some would prefer to work with others, however, legally, they are discouraged from doing so.

Concluding comments

In brief, my research data leads me to conclude that there are a number of consequences of the current legal approach which have a negative effect; in some instances, exploitation of sex workers was the direct result of particular legislation and in others, increased vulnerability to exploitation resulted indirectly, as the result of the relationships between law and social stigma. For example, I argue that the current legal approach towards prostitution increases sex worker's vulnerability to exploitation in four ways: first, by isolating sex workers from working with other people, their safety is compromised; second; by penalising third parties, sex workers are prevented from accessing services that would help them to facilitate and organise their work more safely, and responsible organisers are discouraged from operating; third, the ambiguous legal status of prostitution and the negative effect this ambiguity has on social stigma renders sex workers at a disadvantage when it comes to negotiating with other people in the course of their work; fourth, sex workers are often perceived (both by themselves and by potential exploiters) to be unprotected legally and are characterised therefore as 'easy targets' for exploitation.

The effects of negative social stigma were also evident for most participants, regardless of gender. Although both men and women were adversely affected by social stigma, for women, this appeared to have a greater impact and was mostly associated with the notion that women only resorted to sex work because they had little choice. This places sex workers, especially female sex workers, in a weaker position in terms of negotiating with people around them. Furthermore, the stigma and confusion about the legalities of sex work are exacerbated by media stereotypes and have been rekindled by recent discussions about the criminalisation of purchasing sex. Further criminalisation, either of clients or of sex industry organisers, would not only make sex workers more directly vulnerable to exploitation, but would also add to the ambiguity as to what exactly constitutes legal behaviour within sex work. In other words, even if further punitive measures were not directed at sex workers themselves, the effect would be to add to an already complex set of laws that surround their work. If sex workers are to be protected then the law should be clarified and simplified, and any legislation that is retained or introduced should focus only on identifiable exploitative behaviours rather than assumptions about the relationships between sex workers and other people.

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