FACTSHEET

Sexual Exploitation and Supporting 'Hard to Engage' Women

This factsheet must be read and followed through by attending the recommended webinar that will focus on case studies and outline details of good practice in supporting women at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation

For women experiencing sexual exploitation, a range of factors make engagement with support services challenging:

- Fear of stigma and prejudice affecting access to support and provision
- Feeling unheard and misunderstood
- Living with abusive relationships and work-related abuse
- Fear of being 'outed' in the community
- Fear of the safety consequences of reporting crime
- Fear of debt and destitution
- Concern about explaining CV gaps when seeking employment
- Language and cultural barriers in some cases
- Low confidence affecting self-representation and the ability to communicate need
- Broken trust from past experiences with perpetrators
- Broken trust from negative past treatment from services

In 2022, research into the support needs of those involved in the UK sex industry found that mental health issues had been disclosed by 78% of women, more than any other as a key area of concern. Of those, 96% cited concerns with accessing support services. Please click on the link for further reading:

Support-needs-of-those-involved-in-the-UK-sex-industry-FINAL-for-publication.pdf

Women in the city who entered exploitative relationships and have engaged in survival sex due to unstable immigration status, and destitution - needing a bed for the night, face additional challenges to engagement:

- Reticence to disclose trafficking and modern-day slavery out of fear of safety from perpetrators who have groomed and isolated survivors, developing sham relationships to exploit them.
- Fear of weakening a Home Office application due to insufficient evidence of trafficking, exploitation and abuse. Evidence can be hard to gather, due to the hidden nature of the crime of sexual exploitation.

Survivors are known to omit evidence in asylum applications due to shame and fear. This increases their risk of destitution and vulnerability to re-trafficking.

'Hard to engage women? More like hard to engage services.?'

Services supporting women adversely affected by sex industry involvement advocate and work alongside them to enable access to support. Specialist support is important but not in isolation.

What is needed?

- Genuine partnership working and a shared trauma-informed culture amongst services allows room for trust to be built between survivors and those seeking to reach them.
- Professional curiosity with the best interests of the survivor in mind, alongside good listening creates space for women to consider disclosing exploitation and abuse.
- Flexibility of approach and recognition of individual needs. Tailoring support around questions of culture, language and literacy.

For a guide to professional curiosity as published by the Portsmouth Safeguarding Adults Board (PSAB) head to:

Professional Curiosity PowerPoint Presentation (portsmouthsab.uk)

- Professional awareness of local specialist safe spaces for referral and signposting

Further resources and available support services:

Haven - Harbour Church A weekly safe space women's group for survivors of violence and abuse. Tel: 07869 258165 vista@harbourchurchuk.org by referral only

Minerva Community Service - Advance Charity Safe spaces and support for women in contact with the criminal justice system **023 938 78992** **minerva_hampshire@advancecharity.org.uk**

Project W – Ambition Portsmouth Tel: 07464 981060 For women in recovery – an inclusive, welcoming and safe space solely for women with a twice monthly Women's Health Clinic

Weekly drop-in Sexual Health Clinic for Commercial Sex Workers Thursdays 13:00-15:00 St Marys Community Health Campus (Portsmouth) | Lets Talk About It

Sexual and Contraceptive Health Clinics within Hampshire and access to one-to-one phone consultations with a sexual health care practitioner. Website translator tool.

Home | Lets Talk About It

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- National Ugly Mugs (NUM) , a UK-wide charity working with sex workers to do research, design and deliver safety tools and to provide support services to people in adult industries. Including a safety reporting tool on individual customers and support with reporting to the police https://www.nationaluglymugs.org/
- Sex worker friendly counselling directory 2023 Therapist Directory (nationaluglymugs.org)
- Online specialist trauma counselling for women who have been involved in prostitution and those who have been trafficked for sexual purposes. A4 size (squarespace.com)
- The working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK – A Briefing Beyond The Gaze – The working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK

Portsmouth City Council in partnership with:

VISTA

Portsmouth City of Sanctuary