

To What Extent do the Negative Stereotypes Surrounding Female Sex Workers Influence their Status as Victims of Sexual Violence?

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Declarations:

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract:

This research study is based on the public perception of female sex workers and the unfair treatment that they receive from all social aspects, such as health care and law

enforcement. The study dives in deep to consider how the misconceptions surrounding women who work in the sex industry have a negative effect on the way they are treated and supported after they have been victims of sexual violence and abuse. The study intends to break down the stigma and stereotypes behind sex work to investigate why society treats female sex workers so negatively, and the reasons behind the controversy of sex work. Examining the extent to which the stigma and stereotypes impact their status as victims of sexual violence, it will look at the current solutions to the issue and propose new recommendations that could have a positive impact on the way female sex workers are treated and supported after victimisation.

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Our society still has deeply ingrained notions of sex work and the women who participate in it, sexual violence towards these women is prevalent in all aspects, whether this be physical or sexual abuse, harassment on the streets or abusive comments left to women who work online. Society sees women who take part in sex work as ‘deviant’ and there are many other labels that are used to describe them, such	

as ‘whore’ or ‘hooker,’ potentially devastating words that have negative impacts on these women. The National Institution for Health Care Research (2024) conveys many of them to be ‘junkies’ or have issues with alcohol or other substances such as crack or heroin. they suggest that many of these women are stuck in the same cycle of ‘work-score-use’ and their addictions only reinforce their dependency on the job, participating to their health and social issues. Another damaging viewpoint is that female sex workers were victims of abuse within their childhood, this is a misconception that takes away focus from their personal choices and sense of self and belonging; it is important to recognise that each of these women have their reasoning and diverse experiences that led them to work in the industry, (Stoltz et al., 2007). Undeniably, society values these women as vulnerable and disordered, often seeking comfort from substances and male validation, from the questionnaire, the answers from the participants align with this viewpoint as many admitted to their beliefs that female sex workers are filled with desperation and social disadvantage. It was also found from the data that many of the participants assumed that sex workers suffer not only from poor mental health, but STIs and STDs too, this a viewpoint that must be challenges as it is nothing more than an unfair generalisation, like in any other profession there is a level of risk and these women are aware of the precautions they can take to minimise their encounters with infections and disease. 30

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1.0 Introduction:

The term 'sex work' refers to the different acts such as prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, the taking part in or performing pornography, and other forms of sexual services that are exchanged for money or goods, (Metropolitan Police, 2024). The law concerning sex work in the UK has seen several reforms over the past twenty years, however, there has been no momentous change from the first reform back in 2003, to the more recent reforms of 2014 and January 2022. The reform of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, saw that prostitution itself was legalised within the UK but other activities that can be associated with sex work, soliciting in public for example, were still a criminal offence, (City of London Police, 2023). The most recent reform of the Sexual Offences Act legalised other activities such as running a brothel and loitering for the purpose of prostitution, Metropolitan Police (2023) explains that they were now legal, but both activities came with restrictions, meaning that under certain circumstances they would be deemed a criminal offence. Since the reform of the law along with the decriminalisation of prostitution, a large majority of female sex workers have been left feeling frightened, anxious, and more at risk of being trafficked than ever, (Boff, 2012). Furthermore, Owen (2017) expressed how women working within the sex industry are more afraid than ever to come forward and file reports of abuse and violence that they have fallen victim to. Last May (2023), an event was held for the purpose of discussing the safety and protection of sex workers and the role that stigma plays in the prevention of their safety, security, and support. The website intended to promote and explain the event, the Public Policy Exchange (2023) concluded that a high number of people working within the sex industry were afraid or unconfident, as they (Public Policy Exchange, 2023) go on to say that an "estimated number of 152 sex workers have been murdered" these figures take place between 1990 and 2015 in the UK.

Sex work is controversial and because of the stigma around the work, the women who rely on this type of work for income are treated poorly, not just by the public but much of the time by law enforcement too. Stardust et al., (2021) claim that the poor treatment

and the risks that are instigated by the law enforcement do not receive enough attention, possibly as a result of the lack of research and resources therefore meaning there is little to no change and much ongoing danger for these women. The benefit of this research is reaching for the potential of finding a solution to try and eliminate many, if not all the negative connotations that fall on these women for them to receive the support and guidance that all victims are in desperate need of. The focus remains primarily on female sex workers, the reason being Turek (2022) explanation of a study conducted by Laura Watson of the English Collective of Prostitutes, that involved female sex workers coming forward to share statements or opinions from law enforcement in the process of reporting violence or assault against them, one female sex worker shared that officers had told her that they “don’t really investigate matters when (the victim) has intentionally put (themselves) at risk”. This statement highlights the unfair treatment and victim blaming that too many sex workers must face in the hands of the people they trust to have the resources and ability to offer help and support.

1.1 Aims and Objectives:

Overall, the aim of this study is to critically examine to what extent then negative stereotypes surrounding female sex workers can impact their status as victims of sexual violence. To do so, objective number one is to identify the already existing stereotypes surrounding women who work within the industry. Secondly, to consider the negative connotations associated with different stereotypes of sex workers that can be improved to provide equal treatment of victims. There are many misconceptions that can be harmful towards these women. An example of this being the statement from Global Network of Sex Projects (2014) stating that feminists, along with abolitionist groups claim that women working in the industry have survived sexual violence as children and are now “blinded by the oppression” creating the inference that a large amount of women who work in the sex industry are previous victims of abuse from childhood and due to their difficult circumstances and pressures from within society, they may not have the understanding or acknowledgement of the extent of their oppression.

1.2 Approach:

Adopting a mixed methods approach, this study intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of how negative connotations have an impact on how female sex workers are treated as victims of sexual violence. A mixed method approach utilises the combination of qualitative and quantitative data to offer a more nuanced explanation of the public perception of female sex workers. The study, broken down into seven sections, will be completed at various stages. The first part being proposal and ethics to be completed by Friday 20th October, the second (the introduction) by Friday 10th November. The literature review to be completed by Friday 8th December, next will be the methodology completed by Friday 9th February. An analysis of results will be conducted by Fridays 22nd March. Finally, conclusions and recommendations by Friday 19th April and the final submission date will be 7th May 2024.

1.3 Research Topic:

Aside from the apprehension that sex workers have towards law enforcement, there are numerous issues that these women face, when working or even reporting violence against them. The public attitude and knowledge toward sexual consent are massive concerns as YouGov (2018) explain that 11% of their participants held belief that the higher number of sexual partners one has, the less harm they experience from sexual violence, including rape. This belief perpetrates the destructive and inaccurate interpretation that the sexual history of a woman has influence or even the justification of violence against her. The misunderstanding of sexual consent has the public confused about the impact of sexual violence against women and girls. Regardless of sexual experience, consent is continuous and voluntary agreement for the engagement of sexual activity of any kind, (Rape Crisis England & Wales, 2023).

According to Swift (2022 p.1), globally, “it has been reported that those working in the sex industry have 45-75% chance of experiencing sexual violence”. Swift (2022) continues with the explanation that studies from the US portray higher rates of sexual violence towards women are enacted by law enforcement and this claim can be supported by Murphey – Stanley (2022) who puts forward that qualitative research studies confirm that sex workers in Baltimore, including some incarcerated, experience physical or sexual violence from officers the percentage being 38%. The dehumanising practices of law enforcement leaves around 30% of offences of sexual abuse, coercion or assault conducted by US officers., as illustrated by Sloss & Harper (2010). Street sex workers are portrayed as some of the most vulnerable people within society, especially as the reform of the law allows them to work alone. According to Manning, Majeed-Ariss & White (2020), street sex workers are more likely to come forward with reports of violence compared to those who work alongside others in brothels or flats. In the UK, it has been reported that (female) sex workers that work primarily outdoors were six times more at risk of violence by clients or public service providers than their counterparts that work indoors, this figure also from Manning, Majeed-Ariss & White (2020). Overall, female sex workers are reluctant to report assault as they believe it to be a waste of time, either the victims are not taken seriously enough or they think they are incriminating themselves because of the details of their job, (Sex Workers Project, 2023)

2.0 Literature Review:

Regarding sexual violence, a person is guilty of an offence if they:

- (a) Touch another person intentionally,
 - (b) If the touching is of a sexual nature,
 - (c) The other person does not consent to the touching,
 - (d) If person A does not reasonably believe that person B consents to the touching,
- (UK Public General Acts, 2003. C.42)

In simpler terms, sexual violence on any level defined in English and Welsh law as touching another individual in a sexual way without their consent, any act of a sexual nature that is harmful or unwanted, the attempt to obtain sex or acts of sex by coercion or violence, (National Sexual Violence Resources Centre, 2010). Regardless of the relationship to the victim, any act of violence/coercion resulting in an act of sex is sexual violence or even rape if penetration is involved. This also include an attempt or uncompleted acts that occur without the full consent of the victim(s), (Rape Crisis, 2023). Crimes of a sexual nature are a more common issue for the public and the criminal justice system than society is led to believe, even in areas where it is deemed 'safer'; the volume of rape and sexual violence cases recorded by our criminal justice system have only increased over the past ten years according to the Office for National Statistics (2023). Even more concerning, the number of cases that go unrecorded every year are immeasurable. A total of 193,566 sexual offences were recorded by police forces in England and Wales, year ending March 2022. Meaning an approximate increase of 30,000 compared to year ending March 2021, and as high as 45,000 more than the previous year. The Office for National Statistics (2023) holds the Covid-19 lockdowns responsible for the decrease between 2020-2021, inferring that the number could have been much higher were the UK not forced to abide by restrictions, this is very alarming.

Aforementioned, sexual violence is more prevalent than imaginable, research found by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2023), state that around one in four women are at risk of experiencing some form of sexual violence in their lifetime compared to one in twenty-six men. To put this into a much larger perspective, over half of the female population in England and Wales are likely to experience some form of a traumatic and lifechanging act of sexual violence, or an attempt, whereas a third of men will be at risk of experiencing sexual violence that involved physical contact during their lives. Women who work in isolation or isolated from their family are at a higher level of exposure to sexual violence. Benoit et al., (2018), disclose that sex workers from all over the globe experience an extraordinarily prominent level of victimisation, especially on

parts of the world where their line of work is still criminalised. Despite the changes in the sex work industry, society, public perception and policies persevere in portraying this occupation as inherently immoral or exploitive, (Garcia et al., 2017).

Where prostitution and sex work are illegal, women are often isolated and must service clients discreetly in places that are usually secluded or 'out of the way' so there is less chance of them being caught by authorities, the issue being that in isolated places there is a small percentage of help for those who fall victim to the men paying for their service, (Shannon, 2009). Working alone and in remoteness is already a disadvantage to these women but when other struggles such as homelessness, debt, substance and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse are paired with work issues these women become some of the most vulnerable in society, (Balfour & Allen, 2014).

In the twenty-three months between June 2017 and May 2019, twenty individuals reported to be street sex workers attended Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (also known as a SARC) where they each received a forensic medical examination. Manning, Majeed-ariss & White (2020) delved into case notes from these sex workers were compared to another twenty individuals from around the same timeframe, these twenty also visited the SARC, where it was found that the sex worker population dealt with higher rates of mental health issues; children no longer in their care and higher levels of substance misuse (as compared to the other individuals). The many flaws in our system mean that street sex workers carry a burden of unmet health needs and experience multiple health and social problems and inequalities, (Potter et al., 2022). A key challenge is the mistrust that these women have for several reasons, the main reason being unequal treatment they receive because of the stigma surrounding themselves and their work.

One of the many issues that female sex workers experience during their line of work is the stigma and the stereotypes that come with it. Much of society is led to believe that the stereotypical portrayals of sex work usually involve something like prostitutes being degraded; as spreaders of STIs and STDs; or as junkies selling their bodies to pay for

their fix. Overall, the many stereotypes tell us that “prostitution is a metaphor for criminality, violence, drugs and degradation,” (Mindedal et al., 2022 p.3&11). Another considerable issue that sex workers face is the characterisation, much of the public hold the view that sex workers, female in particular, need to be rescued. Society has the belief that these women are single, and although a sizeable percentage of them are, many of them have partners and children to go home to, (Ho, 2019). Many views dehumanise these women but there seem to be no negative connotations about the men that are paying for their service.

Mindedal et al., (2020) argues that we characterise and stigmatise women who work in the industry but often have nothing to say about their consumers; sex workers often are stigmatised as single women with drug and alcohol addictions, while consumers of the industry who also share substance abuse issues are not characterised as anything other than men. Socially, females working in the industry are seen as deviant others because they cannot fall into the categories that society has built for them, and much of the time they are excluded from conversations relating to their line of work. The double deviance theory suggests that women are treated harshly by society if they do not conform to societal standards, whereas men are not treated with such firm tone (Hammond, 2014). Labels such as whore, prostitute and hooker are derogatory and are used to publicly humiliate and shame them systematically in laws, the media, social policies, and research literature, (Benoit et al., 2018; Pheterson, 1990).

The stigma theory was proposed by Erving Goffman (1963) where he classically defined stigma as a discrediting attribute. He suggested that a discredited trait may be evident, such as skin colour or the shape and size of a body, or it could be hidden and concealed like a criminal record or mental ill health but could still be stigmatised if it were to be disclosed. Goffman (2022) found that there were four types of stigmas, the first being public stigma, referring to negative attitudes held by society about individuals with “devaluated characteristics”. The second kind of stigma, self- stigma, the internalised stigma that occurs when individuals suffer negative emotions or consequences based

upon societies attitudes towards them, this plays a part in why sex workers are so reluctant to report violence against themselves or other women in the industry. The next stigma is stigma by association, where public disapproval evoked because of association with someone who has been stigmatised socially, and lastly, structural stigma. Goffman (2022) introduced the concept of 'structural stigma' to describe the societal institutions and systems that systematically disadvantage and stigmatise certain groups of people. This concept is about more than just individual prejudice; it is embedded into the structure of our societies and has influencing opportunities and outcomes based upon certain factors that everyone has, those being race, gender, and socioeconomic status, (Fudge Schormans, 2014). First and foremost, stigma attached to sex work is everlasting and is very common or even pervasive in many countries still today, (Benoit et al., 2018; Nussbaum, 1999), exemplifying Goffman's concept of 'conduct stigma' arising from actions that are labelled as defying accepted norms or standards, as a result the individual is discredited due to behaviour that goes against cultural and social expectations, particularly regarding human nature and human sexuality. the public perceptions of sex work have not changed since it became prevalent dating all the way back to 2400 BCE, and even after all those years it remains one of the most "aggressively punished crimes", (Hager & Schwartz, 2021). According to Hart et al., (2022), sex work is one of the largest marginalised professions in the world, and the stereotypes and stigma come with many consequences.

To begin with, stigma brings just as much harm as public or structural; the disapproving attitudes that sex workers internalise can have profound psychological effects. some of these effects include low self-esteem, emotional distress leading to mental ill health and a negative self-image, as if the consequences of eternal stigma are not enough (Toubiana & Ruebottom, 2022). Numerous studies have perceived the consequences of eternal stigma can be inclusive to social isolation and social inequality; this could lead to poor mental health, physical health and well-being and a poorer quality of life, Benoit et al., (2020) called these consequences significant and deleterious. Self-isolation is not good for these women, if they are legally allowed to work on the streets there is always

the possibility of having one or more persons to watch out for them and note down the time and number plate [from client's car] so if they have been gone longer than they should be, it can be reported accurately. Boseley (2018), expresses that women in the industry that fear being picked up by the police are less likely to have a conversation with potential clients beforehand, meaning they rush off to get into vehicles quickly, therefore allowing risky encounters. Working alone these women or girls do not have the same opportunity for safety and the impacts of derogatory terms used to describe these women are almost imaginable. Women with low self-esteem and internalised stigma do not report violence/abuse because they are ashamed of both themselves and their profession, they are more probable to get into cars with men who are dangerous as they believe they are deserving of the poor treatment because of the societal attitudes they must face (English Collectives of Prostitutes, 2019)

Subsequently, in countries such as England and Wales, sex work is only partially criminal; here, sex workers are subject to policies that aim to displace them from public areas but also dictate how they can operate when they are off the streets. The Nordic approach is a legal strategy regarding sex work, it criminalises the consumers rather than the sellers, (Kingston & Thomas, 2018). The aim of the approach is to combat the demand for paid sex as it is considered a form of violence against women. Some advocates have argued that the approach has helped protect sex workers especially female, while others contend that it only increases risk towards them as it could drive sex work underground, (Phipps, 2016). In accordance with Boseley (2018), the criminalisation of sex work only normalises violence against women, but other researchers have found that there is just as much violence once the profession has been decriminalised. Women should not be criminalised for the exploitation and violence they endure, even if they are aware that prostitution is inherently violent, (Dr Karlsruhe, 2021). Nevertheless, there are ways for women to report violent consumers without the use of the law enforcement. National Ugly Mugs (NUM) is an organisation that works alongside sex workers to ensure that they can get justice and protection, providing an online service for women to report and alert violent consumers, the initial

aim is to end violence against the largest stigmatised and marginalised populations, (National Ugly Mugs, 2023). NUM has become a vital tool over recent years, yet the organisation has witnessed a decline in the willingness of women accessing police powers after experiences of victimisation.

The implications of under reporting or the refusal to share information about violent individuals is highly dangerous and concerning could result in more than just sexual violence towards these women, though because of their status in society and their unequal treatment many women decide to keep information to themselves. Bowen et al., (2021), conveys that there are significant flaws within the criminal justice system in England and Wales, this regards the inequitable access to safety for sex workers, and these flaws pose a risk to everyone. Results found in Bowen et al., (2021)'s survey reveal that there is a lack of trust within all aspects of the criminal justice system and sex workers feel almost alienated because authorities rarely believe they are victims. In line with this, Campbell & Kinnell (2021) conveys that female sex workers are reluctant to report crimes of a sexual nature, the cause being the prejudicial attitudes that street sex workers suffer from those working in the criminal justice system. Disturbingly, nothing has changed in the past two decades, so women are still facing the same issues and are hesitant to filing reports. Data collected by the researchers (Campbell & Kinnell) propose that men who murder female sex workers frequently have a history of violence, including sexual, against other sex workers or female encounters. Therefore, it is incredibly important that crimes of violence against sex workers are investigated thoroughly with diligence and are treated with the seriousness that they deserve.

YouGov (2018) has shown that inquiries into sexual violence and rape have uncovered troubling observations regarding juries' hesitancy to convict certain defendants accused of rape. They go on to propose that victimisation is not taken seriously enough, many times when a female sex worker has come forward with an allegation, despite the mountains of evidence that prove they are some of the most vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual crimes. for some sex workers, this is enough to convince them that

reporting to law enforcement as there is a lack of justice, meaning it is a waste of their time. One sex worker, Tammy, a NUM user, and a woman of colour, believes that the authorities would not listen to her because of the colour of her skin, she also remarked: “the police see us as dirty,” (Bowen et al., 2018 p.8). Tammy also insisted that she had previously been let down by officers after she had filed an allegation of rape and the authorities tried to convince her that her abuser was not really hurting her.

Addressing sexual violence against sex workers is a crucial task for several reasons. These women are targeted by violent men because of their known vulnerability and their hesitancy to report. Firstly, the issue needs to be addressed as it promotes human rights while acknowledging the vulnerability of this population while challenging societal stigma, (Cruz, 2013). Additionally, addressing the issue not only contributes to public health efforts but also has the potential to reduce harm done to women, and fosters a more inclusive and equitable society. Often, cases are reported, and the sex workers face discrimination receiving mixed responses from officers dealing with their case, (Munro & Scoular, 2012). As a result, there has been an increase in evidence-based calls to offer more support and to make sexual violence against sex workers a public health and human rights priority, (Platt et al., 2018). Repeatedly, sexual violence against sex workers is under-addressed with several challenges such as stigma, social barriers (when cases lack evidence) and social prejudices hindering effective responses. More awareness and advocacy are needed as well as policy reforms to ensure that female sex workers can be protected, safe and supported always, not just when they are victimised, (The National Institution for Health Care Research, 2024).

3.0 Methodology:

3.1 Introduction:

A research methodology can be best described as the design and set of processes/procedures of collecting data, and subsequently the analysis of collected data, (Oxford University Press, 2024). Research methodologies give legitimacy to research and Denscombe (2017) conveys that they are a vital element that can often be overlooked or neglected by researchers. A methodology provides a structured framework to ensure that research is valid, reliable, and rigorous. The word 'methodology' refers to the way that researchers can create knowledge. Within this chapter, the methods and practice of discipline will be set for the determination of the underlying physiological principles that will be critically examined, discussed, and further critiqued and evaluated, (Denscombe, 2017; Kumar, 2019).

3.2 The Research Onion:

The research onion, a methodological framework, designed by Saunders et al., (2019, p.108) was created as a guide through the different 'layers' of research that are essential when conducting a research study. Since the introduction of the research onion, the framework has been widely used as a structural guidance tool for researchers

conducting research studies, (Melnikovas, 2019). The framework was put together to facilitate researchers to effectively communicate their research design with others, whether this be through these of papers, conferences, or utilising images, it allows for an organised and straightforward way to converse the key elements of a chosen study, (Saunders et al., 2016). The research onion is made up of six layers, which are the following; techniques and procedures, time horizons, choices, strategies, approaches and lastly, philosophies. Melnikovas (2019) explains that these layers have the sole purpose of enabling the researcher to choose a suitable practice or theory within the already existing layers to help them answer the questions they have within and for their research.

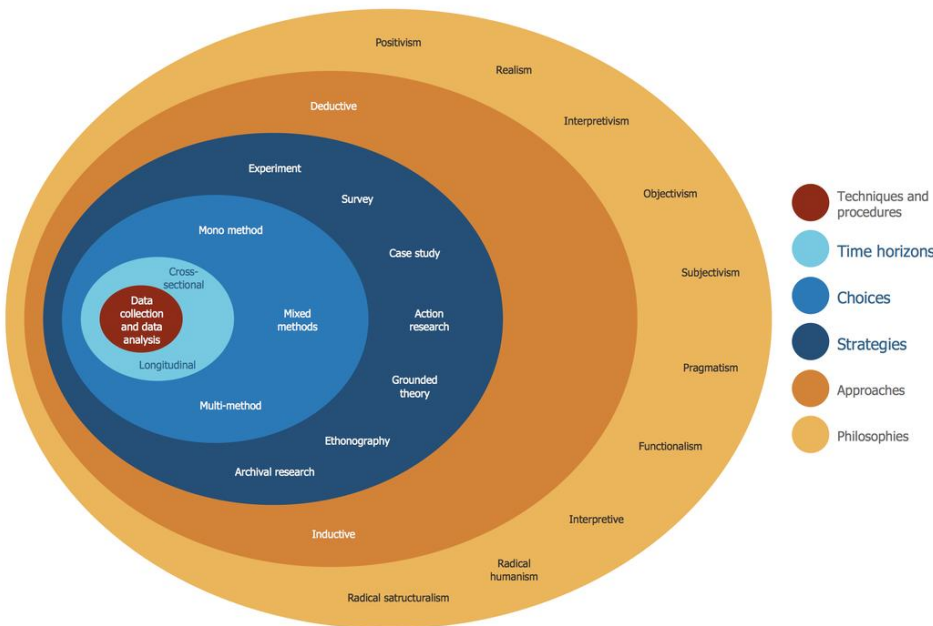


Figure One: Saunders et al., (2016).

3.3 Research Objectives:

The Human Rights Campaign (2023) stresses that sex work is merely a part of survival in societies where the necessities such as housing, food, clothing, sanitary products, and much more have become unaffordable or inaccessible for many women. These

women have much to worry about, along with the negative stigma around their work, there are many other issues that come with sex work including concerns around how consent works, the experiences of violence and potential exploitation combines with the possibility of human trafficking. Additionally, along with the issues of safety and protection, there are also public health issues and the debates on whether there should be criminalisation or decriminalisation of all kinds of sex work.

The following are the three objectives of this research study:

1. To identify the existing stereotypes surrounding women who work in the sex industry.
2. Consider the negative connotations associated with different stereotypes of sex workers when they are victimised.
3. Reflect on what is being done to address the negative stereotypes and propose recommendations on how the misconceptions of female sex workers can be improved to provide equal treatment as victims.

However, due to the lack of research, objective three will not be the focus of the research questionnaire. Instead, the participants will be asked to select recommendation options that they feel would be the best course of action for the authorities and organisations to take.

3.4 Theory, Practice and Approaches:

The theory of knowledge and where it has been gathered from is the epistemological segments of the methodology, this is one of the largest segments – or layers of the research onion, and it influences many decisions that need to be made during research studies, (Catterall, 2000). For example, it is intertwined within all aspects of the research onion and guides researchers in the choice between deductive and inductive approaches. This study has the intention of proving that the negative connotations of sex work influence the way sex workers are treated by others in society. Not only this,

but the inductive approach will offer more of an observational perspective of the data that has already been collected by previous researchers.

The research is being undertaken to understand and further analysis why sex work is continuing to be negatively stigmatised by our societies when there are so many women made to feel that it is their only chance at survival. With growing rates of OnlyFans since the Covid-19 outbreak where many lost their jobs or were not able to have an income because of lockdowns, why are women still being targeted and disrespected or even degraded by the same people in society that are consuming and subscribing to their channels of work.

3.5 Choices and Strategy:

For this study, a questionnaire will be conducted with the objective of collecting a more in-depth insight into the way society views and stereotypes sex workers, the focus will primarily take place around female sex workers. The findings from the questionnaire along with secondary data from various other sources should help determine the misconceptions of sex work and their impact on the credibility of sex workers as victims of sexual or physical violence during their line of work. For this to happen, the questionnaire will contain both open and closed questions, where the participants will have a chance to give as much detail to their answer as they wish, many of the questions will be asking about the negative connotations that come along with sex work and how the public perceives these women. Langenbach et al., (2023) states that society has always had a 'negative' and 'controversial' attitude that condemns women who chose to participate in sex work.

By collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, there should be enough evidence to show a clear indication that the stigma and misconceptions surrounding female sex workers has some impact on their treatment from law enforcement, health providers and society overall. Considering their vulnerability and the status they hold within society, not enough is done to protect them from harm and there is not enough support for these

women when they are victimised. this could be the leading factor as to why women in the sex industry are reluctant to file reports with the police, according to Ghassan (2023), the number of these women willing to work alongside the police and other public service authorities has dropped by 28%, this is a significant amount. If there were more support for these women, this number would not have decreased in this way.

3.6 Time Horizon:

When selecting the right research method, a questionnaire seemed the most sensible option for the purpose of identifying the public opinion on female sex workers. the questionnaire will be open between March 1st, 2024, and March 15th, 2024, giving participants fourteen days to answer before the data will be collected and analysed. The use of a shorter time limit in research studies can have more than one advantage.

Firstly, a shorter time span allows for a more focused and manageable study, without the risk of changes in variables or even the loss of data over a longer period.

Additionally, if participants are aware that the questionnaire will be closing within a brief time, they are likely to take part without putting it off. However, using a shorter time limit can have disadvantages, keeping the questionnaire open for an extended period would allow the capture of long-term trends. Considering the questionnaire will tend to focus on public opinion, it would benefit from a longer observational period, but this is time that should not be wasted.

3.7: Summary:

The epistemology would involve the consideration and how to acquire the knowledge about the public attitudes towards sex workers, an online survey/questionnaire would allow the public to participate and contribute their opinions without any backlash or repercussions. The exploration of many different questions could bring together an in-depth understanding of the connotations that the public are led to believe about working in the sex industry. To ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data, it would be vital to critically examine the sources of knowledge, e.g. the questionnaire and studies

that have already been conducted in the past. by exploring more than one research method there is the potential to gain a deeper understanding of public perception and beliefs of female sex workers.

4.0 Analysis:

4.1 Introduction:

To better understand data, it needs to be analysed through detailed examination. Several sources such as Richards (2015) and Sullivan (2011) suggest that the most crucial part of any research is the data analysis as it summarises the core data that has been collected through logical and analytical reasoning to help determine trends, patterns, or relationships between the data. Within this study, an analysis of research data collected by the online questionnaire will take place to determine the largest stereotypes surrounding female sex workers. The analysis of the questionnaire should also prove that despite the prevalence of sex work in our society, there are still many people who are unsure or have negative feelings towards these women, and the main reason they have for taking part in sex work. In addition to this, the analysis will determine the slurs and the negative connotations that first spring to mind when hearing the words sex work, and how common these misconceptions really are. The study is expected to show that many of the misconceptions or stereotypes that surround female sex workers are deep rooted into society, opinions from older generations are passed down leading to the same mistreatment of these women from the newer generations too.

4. 2 Findings:

Question Four: 'Can you give a word or an example of a 'sex worker'?'

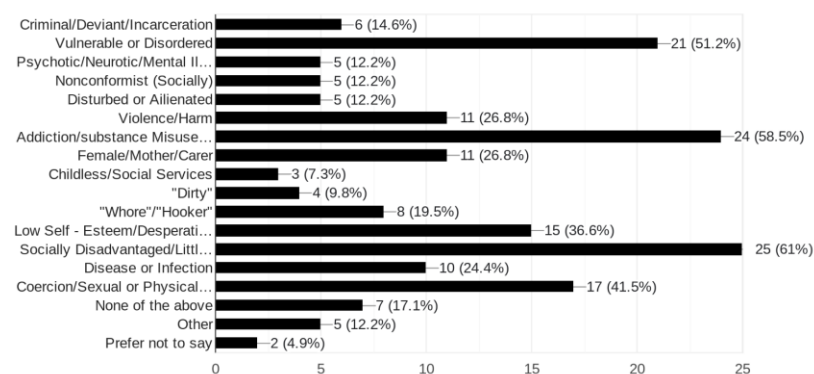
Within the questionnaire, one of the questions asked for the participants to give a word or an example of a sex worker. Three participants choose not to answer the question, but of those who did, 32.5% overall used the words “hooker,” “whore” or “prostitute.” These words, especially the first two, are degrading and humiliating for these women, but they prove to be the better-known stereotypes, (Lister, 2017 & Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, 2018). These words are derogative and bring these women low self-esteem, therefore leading to their belief that they are not capable, or even worth a situation that is better than their own, (Benoit et al., 2018). The words that the public use to discuss these women matter, hearing negative things about oneself, or someone alike, repeatedly leads to the same belief damaging mental health, and often when a person hears the stigma surrounding them, they start to experience internalised stigma, (Mental Health Foundation, 2023). The labelling theory suggests that than those who are labelled negatively often internalise that label and act accordingly; they take on the role they are perceived as. The theory explores how judgements and societal reactions can ‘shape’ the behaviour or identity of certain groups of people.

Question Six: ‘Existing literature suggests that there are many stereotypes surrounding sex workers. Which of the following do you personally associate with sex workers?’

When analysing the data collected from this question, it was revealed that the most popular stereotype from the participants was ‘socially disadvantaged/little education.’ his stereotype was selected by 61% of respondents. The fewest participants (4.8%) selected the option of ‘Dirty’ eating the inference that many people within society have a higher level of respect for these women or they realise that their job does not make them dirty. Another stereotype that was selected by many of the participants was ‘Addiction/Substance Misuse/Alcohol Abuse,’ selected by 58.5% of participants showing that society conveys these women to be dependent on substances. From the literature review it is obvious that many of these women do in fact use substances to cope, this was seen in the SARCs, where the group of sex workers had a higher level of misuse of

substances compared to the control group. Another source, Silbert; Pines and Lynch (1982) noted that substance abuse was not seen for 55% of their study participants (of 200 prostitutes) until after they initially started to partake in sex work, likely being a way for them to cope. However, the issue is this data is now outdated and there have not been any further significant findings more recently.

6. Existing literature suggests that there are many stereotypes surrounding sex workers. Which of the following stereotypes do you personally associate with sex workers?
41 responses



Comparison of Question Eleven and Twelve:

Question Eleven: Existing literature suggests that women have more motivation for sex work than men, please select which of the following you would perceive as motivation for these women.

Question Twelve: What would you consider to be the motivation for sex work for Trans sex workers?

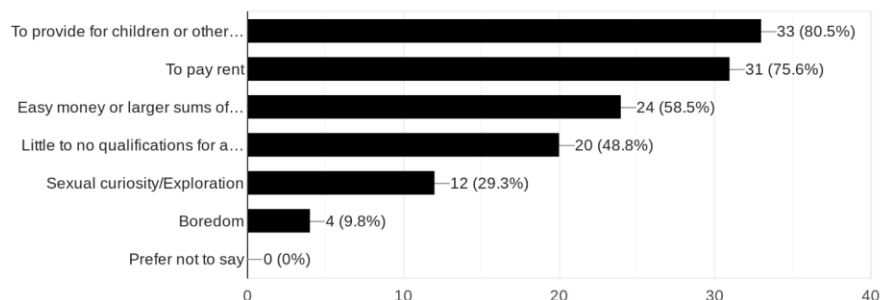
In the study, there were two questions, remarkably similar meant to compare the public opinion on the motivation for female sex workers, and then the motivation for trans sex workers, either male or female. 80.5% of participants selected 'To provide for children or others' as motivation for female sex workers, but for trans sex workers, only 50% of participants selected the same motivation. Interestingly, participants thought that 'Sexual

curiosity/Exploration' is a bigger motivation for trans sex workers than female, the difference in percentages being 15.7%. This just highlights the societal biases that females are more inclined to take risks to provide for their families. These stereotypes or biases can lead to a lack of understanding and empathy or even ignorance, which results in less recognition of their ability to provide for children. It is vital that these biases are challenged to promote inclusion and respect for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or occupation, (Project X, 2022).

For the motivation of trans sex workers, the largest percentage of responses fell on 'to pay rent' at 72.5%, the percentage of this motivation was particularly high for female sex workers too as 75.6% of participants selected this option. Bowen & Megson-Smith (2023) report that sex-for-rent is a new issue at current and the cost-of-living crisis and housing costs are only worsening the issue. Bowen (2021) issues her concern as people who were in mainstream jobs felt that they had no option to turn to sex work to earn enough money on the side to cover their rent, she illustrates that people are taking 'extraordinary' risks to afford their housing.

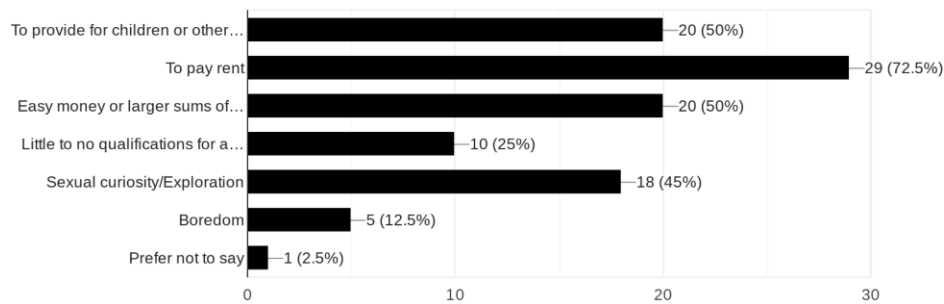
11. Existing literature suggests that women have more motivation for sex work than men, please select which of the following you would perceive as motivation for these women.

41 responses



12. What would you consider to be the motivation for sex work for Trans sex workers?

40 responses

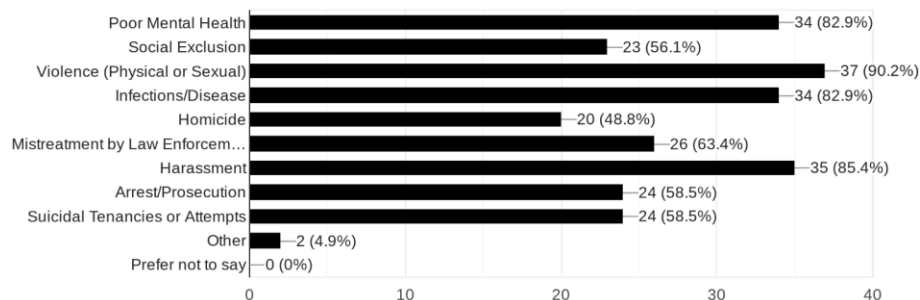


Question Fifteen: Select the following dangers/disadvantages that may be associated with sex work & Question Sixteen: What percentage, do you think, of female sex workers fall victim to sexual violence annually?

The study showed that the participants were able to identify the risks and dangers of working in the sex industry, with 90% of participants selecting 'Violence (Physical or Sexual)', therefore proving that society has some awareness that sex work can be dangerous for these women. This aligns with the findings from Swift (2022), that concludes that sex workers have a high chance of experiencing some form of sexual violence. 58.5% of participants think that between 61-80% of female sex workers fall victim to sexual violence annually, research samples show that the lifetime prevalence of violence towards them based on reports of client violence is anywhere between 50-100%, (Shannon, 2009).

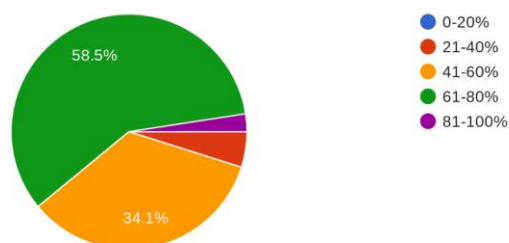
15. Select the following dangers/disadvantages that may be associated with sex work.

41 responses



16. What percentage, do you think, of female sex workers fall victim to sexual violence annually?

41 responses



4.3 Summary:

Overall, the findings from the online questionnaire prove that the public perceive these women negatively, using degrading and offensive words to describe and insult them, only adding to the derogatory comments and complimentary attitude towards female sex workers. The data shows that much of the public has knowledge on what consent is, but there is some confusion around some situations where a woman tries to change her mind after the initial agreement, it should be known that a woman can change her mind at any time, even if there is no violence or coercion involved. The data collected shows that the stereotypes surrounding sex workers are common and still prevalent in society today, it also allows for the interesting perspective on how the deviant label can impact an individual's life.

5.0 Conclusion:

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter will conclude with the findings of this study to shed light on the treatment of female sex workers that have been victimised by consumers of their work and provide valuable insights for future research and practical applications. The overall aim of the study was to critically examine to what extent the negative stereotypes surrounding female sex workers can impact their status as victims of sexual violence.

5.2 Main Findings:

Objective One: To identify the existing stereotypes surrounding women who work in the sex industry.

Our society still has deeply ingrained notions of sex work and the women who participate in it, sexual violence towards these women is prevalent in all aspects, whether this be physical or sexual abuse, harassment on the streets or abusive comments left to women who work online. Society sees women who take part in sex work as 'deviant' and there are many other labels that are used to describe them, such as 'whore' or 'hooker,' potentially devastating words that have negative impacts on these women. The National Institution for Health Care Research (2024) conveys many of them to be 'junkies' or have issues with alcohol or other substances such as crack or heroin. they suggest that many of these women are stuck in the same cycle of 'work-score-use' and their addictions only reinforce their dependency on the job, participating to their health and social issues. Another damaging viewpoint is that female sex workers were victims of abuse within their childhood, this is a misconception that takes away focus from their personal choices and sense of self and belonging; it is important to recognise that each of these women have their reasoning and diverse experiences that led them to work in the industry, (Stoltz et al., 2007). Undeniably, society values these

women as vulnerable and disordered, often seeking comfort from substances and male validation, from the questionnaire, the answers from the participants align with this viewpoint as many admitted to their beliefs that female sex workers are filled with desperation and social disadvantage. It was also found from the data that many of the participants assumed that sex workers suffer not only from poor mental health, but STIs and STDs too, this a viewpoint that must be challenges as it is nothing more than an unfair generalisation, like in any other profession there is a level of risk and these women are aware of the precautions they can take to minimise their encounters with infections and disease.

Consider the negative connotations associated with different stereotypes of sex work when they are victimised.

There are many negative connotations based around sex work but the most destructive are the words 'whore/hooker,' 'dirty,' 'desperate' and 'full of infection.' Mental health is a fragile and dehumanising words or phrases such as those listed are stigmatisation that these women are faced with nonstop and such language perpetuates the negative connotations and stereotypes, reinforcing the societal biases that should have been challenged previously to help tackle the violence, abuse and harassment that is ongoing for these women, (Balfour & Allen, 2014). Again, the connotations that all these women are addicted to drugs, alcohol or both is very much just a stereotype, there are many women working the streets that do not abuse substances, this is another generalisation that perpetuates stigma and leaves the public with a misunderstanding about the behaviours and personal choices of all sex workers. Pheterson (1990) communicates that 'whore stigma' does nothing but render female sex workers as deviant others and was brought about to silence them while denying them the standard social rights that other citizens enjoy. When female sex workers are victimised, they are left feeling misled and let down by authorities as they are rarely taken seriously enough, Stardust et al.,

(2021) has illustrated that often they are denied victim status based of their job and 'irresponsibility' as citizens, many of these stereotypes are illuded with the fear that these people are untrustworthy, and therefore they are blamed for their own vulnerability and labelled as liars.

YouGov (2018) also demonstrates that the public assume that women with more sexual experience are less affected after victimisation, which is utterly absurd. The dismissal of the potential impact that sexual violence of all kinds has upon another person is unacceptable, consent and boundaries are crucial during all encounters and this needs to be remembered. Every woman that has experienced sexual violence has been impacted in some form and their trauma and responses should not be ignored or pushes aside.

5.3 Limitations:

Objective Three: Reflect on what is being done to address the negative stereotypes and propose recommendations on how the misconceptions of female sex work can be improved to provide equal treatment as victims.

There are some limitations such as the lack of research on female sex workers and victimisation of sexual assault. This questionnaire linked to this study only had forty-one participants, the study was small and therefore could not represent much of the public perception on female sex workers as victims. Many of the questions remained optional, which meant that many participants left the question blank, presumably because of the controversy of the topic. As a result of these limitations, there are certain factors that impact the accuracy of the results, affecting the validity and generalisation of the study. Further research could address the limitations in several ways, further studies that focus on challenging and debunking the stereotypes and connotations around sex work. This could be done with the conducting of studies that offer a more nuanced or accurate understanding of the lives and experiences of female sex workers to combat the

negative assumptions that society has. A larger research study would shed light on the diversity of the experiences of these women and their reasoning for part taking in their line of work and challenge the many harmful generalisations that are often made. For a more in-depth and accurate study, much further research and studies are needed. The reason being is that there are many outdated sources containing similar research, but there is a lack of newer research that could further understand the impacts and effects that the connotations have on these women in a society that is rapidly changing and becoming increasingly connected and inclusive. Without this new research, it will be harder to determine the full extent of the effects and the toll that it takes on these women.

5. 4 Recommendations:

Further research should consider addressing the negative connotations that surround these women within the criminal justice system to promote equal treatment for victims. These women are human beings and should be treated with the same respect as other victims of sexual violence, to receive the justice and support they deserve. Another recommendation is a larger support network for sex workers that primarily work on the streets, this could include mandatory sessions with charities or organisations to promote mental well-being. These women experience many dangers and disadvantages within their work, and they should have support for their mental and physical health. Like the rest of society, they deserve access to healthcare and well-being resources, and supporting their mental health can help address the emotional distress that may come with their work, while supporting their physical health ensures that they have access to any necessary healthcare services when they are in need. This should be a priority for all individuals, regardless of what they choose to do for work. Street work can be extremely dangerous, and to promote safety, they could be placed in safe community buildings for their work to ensure that they are not isolated and at risk of violence from consumers. These buildings should be vastly different from brothels, where they have

limited rights and are exploited for financial gain. The last recommendation is support or help for these women that does not include trying to convince them to give up their work, this only reinforces the negative self-image which does nothing for their mental well-being. It also takes away from their choices. Instead of judgment, support should be offered. It is crucial that the criminal justice system fosters a compassionate and non-judgmental approach towards sex work. Each of these recommendations considers the emotional and physical toll that sex work has on workers, and aims to support them, not criminalise them because “no women should be punished for her own exploitation,” (Raymond, 2003. P.2).

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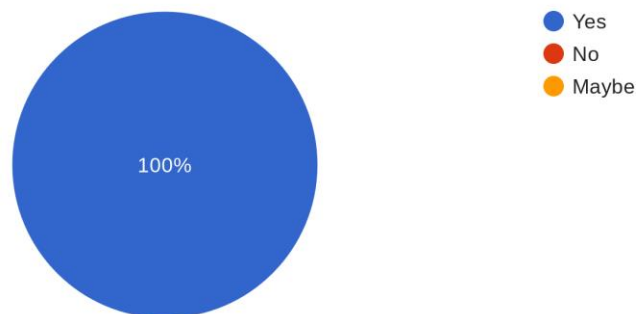
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Appendix:

Research Questionnaire:

1. Do you know what the word 'consent' means?

42 responses



...

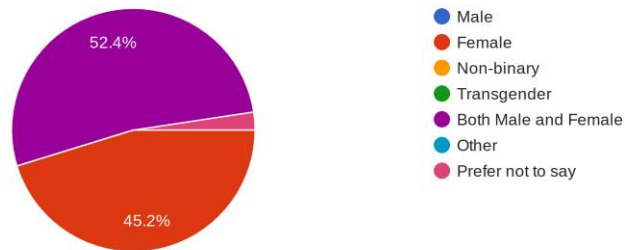
2. If you selected yes, can you explain your own interpretation of the word consent? *

Please describe the word as best as you can.

Long-answer text

3. Which gender do you associate with sex workers or sex work?

42 responses



...

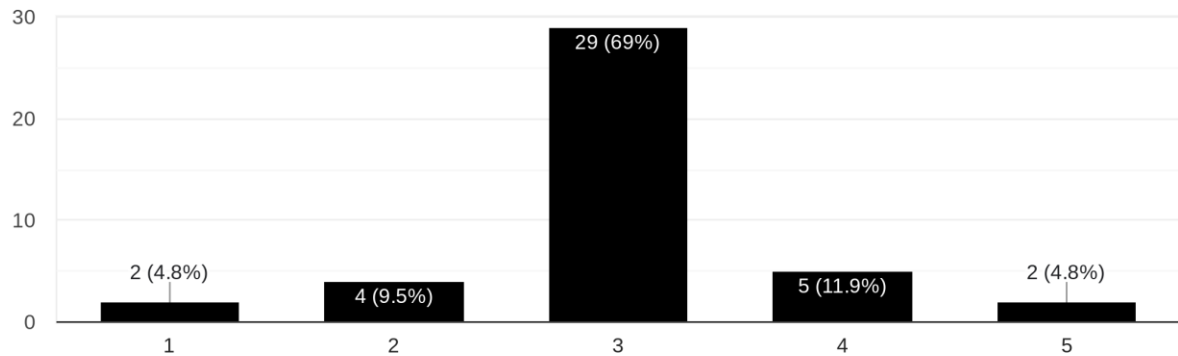
4. Can you give a word or an example of a 'sex worker'? *

Use as many words as you require. If you wish not to submit an answer, please use the term 'prefer not to say'.

Long-answer text

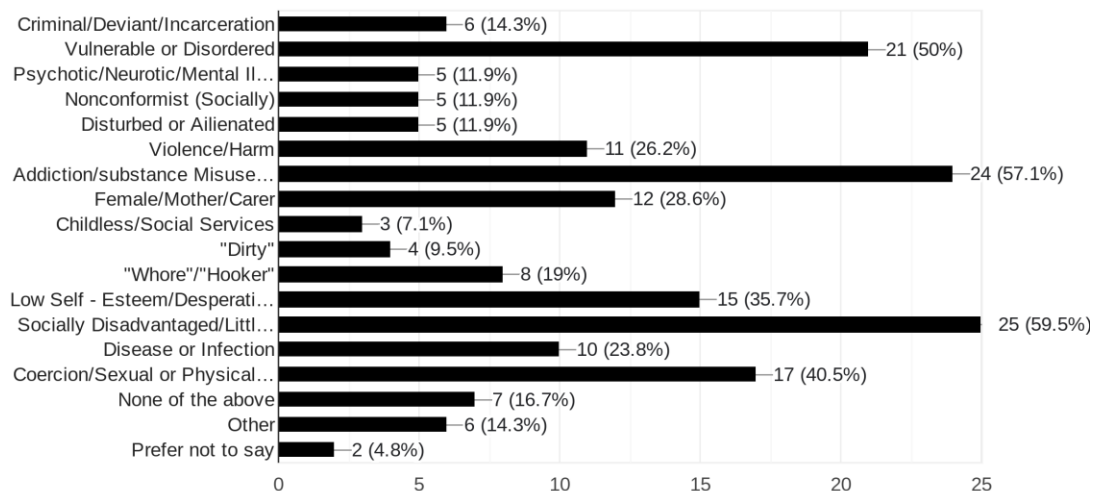
5. Do you consider yourself to have a negative/neutral/positive attitude towards sex workers and sex work, either online or street work?

42 responses

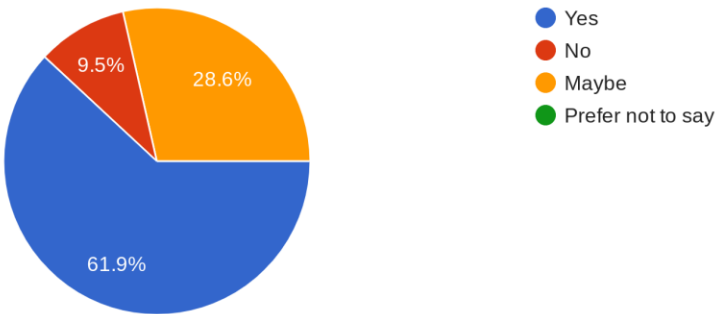


6. Existing literature suggests that there are many stereotypes surrounding sex workers. Which of the following stereotypes do you personally associate with sex workers?

42 responses



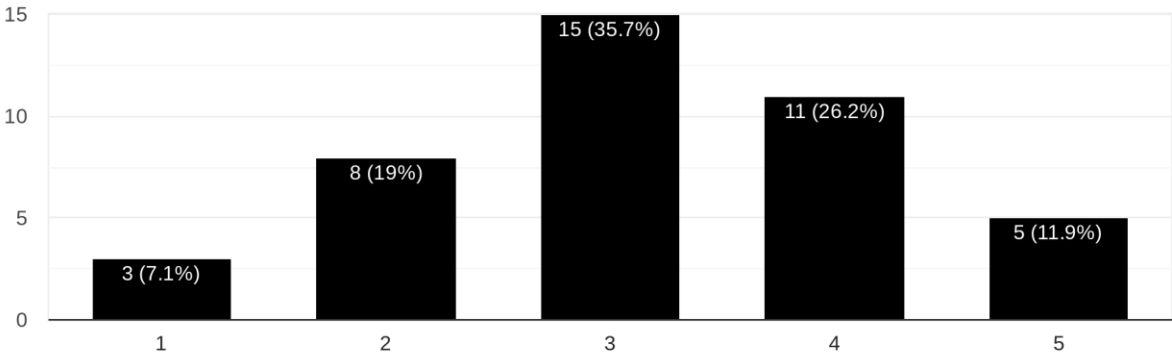
7.Do you think sex workers in general fear stigmatisation or slander from others within our society?
42 responses



8. If your answer was yes, why?
Offer an explanation.

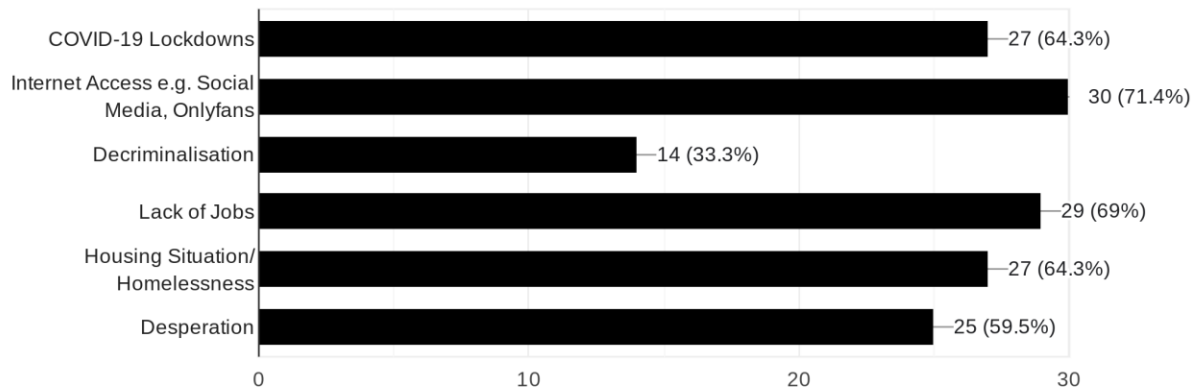
Long-answer text

9. Law enforcement in Swansea consider there to be a little over 100 street sex workers in the city.
How prevalent do you consider sex work to be?
42 responses



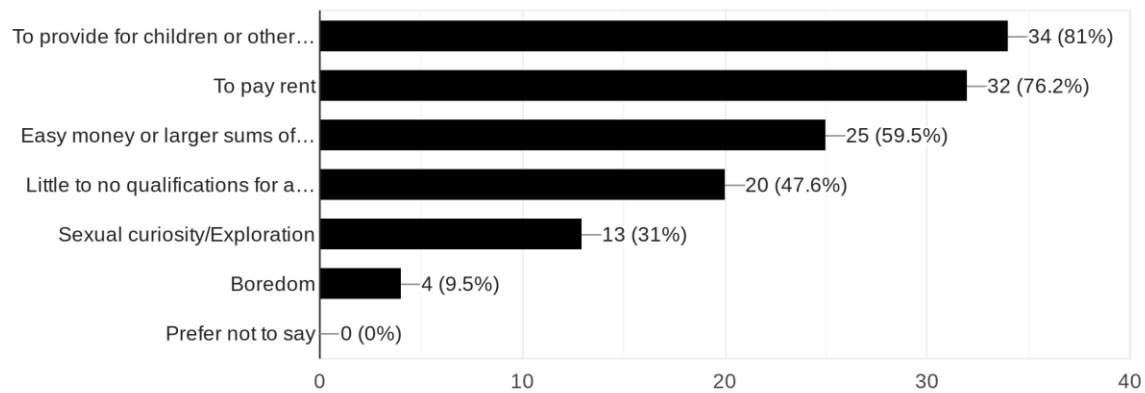
10. Considering the events that have taken place in the last few years, COVID-19 for example, and the lasting effects, which of the following do you ...ould have an impact on the prevalence of sex work?

42 responses



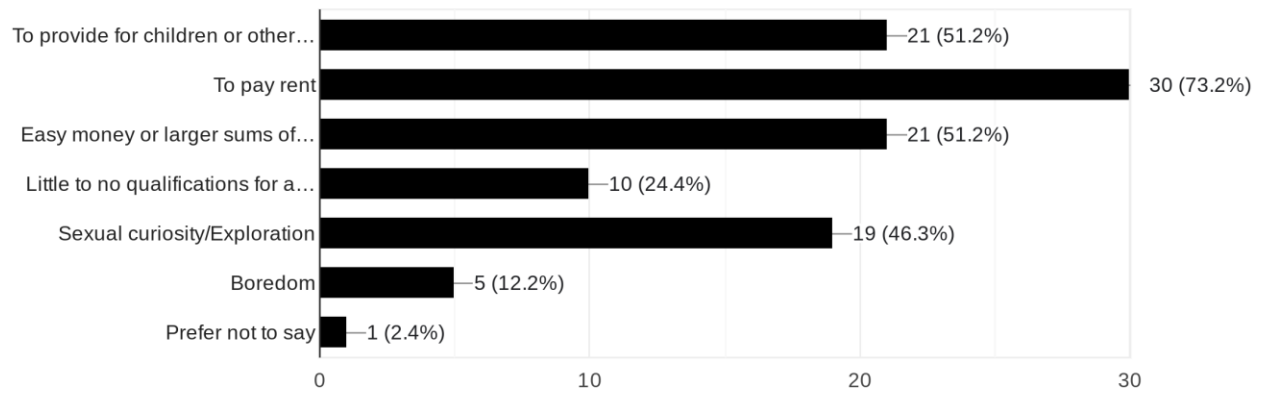
11. Existing literature suggests that women have more motivation for sex work than men, please select which of the following you would perceive as motivation for these women.

42 responses



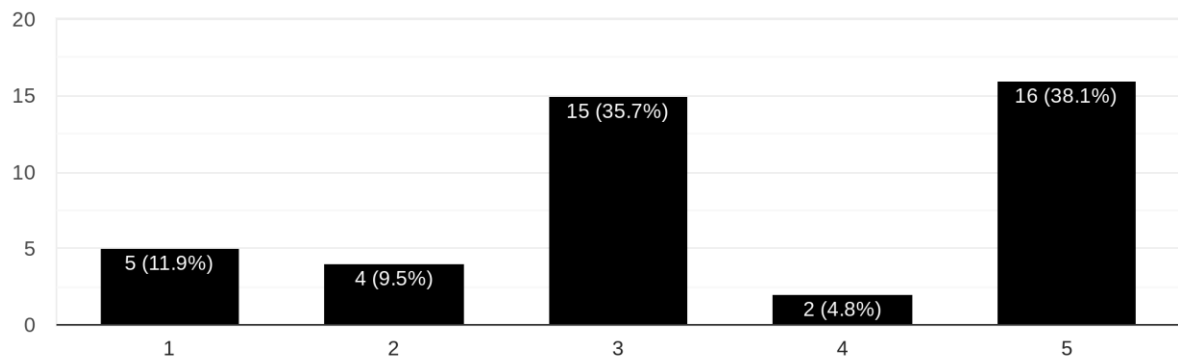
12. What would you consider to be the motivation for sex work for Trans sex workers?

41 responses



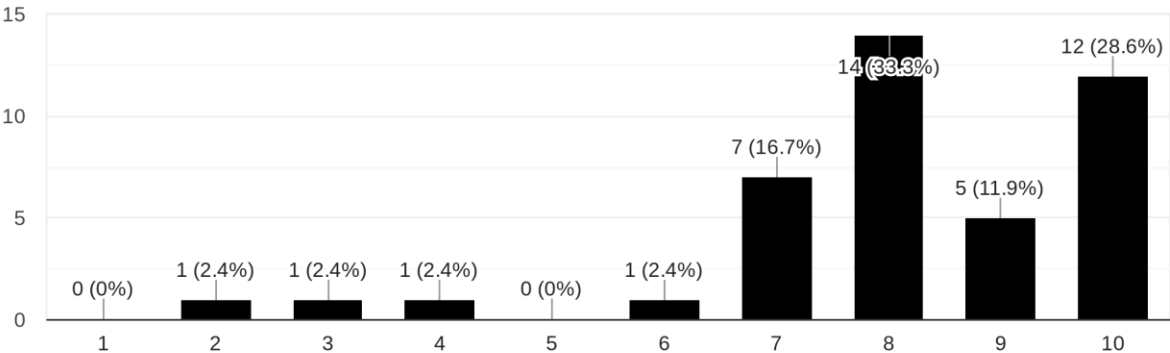
13. "Prostitution is not a job. The inside of a woman's body is not a workplace". To what extent do you agree with this statement?

42 responses



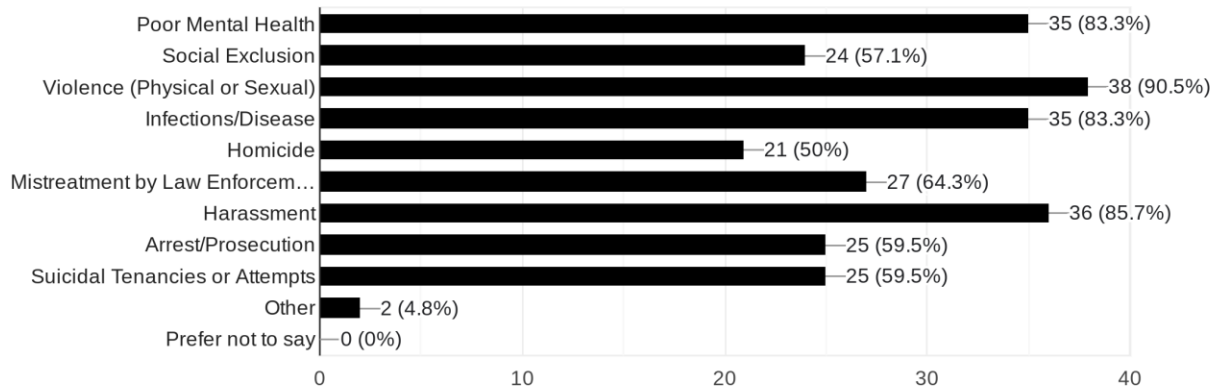
14. One a scale from one to ten, how dangerous do you consider sex work to be?

42 responses



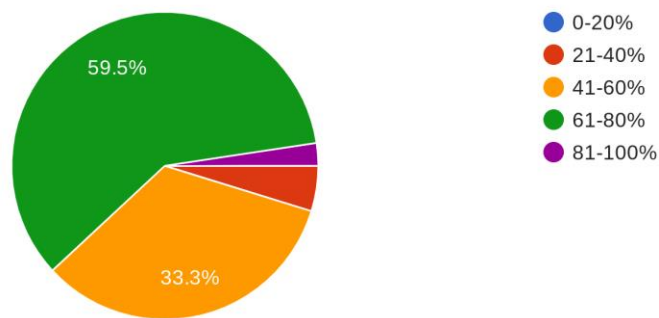
15. Select the following dangers/disadvantages that may be associated with sex work.

42 responses



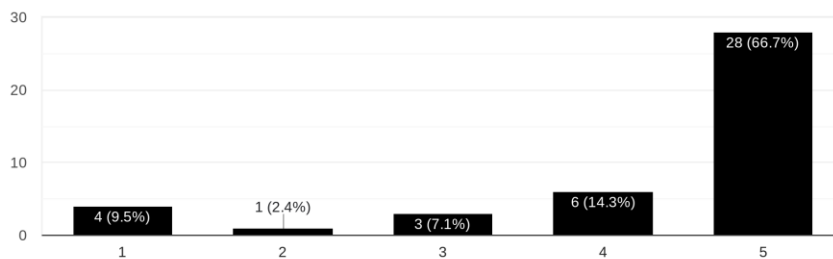
16. What percentage, do you think, of female sex workers fall victim to sexual violence annually?

42 responses



17. In your opinion, should female sex workers that have experienced physical/sexual violence receive the same treatment as other victims of the same crime?

42 responses



18. According to the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, "sex workers of colour, * migrant sex workers along with transgender sex workers experience an even greater risk of assault. Overall, there is a 45-70% chance of sex workers experiencing some form of violence on the job, whether this be physical or sexual". How does this statement make you feel?

If you don't feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, please put 'prefer not to say'.

Long-answer text

19. Which of the following measures do you think could be put in place to prevent violence and keep sex workers safe when they are working?

42 responses

