Visual Violence:

Sex Worker Experiences of Image-Based Abuses

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VISUAL VIOLENCE PROJECT REPORT

'Absolutely visual violence has to do with the stigma of sex work, sex workers are the pariahs of the world' (Heather, interviewee)

First and foremost, a sincere thank you to all the people who offered their time and experiences for this project. With thanks also to the collaborating organisations and collectives for their input at all stages of this research. Likewise thank you to the National Ugly Mugs' casework team as well as the Revenge Porn Helpline for their considered insights. The knowledge produced in the below document is a testament to the openness of many sex workers combined with the expertise of sex work support collectives and organisations; we thank you all for your valuable input.

In partnership with

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Foreword

This visual violence research project was commissioned by National Ugly Mugs and conducted in a participatory manner in partnership with sex worker collectives and organisations Umbrella Lane, the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP), Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM), and the Sex Workers' Alliance Ireland (SWAI). Image-based abuse, typically, relates to the non-consensual photographing or filming of sexual content (see Flynn and Henry, 2019) and is a well-documented problem beyond the sex industry. Little attention has been paid to the way internet web technologies have enabled photographic violence and the implications for image-based surveillance against sex workers. The accounts contained herein go some way towards addressing this and we seek to showcase image-based harms, specific to sex workers and their experiences, and we call this *visual violence.*

The report that follows provides vivid descriptions of abusive photographs and photographic practices. Some photographs are interspersed as examples throughout and have been recreated and staged by a co-researcher, Camille Waring, who is 'face out' and 'name out' as a sex worker in online spaces.

Background

All types of sex workers have been selling sexual services on the internet since the mid-1990s (Cunningham, et al., 2017, p.49). The internet has provided many ways for sex workers to connect with customers, sell physical sex and sexual content, and connect with other sex workers and communities. During the pandemic, the internet allowed many sex workers to sell erotic content instead of providing in-person services; putting photographs online now is a part of selling sex online. Unfortunately, this has also led to a proliferation of the harms sex workers can face, with visual content used as a vehicle for harm.

The collaboratively produced *'Sex Workers Too: A Summary of Evidence for the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) 2020-2024 Consultation'* (Bowen *et al.,* 2021) recommended that more attention must be paid to visual violence and image-based abuse

experienced by sex workers. There is a notable absence of consideration of the types of visual violence experienced by sex workers. Typically, much more is much written about harmful communications and the colloquial term known as 'revenge porn', the distribution of unauthorised sexual images for example the classic cases of a jilted ex-partner sharing content; image-based sexual abuse such as upskirting or creepshots; the accessing large scale images databases for malicious and other sexual material shared online via phones (Powell, 2010; McGlynn, 2017; McGlynn et al, 2017). There is also a wealth of academic studies on the dissemination and non-consensual sharing of sexual photographs via the internet (Citron and Franks, 2014); creepshots (Burns, 2018); up-skirting (Thompson, 2019) and cyber flashing (Miller and Donald, 2019). Meanwhile, for the sex worker, the sharing of non-sexualised photographs is just as great a threat as the sharing of sexual intimate photographs for non-sex workers. 'Revenge porn' legislation is inadequate to address how sex workers experience this crime and theft of content (and importantly, what can be done about it). More discussion and research by and with sex workers are needed to define what a 'private image' is and what rights sex workers must have concerning their online content that gets used without their consent, is stolen, or distributed to unintended audiences.

Image is defined as a representation of a person which may be two or three-dimensional. There are two forms of images in practice: still images such as a photograph or moving images such as a film. For the sex worker, the physical form of an image used to sell sex or sexualised products can include different types of still and moving images such as digital and physical photographs, GIFS, video clips, memes, and live streaming of performance online such as camming streams. It is imperative to recognise streaming as a form of image because it can be the site of visual violence regardless of whether the sex worker is recording the performance or not (Chakravorty, 2018). Sex workers produce many different types of visual content to sell sexual services. It is thus important to recognise the many forms of visual content that come under the term 'image' alongside the need that sex workers must publish photographs to attract custom. Image 1 below is an example of how sex workers currently utilise their own photography to then be used as advertising content online.

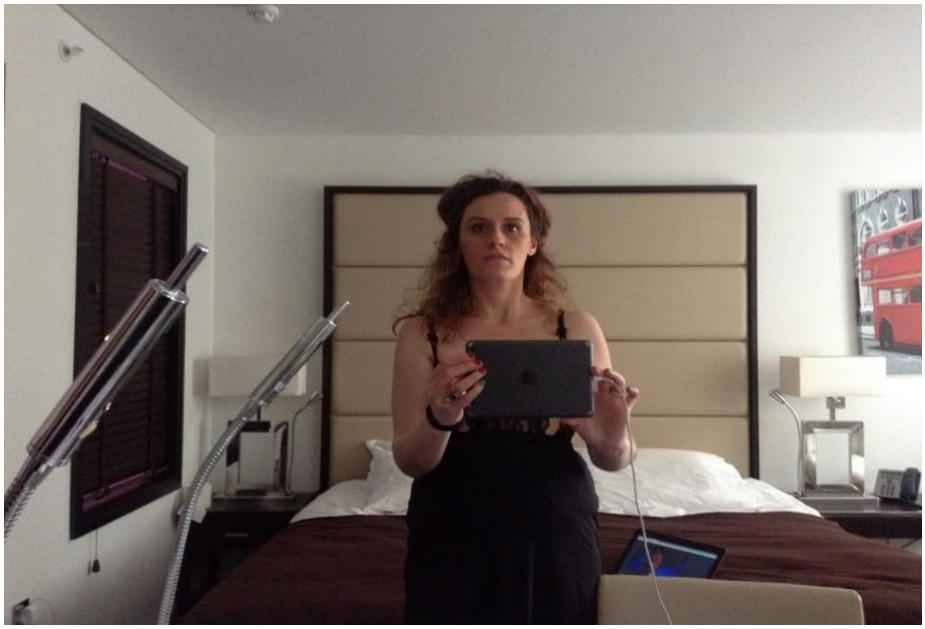

Image 1: Waring, C. (2016). *Untitled*. [Digital Photograph] Battersea, London, United Kingdom. Sex Workers are required to post photographs online in order to sell sex. Typically, these photographs can be selfies, like the one above or professional escort photography.

Legislative Frameworks

Sex workers based in the U.K and Ireland experience visual violence in a complex web of legislation that criminalises revenge porn. Revenge porn had its roots in the 20th-century. In 1997 'real core' pornography arose as a new genre of pornography consisting of images and videos of ex-girlfriends distributed through amateur pornography forums (Dery, 2007). However, this trend in amateur porn was problematic because many women in the published images had not consented to the images being shared. Thus, real core pornography became motivated by power and control and constituted a technologically facilitated form of psychological abuse, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. The problematically termed 'revenge porn' first garnered attention in 2011 with the website www.isanyoneup.com, set up by American Hunter Moore. (Citron and Franks, 2014).

The website's purpose was to allow ex intimate partners (typically men) to shame women by uploading nude and sexually graphic images (photographs and videos) alongside personally identifiable information (Stroud, 2014). Following the backlash to Moore's website, several high-profile celebrity revenge porn cases, the upswing of civil lawsuits and the increasing numbers of reported incidents of revenge porn, several U.K. based women's advocacy and feminist groups lobbied the government for legislative reform to have revenge porn be dealt with in the criminal justice systems.

In response to the problem of revenge porn on 13th April 2015, Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 was enacted in England and Wales; this created a new criminal offence for disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress (McGlynn et al., 2017). This led to the introduction of the possession of rape pornography offence in Northern Ireland under the Justice Act 2016. The Isle of Man amended the Sexual

Offences Bill to include the non-consensual distribution of sexual images. In July 2017, a law in Scotland was passed that anyone who shared or threatened to share someone else's intimate images without their consent could face up to five years in prison.

In Ireland, the dissemination of intimate images without consent became law in 2020 with amendments to the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Bill to include the new image-based offences in the wake of high-profile cases reported extensively in the Irish media. Backlash about the leaking and circulation of intimate images of thousands of Irish women and teenage girls prompted an outcry for legislative reform. This collective community outrage followed the tragic death of a young Irish woman. Nicole Fox committed suicide at the age of 21 following years of relentless online bullying and harassment. When she committed suicide, there was no legislation in Ireland to make online harassment a criminal offence. However, Nicole's mother, Jackie, fiercely advocated a change in Irish law (Coyne, 2021). This law became known as "Coco's Law", and its purpose was to create new offences concerning online harassment and harmful communication. Coco's Law also established new offences dealing with the non-consensual distribution of intimate images (ibid).

Since 2015, several other image-based sexual abuses (in addition to revenge porn) have been classified as crimes brought about by campaigns spearheaded by victims. The Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019 (c. 2) is an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that amends the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to make upskirting a specific offence of voyeurism. The Act came into force on 12 April 2019. At the time of publication, there is currently no law making the unsolicited sending of obscene images via wi-fi or Bluetooth, also known as "cyber flashing", a criminal offence (Waring, 2021).

In December 2021, the Revenge Porn Hotline published their *Intimate Image Abuse: An Evolving Landscape* (The Revenge Porn Hotline, 2021). The report details the staggering figures associated with the scale of image-based sexual violence in online spaces. In the five years between 2015 and 2020, the Revenge Porn Hotline helped over 8,000 people and successfully removed nearly 200,000 pieces of visual content shared illegally (The Revenge Porn Hotline, 2021). Currently, the Revenge Porn Hotline supports those experiencing intimate image abuse with technological innovations, further advice for sex workers and contributions to the law review being at the forefront of work in the future. The report details an alarming rise with the doubling of offences reported in 2020, with cases of sextortion (webcam blackmail) tripling in 2020. Intimate image abuse is predominantly male–perpetrated, accounting for over 76% of cases where the perpetrators' gender is known. When a female reports images to the Helpline, an average of 42 images are reported, whereas it is less than two for male victims. It continues to work with the Law Commission to review the law on sharing intimate images without consent to improve support for victims. The Revenge Porn Hotline is committed to providing more support to vulnerable groups such as students, sex workers and those with disabilities (ibid).

SESTA-FOSTA

It is worth noting that sex workers working in the U.K and Ireland are subject to American law. American legislation dictates how sex workers in the U.K and Ireland visually depict themselves and what platforms sex workers are permitted to advertise. This American legislation, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and Allowed States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA), is impossible for sex workers working outside of America to circumvent, and this has direct consequences for the way U.K and Ireland based sex workers experience visual violence. Coming into effect on April 11th, 2018, while ostensibly targeted at online sex trafficking, SESTA-FOSTA also made it a crime for a platform to promote or facilitate the prostitution of another person. The law effectively blurred the distinction between adult, consensual sex work and sex trafficking. It forced social media platforms to take much more restrictive approaches to sex and sexuality in general, even in the absence of any commercial transaction of sex.

SESTA-FOSTA was designed to render prior legislation obsolete in section 230 of the Safe Harbour act 1996. As the name implies, Safe Harbour allowed providers of "interactive computer services" (such as websites) immunity from liability under civil laws for the actions of their users if they publish objectionable content such as obscene content. Section 230 had been considered an essential piece of internet legislation that allowed user-generated content to be published freely. More importantly, website hosts were not liable for civil wrongs committed by their users if the service was not directly involved in the offending content. SESTA-FOSTA made it illegal to advertise sex trafficking, knowingly benefit financially from participation in a venture that promotes sex trafficking and engage in activities related to sex trafficking besides advertising.

Crucially, SESTA-FOSTA rescinded legal immunity for websites that intentionally and, most notably problematic and dangerous for sex workers, unintentionally host user-generated advertisements for sex trafficking. This lack of protection in American law harms consensual U.K and Ireland-based sex workers, with consensual sex workers not considered workers or a group distinct from sex-trafficking victims. U.K and Ireland based sex workers posit that SESTA-FOSTA chief outcome has eliminated digital screening and security protections that consensual sex workers rely upon, thereby forcing the industry back into dangerous models of working online with visual violence becoming increasingly problematic since the inception of SESTA-FOSTA (Waring, 2021). Perhaps most troubling for sex working in Ireland is the further restrictions imposed by SESTA-FOSTA are on top of already harsh online advertising restrictions that already limit how sex workers visual depict themselves, with the advertising of sex work prohibited by the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act of 1994 (The Law and Your Rights | Sex Workers Alliance Ireland, 2021).

New Definitions

Moving away from more typical understandings of image-based abuse, our definition of visual violence has been developed in consultation with sex workers and partner organisations/collectives and is defined as:

'Sharing (or threatening to share) sexual and non-sexual visual content on the Internet or in other public and/or private realms without the expressed consent of the sex worker for the purposes to identify, or 'out', a sex worker with the intent of causing harm, nuisance, shame, distress, embarrassment, blackmail, and reputational destruction.'

The report that follows is underpinned by the above collaborative definition, and we outline below the participatory ways in which this research was conducted.

Methodology

One of the difficulties researchers wanting to research sex worker communities is how to access marginalised populations and when access is gained, how to protect the integrity of the research by ensuring participants are authentically sex workers. These research barriers were overcome by employing an experiential research approach. All elements of this research embraced participatory action research principles or participant-driven action research (Bowen & O'Doherty, 2014) where sex workers are involved in every stage of the knowledge creation and dissemination process. We acknowledge the expertise of lived experience and allow for equitable participation of members of the sex work community, working collaboratively with four partner organisations and collectives.

Engaging with this approach is beneficial to sex worker recruitment for research purposes. Sex workers were recruited for research participation in three ways. Firstly, forming research partnerships with the sex worker support groups ECP, SWAI, SWARM, and UL[1]. These groups were invited to provide feedback on all aspects of the research design and methodological approach and, importantly, refer sex workers who utilise their services to participate in this research project. Secondly, sex workers were recruited via online platforms. Social media accounts were instrumental in promoting the visual violence research project and for sex worker recruitment. Internet sites used by sex workers were used to recruit research participants. Thirdly, research participants were recruited directly by sex workers themselves. Sex workers shared details on private social media networks connecting hundreds of sex workers across WhatsApp and Facebook groups. WhatsApp was instrumental in the number of migrant sex workers interviewed.

[1] Please note: Umbrella Lane (UL) closed its doors in November 2021. NUM has opened 'NUMbrella Lane' to continue its legacy and provide a wellbeing space operated with sex workers in Scotland. Please visit https://nationaluglymugs.org/numbrella-lane/

This research project involved three modes of data collection: an in-depth survey; qualitative interviews; and cyber-ethnographic social media content analysis. The following three sections describe the specifics of each in turn.

Survey methodology

Both interview and survey questions were constructed collaboratively with NUM researchers and representatives from each of the four partner organisations. Following a thorough collaborative testing and refining period, a set of questions allowed the data presented herein to be collected with ethics and sensitivity at the fore. Recalling instances of visual violence can incite a range of emotions, including distress. Some survey questions were set to 'optional' and thus the number of respondents per question varies.

The final survey was 'live' for a period of 2 months over the summer of 2021. Committed to ensuring the veracity of responses, we employed a strategy largely involving word-of-mouth and reaching out to communities served by the partner organisations/collectives who cascaded the survey link through their networks. Midway through the live data collection point, the survey was openly advertised on social media websites and very quickly subjected to a 'bot' attack. These responses were subsequently identified and filtered out, and the previous strategy was re-employed. In total, 67 sex workers completed the visual violence survey. We asked 32 questions in total, seven of which related to either demographic information or other sex worker specific details such as working environments, or their referral avenue to the survey. In the ethos of respecting sex workers' time and expertise, survey participants were offered a £15 token. Access to the NUM casework team was offered at the point of survey completion.

Qualitative Interviews

Complementing survey responses, 21 qualitative research interviews were conducted in total. Nineteen of these took place with sex workers based on thirteen open-ended questions. The interview questions centred on what visual violence was experienced in relation to the type of sex work the participants performed, consequences of the visual violence they had experienced, how they dealt with visual violence in the past, how they wished visual violence was handled and how sex work support organisations in the future can better assist with visual violence. A further two interviews were conducted with the NUM casework team members who are experienced at responding to requests for support regarding visual violence, and the Revenge Porn Helpline, who likewise have substantial expertise in dealing with image-based abuse.

Interviews were held over the phone or online and participants received a £50 voucher for their time. One sex worker did not wish for the interview to be recorded and therefore

handwritten notes were taken. A further participant was excluded from the interview process and the interview was terminated because they did not meet the criteria of the project.

Social Media Content Analysis Methodology

The third mode of inquiry involved social media content analysis of a forum space designed for sex workers. Social media content analysis is an effective tool in studying sex worker populations in online spaces and has multifaceted benefits. It can ensure participants' authenticity (in this instance, the chosen medium of one sex worker forum space allows posts only from 'verified' sex workers). Content analysis allows for the study of unbiased language outside of a research context; social media is used as an unfettered form of communication between sex workers and allows for data extraction; however, the content analysis does require expert knowledge on the part of the researcher to identify patterns in written posts. Social media is a vital part of sex worker community formation and sex worker social media content is widely accessible, easy to access, and an accepted form of sex worker-generated research data. For this project, social media content analysis was conducted on a single forum for sex workers. Sex worker posts spanning three years were examined for discussions of visual violence. Search notifications were set up to identify posts and threads suitable for analysis. In total, 100 posts describing visual violence were identified.

Research search terms centralised the keywords 'photos', 'photographs', 'pic', 'pictures', 'verification', 'Instagram', 'Twitter' 'Revenge Porn', 'outed', 'face', 'OnlyFans', 'Photographed', 'hidden camera' and 'filming'. This approach enabled posts to be analysed using use cyber ethnographic techniques to elicit knowledge about how sex workers experience visual violence. No demographic data were collected from this content analysis; however, post analyses indicated all the content postings came from women sex workers in the United Kingdom. Permission was sought and granted from forum moderators before social media content analysis was conducted. No identifying data is published in this research to protect the sex workers' identities posted on the forum. The outcomes of this content analysis are detailed at the start of the findings section below.

The findings that follow are presented in the following manner. First, the social media content analysis provides some background to the more in-depth interview and survey responses. Following this analysis, the primary data findings from surveyed and interviewed individuals are grouped into 6 key areas. First, demographic information is presented, demonstrating *who took part* in this research. Then, the *context* of non-consensual image and video sharing is considered before exploring *whether the Covid-19 pandemic* has impacted experiences of visual violence. Following this, the *impacts and implications* of visual violence are presented before discussing the *role of adult websites and forums*, and how these are conduits, facilitating some of the experiences detailed below. The survey findings conclude with how sex workers 'manage' visual violence in their working lives, addressing *support avenues, strategies, and solutions.*

Findings - Social media Content Analysis

Posts analysed from a sex worker-only forum indicated that sex worker experiences of visual violence are consistent with the qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data findings detailed in the following sections of this report. Therefore, the results discussed here are contained to four themes unique to the social media content data analysis. These unique themes extracted from the sex worker forum centre on four elements: acceptance, denial, language, and surveillance. One theme consistent across other forms of data collected was xenophobia. A disturbing example is discussed in this section as it demonstrates the role of sex for sale directories in visual violence.

Posts indicated a widely held view that visual violence was generally just an accepted negative part of selling sex online, simply a workplace hazard one has to endure to sell sex. This attitude is partly driven by the overwhelming scale of the problem and the perception that it is so widespread that sex workers feel powerless to protect themselves from visual violence or deal with it once they had been victimised, unaware of how to act. Posts overwhelmingly lend towards being dismissive or unaware of how visual content can be weaponised as violence, such as in revenge porn, or as the vehicle for other forms of violence.

The most contentious aspect of the sex worker posts about visual violence was that *it is not perceived to be a form of violence*. The influence of peers on the forum, who serve to minimise problems around visual violence, appears to discourage other sex workers from posting and thus ignores the impact visual violence can have on sex worker earnings and mental health. The denial of visual violence as a form of violence is problematic. This denial is reflected in minimising language, referring to visual violence as an annoying hassle, something punters or clients do as part of the culture of paying for sex.

In some instances, this reflects an embedded victim-blaming narrative that suggests sex workers 'brought this on themselves' because they posted photographs online. One sex worker lamented that clients had published her face photos on punting forums. She subsequently followed up her initial response by posting that she had learned a hard lesson and would never post photos online again. Another sex worker expressed significant fear about being victimised and became paranoid that sex buyers would commit visual violence against her. She immediately took her photos off the Internet.

The dismissive linguistic discourses on the forum were evident in the complex language used to describe themselves as victims and offenders in their victimisation. Common phrases were *'I know this is stupid, 'Not an intelligent thing to do', 'I am a silly girl',* and *'I was naïve'*; consequently, some sex workers held themselves responsible for the visual violence committed against them. Visual violence ranged from being outed through sharing face photographs, to being filmed consensually in bookings but then having that film shared with unintended audiences.

The dismissive minimising language was used by victims themselves and other sex workers commenting on posts about visual violence. Victim-blaming responses about being reckless and careless and accepting this type of visual violence as punishment for selling sex online echoes a bifurcation found in broader sex work, legal and sociological discourses (Eikren, 2016). These two common branches of thought state: one, that image violence against sex workers is a gendered crime, with women predominantly as the victims and men most likely to be the perpetrators; and two, that women sex workers bring visual violence upon themselves.

Several posts detailed the conflict and anxiety about having to post photographs online to sell sex and the problems inherent with the surveillant culture of the Internet. Several expressed anxieties about showing their faces in photographs. Avoiding being recognised in real-life settings was a concern, especially for sex workers working in small, isolated communities and perhaps living where they worked from. Travelling and touring sex workers expressed the same sentiment of concern that hotel staff are searching through photos looking for touring sex workers. The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Allowed States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) has made it a crime for a platform to:

'…promote or facilitate the prostitution of another person. The law effectively blurred the distinction between adult, consensual sex work, and sex trafficking and forced social media platforms to take much more restrictive approaches to sex and sexuality in general, even in the absence of any commercial transaction of sex; hence sex workers expressed fear. They described instances of being detained at airports and denied entry to foreign countries. However, these fears or accounts are regrettably dimmed with scepticism on the forum' ***(Tripp, 2019. p.219).***

Some forum posts indicate websites can have a cavalier attitude regarding helping sex workers with visual violence, an example being that Eastern European sex workers are required to post photographs of their faces on public profiles, then advertising platforms refuse to remove profiles even after the sex worker has 'retired'. Alarmingly several posts discuss the extra demands placed on Eastern European sex workers. One sex worker explained that a client had filmed her with her permission then, without permission, used the photos to set up a profile on an advertising platform. He subsequently sold the explicit content for three years without her knowledge. The profile was deactivated when the sex worker complained only for the profile to be later reinstated by the website.

A common theme was frustration expressed by sex workers at the apparent racial profiling and discrimination on sex for sale directories. Racial profiling manifests in repeatedly providing verification photographs and having photographs removed and accounts suspended because photographs are labelled as fake. One sex worker lamented she was required to show her face on her public profile.

Who took part in the research?

Interviewee demographics

The demographic of sex workers interviewed reflects the diversity of sex working populations in the United Kingdom and Ireland. 84% of interviewed participants identified as female, 5% of whom said they are trans-women, with 16% of participants identifying as male. 47% of the participants were aged in their 20s, 32% of participants were in their 30s, 16% of participants were in their 40s and 5% of participants were in their 50s. 68% of interviewees stated they are migrant sex workers. 68% of sex workers identified as white with 16% of research participants identifying as sex workers of colour and 16% of research participants were black sex workers. Sex workers worked in England, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and abroad in Europe, the Middle East, and North America however it should be noted most of the sex work was performed in Ireland and the United Kingdom. This diverse demographic was due in part to how migrant sex workers shared research requests via private networks of sex workers connected, for example, via Whatsapp groups.

The types of sex work performed by interviewees spanned the spectrum of sex work: full-service sex work (FSSW) working independently; brothel and/or agency sex work; domination; selling erotic visual content via OnlyFans; camming one on one with a client or through registered camming websites or sex for sale directory; stripping; pornography acting, and one sex worker reported being an erotic lingerie model.

Survey participant demographics

The 67 people who completed the survey accessed the survey through a variety of pathways. Unsurprisingly, most people found the survey through National Ugly Mugs and the four partner organisations and collectives. Interestingly, eight people found the survey through WhatsApp group sharing and 'word of mouth' among sex workers, five people from Sleepyboy, three people from local UK support services, and one person from the organising collective United Sex Workers (USW).

The gender and ethnicity of survey respondents are displayed below, capturing the diversity of individuals who took part in this research. Both gender expression and ethnicity/race were presented as free-text responses and therefore the detail in the chart below reflects the chosen words of sex workers.

Although the majority comprised women/cis-females (73.1%, n=49), responses from men/cis-males (17.9%, n=12), people identifying as non-binary and genderqueer (6%, n=4), and one trans woman (1.5%) and one transmasculine (1.5%) respondent allow the perspectives across the range of gender to be expressed. Seven out of 65 people stated that their gender identity was not the same as that assigned at birth.

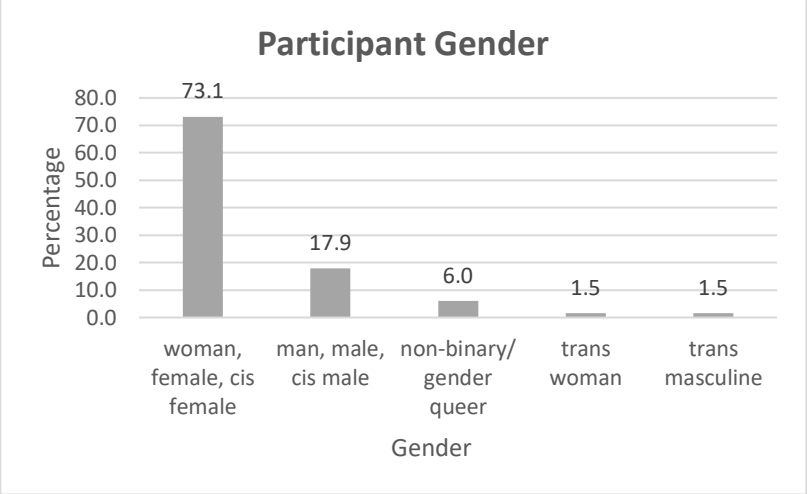

Figure 1: self-identified gender

As with gender, we asked a free text question about ethnicity/race. Once again, people's responses reflect their own words and not ones easily selected from any government 'drop down' list. Whilst the largest 'group' of respondents identify as white or white British and reflect 56.7% (n=38) of participants, an array of other ethnic identities were given for this question, including the responses of people identifying as: Asian (n=3), White Irish (n=3), British Asian (n=2), white Scottish (n=2), Hispanic (n=2), mixed-race (n=2), white European (n=2), Latino (n=1), black (n=1), black Afro-Caribbean (n=1), indigenous native Brazilian (n=1), Latino (n=1), Finnic (n=1), white Polish (n=1), black British/ African origin (n=1), white South European (n=1), white European / Scottish (n=1) and half Irish (n=1).

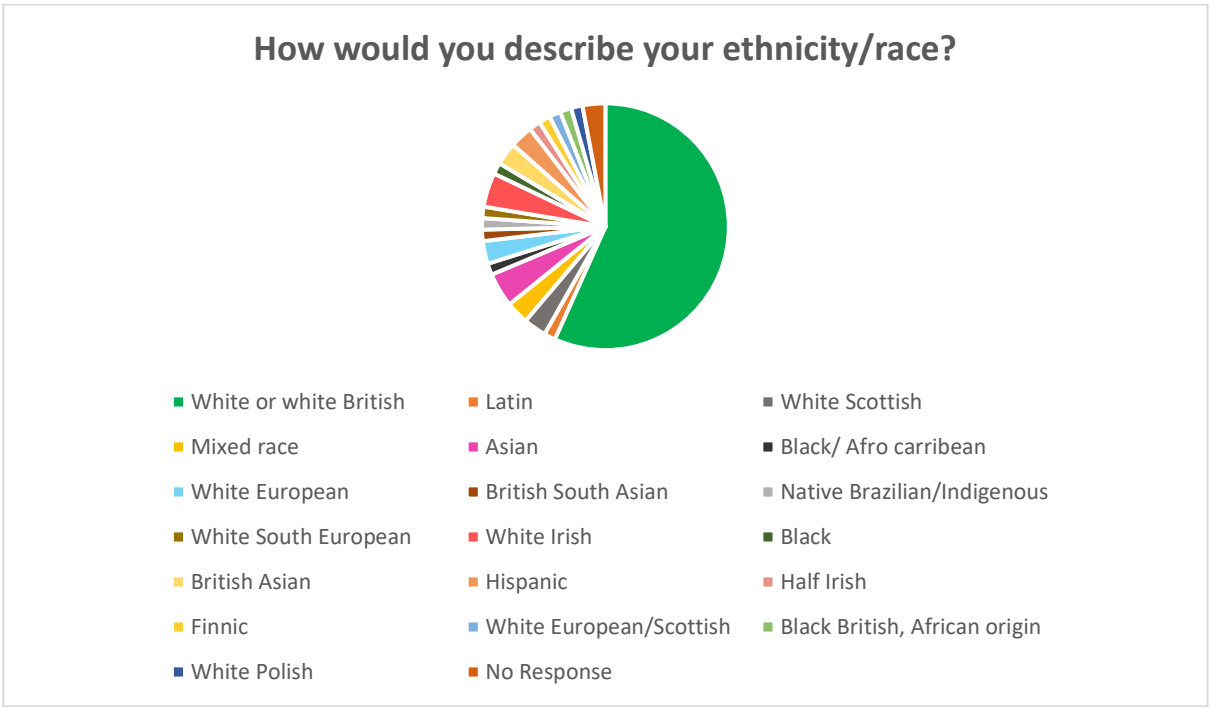

Figure 2: Ethnicity/race

Of the surveyed individuals, the largest proportion selected their age bracket as 26-35, comprising just over half of respondents with a further almost-quarter selecting 36-45. Only 3 respondents selected 18-25, and two people selected 56-65. The survey did not attract participation from sex workers in the 66-75 or over 75 brackets but we acknowledge workers of this age do exist and were careful not to exclude older participants through a generic 'Over 60' tick box.

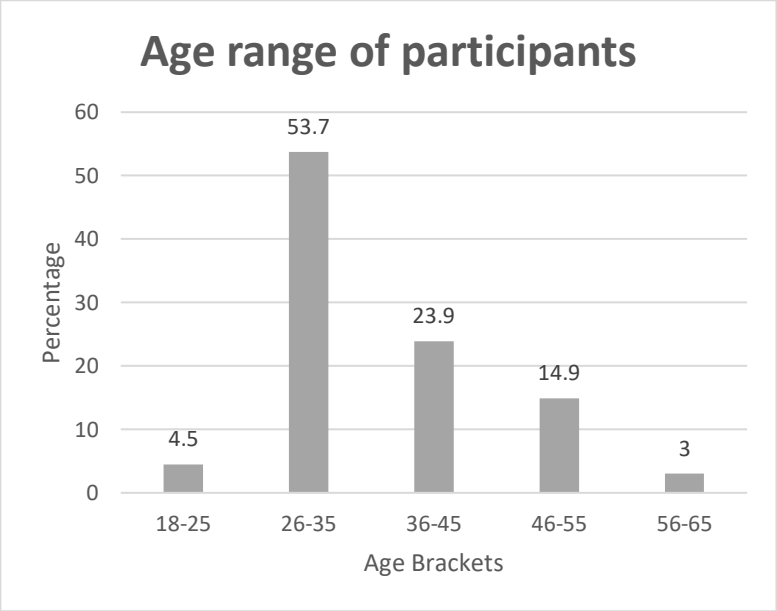

Figure 3: Age of survey participants

The below displays the given regions of participants and to some extent reflect factors of population size (e.g. London) and the locations of the partner organisations in this community-based research (e.g. Scotland and the Republic of Ireland).

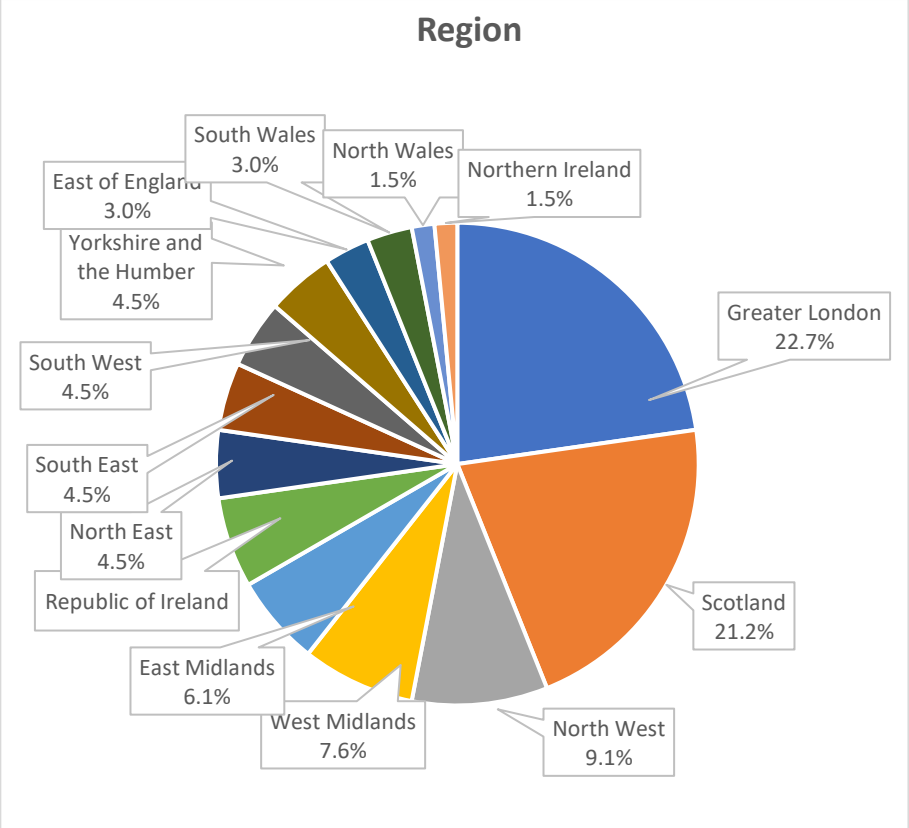

Figure 4: Where respondents are located

Beyond demographics, the people completing the visual violence survey worked in a range of environments. The numbers below reflect individual people and not percentages, as many respondents selected 2 and often 3 working locations. For example, it is likely a person working from in-call premises may also offer outcalls to homes/hotels.

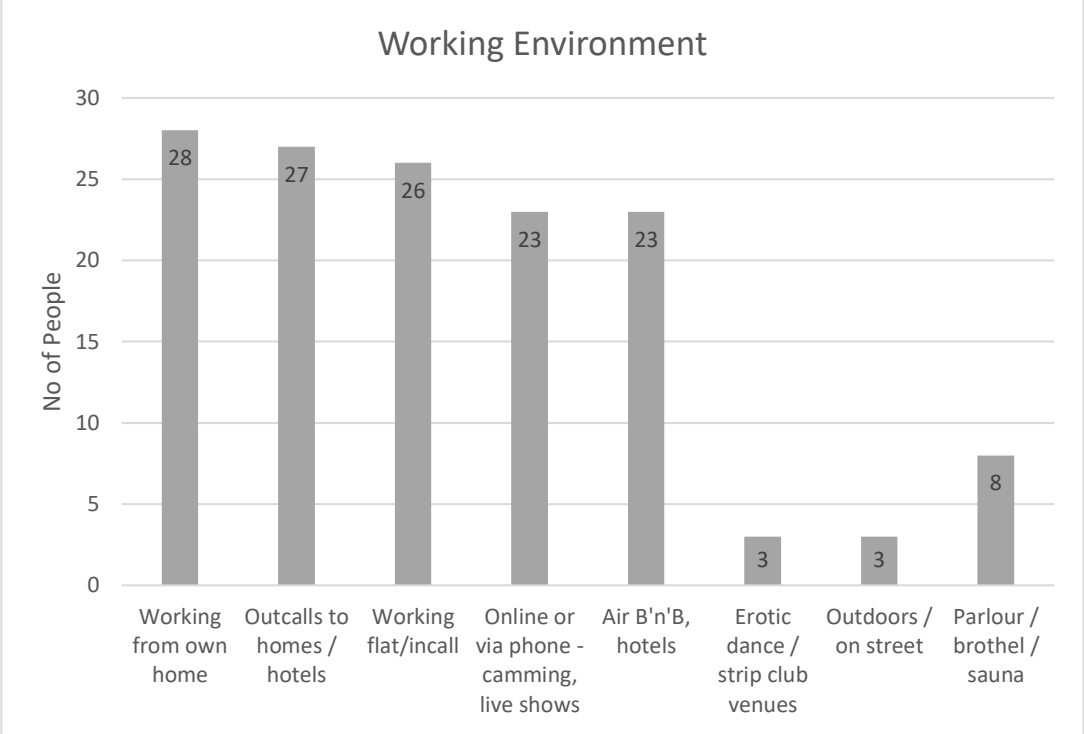

Figure 5: Spectrum of working environments

Importantly, we captured some detail of surveyed individuals' circumstances beyond sex work. Figure 6 below shows the relatively high percentage of people engaged in 'other' work or living dual lives (Bowen, 2021b), and almost a fifth declared they are students/studying. Just over a fifth of respondents rely solely on sex work. The industries participants held other work in include hospitality, healthcare, management, creative arts, beauty, education, and business.

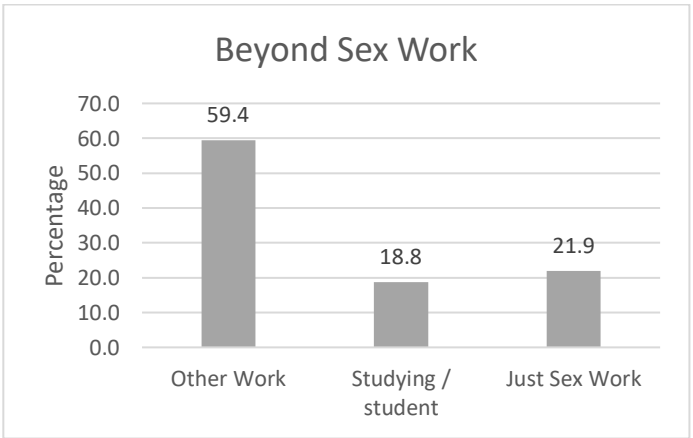

Figure 6: Other work status

We also asked about parental and migrant status. Of the 43 people who answered this question, 25 (58.1%) said they are a parent, with 18 people (41.9%) stating they are migrants.

The context of image-sharing: Who, what, where, and why?

To contextualise the circumstances around visual violence, we asked respondents: *what type(s)* of visual abuse they had experienced, *who perpetrated* visual violence against them, and *with whom* (where applicable) these images and content were shared. We also asked *where* images were shared, and *for what purpose*. Figure 8, below, details the people who enacted visual violence upon the 67 survey participants.

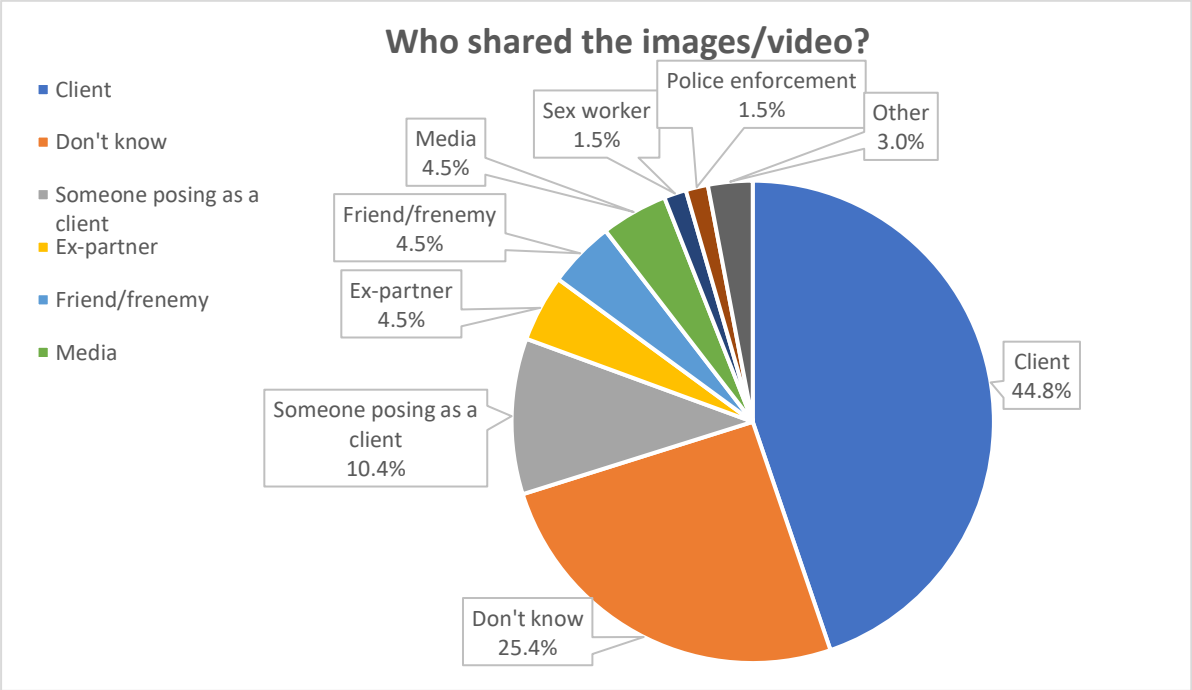

Figure 7: Perpetrators of visual violence

The most notable findings here are that sex workers' clients (44.8%, n=30) or people posing as clients (10.4%, n=7) were most often cited as the perpetrators of visual violence. These findings are consistent with the earlier mentioned *Sex workers Too* consultation summary of evidence for the VAWG 2020-2024 strategy (Bowen et al., 2021). That over 55% of sex workers experienced visual violence through the realm of people they rely on for work (clients and prospective clients) speaks to the power dynamic inherent between service providers and purchasers where imagery is concerned. This juxtaposition between a client's right to privacy and the demand that sex workers be visually seen in online spaces has fuelled visual violence against sex workers (Waring, 2022. pp 1-6). This is also a common theme reflected in feminist media studies that visibility is guided by power dynamics and dependent on complex social and technological that can be summed up as a strategic set of practices that benefit the invisible. In the context of online sex work, one such example would be requiring sex worker verification photos but not sex work client verification photos (Brighenti, 2010). Typically, it is men who watch and women who are seen, resulting in forms of control and domination.

Sex workers we interviewed recalled that sex work clients were overwhelmingly the perpetrators of acts of visual violence against them, consistent with the survey findings above.

Individuals described instances of being filmed and photographed in bookings without consent. The culture of 'punter' forums encourages and mainstreams the outing of sex workers through the sharing of sex workers' private or work photos. One sex worker describes the entitlement of men to film sex workers:

'I mean I had to kick a client out a couple of weeks ago, a regular client because the first thing he does is he whips his phone out and starts filming, and I'm like what the fuck are doing, like where's that come from' (David, interviewee).

Beyond this, alarmingly, a quarter of survey respondents (25.4%, n=17) did not know who shared their images or visual content non-consensually, illustrating the precarious situation sex workers are placed in, in an increasingly online-mediated world. This finding is in line with other forms of web-mediated visual violence committed against non-sex working individuals, that the victim often is unaware of their victimisation. Instances include 'creepshots' whereby images of visual violence are surreptitiously captured and often distributed without consent or knowledge of the victim. The very act of visual violence regardless of whether the victim knows they are a victim constitutes an act of violence in and of itself (Thompson and Wood, 2018).

The remaining 13 respondents reported that the culprits were a friend or 'frenemy' (4.5%, n=3), an ex-partner (4.5%, n=3), or simply the 'media' (4.5%, n=3). Claire, a lap dancer and content creator on OnlyFans, reported being filmed during sex by a former boyfriend. Her ex-boyfriend planted hidden cameras in a room and then initiated sex with a third person. Claire suspected she was being filmed and asked him to put his phone away, unaware of other hidden devices. After the incident, Claire was made aware that the secretly recorded footage was being circulated on a WhatsApp group of men who share sexualised images of women filmed without their consent. Upon challenging her ex-partner, his response was one of victim-blaming and the embodiment of sex work stigma, saying she was a sex worker who shows her body for men; what difference does it make if he filmed her:

'The stigma of being a stripper is a big reason why this happened; they don't like the idea that women can make money from their sexuality because they have always had power over us, we were just something for them to use, but now they are very bitter women making money off something they are used to get for free' (Claire, interview participant).

One survey participant had their image or video shared by police, with a further respondent stating they had experienced visual violence from another sex worker. Two female interviewees, Zoey and Clara, reported acts of visual violence perpetrated by other sex workers. In both cases, it was believed that visual violence was retaliation for some perceived aggrievance. Clara, a full-service sex worker from London, reported another sex worker outed her because she accepted physical bookings during the pandemic. Zoey, an American sex worker from California, said a sex worker leaked her private Facebook photos. Sex worker-perpetrated acts of visual violence highlight the potential need for some sex workers to

compartmentalise their lives, not only need to protect themselves from client-perpetrated visual violence but also potentially from fellow workers:

'It's difficult because you can't… you feel you can't ask for support, because then you're, I don't know, breaking that compartmentalisation, which you've created to try to protect yourself' (Zoey, interview participant).

Zoey's visual violence involved being outed on social media when a fellow sex worker leaked her private Facebook content linking her real name to her sex working identity. Zoey described feeling particularly violated because the visual violence was committed by a peer, who would understand the fear and consequences of being outed as a sex worker.

Clara's visual violence involved her being photographed in person. Subsequently, the photographs were shared with third parties with the explicit intent to impact Clara's earnings and get her into trouble for violating COVID-19 social distancing rules. The photos in question were taken when Clara let a client into her hotel room. She recounted a photo taken as the client walked in the door. She was unable to say if the client was involved in the set-up. The sex worker who took the photos then sent the photographs to the hotel manager. Clara was subsequently evicted and banned from the hotel and lost much-needed earnings during the pandemic. Clara believes the other sex worker was a rival touring sex worker upset that she worked from the same hotel.

Following on from this, when asked *'who was the image shared with',* the most common of 67 survey responses were: potential clients (23.9%, n=16); that they had been 'threatened/blackmailed but image(s)/video was not shared', (23.9%, n=16); or 'I don't know' (also 23.9%, n=16). This is in line with non-sex worker individuals' experiences of revenge porn in which the threat is just as vicious as the act and must be seen in the theoretical framework that the photograph is a complex cultural artifact used as a vehicle for violence (Eikren, 2016). Participants could select multiple options for this question. Media, friends, and 'other sex workers' were cited by 15% or (n=9) respondents, with 7.5% (5 or fewer) individuals selecting separately: people posing as clients, family, place of work, school friends, work colleagues, and police. Consonant with the uncertainty of even knowing if visual violence has taken place and who enacted it, these findings highlight the comparative difference to typical definitions of violence, where the victim often has at least some awareness that it has occurred. Anna encapsulates this sense of unknown victimisation: *'there's always people chasing you around and just trying to out you, just for the sake of, oh, I gotcha'.*

A further multiple-choice question asked *what types* of image or video respondents had experienced being shared non-consensually. Commonly, 53.7% (n=36) selected publicly available sex work marketing content from their own site or social media, and 29.9%, (n=20) had experienced the sharing of paid private gallery or subscription visual content. Roughly, one-fifth, 20.9% (n=14) had experienced visual content *unrelated* to sex work, such as Facebook pages, shared. 19.4% (n=13) indicated they had images/ video taken when with a client/customer or by a client/customer, whilst 9% (n=6) selected 'images / video taken of me

while sex working in public spaces/street'. These 'whilst-sex working' findings were also asked about directly in the question 'Has anyone ever filmed or photographed you without your consent whilst sex working?' The reported results below are not consistent with the above; however, this could be due to multiple-choice questions limited to 3 options and some inevitable overlap across questions.

As this question specifically asks about non-consensual filming or photography whilst working, these figures are considered the most salient despite constituting a cumulative total. It is perhaps telling that only 9% (n=6) of people stated 'no' to whether they had experienced this, with 43.3% (n=29) being unsure whether they had been filmed or photographed without consent whilst working, chiming with earlier statements around simply 'not knowing'. 19.4% (n=13) said they had experienced this when working in someone's home (the place where it can be reasonably stated that clients have more power); 10.4% (n=7) when working from in-call or outcall premises such as a hotel; and 9% (n=6) whilst working from their own homes. Meanwhile, 9% (n=6) selected while performing online live shows and 9% (n=6) whilst working at sexual entertainment venues such as pole dancing/strip clubs. Likewise, brothels and parlours were reported sites, with 4 people experiencing visual violence in this setting. 4 respondents (6%) had been working outdoors when filmed or photographed, and one of the in-depth interviews we conducted details the horrific visual violence enacted upon a street sex worker by the media. For one interviewee:

'This man, while doing a lap dance, took his camera out took a photo and said he has not had sex in 14 years, and not masturbated either, and the man said he looked at the photos and said 'I can't see a lot but I can see enough' and the club just gave him a warning. It shook me up, it totally shook me up and put me off my game.' (Claire, interview participant)

Unsurprisingly, *where* images and video were shared most often was online or through social media (67%, n=46). People experiencing visual violence once again chose more than one mode option for this question, selecting too that text-based groups such as WhatsApp were sites of sharing (16.4%, n=11), some people had their images sent to them in a message (20.9%, n=14), and a smaller number of 9% (n=6) indicated sharing occurred through it being printed and posted to people they knew. Revenge porn first gained visibility in 2011 when the previously mentioned internet entrepreneur Hunter Moore's website isanyoneup.com invited its users to shame their ex-partners by uploading nude photos alongside personally identifying information (Eikren, 2016). Sex worker responses to the survey to some extent reflect a technologically facilitated extension of patriarchal violence against women and a society that punishes women for expressions of their sexuality—a form of psychological abuse, domestic violence, and sexual abuse (Citron and Franks, 2014; Gavin and Scott, 2019). A quarter of those surveyed (17 people, 25.4%) had their images and visual content shared on punting/client forums – this will be expanded upon further when considering the role of Adult Service Websites and image-based abuse.

We asked individuals whether their sex working content had been used to create 'deep fake porn'. Deep fake pornography is when a person's head, typically a celebrity's, is superimposed

onto the bodies of porn actors and sex workers, and the images circulated online to shame the celebrity by suggesting they made sexually explicit content. Sex workers are rarely considered as victims of abuse when discussions of deep fake porn (a portmanteau of deep learning and fake), an iteration of image-based sexual violence, surfaced on the internet, particularly on the social media platform Reddit, in 2017. However, no consideration is given to the sex worker whose body and visual content has been stolen to shame the other (usually) woman; the sex worker is invisible in her victimisation (Maddocks, 2020). The words of one interviewee illustrate the point:

'So this girl has 600,000 followers on Instagram and she's like a top Pornhub model. So I'm surprised her photo was taken (from her Instagram account) and used in a fake ad because that's kind of ballsy, right, like if you are going to steal images, steal it from someone who is not well known but like if you are going to break copyright you wouldn't want to go after like a big pop star because you will get sued. So it's weird that even though she is nearly an A list celebrity in the porn industry but she was still fair game for stealing her pictures and maybe that's because it doesn't matter how successful you are in this industry, you still are considered not to have power or the ability to fight back for yourself' (James, interview participant)

Several survey respondents had neither encountered the term 'deep fake porn' before nor the possibility that this could happen (although we gave a description as, for example, 'a different person's head superimposed on your body, or your head superimposed onto sexually explicit images or porn'). Unsurprisingly, many of those surveyed simply did not know if this has happened to their visual content, however 17.6% (9 out of 51 people) who answered this were aware they had been victims of 'deep fake porn', with malice generally described as the reason behind the action.

The survey asked whether individuals knew *why and for what purpose* their images/recordings had been taken and shared. Respondents often selected multiple possibilities for this, with the three most commonly occurring reasons being 1. For content theft or to use on a fake profile (34.3%, n=23) 2. To 'out' them as sex workers (31.3%, n=21) and 3. For personal use by the person recording (29.9%, n=17). Beyond this, notably, 16 people selected 'to blackmail/threaten/shame me' (23.9%) demonstrating the insidious way in which a sex worker's image can be utilised as a weapon, a finding this research brings to light. Only two interviewed sex workers expressed concerns with social media and visual violence. Concerns were based on being accidentally outed to sex work clients in non-sex workspaces. One person described an instance where she was recognised on social media by a sex buyer stating that clients find her personal social media accounts and appear in threads and friend requests on social media. It is perceived that some sex workers and clients alike are unaware of how much information various 'apps' search and share, enabling the unwanted linkage between sex working identities and real-life profiles.

The 19 in-depth interviews included questions around stigma and reasons for being targeted by visual violence. Most people felt that sex work stigma played a role. One full-service

Spanish sex worker laments 'because of stigma, they look at us like we are not human' whilst Daisy thinks 'they do this to dehumanise us because they think we are just nothing'. Sex work stigma is a widespread problem seemingly omnipresent in sex work although it can vary in intensity according to gender, class, race, and type of sex work performed. Research on sex workers, their managers, and their clients offer abundant evidence of the harmful consequences of stigmatisation. Stigma is a perceived 'given' in the sex work arena; well-documented in research on pornography, direct sex work, and commercial stripping as an obstacle that sex workers and their associates confront regularly (Weitzer, 2018). Sex work stigma is premised on sex workers as dirty and disposable. A mark of disgrace and spoiled identity. A cultural and social construct that blames the sex worker for acts of violence perpetrated against them. The complete disregard for how sex workers experience visual violence and the wholly inadequate revenge porn legislation to consider sex workers' experiences of visual violence typifies how sex workers' lives are deemed less 'valuable'. The image can be a vehicle for stigma.

A word on the Covid-19 pandemic and visual violence

The Covid-19 pandemic has enabled image-based violence to flourish unabated. Compounding this, Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on sex workers' ability to earn money; Covid-19 guidance did not allow in-person sex work to occur legally, and many switched to 'online' modes of working, using online platforms to market and sell content. This has shifted the economics of sex work and to some extent, altered, the way sex workers use the internet to sell sex. Sex workers unable to sell physical sex find themselves in the predicament of having to navigate the world of online sex work through the selling of photographs and non-touch sexual services to maintain an income. These possibilities are not afforded to all sex workers. Consequently, the social and technological disadvantages inherent in the class strata of sex workplace some sex workers at a disadvantage based on class, race, thinness, immigration, gender, and economic status. One participant, Sia, was *'worried when the pandemic hit, how was I going to survive, so I opened an OnlyFans account because I was completely broke'.*

When asked whether the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted sex workers' experiences of visual violence 53 out of 67 surveyed people responded to this, with 23 people (40.4%) giving some form of 'yes', including '*most of the work became online, which led to a larger amount of visual material being uploaded*' and that *'the pandemic exacerbated visual violence because people were at home doing nothing'*. Some participants state visual violence is *'worse than before'* and that working exclusively online *'made me vulnerable'* making it *'harder to make money'.* In relation to Adult Service Websites, some felt that leaked profiles *'have been more prominent and the saturation in online sex work has made it really profitable for people to profit from stealing content as there is so much of it and workers are in a vulnerable position'.*

With the shift to online working, *'I make/sell more content so more content has been stolen as it's easy to steal images that are online'*, with another apprehensive about the implications of online profiles proliferating '*also now many more fake profiles set up with my images which is an annoyance to have to keep reporting for removal, so I am more worried of being targeted like this now that I am expanding the online working profiles as not able to work in person'*. One person stated simply '*there are many more bad clients'* – perhaps reflective of the situation many sex workers have found themselves in when navigating a pandemic - the previously 'good' clients become scarce / are spread more thinly creating ideal circumstances for those with nefarious intent to be entertained as a prospect, when previous safety screening may have excluded them altogether.

100% of interviewed sex workers reported the pandemic had impacted their working practices, with many sex workers shifting to online work during the pandemic. Shanice, a black migrant sex worker remarked that she *'Only started [online working] because of the pandemic'*. All interviewees expressed views that Covid-19 and government actions in response to the pandemic (such as lockdowns) had increased acts of visual violence with all 19 people reporting that since March 2021, their experiences of visual violence had increased. Sex workers reported two main reasons: the transition to online sex work and the boredom of clients during lockdowns. Migrant sex working women of colour reported significant problems borne out of social distancing laws that effectively criminalised in-person sex work.

Sia, a sex worker from Sri Lanka, was outed as a sex worker after a family friend recognised her on OnlyFans:

'Nobody knew I did anything for years until the pandemic, and this guy screenshots everything. I am terrified of being filmed (if I go back into escorting), but I need the money'.

Sia was subsequently the victim of an act of visual violence that led to her being threatened to have acid thrown in her face; a threat of direct physical violence fuelled by being outed by her online image. Sia's experience reflects how the image, for sex workers, can be a vehicle to other acts of violence.

Web mediated technologies and visual violence

21st-century sex work is performed on a number of internet platforms (Sanders et al., 2018). No longer just a destination on the internet, sex work forms part of the fabric of the internet with sexual products and services sold not on sex-for-sale sites but on social media platforms. This merging of sex work with non-sex workspaces presents several problems for sex workers in online spaces. For interviewed participants who used the OnlyFans platform, all reported having had their content leaked, airing significant frustrations:

'Why have OnlyFans not put things in place to stop people from screenshotting like on Netflix for example, if you screenshot you get a blank screen' (Michelle, interview participant)

'It comes down to money, not our welfare' (Claire, interview participant)

Sex workers described a website that specialises in 'leaked' content. Participants reported OnlyFans content was leaked by individual content buyers and often as part of a coordinated hacking attempt. Sex workers reported that clients would rather pay another man for leaked content than pay the sex worker directly:

'There's a page called [REDACTED] if you subscribe to them, you get access to all of the OnlyFans profiles that have leaked' (Sarah, interview participant)

Several sex workers questioned why this act of copyright infringement was not a form of visual violence given how malicious and vindictive it could be. For Sarah, *'it should be illegal in its own right because it's very clearly copyrighted content that belongs to other people. It's not even like subtle'.* Concerns are expressed by Claire: *'I protect my face on OF to avoid people trying to out me, I find OF a form of artistic expression, but I worry where the images will end up, it's a bit disconcerting'.*

Sex workers also expressed sentiments of victim-blaming because they had uploaded content themselves:

'Ultimately with my image being online and that sort of thing because I obviously did it myself. I made that decision, like, but the fact that… it is unnerving, the fact that it's in (leaked photos and videos) so many more spaces than you can ever imagine at first. Because you prepare yourself for whatever degree to… for this to happen. But once I started going on Google, and you know opening all the lists, seeing the videos, and it has thousands and thousands and thousands of views, and I don't know where these people are, where they are from, and all that sort of is terrifying' (Sarah, interview participant).

For Claire, *'It's a big issue, I have had my content leaked as well. This is my body and people are just sharing it about like it's nothing'* whilst Sarah expressed frustrations around trying to get leaked content removed: *'I had to fight OF tooth and nail, but they were telling me there was not enough evidence even though I provided it for them. My god, they don't care'.* She further added that this was due in part to the mainstreaming of OnlyFans during the pandemic:

'*It has become a part of pop-culture in a way, but isn't necessarily helpful because I feel that sex working is a different culture as well when it's – because of criminalisation right? It's like who need to know, knows, but the sort of – rest of civilians and society isn't. I feel like because Only Fans has become such a big thing' (Sarah, interview participant).*

Clearly, the myriad forms visual violence can take present significant unease, frustration, and concern for people taking part in this research, to be discussed in more depth below.

Impacts and implications of visual violence

Impact of non-consensual sharing

Interviewed sex workers expressed overwhelm at the sheer scale of the visual violence problem. They felt that visual violence is more than a straightforward copyright violation that can be dealt with via traditional copyright infringements in online spaces. This scale of visual violence is reflected in previous studies that consider visual violence against non-sex workers, noting the scale of the problem can be 'unquantifiable' and often hidden but there is also limited knowledge as to the extent of the problem. (Powell et al., 2019. pp.393-402).

For James, concern that images on the internet are permanent is apparent:

'You could be a sex worker on OnlyFans and you could have a really good two years where you are motivated to take your pictures and you make money and then you might want to quite all of that and then it's all on the internet'

Disturbingly, all 19 sex workers interviewed reported that they feel that they may not know they have been a victim of visual violence because they have avoided looking on punting forums or they don't know where to look to find it. Sia, a full-service sex worker from Sri Lanka, started selling erotic content online during the pandemic and laments: *'they feel free to do whatever they want, to take your picture without your permission; it is widespread nowadays'.* Sia speaks to the problems of sex work clients feeling empowered to commit acts of visual violence. Several sex workers expressed sentiments that reflected views that the internet can be a 'crime scene' where people, mainly sex work clients and consumers of visual content, can commit acts of visual violence with impunity. Acts of violence are aided by sex work sites that disregard sex workers' experiences of visual violence through inaction.

Daisy, a sex worker from China, reported feeling distraught when she was outed on a punting forum when a punter shared her face photograph, recalling *'it was traumatizing; I could not eat for two weeks'*. For Heather, the toll of visual violence resulted in deleterious impacts on her mental health: *'I was suicidal for two years, I asked them to take down the photos and they refused to'.*

The repercussions of visual violence can reverberate widely. In the survey, respondents were asked the (optional) question of what impact non-consensual sharing of images/video had on sex workers' lives. Below are some of their experiences, often revolving around fear, worry, harassment, mistrust, paranoia, embarrassment, frustration, anger, and depression. Sex workers reported similar impacts to that of visual violence perpetrated against non-sex workers, that sex workers experience violation of personal and bodily integrity. It should also be noted that acts of visual violence also impact the integrity of the group the sex worker belongs to. Visual violence has ramifications for all sex workers as does visual violence perpetrated against non-sex workers (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017). The included quotations

here are only a precis, demonstrating a range of impacts across a spectrum of experienced harms and consequences.

Fear and anxiety are cited as impacts of visual violence, with implications for sex work income: *'I gave up on doing live cam shows because I did not feel safe anymore'* and *'It is a fear every time I go to work'.* For this person, *'It's made me a lot more anxious when working to a degree that has severely affected my income as I get so paranoid about seeing clients and letting my guard down in a booking in any way'.* Likewise losing control of sex work-related content *'Freaked me out having images on websites without my consent it led to me having to change my number then losing business because of that, lots of prank calls and obscene WhatsApp messages'.*

Meanwhile, others express despair that their content is freely available to people who have not paid, that it can lead to reputational damage and that losing track of content is a real possibility: *'Stolen images used to create fake profiles cause me worry about what people might think I've said or done that wasn't actually me'. 'Extremely frustrated that hundreds of people have accessed a paid video for free on anonymous tube sites, also unsettled and concerned about my privacy and security'.* One respondent stated pragmatically *'I simply wish to have complete control of where my images appear. This will enable me to erase them without a trace if ever I should wish to do so.'*

For others, the effects and impacts on mental wellbeing are profound, with one person citing feeling *'helpless and worthless'.* Another became *'extremely paranoid'* finding it *'hard to trust anyone',* whilst another worker describes it being *'soul destroying'* and *'incredibly upsetting and embarrassing'* to the extent that they *'wanted to change jobs'.* One interviewee, Emma, details worry about her future chance at a professional career: *'it is in the back of my mind, these images could resurface to ruin my career because you hear all sorts of stuff, worry about no one taking me seriously'.* Others experienced harassment and discrimination as a result of sex work content being shared, with one person poignantly surmising *'lost count of the times dickheads have been on the street filming me. Horrible feeling knowing they've sent it round all their mates as if it's funny'.* For Eve, visual violence manifesting in outing within her college:

'I was just a bit naïve and younger and thought people are going to find out, I don't know why but obviously things are online, also top-shelf magazines, I just thought no one's going to know, then someone's found out, I was just mortified because they shared it with all the College, at the time I remember I was highly mortified' (Eve, interviewee)

The fear (and reality) of being 'outed' through sex worker visual content is evident from responses to a question asking whether being filmed or photographed without consent has led to 'outing'. Whilst over half of sex workers report *not* being outed by non-consensual capturing of their imagery (52.2%, n=35), the remaining individuals report an array of outings

to friends or colleagues (23.9%, n=16), to family including children and partners (16.4%, n=11), to neighbours (16.4%, n=11) and 5 people (7.5%) outed to their children's school and a further 5 (7.5%) outed to their place of education. As with some previous questions, respondents were able to select multiples or frequencies, and therefore these do not add to 100%.

These quantified harms tell a partial story, with some surveyed individuals elaborating on painful outing experiences:

'My children have been isolated at school'
'The biggest impact for me was a man finds my personal social accounts and sends images from my work adverts to anyone that is tagging me in a public post, so many friends and family back home who do not know of my work. This brings a lot of shame to my family and causes a lot of pain to find out in this way. I was also scared at the time that this would impact my rights to stay in England if my real identity is linked to this.'
'Screenshots of my profile were sent round uni'
'a fellow escort stole my personal WhatsApp pic and printed it online, it was horrific'
'I have had to leave some groups, friendships, jobs, because of being outed/shamed'
'Loss of friends, rumours, being stigmatised by everyone in my town'.

'My parents are very poor, they live in a small village outside of São Paulo, I work so I can send money home, so I don't want anybody to know what I do' (Alyssa, interview participant).

'Outing' a sex worker directly contravenes sex workers having a reasonable expectation of privacy, even when there are intimate images online for work-related purposes. Simply the fact of having intimate images online does not mean that a sex worker expects that content to be posted and shared without consent (Stardust, 2021). With the increasing pervasiveness of digital technology, privacy and anonymity is becoming more difficult to maintain, and this puts sex workers at more risk of visual violence. The face is one of the most rudimentary codes of a photographic self-portrait. However, for the sex worker, showing one's face in a portrait is a complex, nuanced choice and at times, a dangerous practice with devastating consequences. A sex worker's decision to conceal their face in a self-portrait is a critical anonymity practice that intersects visibility and surveillance (Waring, 2022, unpublished thesis).

Image 2: Face out (photo on the left) refers to a sex worker showing their face in a photograph. Face in (photo on the right) refers to sex workers hiding all or part of their face by way of artistic and/or editing intervention, protecting their visual identity while the photograph is being made or during the editing process.

It is erroneous to assume that sex workers who do not hide their faces in advertising are by default 'out'; however it is clear from some responses (throughout the survey, largely) that 'face out' is perceived to be living openly with friends, family, and wider circles, with sex worker status 'known'. Relatedly, the blurring (or unblurring) of photographs can be a source of unintended identification for some. When asked *'If you try to hide your face in photographs, has someone unblurred your face photos, tracked you down via a facial recognition app or information contained in the image?'* 9 out of 53 people (17%) specifically stated they do not hide their faces in sex work advertising; however, for those who this was an issue, a range of experience were detailed. Despite going to lengths to cut out their face from photos, one person had their address *'sent to me by a client as it showed up on metadata of a photo I posted to my SW Twitter'.* Another sex worker pondered whether this had happened to them:

'I wonder if this is the case as my photos are non-identifiable otherwise and I've had a few incidences of a local crowd of guys sending me messages to book. […] I did have one of them tell me I lived locally, my address, and the name of my local civvie workplace. I think they just wanted to shock me.'

For this surveyed participant:

'Sometimes I have to take a video for work and my company has already blurred my face but some of my clients have recognized me and they have done facial recognition of the graphic information and then they confirm it, and they often harass me with the video'.

Similar to deep fake porn, some of those surveyed were unaware that personal details could be tracked through visual content data, citing *'didn't know this was possible!'* whilst another considers the prospect of this 'scary'. One interviewee, Eve, explains *'I think, I guess when I started, I didn't really know about that stuff and I guess when you start, I was kind of naïve, you don't know how anything works, you just don't really have a clue about any of it'.*

Adult Service Websites: exploring links with visual violence

Advertising platforms and discussion forums

To register on directories as a seller of sexual services, it is commonplace for workers to be required to show proof that they are the sex worker in the photographs on their profiles. Typically, a sex worker is required to take a 'selfie' holding a current newspaper or a reference number provided by the directory and upload it onto the site to verify the person in the photo matches the photographic ID (such as a passport). The directories then advise potential clients that the sex worker has passed checks because the sex worker was verified by providing the verification photos.

Image 3: Waring, C. (2016) Untitled. [Digital Photograph] Battersea, London, United Kingdom. Example of a verification photograph, typically the sex worker is given a random number generated by the site, told to write the date and the name of the website along with a current

newspaper. The photograph is required to show the sex worker's face so the face can be compared to the photography ID provided to the website by the sex worker.

Website verification processes are inherently problematic. Failure to follow the verification process has resulted in sex workers being excluded from earnings. For Heather and others interviewed, *'the photograph verification process is a form of blackmail'*. A full-service sex worker from Eastern Europe goes on to suggest that the verification process is racially charged:

'It's a problem that they want a photograph of your passport which is not nice but if you want to make money you have to. I think mostly Eastern Europeans have to do this because I have friends of mine, I have two friends from Britain, they don't have to, no problem for them' (Natalie, interview participant)

For sex workers who do not comply with verification processes, a 'warning' (image 4, example) can be placed on an individual's profile. The warning advises clients to proceed with caution in dealing with the sex worker. The message to sex work clients is that sex workers who refuse to comply are 'suspicious', thus need to be avoided which can seriously impact a sex worker's earning capacity. This attitude and approach ignore sex workers' right to privacy, anonymity, and sex workers' concerns regarding visual data leaks and the surveillant nature of the internet.

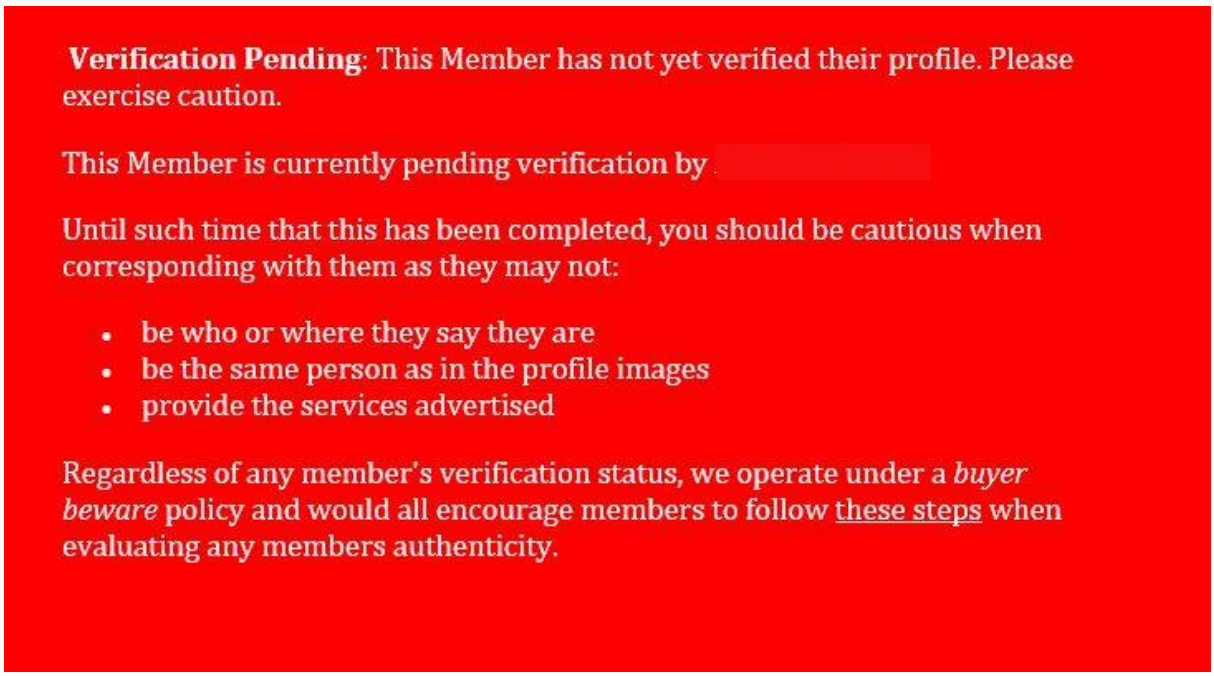

Image 4: Example of text warning clients about a sex worker who refuses to provide photographs for verification.

Image 5: Several Eastern European sex workers reported having to submit to extra photographic demands by sex for sale directories requiring photographs to include passports.

Eastern European workers reported additional photographic demands when providing verification photos including having to stand in front of the street sign of the street they reside on or a famous UK landmark to prove they are in the country. Racist tropes in the sex industry explain why several black and women of colour sex workers reported having to provide verification photographs multiple times because sex buyers constantly challenge the authenticity of the photographs those workers are using to sell sex.

Alyssa a migrant from South America and a full-service sex worker expressed concern about that lax security around the verification photos, when *'They (sex buyers) stole my verification photo and put it on a punting forum, and I could not defend myself because I could not write English that well'.*

Surveyed sex workers expressed similar concerns around photo verification and 'real' identity. We asked whether individuals had ever experienced these verification photos being 'released' or 'found' by others. Of the 64 responses, 42.2% (n=27) had not experienced this whilst 17.2% (n=11) had. A further 21.9% (n=14) had not experienced this themselves but knew of sex workers it *had* happened to. In sync with previous answers, 10 respondents (15.6%) simply could not be sure.

The following demonstrates one way in which service providers can find themselves unwittingly sharing content: *'I usually select it to stay hidden but when making the change from my profile being set to "service seeker" when I was on a break back to "offering services", the box unchecks itself and was left unchecked for a few days. I was notified about it being public by an anonymous email informing me that it had been shared on a forum'.*

Punter/client forums are recounted as sites of considerable contempt amongst some of the sex workers surveyed. When asked whether they had experienced images being discussed or ridiculed on sex buyer forums, the following derisive comments ensued**: '***I don't check those*

toxic platforms, men are trash', 'I don't read their grubby little forums, but I wouldn't be surprised', Not ridiculed [but] talked about in ways I don't like. Men can be dirtbags'. One person states '*Yes, after I came out as trans. I found a forum post where I was being mocked*' whilst another further recounts how *'photos of sex workers have been viciously discussed'.* Surveyed individuals recall the humiliation that such discussions can cause for them, including: *'some men were talking about my post-baby belly it was humiliating. They have no idea how much pressure we are under to look a certain way'* and *'yes on an old forum, men were very cruel about my body'.* The details of a sustained effort assault on one person's appearance resulted in '*a YouTube video with images of me was created where the person was criticising how I looked and claiming I must have been abused to end up making such content. It really was hateful and hurtful.'*

Of the people who chose to answer this question, most recalled intensely negative associations with client forums. Only three people demonstrated mechanisms for coping with these possibilities, including *'tried to block it all out years ago', 'I don't check'* and a singular *'don't care about what average Joes have to say about me'*. It is well documented in the literature that sex work clients use punting forums as expressions of masculinities, can be misogynistic and sexist, and serve as sites of endemic visual violence. These online 'punting' forums give platforms to disgruntled clients to shame sex workers through the image and to publish secretly recorded content (Stardust, 2021).

Beyond the derogatory discussion of sex workers' appearance on client forums, of the 52 individuals who chose to answer this question, 44.2% (n=23) had contacted punting forums/client spaces for removal of content relating to them. Of those who gave more than a simple yes, outcomes of these contacts included being 'ignored', 'ridiculed', 'threatened', and 'badly bullied'. Only one person stated that eventually (presumably the perpetrator) was 'barred' from the site. Interestingly, only 2 survey respondents knew of the existence of the Revenge Porn Helpline, a UK service dedicated to supporting adults experiencing 'intimate image abuse'. Due to the wording of legislation detailed in the literature review, current legislation does not account for sex workers' experience of image abuse. Speaking with a representative of the Revenge Porn Helpline, this is a common stumbling block when trying to assist sex workers seeking redress for the variety of visual violence perpetrated against them. To this end, RPH is presently constructing a sex-worker-specific website with help and resources to navigate these legal quagmires. When sex workers contact the RPH, typically this tends to be around leaked content, filming without consent, threats to 'out', and voyeurism.

One survey respondent offered their experience with trying to get content removed themselves: *'The main issue for me is escort directories who have hijacked my pictures and my phone number either ignoring or defying my request for them to remove the material. One even rejected my DMCA [a takedown request] on grounds that the profile had apparently been paid for. Understand that the profile features MY phone number and that, before filing the*

DMCA, I had requested them several times to remove both my images and my number). When I then asked for my apparent login details, they once again ignored me.'

An experienced member of the NUM casework team discussed how forms of visual violence, whilst tricky from a legislation perspective, could sometimes be tackled using harassment avenues should the individual wish to explore legal pathways. In some instances, the NUM casework team has assisted in content being removed from ASWs, with some sites more responsive than others. Due to the unfit-for-purpose legislation, this can sometimes mean 'people can get caught in a cycle'. When asked about the impacts of visual violence upon sex workers contacting NUM for help, the staff member stated, 'filming without consent, people do see as a serious problem and hugely violating', particularly (but not exclusively) in instances where visual content is used as blackmail, for example.

Managing visual violence: support, strategies, and solutions

'My ex did threaten to out me to my local community and I think he has done because of the way I've been treated recently I just have no idea what's been shared' (survey participant)

The combined experiences of people taking part in surveys and interviews demonstrate that fear of visual violence is prominent. Sixty-seven (n=67) surveyed people responded on a Likert scale asking them how concerned they are about visual violence. Figure 8 below depicts the high percentage of people either very concerned (45.5%) or moderately concerned (45.5%). This combined total of 90% of respondents indicates the level of concern expressed by those engaging in this research.

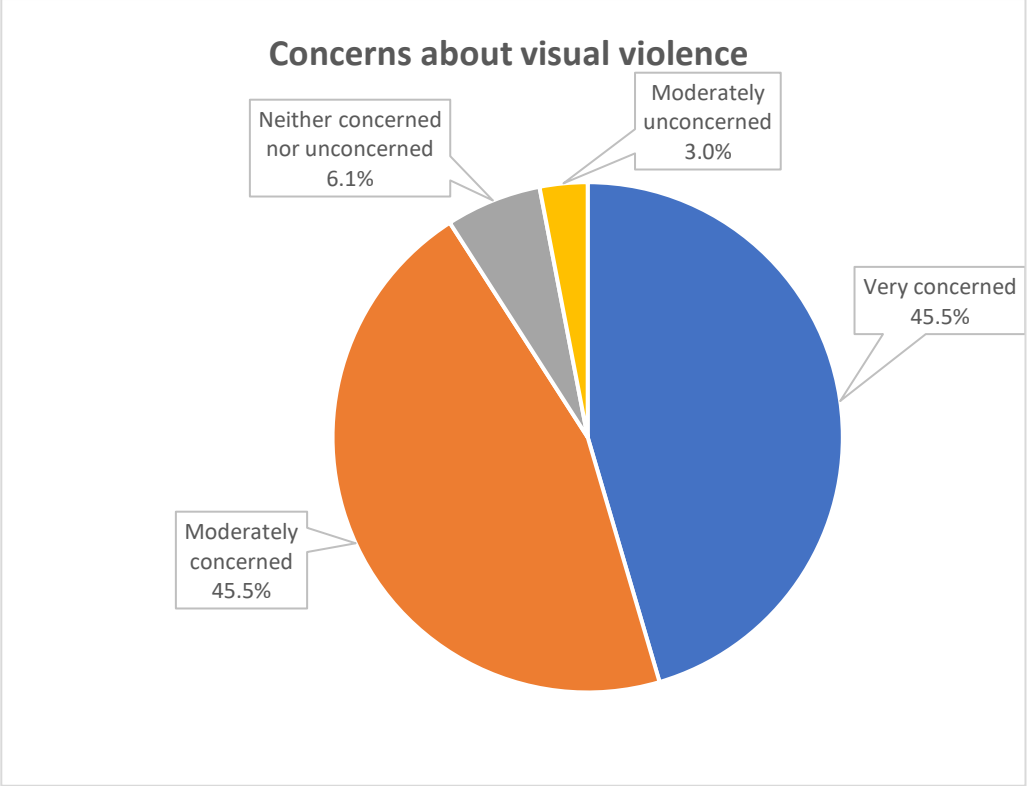

Figure 8: How concerned are sex workers about visual violence?

Visual violence and discrimination

This section relates to groups of sex workers who are particularly vulnerable to acts of visual violence, reflecting that certain populations of sex working individuals are subject to visual violence more than others (Powell, et al., 2019). Survey participants occupying minority positions, poignantly, spoke of varied discrimination: *'I am indigenous, queer, migrant and poor. My abuser knows I'm extremely vulnerable, he wouldn't do that with someone that could fight back' and 'it's also worse now I'm out as trans'.* For many though, discrimination starts from being a woman, below.

For people taking part in this research, many believed that being a woman was grounds enough to be targeted for visual violence. One survey respondent surmised that women are perceived to be *'easy targets'* whilst another believes *'this form of violence is to do with being a woman, as clients hate that we charge for services'*. Two people surveyed stated they had been targeted because of being transgender, with one woman stating *'I am a target because I am a Thai woman and trans. I think the man who did this felt shame and disgust at his attractions and was trying to bring hurt to me and my family and to make me feel bad and ashamed'.*

Disability features as a social category that can make some workers vulnerable to targeting by those with ill intent, including an awareness by one person that *'Most of my clients don't know*

about my disabilities but I do also feel that I am a better target due to them'. Three surveyed people stated their being migrants incited targeting, with one person believing that *'being a migrant and that information being public has led to certain clients believing they can get away with it more.'* Some commentary about 'unusual' body types, 'fatness', and 'being older' feature as reasons too for targeting. One person believed they were targeted because they were a street worker.

In-depth interviews support the varied forms of discrimination involved in experiences of visual violence. Racism and xenophobia are particularly featured in interviews, with Sia stating, '*most of my experiences of visual violence has been because I am Asian'*. Non-white western sex workers can become targets of client-perpetrated visual violence because they are valued less on the class strata of sex work; this racist targeting results in black and people of colour sex workers having to be hypervigilant against acts of visual violence (Stardust, 2021).

32% of interviewed people reported their victimisation by way of visual violence was due to racism. These 32% were all sex workers of colour. 80% of migrant sex workers reported their victimisation was due to xenophobic tropes and nefarious stereotypes inherent within the sex industry. Shanice reported that a 'regular' sex work client filmed her whilst asleep during an overnight booking. The man then used WhatsApp to send her the photographs over a long period of time. Frightened, she did not work for five days afterward but felt unable to report the incident; she felt as a black migrant she would not be afforded the same level of protection as a white western sex worker.

Sia believes she was targeted because she is an Asian woman selling sexualised content on OnlyFans. The man who leaked her online content was a man she believed held racist and misogynist views about Asian women selling content on platforms:

'I had my pictures taken from OnlyFans sent to my parents by a guy that knew my cousin. He screen-shotted my OnlyFans and he sent them to my parents'. Daisy, a Chinese sex worker echoes this, stating *'It was just so hard […] Most girls of they are doing this job, if they are Asian have to be careful'*

Karim, a male escort from the Middle East studying in the UK discusses that Islamophobia and xenophobia drove his experience of visual violence. A male client took a photo of Karim's passport, using this to blackmail him with threats of outing to the embassy of his country of origin.

Emma, a street-based sex worker with over two decades of experience, reported suffering two extreme examples of visual violence. One revolved around filming and then being shamed on social media and another instance involved being 'outed' in newspapers after being photographed on the street by a journalist. These photos continued to be circulated for many years and as a result, Emma experienced shame, stigma, physical and sexual violence, and the

loss of income. Emma reported suffering sexualised violence when her child was with her, as a consequence of the media 'outing' and recounts experiencing paranoia and reluctance to leave her home.

The experiences of male victims of visual violence are notably absent in image-based abuse discourses. Narratives and responses to these abuses have informed the view that image-based abuse is a gendered crime typically perpetrated by males, with the victim always female. This gendered attitude is inherently problematic as it ignores and excludes the experiences of male victims of visual violence. Three male sex workers in their twenties were interviewed for this project, two based in England and one in Ireland. All performed online sex work such as camming and/or selling sexualised content online and sold physical acts of sex to men.

One male sex worker eloquently described his thoughts about how the internet was dangerous for male sex workers and highlighted the need for males and others on the gender spectrum to be included in the discussion of image-based victimisations. David, a queer escort, expressed views that visual violence committed against other gender identities is predicated on the stigma of sex work and intersects with other forms of stigma about being gay and non-binary in online spaces:

'It's predicated on the stigma of sex work because there's like a similar intersection; like being on Grindr there's who aren't out as queer, and they're very, very conscious of visual violence, and have the more discreet profiles of nothing with their faces in. Because they're aware of the stigma, being out as queer and images used to out them'. (David, interview participant).

The male, queer and non-binary sex workers expressed feeling considerable pressure to show their faces in marketing material. When questioned about why there was this pressure to show their faces as part of selling sex, all three research participants felt this demand for face photographs was a form of visual violence and a perceived weapon of control over the sex worker:

'Well it's a little bit of like ownership and shame like it literally is a currency and like a lot of currency, they hold their value over time, so you can hold over someone's head and you know there are psychopaths out there and sociopaths and sadists and when it comes to sex, sometimes those things, that's where people, you know, express those tendencies but when it comes to sex a lot of people are conflicted because you know for a lot of people sex is still a dirty thing that you do' (interview participant)

The photograph is seen as both a currency of trust and a weapon, with Karim stating, *'some guys, they might put sex workers on a pedestal and then they feel like because of that they need to take them down a peg or two'*. Male and non-binary sex workers experience the same acts of visual violence as women sex workers yet are rarely considered as victims of image-based abuses. David recalls *'I have been filmed before, when I was doing a duo with another*

sex worker, and we didn't know there was someone else there. Another client, filming secretly'. He went on to describe how overwhelmed he is by visual violence:

'A massive tsunami because it's like you against the people who leaked your images, whether they realised it was bad or not and then having to contend with – I don't know how to explain it, it's like a domino effect, that's the problem, you feel like you can't stop it' (David, interview participant)

Trans sex workers who took part in this project reported instances of visual violence. Charlotte describes her vulnerabilities when it comes to being a trans woman sex worker selling sexualised content online:

'Obviously if you are a trans girl and you have a penis, it's maybe even more of a sensitive topic and to upload that picture is quite a vulnerable thing to do and again it can be, you can be totally sexualised as being the slur 'tranny' and like those pictures' (Charlotte, interview participant)

Charlotte was distressed at the idea of those photographs being shared without her permission, claiming if they were released that would be very stigmatising for her to experience. The transphobia that Charlotte describes is what she believes drives her clients to leak her content without her permission, citing *'the same people that would have physical attraction to you and masturbate are sometimes the people that also despise you'.*

With such high levels of concern and articulated targeting and discrimination, how then can sex workers alleviate worry, warn others and seek redress? The following sections explore these management strategies.

Sharing experiences with others

All 67 respondents were offered multiple-choice selection for the question 'how and where do you share with other sex workers your experiences of visual violence?' The most popular form of sharing this information was through private WhatsApp and signal groups (53.7%, n=36), followed by private social media sex work groups and SAAFE forums (both 31.3%, n=21). Worryingly, 16.4% of those surveyed said they did not share their experiences of visual violence at all, redolent of the difficulties some sex workers experience with isolation. 16.4% (n=10) had shared their experiences with National Ugly Mugs, and smaller numbers also ticked: other social media accounts / other support services (Including local and national support) / punter or client forums.

What legal recourse is desired by victims of visual violence?

Fifty-nine people responded to a free text survey question asking what legal recourse they would like to have, as victims of visual violence. Some people were *'not sure about how legislation works for these cases'*, whilst others acknowledged *'well, it's quite difficult to deal with digital law'*. For others who know the law is lacking for sex workers who experience this

particular violence, the wish to be able to *'rely on some kind of up-to-date law'* was expressed. Many individuals desired their online content to simply be removed when requested, and for it to be honoured whilst others wished for perpetrators to be fined, prosecuted, and imprisoned. One survey respondent poignantly stated:

'I would like to be able to go to the police and have them charged without being outed in a public court. First of all, I would want to feel like the police would take me seriously. So often it seems when you talk to friends in the business, that it's a common belief that if we sell sex, we sell our rights to our bodies. There should be a law that directly protects sex workers from this but also from their true identity being public as a result of reporting the crime.'

Difficult relations with enforcement are apparent throughout the experiences of those who filled in surveys and took part in interviews. One person questions: *'What would the police do? As far as they're concerned it's my fault for being in lingerie around a man'* whilst another speaks to the need for legal intervention*: 'when you're vulnerable you want protection.'*

One person recounts the need for *'more effective DMCA takedown handling from tube sites with high rates of stolen content'* and for *'profiles to be shut'*. The desire for retribution is demonstrated in a surveyed person's assertion *'There should be repercussions for him just as there were repercussions for me'.* Some respondents wished for a fining system for stolen imagery, alongside perpetrators being held accountable. The interviewed sex workers reported strong feelings that perpetrators are acting with impunity, citing that acts of visual violence go unpunished, and do not meet any meaningful consequences to this form of visual criminal offending behaviour. This reflects the lack of consequences for those who commit acts of visual violence in online spaces. (Powell, et al., 2019).

Reporting to the police?

3 people stated they contacted police and had experienced acceptable or positive police responses and/or outcomes. More telling is that 44 of the 55 who responded to this survey question gave an outright 'no' as to whether they would report visual violence to police, with an occasional qualifier such as fearing not being taken seriously and reporting to police perceived as a 'risk'. This is particularly the case for people concerned about migrant status, or discrimination based on sexuality, or concern for repercussions for themselves, with one person *stating, 'they didn't care and reported me to social services for being a sex worker'*. A fundamental lack of faith in the police is encapsulated in the words of these people: '*Much like sexual assault/ r*ape, I just wouldn't trust them to do anything concrete*' and this person's appeal: *'Don't blame us and work to find the person like in any other cases'*. The following longer responses showcase some of the experiences of those who took part in this research:

'Whenever I've tried to report anything in the way of harassment, violence, and threats of violence, I have been ridiculed and told that this is an occupation hazard for sex workers. So I

would like that to be something that stops happening, which feels like a really small step, but I can't even wrap my head around what any bigger steps would look like right now. It just feels so far away. I would never bother reporting again' (survey respondent)

'I can't because as a migrant this could be bad for my visa. There's no protection for us. White European women: yes. Not for us' (survey respondent)

'Yes, could not do anything because it was my word against theirs and needed more evidence despite what I had in order to seize his phone' (survey respondent).

I went to police once over a serious incident and it went nowhere. They will laugh us out of the station reporting this!' (Survey respondent)

Interviewed sex workers reported mixed results when dealing with the police regarding visual violence. They typically only reported acts of visual violence that involved sexualised images and in an intimate non-work context. This type of reporting is because of the belief that nothing can be done about sharing non-sexualised photos even though this could constitute harassment.

The worry of slut-shaming and whore stigma responses to their victimisation about selling sexualised images online prevent many sex workers from reporting to the police. The embarrassment inherent in explaining they are selling sexualised content also prevented sex workers from reporting to the police. Several sex workers expressed fears about being shamed and ignored, preventing them from reporting the matter. This worry about the reaction of the police was more significant than the fear of re-victimisation. This worry aligns with the current legislation that only deals with revenge porn in relation to intimate private images. The consensus amongst sex workers interviewed was there was no point involving the police because they felt it would be of no consequence to the offender; however, several sex workers said they threatened to report incidences to the police to scare the offender (without having any intention of accessing police services). Instances in which sex workers did report visual violence to the police involved intimate partner visual violence and one sex worker reported being filmed or photographed during in-person booking and was advised the offender could be charged with voyeurism.

Reporting to the police has been the last resort. Claire, who an intimate partner filmed, reported the police were not very understanding by emphasising her profession as a lap dancer and online content creator would make the process of reporting revenge porn difficult, so she did not pursue the matter.

Several migrant sex workers described reporting to the police as not an option. This is due in part to knowing the police would be of little help, not being taken seriously, being shamed for being a sex worker, being blamed for their victimisation, and wanting to avoid the police due

to immigration status and concerns regarding visas. One male sex worker expressed concerns about being deported and the harsh consequences this would mean for him and his family.

Suggestions for how sex workers want to be supported

'I think it may be good to have a joint resource from organisations […] ways to help protect yourself, what to do if this happens, how to get the support needed' (survey respondent)

Awareness-raising, emotional support as well as practical and legal support comprised the key areas of action that 57 survey respondents would like to see from collectives and organisations that support sex workers. Bringing awareness to how visual violence can be enacted upon sex workers and the damage this particular form of harm can cause, through campaigns and general information sharing, was cited as useful. Similarly, too was practical guidance on how visual violence can be reduced, for example, through video encryption and how to spot signs that secret filming might be taking place. One person suggested a shared search forum, like reverse image searching, that would allow people to see if their images and online content had been taken, with one respondent detailing that *'for a long time I didn't realise my video was out there'*. Individuals also wished for more knowledge around the law, support with what to do from a legal perspective, with potentially available advice online, or a dedicated website. The suggestion to *'pressure Google etc for the right to be forgotten*' speaks to the very practical need for visual content to be recalled and deleted from the digital memory. A small number of people wanted lobbying for a change in the law, and for collectives to work towards ensuring *'the authorities take it more seriously'*. Of more value appeared to be support.

For one interview participant, David*, 'it can feel, like you're up against an impossible system, when you're one sex worker, trying to deal with these agents when they just want you for advertisement'.* Across interviews, several suggestions were made and are summarised below, that sex workers reported would be useful to them:

1. A search tool to check clients who have been known or accused of committing visual violence
2. A dedicated section added onto the NUM reporting form about visual violence
3. A search tool with facial recognition to find leaked content online. The ability for organisations to remove content on sex workers behalf
4. Information sheets on how to deal with visual violence and how to protect themselves
5. Help sex workers to get content removed online.

Strategies for managing visual violence

'I blur more now, there is always somebody out there who wants to hurt you, it's been a hard 6 months' (Sia, interview participant).

We asked survey respondents to share whether they had strategies for managing visual violence and 56 people shared their tips. Watermarking content was often described, as was blurring of images. For in-person sex workers, managing their clients' belongings can be a minimisation strategy:

'I do make sure that their phone is always unavailable to them unless they needed to make or receive a call. If they do request certain videos or photos, it's always done in my phone so I can proof see them beforehand'
'I do tell them to put away stuff'
'I generally have a place I ask them to leave their things, but I always have done that. I am now a lot more vigilant about looking up new kinds of gadgets that can be used as small cameras (mine was a lighter ordered from Amazon which functioned as a camera'
'I'm wary of clients wearing glasses or if going to their hotel or house'.
'Instruct clients get undressed in the bathroom and keep all belonging in the bathroom to avoid being secretly filmed'

Meanwhile for online sex workers:

'I use platforms where I can be notified of screenshots etc, warn them the call will end if they do this'
'I personally am not too scared of being 'outed' but I do urge others to try to keep their backgrounds clean to not only keep the buyer's attention on them but also prevent being recognised'
'I try to keep my content only in a few platforms that are as safe as possible and Google myself every so often, unfortunately the process makes me so uncomfortable and gives me anxiety, so I often postpone it even though it's important'
Interviewed sex workers reported going to great lengths not to be victimised or re-victimised through visual violence. To avoid being outed, stalked, or suffering other forms of violence, sex workers rely on strategies to hide their identity by pixelation, blurring or other artistic intervention. In addition to relying on editing and creative strategies, sex workers go to extraordinary lengths and spend a considerable amount of time concealing personal identifying information in photographs such as body markings, tattoos, and piercings. Social media platforms have heightened sex workers' awareness about protecting information regarding civilian work and private addresses:

'Well it makes me scared because although I'm not face out, I've got photos that are like, [...] just beneath the nose, so the lips, so I make sure that I include the lips, [...]and I know that if

someone in my family saw them, they would know it was me, like you can tell, so I suppose what I'm wary of is them being taken out of the spaces where, like I'm assuming none of my family go – they live in the [redacted], I'm assuming none of them are going to be looking for sex workers in [redacted]' (interview participant)

A key theme expressed by sex workers was the tension between the need to post images to sell or market sexual services, client demand for visual content, and the need to be vigilant against forms of visual violence:

'It's like people will be able to dig out old photos like old clients who, maybe when I was less careful so I've not been face out but there's been other times where I've liked used those Apps to blur part of my – it's not a great disguise, like I've not – I've done it so that my eyes are covered maybe and it's like okay, cool, it's kind of like, it's not face out but you have got everything out but your eyes! It's not a great disguise' (interview participant).

Sex workers reported feeling overwhelmed and helpless in the face of web mediated technologies that enable visual violence:

'it's been very difficult, because I have felt like the only way is to delete all my social media, all my personal stuff and not meet people. Erm, because I didn't have the option to stop doing this work, because I need the money. So, I thought if I had cleared it from my personal life, then it's just less chance of crossover' (interview participant)

Other strategies of identity management include:

'I screenshot my photos before uploading so the photo data isn't there linking back' and 'I look around the room always for anything a bit off I looked up on Google how people spy and what things they do so now I can look out for these.'
I have a coat with a big hood and if it looks like someone's trying to film I hide in the hood' (survey participant).

Decriminalisation of sex work

It is imperative to state how the decriminalisation of sex work could impact the levels of visual violence perpetrated against sex workers. NUM research into visual violence has highlighted to an alarming extent the role social inequalities and harmful legislative frameworks such as the Nordic Model in Ireland play in fostering a toxic online environment that underpins visual violence committed against sex workers. Sex workers experiencing visual violence are failed by the state (which criminalises working practices), with a woeful lack of police action and stigma and victim-blaming attitudes propagated through extreme anti-sex work feminist campaigns to abolish sex work. These factors, coupled with the dire material effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, have increased social isolation for sex workers, this makes sex workers more vulnerable to all forms of visual violence addressed in this research. The financial

precarity of those existing on the margins, an increase in poverty and limited choice outside of the sex industry has resulted in many sex workers performing sex work knowing the risk they face with visual violence and with visual violence underpinned by laws that actively contribute to sex worker visual violence victimisation.

NUM recognises the danger in documenting how sex workers experience all forms of violence without putting research into the legal context about how governments exacerbate harms against sex workers. Inherently anti-sex worker legislative frameworks that render sex workers vulnerable to visual violence are complicit in the visual violence perpetrated against sex workers. Meaning current legal frameworks in Ireland and the U.K. contribute to harmful social environments both offline and online that allow visual violence against sex workers to flourish. The problematics of legislative frameworks that shape sex workers experiences of visual violence are reflected in the experiences of sex workers documented in this report through a detailed discussion of research findings.

Conclusions

The shame, stigma, and fear of violence forces some sex workers to attempt to conceal their identity online whilst the internet make the distribution of sex worker photographs vast, permanent, and more unknown. The visual violence project is one of several steps towards greater recognition of this type of harm and the myriad ways in which sex workers are subjected to it. It is well documented in the literature that modern-day full-service sex workers who work independently and free from third parties need the internet to facilitate their work.

The findings detailed extensively in this report show visual violence to be, indeed, a form of violence. Likewise, it is often used to perpetrate psychological abuse, reputational destruction, and to incite fear for sex workers across all working environments. To date, visual violence perpetrated against sex workers has received little attention. This research project has enabled NUM and partner organisations/collectives to gain much-needed insightful knowledge and understanding of the lived experience of sex workers experiencing these harms. Centralising sex workers' experiences, this project illustrates the weaponisation of photography against sex workers that is perpetrated by sex buyers, intimate partners, friends, family, other sex workers, and strangers on the internet. Visual violence is a much overlooked but technology-facilitated form of violence of which the image itself can be the site of violence; the image acts as a vehicle for other violence that begins with the image being weaponised against the sex worker.

Privacy and anonymity are important for sex workers to feel safe selling sexual services. There are real-life dangers for sex workers who post photographs online. Visual violence can lead to serious social, professional, and health ramifications. Consequences faced by sex workers include but are not limited to: being outed as a sex worker; threats of physical violence; cyber-

and real-life stalking and harassment; being fired from civilian employment; the removal of children through family courts; being excluded from accessing a range of services, most notably housing, banking and rideshare platforms; being shadow-banned or removed from social media websites without warning or any kind of explanation and, more concerning, (viii) suicidal ideations such as thoughts of suicide and suicides (Waring, 2022, p. 1).

Visual violence is a new term that encapsulates a wide spectrum of problematic abusive behaviour in which the image itself can be the site of violence (such as sharing of an unauthorised pornographic image taken without consent, or the photograph as a vehicle for other forms of violence that are enabled and emboldened through the photograph itself). David, a gay male full-service sex worker explained that visual violence is the means to other forms of exploitation:

'Visual violence, it's the vehicle, so it's the start point, which opens the door for lots of other kinds of violation, but it's like, it's not seen as anything'

In recognising that visual violence is a spectrum of problematic behaviour, we reject other mainstream and popular terms such as 'image-based abuse' or 'lens-based violence'. In doing so, this research demonstrates problems with the current legal and social definitions of 'revenge porn' and other forms of image-based abuses such as up-skirting and creepshots, which neither consider how sex workers experience visual violence nor how performing sex work exposes sex workers to forms of visual violence not experienced by those outside of the sex industry. We also recognise that the term 'revenge porn' is overwhelmingly used to describe a heteronormative crime in which the victim is assumed to be female and the perpetrator male (Citron and Franks, 2014, p.2). This assumption of gender and terminology excludes the experience of individuals who identify outside of these gender categories.

Recognising visual violence among all genders experience allows for the rejection of language and definitions that make assumptions about the images being used for abusive purposes were made in a private intimate context and/or for non-commercial purposes and/or were taken without the victim's knowledge or permission. What is problematic for sex workers and what is crucial to deciding if the crime of revenge porn has been committed is the prerequisite in law that the images are private and sexual and makes assumptions that sex acts are ordinarily not seen in public.

We recognise that the digital image, in all forms of an image has become harmful to sex workers. To de-weaponise the image we have identified three main issues that are 'solved' by our collaboratively defined version of visual violence that rejects problematic current language and definitions in four main ways.

1. **An Intimate Image:** The current 'revenge porn' legislation hinges on the images in question being made in an intimate context of a relationship not in a commercial relationship with multiple viewers.

2. **A Sexualised Image:** The current legislation and definitions centre on the shaming of mainly women through the sharing of sexualised images; for the sex worker the sharing of non-sexualised images can be just as vile causing reputational destruction.

3. **A Private Image:** All digitally taken and stored images are networked by design therefore do not meet the definition of a private image as would an analogue image such as a polaroid photo. This means web-mediated and mobile phone-based technologies render digital images, by default, public images.

4. Current legislation hinges on the image/s being made for one other person. What happens when the photos are taken for work as marketing or as a product, or consensually taken during the provision of a service but then maliciously sent or sold to other unknown people? Therefore, this definition shifts the focus from the inference there was only one viewer of the image/s to images that may have multiple consensual viewers. Also, who the intended audience for that image is vital.

Recommendations

The eight key recommendations stemming from the research project are as follows:

1. We recommend that clarity is provided with regards to consent in reference to visual content and images. We recognise that clarity is lacking regarding the rights of image-makers and consent to publish on one platform is widely misunderstood, meaning it is not consent for the images to be shared without the expressed permission of the sex worker. Clarity will be provided by the development of informative and accessible content to sex workers, sex work clients and sex work, sex worker support and activist organisations and online platforms that facilitate the sale and distribution of sex workers' visual content.

2. We recommend that the right to be forgotten is a critical safety and privacy Internet function for sex workers, meaning that sex workers have the fundamental basic human right to have data on the Internet removed upon request. The right to be forgotten (RTBF) is the right to have private information about a person be removed from Internet searches and other directories under some circumstances. For sex workers, this information includes any content relating to their performance of sex work and the harmful sharing of private information as the consequence of visual violence and being outed as a sex worker. Therefore, this research project recommends two key recommendations:

    a. For NUM and allies to develop a policy and strategy for working with Internet Search Engines regarding the removal of content. We recommend amendments to be made to existing right to be forgotten policies to include sex workers and/or the

development of a new, separate policy for sex workers, designed with their needs and lived experience at the fore.

b. To consider legislative change in order to enshrine the right to be forgotten for sex workers in law. By way of example, platforming for amending Article 17 of the UK GDPR individuals have the right to have personal data erased. This is also known as the 'right to be forgotten'

3. We recommend that simpler takedown notices for sex workers wishing to have unauthorised visual content removed from online spaces are developed. And to continue working with platforms toward this aim.

4. We recommend that visual violence by media outlets is taken seriously and is incorporated into ethical journalism practices. In order to tackle visual violence perpetrated by media outlets, NUM and allies will develop a strategy to educate people working in the media industry on best practice when dealing with the visual content of sex workers, to actively challenge journalists who are perpetrators of visual violence, and to challenge unethical journalistic practices that constitute a form of visual violence.

5. We recommend and resolve to build a culture of understanding pertaining to visual violence, the development of an informative resource PDF to educate sex workers on the forms of visual violence, and to help sex workers manage the risks of and understand the consequences of visual violence. To develop a social media campaign targeting sex workers to market the PDF and provide awareness to the wider sex worker community.

6. We recommend that current mechanisms for reporting violence online are amended to include acts of visual violence. This recommendation will allow for a safe space for sex workers to report and seek help and provide opportunity for future data analysis and research projects on the extent of sex worker experiences of visual violence.

7. We recommend that the current ‘revenge porn’ legislation be amended to reflect commercial use of images with multiple viewers.

8. We recommend that academic publications in the field on online visual cultures and criminology outside the traditional academic realms of sex work theory to challenge the definition of a private image, and for this to be amended to reflect the contemporary culture of online sex work.

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