

FACTS ABOUT SEX WORK

There are approximately 72,800 sex workers in the UK -- 88% are women, 6% men and 4% transgender.¹ (No research we have found distinguishes between trans women, trans men and non-binary sex workers or asked those who identified themselves as female or male whether they identified as the gender they were assigned at birth.)

Most sex workers are mothers working to support families.² 74% of off-street sex workers “cited the need to pay household expenses and support their children”.

More than 70% of UK sex workers have previously worked in healthcare, education or the voluntary sector.³

Prostitution is increasing because of austerity. A 60% increase in street prostitution recorded in Doncaster is primarily attributed to destitution caused by benefit sanctions.⁴ A quarter of young homeless women have engaged in sex work to fund accommodation or in the hope of getting a bed for the night.⁵ 86% of austerity cuts have targeted women.⁶

The majority of sex workers are not trafficked or on drugs. A study of migrant sex workers found less than 6% had been trafficked, many said they prefer working in the sex industry rather than the “unrewarding and sometimes exploitative conditions they meet in non-sexual jobs”.⁷ For more information on trafficking see [Trafficking Briefing](#). Claims that over 95% of women in street prostitution are problematic drug users comes from a 2004 study of 71 women, contacted through an outreach project in Bristol, who were particularly vulnerable (2/3 were homeless).⁸ Sex workers who don't use drugs have little contact with such projects and are unlikely to be surveyed. There is no evidence that drug use among sex workers is higher than other jobs.⁹

Sex workers face a lot of violence. Sex workers in London are 12 times more likely to be murdered than other women.¹⁰ It is much safer to work indoors with others¹¹ but this is illegal. There is evidence to indicate that violence from the police is a significant problem. A New York study found that 30% of sex workers had been threatened with violence by police officers, while 27% actually experienced violence at the hands of police.¹²

But criminalisation increases violence. Attacks on sex workers doubled in Scotland after kerb-crawling laws were introduced which criminalised clients.¹³ A 2014 survey found that where arrests of sex workers and clients were high, only 5% of sex workers who were victims of a crime reported it. This compared to 46% of victims in areas where police adopted a harm reduction approach.¹⁴ 63% of sex workers in Sweden said a law which criminalised clients created more prejudice.¹⁵

Decriminalisation works. New Zealand decriminalised sex work in 2003 with verifiable success.¹⁶ Over 90% of sex workers said they had additional employment, legal, health and safety rights. 64.8% found it easier to refuse clients and 70% said they were more likely to report incidents of violence to the police.¹⁷

The average age of entry into prostitution is 19 for outdoor workers and 23 for indoor workers.¹⁸ The claim that 75% of sex workers became involved in prostitution as children is false. It comes from small surveys (e.g. 30)¹⁹ of street based women, and is not representative of the sex

industry as a whole. In one often cited study, the participants were chosen because they were all under 18 when they entered prostitution.²⁰

Prosecutions of sex workers on the street and in premises are increasing. For example, brothel-keeping convictions (the charge used against women working together collectively) rose from 55 in 2014 to 96 in 2015.²¹

The police profit from raids, arrests and convictions for prostitution. The police get half of all assets and cash seized under Proceeds of Crime law.²²

Research has found high levels of condom use among sex workers.²³

Using possession of condoms as evidence of prostitution makes it harder for sex workers to practice safer sex.²⁴ Since police raids in Edinburgh in 2013 condom use among sex workers had fallen and the prevalence of STIs had increased.²⁵

The stigma associated with prostitution prevents sex workers getting appropriate health care. A 2007 study found that 62% of street sex workers and 90% of parlour workers had not disclosed their work to their GP.²⁶

Decriminalisation could reduce new HIV transmissions by up to 46% globally over a decade.²⁷

The prostitution laws are implemented in a racist way. Statistics from the US show that Black people are 13.2% of the population but make up 42% of all prostitution arrests.²⁸ Qualitative evidence from the UK indicates that people of colour and immigrant people are disproportionately targeted for prosecution.

Public opinion polls show that the majority of people are in favour of decriminalisation.²⁹ Other polls found that the public do not support the criminalisation of clients.³⁰

Decriminalisation is supported by prestigious organisations such as: Royal College of Nursing, Women Against Rape and internationally by Amnesty International, World Health Organisation, UNAIDS, Human Rights Watch, Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women among others.

NB Decriminalisation is different from legalisation. Decriminalisation involves the removal of all prostitution-specific laws; sex workers and sex work businesses operate within the laws of the land as other businesses. Under legalisation the sex industry is controlled by the government and sex work is legal only under certain state-specified conditions, creating a two-tier system where the most vulnerable sex workers remain illegal and outside of the protection of the law.³¹

More information on prostitution:

[Decriminalisation of Prostitution: the Evidence](#)

[Fact and Fiction – Debunking Common Myths on Prostitution](#)

The English Collective of Prostitutes is a self-help organisation of sex workers, working both on the street and in premises, with a national network throughout the UK. We campaign for the decriminalisation of prostitution, for sex workers' rights and safety, and for resources to enable people to get out of prostitution if they want to

020 7482 2496
ecp@prostitutescollective.net
www.prostitutescollective.net



References

- ¹ Brooks-Gordon, B., Mai, N., Perry, G., Sanders, T. (2015). Calculating the Number of Sex Workers and Contribution to Non-Observed Economy in the UK for the Office for National Statistics.
- ² Home Office. (2004). Paying the Price: a Consultation Paper on Prostitution.
- ³ The Guardian, 27 February 2015. Most Sex Workers Have Had Jobs in Health, Education or Charities.
- ⁴ The Star, 19 March 2014. Support Bid for Doncaster's Prostitutes.
- ⁵ Crisis. (2012).
- ⁶ The Guardian, 9 March 2017. Women Bearing 86% of Austerity Burden, Commons Figures Reveal.
- ⁷ Mai, N. (2009). Migrant Workers in the UK Sex Industry: ESRC Full Research Report.
- ⁸ Jeal, N & Salisbury, C. (2004). A Health Needs Assessment of Street-based Prostitutes: Cross-sectional Survey.
- ⁹ The Express, 19 April 2015. NHS in War on Staff Drug Use.
- ¹⁰ Ward, H., Day, S. & Weber, J. (1999). Risky Business: Health and Safety in the Sex Industry Over a Nine-year Period.
- ¹¹ 77% of violent incidents were experienced by street based sex workers, 11% by inside solo sex workers and 6% by sex workers in brothels, parlours or saunas. Connelly, L. (2014) Violence against sex workers. Analysis of National Ugly Mugs.
- ¹² Thukral, J. & Ditmore, M. Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center. (2003). Revolving Door: An Analysis of Street-based Prostitution in New York City.
- ¹³ The Scotsman, 16 April 2008. Attacks on Prostitutes Soar After Vice 'Driven Underground' by Law.
- ¹⁴ Data provided by National Ugly Mugs (UKNSWP). (2012-2015).
- ¹⁵ Jakobsson, P. & Edlund, C. (2014). Another Horizon: Sex Work and HIV Prevention in Sweden.
- ¹⁶ Ministry of Justice. (2008). Report of the Prostitution Law Review Committee on the Prostitution Reform Act 2003.
- ¹⁷ Abel, G., Fitzgerald, L. & Brunton, C. (2007). The Impact of the Prostitution Reform Act on the Health and Safety Practices of Sex Workers.
- ¹⁸ Mean (SD) age first paid for sex: 19.6 for outdoor workers, 22.7 for indoor workers. Church et al. (2001). Violence by Clients Towards Female Prostitutes in Different Work Settings: Questionnaire Survey.
- ¹⁹ Benson, C., & Matthews, R. (1995). Street prostitution: Ten facts in search of a policy. *International Journal of the Sociology of Law.*
- ²⁰ Melrose, M. (2002). Ties That Bind – Young People and the Prostitution Labour Market in Britain. Also quoted is Silbert, M.H. & Pines, A.M. (1982). Entrance into Prostitution. where sex workers were asked when they first had sex not when they started sex work.
- ²¹ Hansard (Citation: HC Deb, 13 October 2015, c61WH).
- ²² Broadly. 6 April 2016. Why Sex Workers are Losing Their Homes and Life Savings in Police Raids
- ²³ Ward, H., Day, S. & Weber, J. (1999). Risky Business: Health and Safety in the Sex Industry Over a Nine-year Period.
- ²⁴ The Lancet. (2015). Human Rights Violations Against Sex Workers: Burden and Effect on HIV.
- ²⁵ Health, Social Care and Housing Committee. (2015). Sex Work in Edinburgh – A Harm Reduction Framework – Year One Progress Report.
- ²⁶ Jeal, N. & Salisbury, C. (2007). Health Needs and Service use of Parlour-based Prostitutes Compared with Street-based Prostitutes: a cross-sectional survey.
- ²⁷ The Lancet. (2015). Keeping Sex Workers Safe.
- ²⁸ U.S Department of Justice, FBI, Criminal Justice Information Services Division. Crime in the U.S, 2013.
- ²⁹ YouGov poll (2015). Majority Support Decriminalising Prostitution.
- ³⁰ GfK Poll. (2014). For Professor Colin Francome, Director of the Campaign for Radical Sociology.
- ³¹ New Statesman, 19 October 2015. The Difference Between Decriminalisation and Legalisation of Sex Work.