



UL Engage Reports

2022, No. 10

I Must Be Some Person: Accounts from Street Sex Workers in Ireland

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I Must Be Some Person: Accounts from Street Sex Workers in Ireland

How Sex Workers understand and experience the 2017 Change in Legislation around Sex Work, GOSHH and Psychology, at University of Limerick Collaboration funded by the Dormant Accounts Scheme from the Department of Justice and Equality and Anti Human Trafficking Department, 2018

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AUTHORS

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“I must be some person”

Dedicated to all the sex workers who participated in this journey with us and, especially, the ones we lost along the way. You are loved and missed!



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
agus Comhionannais
Department of Justice
and Equality



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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF 'WORKING IT'

BACKGROUND

In 2018, under the Dormant Accounts Action Plan funding scheme from the Department of Justice and Equality and Anti Human Trafficking Department, GOSHH (Gender, Orientation, Sexual Health, HIV) and the University of Limerick (UL) successfully gained funding for a qualitative research project with sex workers in Ireland. The research scope covered survival or street sex workers in Dublin and Limerick and included a peer participative aspect and an intervention.

The research was overseen by a steering committee (see Appendix: Table 1) consisting of community supports, academics, and sex workers. Specifically, there were academics experienced in research on the subject of sex work, staff from agencies who engage with street sex workers, staff from sex work support agencies, such as homeless and drugs agencies, sexual health agencies, sex work support services, sex work research, trafficking, and political research, GP with experience of working with disadvantaged communities and sex workers and people with past experience of sex work, some of whom became peer researchers. The steering committee was strategic in key consultations around project design, interpretation, and dissemination of our research.

This study was designed to be ready and available to inform the upcoming review on the 2017 Criminal Law (sexual offences) Act which was due in 2020. The collaboration agreement to begin the research project was signed by GOSHH and UL in November 2019, and with extensions motivated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the end of the project was extended to January 2022.

STREET SEX WORK

We start by positioning sex work and the specific target group of this research "street sex workers" in the wider context. A very important differentiation needs to be made between sex work and sexual exploitation or trafficking. Sex work can be defined as an umbrella term for the exchange of sexual services between adults for remuneration.

A sub-category of sex work is survival sex work which implies that the exchange of sex or sexual services is done on a barter basis. Paid work or wage labour refers to the socio- economic relationship between a worker and an employer in which the worker sells their labour power under a formal or informal employment contract. While survival sex work functions on a barter basis, it is worth noting that barter is a contemporary phenomenon frequently viewed as a strategic response to the global capitalist crisis (Melis & Guidici, 2014). Hence, any category of sex work is work, and cannot be invalidated. We refer to the participants in this research as street sex workers. When using the description 'survival' later in this report, we refer to the particularly challenging life circumstances and experienced economic hardships, which led the participants in this research to rely on street sex work as their occupation to be able to survive (i.e., make a living).

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF 'WORKING IT'

We reiterate that in the context of this research and for the participants we interviewed sex work is not sex trafficking or sexual exploitation. This distinction, especially on the legal and policy level, as explained later in the report (see "Policy Recommendations" section), is crucial for the safety of survivors of sexual exploitation as much as it is important for the wellbeing of sex workers. Sex trafficking is defined as human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation is understood as actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Sexual abuse is an actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. Sex work, like sex, can only be consensual and voluntary. Any non-consensual sexual activity or intercourse is defined as sexual assault or rape.

SEX WORKERS IN IRELAND

There is no definite number on how many sex workers are currently working in Ireland - this would be impossible information to gather as many sex workers do not disclose that they work in this field often due to their marginalisation and stigmatisation within the Irish society (Lazarus, Deering, Nabess, Gibson, Tyndall & Shannon, 2012). It is important to understand how research about a specific social group can greatly affect the way in which the group and its members are perceived in the mainstream social discourse. Hence, researchers should aim to adhere to principles of clear and unbiased representation of communities, especially if those communities are already pre-characterized in a specific way or if there is a long-standing history of stigma, marginalisation, or misrepresentation of the community in the mainstream social discourse.

While contemporary sex work is still subject to stigma, there are also hierarchies within the field of sex work. Research reveals that among female workers in different areas of the sex industry, those engaged in street sex work tend to be the most marginalised and stigmatised (Weitzer, 2009). Street sex workers experience financial strains, drug misuse, psychological issues, and exclusion from the wider population. In Dublin and elsewhere, extensive research documents the stigma and victimization of sex workers (Whitaker et al., 2011), which further obstructs access to services and enforcement of human and professional rights among the sex workers (Sweeney, 2015). As opposed to other categories of sex workers, street sex workers are mostly hidden and thus vulnerable, and often expose complex sets of needs and circumstances. Thus, in this project, we specifically aimed to investigate regional differences between the Dublin and Limerick areas, in how street sex workers understand and work with the new Irish legislation, since 2017.

LEGISLATION CHANGE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is no definite The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act was enacted in March 2017 following lengthy debates in both houses of the Oireachtas. Since then, in Ireland, some sex work is still criminalised, such as workers working in the same premises together (Sexual Offences, 1993). In 2017, the purchase of sexual services was criminalised (as per Part 4), and penalties and sentences for brothel-keeping were increased (Sexual Offences, 2017).

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF ‘WORKING IT’

The introduction of the new criminal law explained on the previous pages expands beyond legal frameworks, given that the implementation of any legislation involves complex psychological, social, cultural, and geographical as well as demographic factors. The primary research questions that drove the design of our study were formulated to understand the impact that the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act from 2017 had on the quality of life of street sex workers. Therefore, we asked:

- To what extent do sex workers in Ireland know the law and their rights?
- How do sex workers organise their working practices around the law?

RESEARCH DESIGN

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research aimed to document the experiences of sex workers with the 2017 legislation in Limerick and Dublin, investigating geographical differences or professional similarities. This was motivated especially because services like GOSHH in Limerick had already recorded an increase in violence and a decrease in street prices for sexual services since 2017 among street sex workers. The project was based on extensive experience in working with various categories of sex workers (GOSHH partner) and by a comprehensive ethical and research experience in working with vulnerable groups, exposed to high levels of trauma and stigmatisation (UL partner). The basic approach was non-judgemental and based on an understanding of sex work as "work" (rather than "identity", as defined above), with multiple social, economic, geographical, psychological, and developmental determinants of the sex-workers' well-being. In addition, high importance was placed on the empowerment and capacity building in terms of knowledge, support, and service provision to the street sex workers participating in the research (Shaver, 2005; Vaanwesenbeeck, 2001; Weitzer, 2010).

There were three core components to the research design:

1. Psychosocial intervention during the data collection
2. Ethical and respectful practices in research with sex-workers
3. Capacity building through training, events and dissemination of knowledge

2.1 PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION DURING THE DATA COLLECTION

This research had a quasi-experimental design, where a psychosocial "intervention" was included as a peer-led introduction and explanation of the legislation to the participants. One month after the "intervention" the participants would be contacted for a second one-to-one interview, documenting the experience and reflection since the first interview and intervention.

Originally, the research design included so-called Retreat Research Days, where we aimed both to collect data on knowledge and experience of the legislation, introduce and explain the Criminal Law Act 2017 to the participants, and offer a safe space of social support for the participants. These research retreat days would be relaxing and full of the kind of everyday comforts the participants do not normally experience. It was considered that many of the participants would be affected by homelessness, living in temporary accommodation, with nowhere to go during the day, living with active addiction and self-medicating the active and ongoing trauma they experience. Incentives included a safe place, a choice of therapies or pamper sessions, good food, and a fixed-rate monetary reward. The opportunity to meet peers, to gain confidence from their interaction with each other throughout the day, and get a sense of togetherness from sharing during the group discussions were also considered as potential gains for participants. Support workers from various agencies would be on-site to assist with critical issues that may arise as a result of participation in the research. The retreat aspect of this research aimed to restore a sense of dignity and humanity to the participants.

RESEARCH DESIGN

However, the location for delivering the psychosocial intervention was changed based on consultation with peer researcher sex workers. The Research Retreat Day was deemed to be too disruptive and impractical for the street sex workers. The reasons considered were: loss of money given time away from usual workplaces, loss of safety, substance use risk and issues to be negotiated with managing their use, lack of comfort with hotels (as street sex workers are usually turned away from hotels, especially in Dublin), child care or college arrangements, as well as the more general and equally problematic aspect of lack of trust and time to develop meaningful relationships with the research team. Another consideration was that bringing street sex workers together in one location would not be feasible because of historical or current rivalry, recent crimes against each other (robbing or assaulting), they would be in competition with each other and perhaps the individual differences might compromise the "get-together" and hamper the group discussions, intervention delivery and all other aspects of being together in the same location for 24 hours. Therefore, the Research Retreat Day was replaced with one-to-one interviews in the location of usual work, in a safe space identified by a peer researcher, supported by the whole project team. All associated costs with the previous incentives at the hotel were turned to the monetary incentive, at the advice of the peer-researchers.

The other aspects of the original design were maintained. In particular, those delivering the intervention were people who have experience of exchanging sex (peers). These peers knew the law and had themselves the experience of how the law "works on the street". As anticipated, the peer researchers and the participants shared similar experiences, and the communication of information was facilitated by this. In addition to the verbal explanation of the law, participants were also given "Know your Rights" leaflets from the Sex Worker Alliance Ireland (SWAI; see Appendix).

2.2 ETHICAL AND RESPECTFUL PRACTICES IN RESEARCH WITH SEX WORKERS

The preparation and documentation of ethical and methodological guidelines for research and work with survival sex workers would be the second area of investigation. Ethical approval was gained from the University of Limerick, under the supervision of Anca Minescu (UL partner). However, working with this particular category of sex workers involves a more comprehensive knowledge of techniques for interviewing, understanding addiction, trauma, homelessness, and other issues that affect the well-being and safety of survival sex-workers (Whitaker *et al*, 2011). Knowing and learning how to approach this group by avoiding further perceptions of "exploitation" and by empowering the participants with risk management and harm-reduction strategies was paramount to the research project (Rekart, 2005). Designing an evidence-based ethical approach to research and working with street sex workers was based on a literature review, as well as observations and discussions between the researchers and front-line support workers throughout the running of the project. The aim was to produce a set of guidelines for ethical practices in research and service provision with street sex.

2.3 CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH TRAINING, WORKSHOPS, AND DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Our project design included training and dissemination of the research findings and developed materials. We proposed a national training day providing information and education about working with street sex workers in a way that minimises traumatic impact, empowers the participants, and more generally acknowledges the complex needs and stigmatisation that the group.

Workshops on the current legislation, trauma-informed practice, gender-specific practice, low threshold service provision and safe questioning were envisaged. Prepared by the project team, based on previous research and experience in the field of sex work, and open nationally to any other stakeholder or agency who works with survival sex workers and other people who exchange sex in the Republic of Ireland, this training and research day was planned for the International Human Rights Day, on 10 December 2019 (see Appendix: "First Conference Schedule and Details"). This took place at the University of Limerick with 71 participants, including academics (students and staff), prison officers, homeless agencies, drugs agencies, sexual health services, sex workers, and sex work support services. Two workshops were run during the afternoon: one on "Trauma-Informed Practice", by Aoife Dermody, from Quality Matters; and one on "Working with Sex Workers", by Susann Huschke, University of Limerick and Billie Stoica, GOSHH.

In addition, the research findings were to be disseminated at a follow-up national conference where the stakeholders would have an opportunity to discuss and elaborate on the implications of this research. Due to the public health restrictions, this conference took place virtually, on the 10th of December 2021, with 67 participants, including academics, service providers, sex-worker support agencies, and peer-researchers (see Appendix: "Second Conference Schedule and Details").

Another element of research capacity building was added to the project, in consultation with the steering group and the peer researchers. Special training sessions on participatory research were organised for 6 peer workers, under the guidance of specialists Professor Maggie O'Neil from University College Cork, Ireland, and Rachel Stuart, University of Kent, UK, on the 10th of February 2020. This training was delivered to equip the six peer researchers with relevant research skills, by way of examples from previous research with sex workers where participatory principles guided the research process. A discussion of the legislation and how to deliver this information to participants was also included.

Subsequently, on the 26th of February 2020, members of the research team - Tainara Paulon, from the University of Limerick and Billie Stoica, from GOSHH, facilitated another training and consultation session with the six peer-researchers whereby the data collection materials were adapted to the target population, and where safety and risk assessment were addressed, and protocols for the safety of peer researchers and participants were co-designed.

These formal training workshops and consultations from February 2020, were accompanied by informal and formal supports offered in numerous one-to-one debriefing sessions once data

RESEARCH DESIGN

collection commenced in October 2020. These were held individually by Billie Stoica, but also as a group where all peer-researchers and the project team were providing input. The main supports were around interviewing techniques so that peer-researchers could support the participants to answer more elaborately and confidently. Other advice was given around active listening. The main supports were around building confidence and reassuring the peer researchers that their interviews and process of securing participants were adequate. Other issues which required ongoing communication and consultations between the research team were related to the transfer of audio files, payments for the peer researcher and participants, and making sure that participants were contacted for the time 2 interviews.

Towards the end of the project, peer researchers participated in two debriefing sessions (15 April 2021, 22 April 2021) with Dr. Anca Minescu and Billie Stoica, where further reflection and discussion on the research process, methodology, and social-psychological aspects of working with sex workers were addressed. Finally, peer researchers were also involved in checking the interview transcripts and were consulted with respect to the interpretation of the data analyses and the final reports. Overall, the research capacity building among the peer researchers was of high benefit for all involved and is to be noted as one of the successes of this project.

These trainings and workshops conducted within the framework of a participatory research design were complementary to the conferences and workshops originally planned and delivered within the project.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted as individual one-to-one sessions, during October 2020 and January 2021. As an integral part of the research project, the planned "intervention" was delivered at the end of the first interview. The second interview was planned within a month from the first, where participants had an opportunity to re-assess their experiences and find out if, and which, barriers they might have encountered. In total, there were 50 interviews, 25 participants, interviewed at the two times, as planned.

All interviews were recorded on a phone or dictaphone, and the recording was sent to the research team as soon as it was completed, and once archived, deleted from the original location. All interviews were transcribed by research assistants from the Department of Psychology, University of Limerick: Anastasiia Zubareva and Taylor Hedderman. A sample of the transcripts was sent back to the peer researchers for checking, and where there were difficulties in comprehension the peer researcher helped clarify the conversation for accurate transcription.

PEER RESEARCHERS AS INTERVIEWERS

The interviewers were peer researchers who received additional training prior to conducting interviews, as described in the previous section. There were four peer researchers collecting data in the Dublin area and one peer researcher conducting interviews in Limerick. As mentioned above, ongoing support, debriefing sessions, and psychological support were offered to all peer researchers.

The recruited peer research team was mixed and included current street sex workers, current indoor workers, and other people with experience in the sex industry. The current street workers were recognised as experts on the topic and facilitated to engage in research development and planning. These peer researchers had an active participatory role throughout the duration of this project, for example, they identified the people they would like as trainers for their capacity-building sessions. This included academics from other disciplines who had experience in participative research with sex workers and street sex workers within Ireland and Britain.

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

The method used for recruitment changed from the originally proposed Research Retreat Days described in the previous section. Given the involvement of sex workers as peer researchers, we did not have to rely on agency-based known contacts. Instead, active street workers recruited participants when they were out on the streets working. The plan was that if there were still participants needed, who could not be found in the usual places of work, then we would recruit known contacts through agencies supporting sex workers. This was not necessary in the end.

While the general target group, namely street sex workers, was maintained, there were two changes of criteria, regarding the advertisement of sexual services and gender of participants. The research team was informed that street sex workers also sometimes advertise through Locanto

RESEARCH DESIGN

Different from Escort Ireland, this website did not require a large upfront sum to advertise and worked more like a personal ad in a newspaper. It was agreed by the peer workers that anyone who advertised with Locanto and also worked on the street, could be a participant. The gender target was expanded to include male and trans sex workers if they were available.

Regarding compensation for participants, it was agreed within the project team that cash would be preferred to vouchers. The reasoning behind this was clear. Participation in drug and alcohol-related or homelessness-related research in the past was rewarded with vouchers. However, the recipients then had to go and find someone to buy the voucher off them at a reduced cost, so they could benefit in some way from the gift. It was agreed that putting people in that position was unethical. It was considered that all participants would be adults, all participants would be giving up working time to engage in the process and therefore participation should be rewarded with money in cash. At the research design stage, €300 was allocated to each participant in 'in kind' gains, namely the spa and relaxation services offered during the Research Retreat Day. It seemed fair that this money was provided directly to the participants as compensation for their time and effort, once the design was adapted to one-to-one interviews in the usual locations of work, in Limerick and Dublin. Discussions about ethical consideration, the potential for bribery during recruitment, and other factors were part of this decision-making process.

Cash was considered the only respectful and appropriate form of compensation by the peers. The amount had to adequately compensate for the loss of one hour of work on a good day. It was agreed that €100 per 30 minutes would be acceptable. As the expected time for interview one was no more than 60 minutes, and for interview two was no more than 30 minutes, under this framework the amount was set to €200 cash for the first interview and €100 cash for the second interview. It was also agreed that as the street working researchers would be taking time out of their working day to do the interviews, they would be compensated in exactly the same way. This amount was then extended to the other members of the data collection team as a matter of equality and solidarity.

This adaptation of rewarding participants and reimbursing the peer researchers was not easy to implement, but financial protocols were put in place and a well documented trail of receipts and timely payments were agreed between GOSHH and SWAI for the Dublin branch of the research and dealt locally by GOSHH for the Limerick part of the project. A lead researcher was identified in both Limerick and Dublin. Those people were supported to co-ordinate the interviews and finances for those areas.

THE INTERVENTION: DELIVERING INFORMATION ABOUT THE LEGISLATION AND OTHER SUPPORTS FOR SEX WORKERS

The intervention moved from a peer-facilitated group to a peer-facilitated one-to-one session directly after the first interview. This could allow for a broader assessment and referral process to be employed. Recently developed COVID-19 and Outdoor Sex Work Harm reduction postcards, as well as the SWAI - Know Your Rights Postcards, plus condoms and lube were to be provided as part of the intervention. It was agreed that this intervention would not need to be recorded as

METHODOLOGY

instead the data collection team would be invited to a facilitated focus group to discuss their own thoughts, feelings, and learning from the intervention process, and the data collection process as a whole.

DATA COLLECTION VENUES

Consultation with the sex worker focus group identified that the best place to do the interviews was in an informal and familiar space for the participants, in the usual location of work in Limerick and Dublin. The plan was to walk the streets at night and recruit participants on the spot, bring them to a local venue like a fast food shop or late night cafe, in order to do the interview in a place that meant the street worker could take a break and return to work with very little effort. This plan was also beneficial for the researchers as it meant those who were actively working could work in between meeting potential participants.

The risk assessment and safety protocols were co-designed during the February 2020 trainings and workshops. In essence, the peer researchers were to check in before and after interviews with another member of the research team. Having access for debriefing to Billie Stoica (GOSHH) was also part of the safety measures, to ensure well-being and comfort, in case the experience of the interview was not as expected. All the participants also received a card with the contact details of organisations that can help in case of need (access to health, social and mental health care, protection and rights), and information about their rights.

An added consideration was linked to the logistics around financial remuneration. It was considered unsafe to carry cash during the interview. Instead, a Revolut card was used and cash was withdrawn from an ATM in public spaces/streets, after the interview. This would protect the peer researcher from the risk of attempted robbery or loss of money.

REVISED DATA COLLECTION VENUE DUE TO COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES AND REGULATIONS

Due to COVID 19 restrictions during September and October 2020, all fast food venues and late-night cafes became takeaway only. This meant that recording the interview in these locations would be ineffective due to high levels of background noise. Venues were then changed to whichever agency was willing to facilitate the interviews and also safely comply with government guidelines to reduce potential COVID transmission. In Dublin, this was the Migrants Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) and in Limerick it was GOSHH.

This change had a direct impact on the low threshold aspect of the interviews process. From a potentially safe and easily accessible place to a more formal and organised environment. The need to make appointments was also a crucial change to the format. Prior to COVID restrictions, interviews were planned to be at the time of recruitment. Due to the restrictions, appointments needed to be made as the space needed to be organised, cleaned down, and the confidentiality of the participants maintained. This meant that appointments were made and participants were not

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always able to attend. It is important to note, however, that despite this difficult to manage change in circumstances, the peer researcher team excelled in their motivation and commitment to the project. Data collection was completed without any noteworthy exceptions. It is one aspect where a participatory research design is far superior to a more rigid data collection protocol when doing research with a population as vulnerable and as difficult to establish trust with, such as the street sex workers.

PEER RESEARCHERS TRAINING

In January 2019, a full-day training was organised in Dublin, with overnight assistance for those who lived outside of the area. A local LGBTQI community space was hired to increase the safety of the group and the peers were trained in participative research principles, practice, and theory. This was followed by a further full day in February where the peers designed the recruitment and data collection process. Part of this day involved the revision of the target profile criteria, setting the compensatory amount for both researchers and participants equally, and defining the questions for the interviews. There was one more day planned to role-play the interview and refine skills before data collection began. COVID-19 prevented this from happening.

Training and design discussion continued throughout March and April 2020. In May 2020 an additional steering committee meeting was organised to communicate the changes and discuss potential impact, new budgets, and ethical considerations. The Department of Justice and Equality were informed of the changes to both the design of recruitment and data collection, and as a result, the budget allocations. A new timeline was devised that assumed COVID-19 would be under control and data collection could begin again when the university reopened in September 2020.

DATA DESCRIPTION

The average length of Time 1 interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes, while Time 2 interviews on average lasted from 25 to 40 minutes. We transcribed a total of 1,025 minutes of recorded interviews. The transcription was done by two independent research assistants to ensure objectivity. The transcribed materials were reviewed by peer researchers to verify their accuracy.

Our sample included 25 participants who completed initial and follow-up interviews between October 2020 and January 2021. Every participant completed two interviews: an initial one - Time 1 - and a follow-up - Time 2. At the end of Time 1 interviews, an intervention was delivered: a peer-led introduction and explanation of the legislation to the participants. The Limerick sub-sample consisted of 10 people and 20 interviews, while the Dublin sub-sample included 15 participants and 30 interviews.

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DATA ANALYSIS

NVivo was used for thematic content coding and other data analysis. All the interviews were coded twice: the preliminary themes developed from Time 1 and Time 2 interviews were then refined and united into a coherent structure of the six themes and corresponding sub-themes that we discuss further. Additional consultation with peer researchers was held to verify the accuracy and sensitivity of thematic coding as data analysis was performed by an independent research assistant, who was involved in the transcription process, to ensure objectivity and impartiality.

The following parts of the report are structured as follows: We start by giving a brief summary of our findings in regards to the two research questions. Secondly, we present an overview of all the themes and sub-themes in a table (see Appendix: Table 2), which summarises our data in a quantifiable way in terms of the frequencies with which participants mentioned certain sub-themes within each of the main six themes. Thirdly, there is a schematic representation of how our themes and sub-themes relate to each other (see Figure 1). This figure also describes how individual sex workers and their well-being is affected by the current state of affairs regarding the legislations pertaining to sex work within Ireland and their enforcement by An Garda Síochána. Fourthly, we discuss our findings with examples of quotes from the participants.

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TO WHAT EXTENT DO STREET SEX WORKERS KNOW THE LAW AND THEIR RIGHTS?

To begin with, we will briefly present some of the crucial findings of our research in regards to the extent to which street sex workers in Limerick and Dublin know the legislation surrounding sex work in Ireland, specifically the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017, and their rights. Around half of our sample, 12 participants, explicitly stated that they did not know about the 2017 change in the law, and hence, were not aware of their legal rights. Interestingly, such lack of legal knowledge was clearly a larger problem in Limerick as opposed to Dublin, as eight out of the 12 participants who stated that they were unaware of the 2017 change in the law regarding sex work in Ireland were the participants from the Limerick sub-sample.

Nine out of the 50 interviews mentioned incidents where officers of An Garda Síochána manipulated participants' lack of knowledge of the law and their legal rights. The interviewees shared that some police officers did intimidate sex workers to move away from the space where they would normally stand while waiting for clients by threatening charges of solicitation or prostitution. These threats were successful because a charge of prostitution can ruin one's reputation and severely impact one's ability to perform parental duties. Since many street workers lack legal knowledge of their own rights, they can be misled to believe that they can be legally prosecuted for selling sexual services. The consequences of legal charges and/or convictions can impact one's ability to see and meet with their children. The latter is very important as in more than half of the interviews (added across time 1 and 2), we found 28 (out of 50) references to 'motherhood' as one of the crucial aspects of the participants' identities, life motivations and drivers, and psychological wellbeing and stress-coping mechanisms.

HOW DO STREET SEX WORKERS ORGANIZE THEIR WORKING PRACTICES AROUND THE LAW?

Our findings regarding the ways in which sex workers organise their working practices are quite complex and multi-faceted, so we have compiled this short summary of the findings related to the second research question. The lack of legal knowledge was a more widespread issue in Limerick. Violence, harassment, and abuse of power by An Garda Síochána officers was clearly prevalent in the Dublin area (24 of 30 interviews, 80%) as well as in Limerick (16 of 20 interviews, 80%). Notably, apart from reported incidents of harassment by specifically female An Garda Síochána officers and interviewees' greater knowledge regarding laws on sex work in Ireland, the Dublin sub-sample was no different from the Limerick one.

While the legislation is supposed to prevent exploitation and sex trafficking of vulnerable people, according to our sample, it has drastically marginalized already vulnerable populations and has made the lives of street sex workers in urban areas even harder.

Overall, our data indicates that the nature of sex work that our participants engage in is dominated by socio-economic poverty and marginalization, psychological trauma, and stressors that are

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keeping and pushing street sex-workers into vicious cycles of addiction, homelessness, and psychological trauma, counteracted by resilience strategies and DIY safety tools and informal community-driven safety measures.

The ability to "work together" as a way of ensuring safety and security was the most frequently mentioned issue that the sex-workers wish to see changed in the law and policy. The current legislation regarding brothel-keeping has made the scenario of being able to work together impossible. Sex workers in our sample described the possible benefits of shared working space, e.g. a brothel, as two-fold: safety in numbers and a safe place for work. According to our data, sex work in person poses significant risks to a worker's wellbeing and safety unless there is a clear separation between one's home and a workspace, which preferably should be neutral territory for both a sex worker and a client that provides for both parties' comfort and safety (i.e., indoor setting with either security or other sex workers to ensure safety). The predominant themes related to micro-level outcomes of sex workers in our sample are about the different ways in which the participants ensured their survival and various coping mechanisms that they developed to cope with the hardships, psychological trauma, and risks and dangers caused by the legal framework that criminalises the buyer. *An Garda Síochána and its practices, as well as the existing legislations related to sex work in Ireland, are one of the many stressors and are not perceived to protect sex workers, especially in the absence of information about sex workers' own legal rights.*

The change in the law in 2017, combined with the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, has further decreased the amount of work for street sex workers. *The criminalisation of the buyer, as shown by our data, leads to clients' fears and reduces the amount of work available to street sex workers.* While the decline in on-street clients had been happening for years, the new law drove even more clients to visit indoor sex workers, leaving street sex workers with little means to sustain themselves.

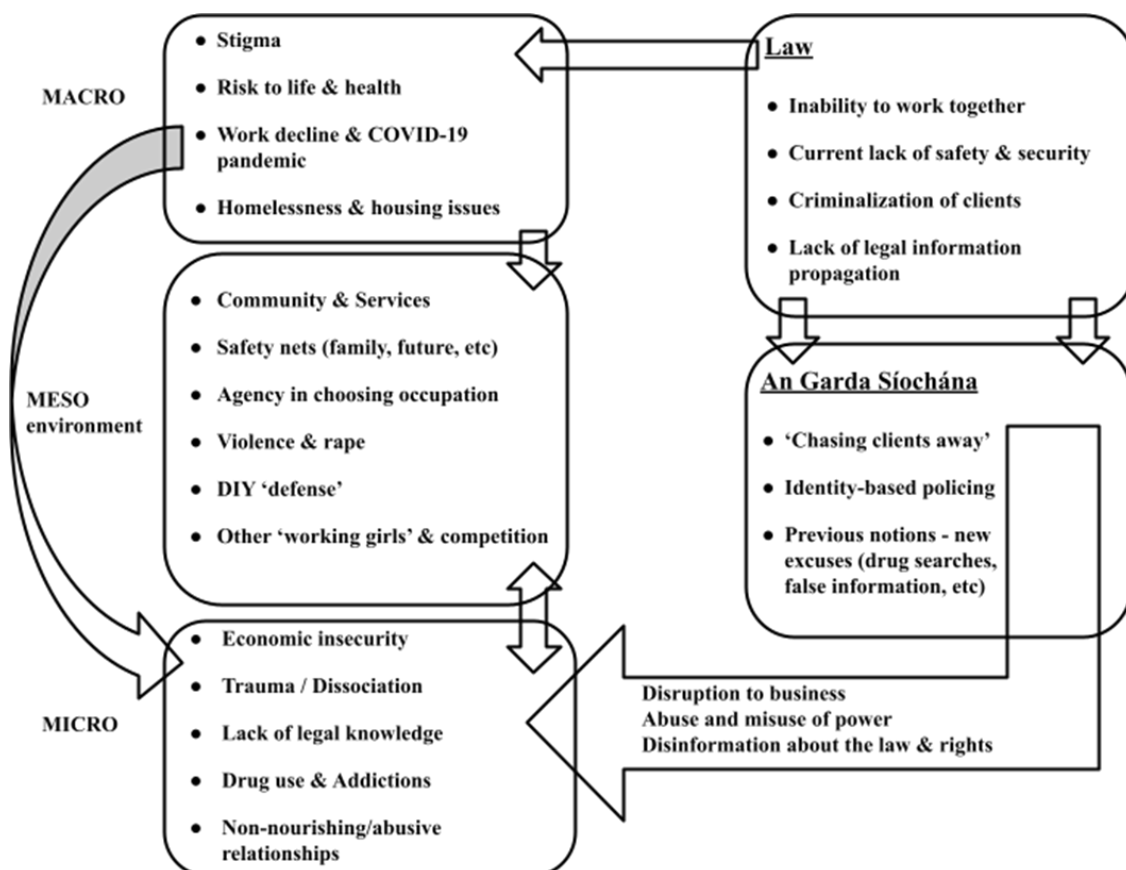
This further puts street sex workers at a higher risk of abuse by potential clients due to the inability to refuse certain work opportunities out of fear of not being able to make enough money. In addition, the increased presence of and patrolling by the gardai have further limited street sex workers' ability to access any given work opportunity due to the lack of time to evaluate the potential client in order to avoid being stopped by the officers. Thus, *solutions to the range of issues sex workers voice in our research have to be more comprehensive and protective of sex workers' well-being, safety, and economic prospects than the current legislative framework allows for.*

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Figure 1. Thematic analysis findings: How Macro-Meso-Micro level factors interact with the Law and the Garda in the Lives of Survival Sex Workers

Figure 1 presents the most pressing issues from the six main themes and their sub-themes (see Table 2 in the Appendix) which are represented as *five clusters in boxes with transparent background: Macro-level "Conditions and context of street sex work," Meso level "Strategies of survival and safety nets," Micro-level "Individual struggles with the nature of sex work," and clusters related to the Law and An Garda Síochána.* Supplementary details on how the data was analysed are presented in the Appendix, in Annex 2. The relationships between these clusters and the policy implications and recommendations are presented in the final part of the Report, Figure 2.

Our findings show the current state of affairs prompted by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 and other existing legislation related to sex work (in place in Ireland since 1993 and 1994, brothel-keeping - as per Section 11 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 1993) negatively affect lives, safety, and wellbeing of people who choose to do sex work. Moreover, the framework employed by the Garda and the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB), which portrays all sex workers in Ireland as exploited victims of the sex trade, seems to directly translate into disruptive activities that contribute to incidents of violence against sex workers, as well as enable very serious incidents of misconduct, including sexual assault and verbal abuse by gardai, and false legal information regarding legislation surrounding sex work spread by officers.



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In the next section, we have a closer look at the complex relationships between the legislation and its far-reaching consequences in multiple layers and dimensions of street sex workers lives, from the macro-level (which identified factors affecting all participants in our research) to the meso level (describing the living social environment of everyday work and life of street sex workers) and the micro-level (describing issues that affect some but not all participants). We note how the enforcement of the law, its application in various settings, and the broader context it generates are related to the individual sex worker's lives and wellbeing.

HOW THE EXISTING LEGISLATION AFFECTS STREET SEX WORKERS AND THEIR WELLBEING? *'We're actually good people': On stigma perpetuated through the legal framework*

Widespread stigma and the discourse of legislation and policy that portray all sex workers as 'exploited victims of sex trade' is very harmful to street sex workers on multiple levels. The stigma and harmful discourse forces street sex workers into a duality of existence that centres on their inability to disclose their occupation to others (sometimes including their own family). This creates a lack of psychosocial supports in situations where these supports are crucial. Since street sex workers are frequently stigmatised by An Garda Síochána officers and other service providers, *sex workers from our sample reported feeling uncomfortable seeking legal or social supports from the designated institutions because of a fear of being judged, abused or harassed.*

Sex work for participants in our sample is a legitimate job and undoubtedly a very hard one, and they have clearly stated that this occupation gives them a sense of dignity, as they do not have to beg for money, nor do they do any harm to anyone in the society. *Many participants feel dignified by having the agency and free choice to have chosen their occupation and provide a certain service in exchange for money, as opposed to engaging in robbing, stealing, or dealing drugs.*

We're actually good people. We're people that are just living every day, and we're alive. And this is just it- that what we have to bloody do, you know?

It's not like working in a shop, but... it is work. I'm used to it now. [...] I'm not robbing people. I'm going out and making me own money, but it's from which way I'm making it.

I haven't got the nerve to shoplift. [...] I don't believe in selling drugs either because people really lived off my misery and I'm not gonna live off somebody else's misery. [...] I know working on the streets is hard but you get used to it.

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...and they [gardai] name and shame you, you know; and you just have a job, at the end of the day it's just a bloody business, and you're not hurting anybody. [...] you don't understand [sex workers' experience] unless you have to be in this situation, you know; 'cause it's really [sex work] isn't that bad really. It's not that nasty of a thing, we're not nasty people. That's the same thing [as any job]: we're trying to earn a bloody living, and that's the only way we know how [to]. [...] a lot us [sex workers], aren't... well, the ones I know, wouldn't be really educated, still, [we] realize that you can't get a job that would pay this type of money, you know. And, uh, you know that's the only way they know how [to make money], and they're good at their work,

Sex work is a legitimate occupation: Bodily integrity and autonomy

This further brings about the very principles of bodily integrity and bodily autonomy. Bodily integrity is the inviolability of the physical body and emphasises the importance of personal autonomy, self-ownership, and self-determination of human beings over their own bodies. Bodily autonomy relates to the concept of affirmative consent, which requires full and eager participation in any sexual encounter. *Most of our interviewees highlighted that sex work for them is about adults who fully and willingly consent to the exchange of sexual services for monetary compensation.*

I'm my own person and I have a right to my own body like.

All of us are doing a legitimate bloody job 'cause at the end of the day it's two - it's a man and woman, - two grown bloody adults, you know?

But I always make sure that I make enough for that stuff [toys and necessities for kids] so swapping sex for drugs or sex for anything other than money - it's just not for me 'cause it is my job. [...] I still do it on a want-to basis, you know what I mean; if I don't need to go out I won't go out .

now [gardai] are chasing the men, and it's putting the men off. I think that's wrong. I think if people are open and willing to pay someone for sex, obviously they're not happy in their family home, or they're not married or they're lonely like so, it's like, like, like in Thailand - it's legal over there - so, I think it should be legal here.

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I do give it a good bit of time because I take pride in my work, I like customer satisfaction because I want them to be a return

I think it's our choice it's our body. [...] because we're addicts, because we need to make money to survive every day, to cure ourselves, or you know if we need money for anything else, 'cause the hostel is dear enough down there.

In the Republic of Ireland, bodily integrity has been recognised by the courts as an unenumerated right, protected by the general guarantee of "personal rights" contained within Article 40 of the Irish constitution. In *Ryan vs Attorney General*, it was pronounced that "you have the right not to have your body or personhood interfered with." This means that the State may not do anything to harm your life or health. However, the current legal and policy framework employed by the State in regard to sex work in Ireland is endangering sex workers' physical and mental well-being. The simplified breakdown of how this happens is presented further.

While radical feminists draw upon the pre-Kantian concept of sexual objectification to argue a singular effect of sex work on women's bodies, rendering it inherently exploitative, the present scholarship and factual evidence show that this notion of sex objectification has little relevance in 21st-century capitalist societies, as sex work can be compared with most other forms of service work. Sex workers are no more transformed into "objects" than other workers who exchange their physical and/or mental labour for a wage under capitalist relations and that, indeed, sex work under some conditions is not only productive but also comparatively more attractive than other service jobs.

I'm 46, uh, I'm working since I'm about- since I'm about 23. I started off with doing it when my partner, [the father] of my two kids had a terrible accident. He was on a life support machine, and we had a new car, new house, and some bills needed to be paid and I happened to meet someone that had been working, that was doing it- and I said I'll do it for a few weeks; and she'd helped me all them years until now. [...] And it just reeled me in and then the money became so glamorous and then the whole lifestyle- lifestyle involved in that, you know. [...] I remember that night I went out with €40 and €110 I counted. Pound, it was actually. I couldn't believe the money I earned. That was a Friday night and the next night I went home with £900. That was £2,500 I had.

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The secrecy yeah but I think sometimes you get more out of that and once you get the money and once you, you know... 'cause like when I was on drugs when I was out working it was always about owing people money for drugs, and I would have got layed onto me or paying my rent or hospital bills or even myself even just clothing myself. You know? [...] So... not just addiction but it's just, I-I like having money in my pocket you know to go out treat myself to stuff as well like it's not just drugs.

I was saying like that's easy money to make [...] Think I'll get a job at McDonald's. (laughs) 15 euro an hour. [...] Get me own money and- you know. Not robbing people. Not robbing me ma or me dad. Not going to shops, robbing them out, you know?

My mum ended up with cancer. I was homeless and I was a drug addict. What can I do to help? I can work, I can get money and help her pay the house; I was going to look after her; we managed on €800 a month on social welfare, her mortgage... [...] she doesn't have social housing, like the rest of the girls I grew up with their mas have social houses; my mum didn't. And my dad remortgaged it just before he left, so she used to pay 750 for a mortgage. She only gets a 100. Yeah, she can't pay it. So she had not paid it in years. You know then she got cancer and then she wasn't... So me working like, kept me habit of course. but back then me working a week had me habit going, kept me ma's house mortgage paid, kept the bills going, kept me wearing the best of clothes I ever had; I never had to wash them I just kept buying them. because I was getting so much money. couldn't do that now. Now I work just to use a little bit.

I'm providing a service and I don't feel, I don't feel weird about it but I'm not going to undercut myself for, for a job, like I mean I'd literally rather not.

Many street sex workers are affected by homelessness and lack of accessible housing

This Many street sex workers are affected by issues of homelessness or lack of adequate long-term accommodation, i.e. they have to stay in hostels. *The issues around homelessness and lack of adequate accessible housing further exacerbate the physical environment burdens, and general sense of lack of safety and security during and outside of work.* Homeless hostels do not offer the

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desired environment for people who are going through rehabilitation from addictions or trying to give up narcotics. Some of the policies of homeless hostels also contribute to psychological stress over potentially not having a place to sleep and not having any agency over that living space, e.g. there is a curfew at night, rooms are locked during certain hours of the day, no visitors are allowed inside these facilities, and a frequently such places lack kitchen.

It is further important to note that homeless hostels are designed as emergency accommodation, however, due to the housing crisis and lack of affordable or subsidies accommodation, and social stigma around sex work, many of our participants have been staying in this type of accommodation for years. The recent report by Merchants Quay Ireland (2021) showed that 42% of people homeless in Ireland are female and the average age at death of women who are homeless is 38 years. These are very worrying statistics given that the majority of street sex workers are also homeless.

I live in a hostel. Yeah, I live in a hostel, um. since last year. It's much handier for work lately, because I was staying in a tent [...] which is no use to work. Yes, you know, I mean: come back to my tents. [both laugh] Not that they can go back to the hostel.

I live in a hostel, I've been over here for nearly nine years. [...] The-the hostel that I live in is in the red light district area. So, like when I found out that, that's when I was like, "Look, just go back to that and, like, start, you know."

I've slept without a roof for the last two or three years. [...] I'm in a hostel now. Um, it's all right, it's all right, I've got me own room, like, uh, you have to [...] ... go by the rules and stuff. So I have me own, uh, en-suite. But there's no kitchen in it and, uh, you have to be in by 10 o'clock. You know like you're not allowed to knock on doors, you're not allowed to stand in the halls, you're not allowed to stand outside...

I'm in homeless accommodation at the moment [.]. all I have is just a room and a bathroom, like a toilet, but, um, it's been five years; and I have to be in by 11 every night, but you can stay out three nights a week, but you know. it's just, it's just. you need your own place, you know. It's very difficult being over there just yeah. Like I can't have a visitor; and me daughter, she can't come over, she can't come in for a cup of tea. Nothing like that, you know, no privacy; you're basically just meeting at the door, you know?

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They're independent living flats. So um, if you're not in by 11 you don't get in. [...] It's a B&B hostel, kind of thing, but you have your own room, your own toilet, and you know like you can have your own microwave, kettle, toaster, stuff like that. It's okay, but every- body in the building is strung out to bits. Except me, and that's the God honest truth I'm the only one that's not on anything except my methadone and that's it. That's it nothing else.

I'm in the city at the moment but I'm actually homeless at the moment. Again, because of covid, there's no room in hostels so I'm currently on the streets.

*I I've been so f**ked up since I lost my house that I just haven't bothered to make friends with anyone. I made some- ... a couple of friends in *name of place* house but when you leave that house they forget about you.*

On drug use and why possession and personal use should be decriminalised

66% of all the interviews (33 out of 50) mentioned *drug use as a coping mechanism or something that affected our participants' lives*. According to City Wide Drugs Crisis Campaign, in 2020 there were 15,846 recorded offences for possession of drugs for personal use in Ireland (69% of all drugs offences for that year). Many, but not all of our participants reported being affected by drug use and issues related to the consequences of their substance use. It is important to stress that only some participants who talked about drug use stated that they were struggling with addiction and needed additional healthcare and/or social support.

Besides some concerns about physical wellbeing or addiction, some participants talked about the social consequences of drug use that are mostly caused by criminalisation of personal use of drugs in Ireland. Some of our participants reported experiencing issues with accessing or retaining housing options, being stigmatised because of their drug use, or not being able to fully perform their parental duties. Moreover, it is worth noting that the criminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use seems to be used by law enforcement to indirectly punish sex workers, as further discussed in this report. Several interviewees noted that "drug searches" are used as an excuse to interrupt the street activity and get picked up by the Gardai.

Using drugs as a coping mechanism:

[Interviewer: And like where do you get your strength from?] The drink. And the pipe. Not lying.

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You know what I mean; it used to be like my pain management, slightly. so, I'd get drugs into me to make things a little bit pliable.

I'd have to have something in me to do it. Just I'm not, again, it's mainly the street cause I'm a bit nervous on the street. I'm afraid I'm gonna get into a car and not come back. It's nerve-racking like.

I started taking heroin when I was 19, and for the first 6 years of taking it I really didn't go into the game, sex work, but only up to the last 7/8 years, that's when I started going at it again. To try and make money, to support my habit.

How drug use interacts with other aspects of sex-workers' lives:

So, our local community drug team were coming out nightly, and giving us like a few euros a week just to go off and get well, and so that we didn't have to get into anyone's cars. [...] Yeah, to keep us safe. So, um, that's what I'd done, I went into treatment, um, I had my daughter. I relapsed quite a few times. I got kicked out, and my daughter was put up for adoption, so. [...] Yeah, so even though like a lot of people that are in this industry are like on drugs and stuff as I am, do have a chaotic lifestyle, but I don't find my life chaotic at the moment.

And I had my daughter when I was 19. And she was. when she was 8 or 7, I got into, uh, I had me an addiction after her father passed away when she was 6. [...] So hopefully, now I'm starting my clinic on Tuesday to go on my clinic. [...] If I wasn't on drugs, I reckon I will be either city counsellor, or I'd be teaching people as to Reiki .

'Cause I had my son. I moved out and all that, then into drugs. [...] I'm off substances since early June. Smoke weed but that's it.

I'm jolly and like I'm down to earth really and stuff like, [...] and I am strong. at this stage, I'm gonna need it to go out just 'cause I'm strung out on heroin really bad and cocaine and, you know, it's just really the crack. [...] If I'm feeling bad and down, I read or I write. [...] I have a little book, and I write all about my son and from when I had, from when I started drugs, like from when I was pregnant and all down to from when I stopped seeing him, and day-to-day .

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Homelessness and drug use:

*Yeah, because I've been in the place for six years, in the hostel but I have been kicked out loads of times but I mean they've always let me back, because I am a good girl in general like so they've always let me back but see, I don't wanna get kicked out again you know? [...] And I keep getting kicked out for the smell of it [*marijuana] in my room and stuff like that so I mean I genuinely think with them I'm running out of chances you know? Like there's only so much you can do for someone you get what I mean. So when I go back, every time I get kicked out there's still smoke but I smoke outside I don't smoke in the house and then I start getting comfortable again and before I know it I'm smoking in the house.*

*Down in, down in where I am at the moment living like I can go six, seven weeks without drugs and I'm doing fine and then it's like I hit a wall and I have to take something cause everyone is out of their head talking s**t, you know what I mean. [...] And I've talked to so many people in the hostel and they've said the exact same thing.*

We conclude from the voices of the sex workers that addressing the social and health issues relating to drug use is a more positive and effective approach, both for the drug user and for the wider society. Decriminalisation is not a panacea for issues related to drug use, and further investment into specialised social and healthcare services is required. However, it is clear that the consequences of drug use are made worse by addressing them through the criminal justice system rather than the health system.

The harms of criminalising the use of drugs are well documented and alternative approaches are being considered internationally (Stevens, Huges, Hulme, & Cassidy, 2019). The negative impact of criminalising people for their drug use is illustrated, for example, by stigmatising people and limiting their access to affordable accommodation or their ability to perform parental duties and retain custody over their own children. Indeed, criminalising possession as a policy response is not considered effective - it is reported that there is no clear link between the harshness of a country's policy on possession of drug use and levels of drug use. In turn, the available evidence supports the argument that decriminalisation of personal drug use has a positive effect on broader society: decriminalisation has been found to be associated with a range of positive health and social outcomes (Dillon, 2019).

The current law does not protect the safety of sex workers

There was a widespread perception among sex workers that the existing law does not protect them or their well-being. There was a clear lack of safety of feeling safe among street sex workers.

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'Cause like I've got nicked and charged years ago with carrying a knife. But it was to make me feel safe. Because I didn't feel safe out there.

People need to start listening because at the end of the day we're risking our lives. [...] the police and judges you know cause when you go-I got done for soliciting loads of times and I did get locked up for it and people would be asking me what I was in for.

*We are now like criminals [.] But if I go and do it alone and get myself gang-raped, I'm f*cking not a criminal. I may be gang-raped because there wasn't anyone else with me. But at least I can, you know what I mean, like. Oh my God, I'm so glad I didn't bring that extra girl with me. Because now I'm not a criminal, I don't get charged. You know what I mean? It's bullsh*t like, you know what I mean.*

Moreover, the section of the existing legislation that criminalises sex workers who work together, framing it as either brothel-keeping or human trafficking, prevents sex workers from ensuring safety. Most of our participants have reported fears of being charged with brothel-keeping, while also emphasising that working together from a shared space would have been the scenario that would ensure their physical, psychological, and financial safety and security.

At least if it's in a brothel you're kinda in a safe environment if you have your friends around you.

Yeah. In the past life without the internet, being able to self-advertise yourself in a place like, if you were working inside, it was, either in a brothel or like a pimp, like, you know... whereas now, like, the options to work for yourself with girls that you know, without paying somebody else, just paying rent to the landlord like, when you're renting the space, that's an option for us now. But it's an illegal option.

People I wouldn't know the first step to go about [changing the law/environment to be safer]; well, I suppose: calling a couple of girls and probably speaking to somebody that has a building; and open them up and start from there. It would be safer indoors and probably have security on the door to make sure the girls are alright.

Moreover, there were a few participants who shared that due to their vulnerable circumstances and homelessness, they had to stay in exploitative settings due to the fact that it offered them the

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roof over their head. If working together was legal, these sex workers could have left those exploitative settings for something more fair and safe.

An Garda Síochána: Discriminatory enforcement against sex workers

After the 2017 legislation has criminalised the buyer, clients' fear of being arrested or prosecuted has led to less business on the street. Moreover, the increased presence of Gardai in the areas where sex workers would meet their clients has been very disruptive to the work and lives of street sex workers.

First of all, gardai would frequently engage in identity-based policing, and since sex workers can no longer be arrested for selling sexual services, the officers sometimes end up making up other excuses to police street sex workers and create an extra level of discomfort for them.

It's-it's gone a bit a little bit harder cause now the other night I was out working and the police were chasing the punters. [...] But now they're chasing the men and it's putting the men off.

They pick you up for something. Just to keep you out of the street, but it means you can't make any money, you know?

No, [I didn't get a charge for soliciting], I got a charge sheet for, um, disturbing the peace. I wasn't. [...] Yeah. The guards speak down to drug addicts, working girls. Um, like that, you know? 'Cause they have the power over us.

Not many punters and the police is around 24/7. It's very hard. [...] Um, I was standing out at the corner and they told me to move. So I walked down the road. Then I went back, but they told me to move again. So I did a lap. And they came back. While I was walking. Just like- and they arrested me there and then. They were after telling me to move twice already. [...] More support. And no arrogance. Like just because they're- they have a job to do, I have a job to do. In their eyes it's different. My eyes-, I need that job.

Secondly, while patrolling the areas, some gardai harass street sex workers, and reinforce the negative psychological feelings of internalized stigma amongst the vulnerable community.

But they know like. they are intimidating me. and you're not gonna get any work, and even if you say . I will have to move, they will park there across the road, and I will have to move, I have no choice.

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I just find the guards are really. some of them are alright. you get one or two, but it's mostly ban guards are. [they] kinda look down on you. [.] Because they're women, they kinda have a thing like: how can you do that? You know [.] I find the women are more... disgusted with you, you know. [...] I think like, it's a personal thing. The judgments, which they showed me like. [...] Yeah, a lot of ban gardai. the way they let their personal opinions get or. take over their job. You know, it's like a geared woman, and I'm alone and everything. [.] "how could you allow yourself to come outside offering your body for money;" [.]*

I've seen they'd jump out with handcuffs and say take you down to the station... Their excuse would be: I'm getting you down for a drug search, or in case we find your body we need to take a picture, in case your body is found for identification. So we need to take a photo, you know, just to get you down and hold you in the station. So, they'd be searching your body now, and [.] altogether you could have been making two to three and a half hours, so, they know; they basically do that to get you off the street, you know.

* 'ban' - Irish Gaelic; prefix appended to words to make a female form, similar to -ette or -ess in English.

And it was this woman copper and she just took a dislike to me. I never gave her any flipping well at, uh, what happened was I got arrested and I gave her my name and I end up at the police station and she got hold of my phone and opened up my phone. I'd no the pin on it, opened up me phone and realised my name wasn't that name [...] Every time she saw me on the fucking street, she'd stop, get out of the car and she'd give me a good set, tear me like [...] and then she'd walk me, she'd have her blue lights on, you know, whoo whoo, just the blue lights on and she'd drive beside me and she'd walk me down all the way down to Steven Square and out the area. She'd make a show, she would. She just took a bad disliking to me, she did, you know and every chance she got to put the arrest she would.

Even though there is no specific offense of 'hate crime' in Ireland, from the framework of the Human Rights-based approach, *identity-based hostility in these kinds of situations should be addressed as a form of discrimination*. As reiterated many times in this report and other reports that have been addressed to different offices within or under the Irish government (e.g. the 2018 144 pages report funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission under the Commission's Human Rights and Equality Grants Scheme 2017), there are many problems related to power abuse and misconduct within An Garda Síochána and amongst its officers.

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[...] if the police kinda looked out for you instead of chasing away your clients and instead of giving you a hard time and telling you to move on eh, it would be a bit better like it would make it better

Just to like to protect, not really to come over and pester us just to like protect us. To make sure we're alright really you know what I mean?

And Yeah, the way they treat us as well, like. They used to make a show of me. And they used that as it's going on the payroll for them and eh, some of them would be curious asking me questions like how much would I get for this or -how much would I get for that, and they'd be like "You get more than us" so, I thought I sensed a bit of jealousy from some of them that time.

I'd rather see them being genuine and looking after us and taking down the regs [registration plate numbers] like what I do.

Like, you know if we were not being harassed by the guards, like I know the guards would need to be there for your protection as well, and I accept that, and a lot of them do their job good; I'm not saying they don't, they do, but there's always one or two of them that don't, and they'd humiliate you . If there was some sort of a law that would allow for the client to. to see your client. They would come pick you up, and you'd know that the guards aren't sitting and watching it, and the minute the car pulls up they'd just jump on top of you. because once they know you are on the corner, they know if the car pulls up, they can go and arrest them, you know? So we can't make a penny, can't make any

The existing law and its enforcement place street sex workers at increased vulnerability from lack of income and personal protection

Less business and the larger presence of Gardai leads to more risky behaviours due to the lack of time to assess a potential client, as a result, sex workers become more vulnerable to violence, crime, and rape. The fact the law does not protect sex workers and their well-being was captured in the common trope of street sex workers carrying various objects as potential self-defence tools due to the fear of violence from their clients or other sex workers and the disbelief that gardai would protect or help them.

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Yeah. I always carry a pen. Just in case anything happens, just straight in the eyeball. [...] I used to carry, um, I put a brick, like a half a brick into me bag. In case someone tried to grab me or something just give them a bang of it.

I carry a screwdriver in my handbag for protection. [...] It makes me feel a bit more safer.

I have a little alarm, and I do bring me little scissors [...] Just to, if anything very bad happened like.

*That but other than that, like, I'm well able to look after myself, well able. And I always bring a stone with me. It's about that size. If someone was to do anything it'd be boom *slapping hands* straight into the head and then I'm straight out of that car and I'm gone, that's the truth.*

... just like sharp things that you put in your hair that you could stick into someone's neck or something; you could seriously injure them so you'd be able to stun them, to get out of the car and run you know?

Sex workers who face violence, crime, or rape felt discouraged to report such incidents to An Garda Síochána for a range of reasons. We summarized the data as follows: a) there is a history of trauma inflicted by aggressive Garda tactics from the past among sex workers; b) it is believed that some officers sexually exploit street sex workers and abuse their power; they also engage in identity-based policing, and hence, there is a general perception that the law enforcement officials will not help and may instead abuse a survivor; c) previous cases of sex workers reporting incidents of physical assault or rape did not lead to receiving help, being able to prosecute the perpetrator, or receive justice; d) there is widespread stigma around sex work in the Irish society, and hence, sex workers could be afraid of publicity (e.g. news media).

While the change in the legislation happened quite recently, many of the participants in our sample had started doing sex work years before that. Firstly, this means that many sex workers in Ireland fear gardai based on the violence inflicted by the law enforcement officers prior to the 2017 legislation. Secondly, since the levels of legal knowledge and awareness of their own rights are quite low among street sex workers, many participants in our sample reported avoiding gardai due to the pre-existing fear of getting a charge.

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*Cause you think you know people, some people already kind of know but they don't know for definite like what you're doing so I thought like I was like if they saw me walking up and down the street more than once, that they were gonna f**king pull me in and arrest me and say that I f**king, working on the street and a f**king big charge sheet and I'd be on the- I'd be f**king across the paper or something, disgrace then for my son and everything then as well like going to school.*

Well, when I started working at the beginning there was the law was - in the beginning, you just got arrested. [...] It's usually just individual copers that really turn out to be arseholes.

Yeah, we used to tell them first that we were just waiting on someone, cause then they told us that it was legal like that we were allowed to do it so I thought they were winding me up [...] but then we started - we started coming around more often.

I wouldn't go to the guards about it because I'm frightened to go to the guards about it in case they would turn around and say sure you shouldn't be soliciting, you shouldn't have got into the man's car. If anything, it would be shameful. I'd be disgraced if I did go in.

the cops was always our enemies, and you know we've got problems when it comes to the cops. You can't just go up to the cops...

Abuse of power by An Garda Síochána and other agencies: Mistreatment of sex workers

Five participants in our sample of 25 (a fifth of the sample) disclosed that they had been sexually exploited by gardai. *This shows that there is a clear problem within the Irish law enforcement system if members of An Garda Síochána engage in exploiting the vulnerable populations.*

Beyond sexual exploitation cases, some other participants from our sample reported being approached by An Garda Síochána officers who were looking to buy sexual services from our participants. According to 2017 legislation that criminalises the purchase of sex or sexual services, those officers were knowingly committing a crime. Our data also documented widespread incidents of gardai harassing and verbally abusing street sex workers.

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Now I have his badge number. [...] He asked me what my rates were [...] I said "I don't do business with police officers." He says to me "Well, you will do business with me, I need you to co-operate." [he's trying to force me into doing business with him] I said well, like okay, started going [away]; [...] He says, "Okay;" says, "I'll ring, um, Sergeant [name omitted] down at the police station and I'll tell him what you've said to me." And he said "What? Do you want me to believe a drunk that's become a prostitute?"

*[T]he Garda can be b*****ds to us [...] They treat us- they do... they do come along and go like this [gestures] - you know what I mean - as if to say "Give us a blowjob" they're dirty b*****ds; I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude when I say it, but some of them can be dirty f**king b*****ds. The way they speak to us, the way they degrade us, they bring us down so bad that you feel like "F**k this I'm going home," do you know what I*

[T]he car might pull up, and say there are three or four male guards in it, and they'd say, they'd say in a joking way: [...] what you're doing, what you'd do for a tenner - and then they'd be laughing, you know. so you're getting embarrassed, but you're not going to complain about it because it was said in a joking way; but still it's mean, you know.

Like, well I found they looked down on the girls [...] they call the new girls fresh meat...

Many participants in our sample shared their experiences of not receiving adequate help or protection from An Garda Síochána officers, in concrete situations when the sex workers were terrified for their safety.

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*The police were two seconds down the f**king road right. I went straight to them I went in I was like "Listen I said look there's glass all over me" right my arms were full of bruises, full of bruises all here cause he, like the way he grabbed me was really f**king hard and I went to the guards told the guards 'cause they were in a Mariah van two minutes down the road literally two minutes down- I told [name] all about this. And eh, literally two minutes down the road I said "Listen some man is after trying to pull me-" I didn't actually say I was a working girl just that some man was after trying to pull me into his car and I said "He-he pulled me into the car in the end" I said and "I had to kick the window through" I said, "Can you please I'm begging you I'm begging you can you please watch me going home." They drove off the other way. They didn't go the way the man was, they went the other way. [...] I was probably going to be found dead the next morning if I had not of jumped out that window. [...]*

We were gobsmacked. She was full of blood. She had a big black eye. She had a tooth missing. [She was raped and the guards said] "If we charge him, we're going to charge you as well." [...] she never went working up on the street again after that. [She got no support from the cops whatsoever] Absolutely none whatsoever. It tells you whenever you're in a situation - run.

Some participants in our sample reported incidents of abuse of power by An Garda Síochána officers or other officials related to law enforcement, e.g. the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). Our participants also reported cases when gardai spread disinformation in order to disrupt the work of street sex workers by intimidating them with the possibility of arrest and a legal charge for prostitution that would follow.

[T]hey pull in and [...] some would say like ' yeah there're neigh-bours, just keep it quiet, take a walk around the block and come back.' Uh, some will come and say... give you a caution, is it? Yeah, a caution; and say "If you're here when I get back, I'll arrest you." I was-I got three charges for that.

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...there was a fella, I don't know if he still lives there, he worked for the DPP, he got um. he was friends with a lot of guards, detectives, so [he] used to ring them [...] and he'd come out and he'd say: you should be gone, and after 10 minutes, right after he'd ring the guards, and [in] 10-15 minutes detectives would come. and they'd warn you: you have 5 minutes to get off this road. [...] and that DPP fella, I don't know if he still lives there, but the guards used to tell us: if we don't move these girls, we'll lose our jobs. we'd be put to some station in the countryside, like we have no choice. like, the superintendent is tell us to get girls off that corner [...] So, these guards, it's like their superintendent, or whoever was over them, was getting calls from that Public Prosecutor and he was basically saying: they'd better be taken off that corner, [.] no one works on that corner anymore. completely no girls work down there, and everything . and for years, years and years me and my aunties worked there, like I worked down there, and my friends worked down there. And when yer man moved into that house. He got everyone stopped. Yeah, yeah. That's how much power he had.

The participants who felt comfortable sharing their experiences of violence, especially gender-based violence, *have all concluded that if the case was ever brought to the court in the Republic of Ireland, the perpetrators ended up not being adequately punished. But in the majority of cases, the participants stated that they did not bother reporting the crime due to the pre-existing experience of being ignored or abused by An Garda Síochána officers under similar circumstances.* This, thus, yet again emphasises the need for clear differentiation in the law in regards to sex work, sexual assault, exploitation, and sex trafficking, so the actual crimes can be potentially discovered faster, and survivors of such crimes and violence receive adequate support and help in a more efficient manner. Moreover, more supports and capacity building within sex workers community would result in better crime prevention.

We further explain how the differentiation between voluntary sex work and sexually exploitative practices helps address and discover crimes, protects victims of sexual violence, and assists social justice.

Yeah, cause the-how I got into the game is when I was 13 when I ran away from home. I got-I basically got kidnapped by-by a Travelling man and he pimped me out. Pimped me out and he was with a girl, but it was mainly me; I was pimped out 'cause I was like, I was so young and pretty and like, and he ended up getting 15 years, 7-8 years spent, 7 still to do. So, he got a slap on the wrist, you know?

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I say so I took the deal and then it was your man the fair few weeks of the sentence and then he was on the sex-offenders list and, uh, he got, uh, community service because he was in fucking college. He got a slap on the fucking wrist.

One of her boots was down on the canal and she was found in the water just floating like, so you know, no justice like I think it's just... I think the state of the system; it is just- it's corrupt, like [...] and it's just madness. [...] No, they didn't even go looking for the man, not even a description was asked for.

On the importance of repealing existing laws and refraining from the discriminatory enforcement which affects the family responsibilities of sex workers

While the 2017 Act and the shift from a seller offense to a buyer offense have given sex workers more confidence in doing sex work and better grounds to fight stigma, the criminalisation of a buyer leads to further marginalisation of street sex workers. *Moreover, the parts of the legislation preventing sex workers from working together or organising their work from a shared space that undermines their physical safety, financial security, and psychological wellbeing should be repealed as soon as possible.* Most of our participants had children, and for them, financial hardships, homelessness, and additional judicial and legal complications caused immense levels of stress due to the fear of losing custody of their children. From our participants' interviews, we can also conclude that *access to social services and financial supports for vulnerable women or young mothers is insufficient.*

Basically, the reason why I do what I do is because I need money for my kids.

I'm not ashamed of it. But in the eyes of my family, if I got charged to the courts and like and like it came out to them that way so that would not be something that I would be looking forward to. It's about weighing up the safety or legal [aspects]... I can be legal and completely unsafe or I can, you know, be illegal and be safe. My safety is more paramount than what the law thinks is relevant you know, so if I get a chance to [rent a space with a few other sex workers], I'm going to do it.

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*I have one thing, but it is actually about the law, funnily enough, the fact that me and her wanted to go and get a house together cause she's getting hers in the next six months, apparently. but then I was like 's**t we'll both be working from the same house', which then makes it against the law cause there's two of us is that right? [...] and she was like 'Yeah but who's going to know who they're seeing' you know what I mean so just leave it.*

Nah, that'd be son [I am worried about]. Cause he's an awful lot of appointments, he got his two eyes operated on and... he's a great child, I just thought he'd never walk but he did he started walking when he was three. So, he's a blessing.

Better if I was able to do the house sharing with two like-minded girls that I feel safe with, and they feel safer there but... My daughter is me world. I lost one of me kids. I can't lose her. And I would ose her if I gotta a charge. [...] so supporting them financially and you know like. That's really kind of showing them that I do give a shit; you know what I mean, I might disappear for months to end, like you know, as I do. But like I'm always up thinking of them like I'm always putting the money aside like there's a post office account for [my daughter]...

I had two kids at the age of 17 and it was hard for me; and I looked after myself, provided for myself, um, my family they wouldn't- they wouldn't. Well, and I take the kids too, you-you know like, um, they depend on me and I have a granddaughter as well, she is dependent on me and all [...] the kids have no idea of my past, you know.

Complex Family Situations:

My four kids they live with my parents. [...] Nobody wants the kids to find out, but if they did I wouldn't, I'd deny it [...] I wouldn't be proud of it but I'm not ashamed of it either. [...] My kids make me feel good and positive in my life, and I've the money if I wanted to treat them as well.

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See, my daughter was not down for living with me because she is over the age now you know she'll be 20 and I live, you know, like. When I became homeless this time I wasn't going to bring her into another homeless place, so I let her stay at her friend's, she has her room in there and everything, yeah? And she was staying in school to do a leaving cert, and I didn't want to disrupt that.

*My two boys live with their dad. My two girls are staying with their nan at the moment until I get my place and then they're f**king coming home, whether she likes it or not.*

My kids are good, they're good. Um, I obviously can't see them over the covid you know my heart is sore every day. Every time I come out of treatment I keep getting thrown back into a hostel, they're telling me they're getting me places, months go on nothing is happening so I end up using again you know? My heart is sore. My heart is sore every day I'm missing my children, you know?

Several participants in our sample and many sex workers in general are either at risk of suicide and/or suicidal thoughts or have been bereaved by suicide.

*My I went down to the river and I was-I just burst into tears I was roaring crying. I was f**king praying to my partner and [...] it only came into my head "Don't do it, your son needs you" and I was just roaring crying down by the river I was saying "I just want it to end" I said "I just want everyone*

Because the current legislation does not provide adequate safety or support for sex workers, and criminalisation of the clients further exacerbates the risks and dangers that street sex workers face, many sex workers experience immense distress. Since the current legislation reinforces the stigma and further marginalizes sex workers, and law enforcement does not protect them either and engages in identity-based policing instead, the current state of legislation and policy increases the risk of traumatic events in the lives of street sex workers.

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Traumatic events can be extremely destabilizing and many sex workers, despite being survivors of gender-based violence, cannot access the required supports to deal with those traumatic experiences due to the wrongful discourse regarding sex work that is perpetuated through current law and policy. This puts many street sex workers at a higher risk of taking their own life. Moreover, poverty or financial problems and debt have been shown to increase the likelihood of a person dying by suicide: 20 percent of people who took their lives have experienced financial problems or poverty (Samaritans, 2017). Being in the criminal justice system furthers one's risk of suicide, and so does the loss of contact with ones' children (Hibbins, 2021).

Hence, in order to ensure equal access to justice for vulnerable communities, as well as to protect them from crimes and harm, the brothel keeping section of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses) Act, 1993 that is currently in place in Ireland should be revised or otherwise amended. This way of criminalising brothel keeping leads to sex workers either being arrested and prosecuted themselves or them risking their safety and wellbeing by trying to work on their own in fear of being arrested. There were multiple occasions in Ireland where sex workers were routinely evicted from their homes or were prosecuted for working together while such working scenarios were employed by sex workers to merely ensure physical safety.

You said the change in the law. I didn't even know about the change in the law, because to me it's going the same as it's always had.

[the participant talking about working in pairs]: So yeah, I have to put myself in physical danger because if I take myself out of physical danger, I put myself in judicial danger. I just can't make. my physical health: the bruises will heal; like I can still get outta alley with a black eye or a swollen vagina. But I mean like once I'm charged - there's no way.

You It's just a shame that they [i.e. legislators and law enforcement] see it that way. I mean, I can understand it, kind of, in the sense that sex trafficking or maybe being made to or like, you know - no man - brothels, pimps, that type of stuff... but like-minded women working at a job that they work at, not being made to work by anybody, being safe and taking their work indoors, off the streets, away from the public is the wrong thing to do, like, I don't understand.

Because sex workers are not allowed to share premises and clients fear surveillance, some workers feel compelled to go to an unfamiliar place to earn money. Perpetrators of violence take advantage of this.

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Decriminalisation

Our data shows that most of the participants either explicitly (13 out of 25 interviewees, 52% of the sample) or implicitly advocated and called for the decriminalisation of sex work in Ireland.

There should be changes to the law. 'Cause it's hard enough for a woman to stand on a corner. That goes for men too, like, men that work

I would think that clients should be— There should be a law that clients have to wear a condom. [...] if they didn't wear a condom then they could get prosecuted for it.

I think it's an open business where [...] you get paid for [services you provide]. And you're not being raped.

For it, [sex work] to be like you know as a business as when you walk into a shop and buy a packet of smokes it should be that way.

There They, [the guards and other officials], should leave, kinda leave girls if they want to make a few quid and they're doing it kinda behind closed doors. I know standing on the street and stuff like that, but I think it should be, they should let girls work. [...] [Full decriminalisation] would make it safer for girls who work.

Moreover, full decriminalisation of sex work is much needed as a response to the factual evidence of the current legal framework regarding sex work in Ireland forcing vulnerable people into more financially unstable and physically dangerous situations. Decriminalising sex work will start the process of destigmatisation that is widely needed in society, but first and foremost within social services and law enforcement systems.

Decriminalising sex work and the purchase of sex will help to build the legal framework that protects people who choose to do sex work as well as vulnerable individuals who see sex work as their only means to survive.

Decriminalising sex work is an important step in implementing and ensuring a Human Rights-based approach to policing and a trauma-informed approach to social services. Criminalisation of either side of sex work and trade does not help protect sex workers, but rather merely perpetuates the social stigma that treats sex work as an inherently harmful activity. The best way to help sex

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workers, as well as protect people from being sexually exploited or sex trafficked, is to decriminalise both the actions of the sex workers and those of their clients.

The legal pressure that the clients face is absorbed by sex workers: a smaller client base means lower wages and poorer working conditions, with clients who are more likely to act in ways that make sex workers' lives more difficult.

Moreover, sex workers may be in a position to have important information about crimes such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, but unless they are treated fairly and with respect by law enforcement, they are unlikely to feel safe reporting this information to the police. Under the current harmful legislation that prevents sex workers to work together for support and safety, some sex workers become subjected to sexual exploitation that can happen in a brothel setting because they have no other feasible option of dealing with homelessness or risks and dangers of working on their own. Hence, the Department of Justice should further partner with the governmental agencies to strengthen social policies and social services related to the issues of homelessness, drug use, domestic violence and child care, as sex work is frequently an inter-sectional matter.

In the final analysis, our data indicates that *the best way to reduce exploitation experienced by people in sex work and other precarious jobs is to think about freedom and focus on fostering people's capabilities rather than constraining them.* In addition, their voices should be centred in discussions about how to develop integrative policies to improve their labour and other human rights.

FEEDBACK FROM THE PEER RESEARCHERS

Two focus group discussions were organised on the 14 and 22 April 2021, to provide a space for debriefing and drawing on lessons learned between the research team and the peer researchers. Each session was moderated by Dr. Minescu and Billie Stoica from the research team with 3 peer researchers, who had conducted all the interviews and participated in the research design and consultations throughout this project. The sessions were structured to address the following questions in an open discussion for an average of two hours.

Part 1: How was your experience of running the intervention and what is your opinion on how the participants responded?

How did the intervention run? Did you explain the legislation and how was this received? Did the participants have questions, asked for clarification, were they surprised?

Did the participants surprise you in any way during the interviews? Did they say or comment on or reveal anything that you did not expect?

Part 2: How did the research experience affect you?

How were you affected by the interviews? Did the answers or the stories of the participants affect you in any way? (triggered)

Did the participation in the research project affect the way you engage in your work or the way you think about yourself?

Part 3: Were there other consequences of your involvement with this research for your work, your networks and ideas for the future?

Were there other developments in your current work or your future plans that were facilitated by the research?

Did participating in the research have other consequences for your life? (other than just working with the research process) in design and data collection; and other than your own emotional or psychological reaction to the research participants).

We summarise the analysis of these focus group discussions below.

IMPACT OF THE INTERVENTION

Firstly, information about the law and sex worker rights typically came as surprising news to the street sex workers. The majority did not know about the legality of selling sexual services, and had previously been assuming that there is no protection in the law for them. At the same time, the time between the first and second interview (between 2-5 weeks) was too short to allow for any significant changes in quality of life, after the participants learnt about their rights. There were no major incidents with agents of the law enforcement or work life recorded by the participants in that time interval, which also motivated our decision to combine the data from time 1 and data from time 2 for analysis purposes. However, the researchers noticed a significant change from a social psychological personal perspective, which made returning to the time 2 interview beneficial and a nice experience for all involved.

One of the key observations from the researchers was how important it was for the participants to feel understood and listened to, and also how crucial the authentic empathy and lack of judgement from the peer researchers was to the engagement process. At time 2, all participants not only returned to the process, but also reflected on how beneficial it was to be able to speak out. This personal observation was particularly related to the feelings of being validated, recognised and seen as a human being, earning a living and struggling to keep going, rather than the secrecy and stigma that affects the sex worker lives outside of the research space. The shared experiences between participants and researchers was key to the safe space created during the interviews. All researchers noted that at time 2, most interviewees were more relaxed, more confident, less ashamed of their work identity, less guarded, and more open about their work.

What was shocking to most researchers was the level of misinformation about the law and the increased vulnerability and fear of the participants in their working life. Researchers noted the "surprise that the guards let me off" or a general reluctance to engage with the Gardai: "Do I have to talk to the Gardai?" Lastly, what was somewhat surprising to the researchers was the fact that irrespective of the legality of selling sex on the street, street sex workers declared being regularly "picked up" for other reasons, under the public offense order, or drug searches, or location: "you shouldn't be here". This demonstrated an overall level of confusion and vulnerability of street sex workers in their relationships with the Gardai. The research project provided a space where information could be clarified, questions asked and answered, and reliable information passed on to the street sex workers by the research team.

Related to safety concerns, the researchers noted with concern, that street workers did not rely on other supports. Conversations about the legislation and sex worker rights were complemented to identifying ways to protect oneself and others. The researchers shared information about websites like "the ugly mugs", which was described as "life saving", because sex workers share information about dangerous clients, yet this resource has not been frequently used by street sex workers. The need to have social supports and informal networks for street sex workers was a finding we discuss more below, in terms of longer term impacts of this project.

This space of sharing and support created by the research process was appreciated and complimented by the steering group, the sex-worker associations we worked with, and most important by the participants and researchers.

IMPACT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE PEER-RESEARCHERS

As the researchers were themselves affected by the generalized stigma and legal constraints of their sex work activity, having the chance to discuss and support others who struggle was a space for self-reflection and an increased sense of agency. The experience of bonding with another sex worker who in other circumstances would be "seen as competition" was commented upon. In some cases, the empathy and exposure of similar challenges, as well as the non-judgemental normalised space of the interview, gave both researcher and participant a safe space to "just be themselves", be honest, and have the confidence to share experiences that would not generally be disclosed in any other circumstances to anyone else.

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This sense of empowerment was noted by the research team as the most significant positive impact documented by our project. It needs to be mentioned that the peer to peer interaction creating mutual understanding, trust, and a sense of ownership was fostered through the training and overall engagement of the peers through the entire process of research design, recruitment of participants and data collection. This combined investment and collaborations of a mixed research team resulted in the high quality of this data. The 50 interviews were conducted by sex-workers who had research training within this project and elsewhere, who advised on the project design, and especially on how to have access, ensure security and confidentiality to the street sex-worker participants. What cannot be trained or coached, however, is the genuine interest and authentic similarities that the researchers and participants identified through the research project. The initial hesitancy of the interviewees ("can I say this?", "is it ok to say this?") and the tendency and desire to "say the right thing" were met with reassurance and confidence by the peer researcher, which led to a more genuine conversation, than another not-peer participatory research methodology could struggle to achieve.

The positive reinforcement and validation of the identity of a street sex worker went both ways from the researcher to the participants and the other way around. Some researchers noted the hope and curiosity of some participants about a sex worker doing research: "I want to do what you do", or "if you can do it, I can do it!" Similarly, there was a sense of solidarity emerging from the process itself, noted at time 2 by the majority of the researchers. Conclusions like managing the fear of street violence: "you need to be afraid, but not too afraid", on both sides of the interview were reassuring. Other emotional experiences emerged and were shared: about the "why we do sex work", "how i feel about my mother not knowing about what I do for a living", no longer being afraid or ashamed to admit to a "history of sex work" for those who were no longer active, or the overall realization that "being a working girl is not the worst thing in the world."

One of the major ethical concerns about peer-led research and peer doing interviews with sex workers was the risk of being triggered, emotionally primed to relive traumatic experiences that an interviewee might bring up, affecting the interviewer. This was discussed and the training addressed this risk. However, retrospectively, researchers noted that while there was a sense of empowerment, triggering events also occurred. To address those situations debriefing and supports were provided. Following the debriefing, the researchers felt better about themselves, walked away from interviews feeling good "with a spring in my steps", and the most empowering feeling was the realization that research was an opportunity to "give something back", that sex workers have a lot to offer to each other. All peer researchers declared of the project they would "do it again" despite the challenges.

By the time the research project was completed, two of the participants in the research had passed away. This was a traumatic experience for the whole team, and especially for the researchers who had interviewed the two sex workers. It was a reminder of the extreme vulnerability and precarity of the lives of street sex workers, and led all those involved in this research to declare a collective commitment that the voices of those who passed away are to be heard, listened to, and remembered. Reflecting on the passing of our participants also reinforced

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the vulnerability and precarity of the lives of street sex workers, and led all those involved in this research to declare a collective commitment that the voices of those who passed away are to be heard, listened to, and remembered. Reflecting on the passing of our participants also reinforced the realisation that "working girls are bonded in sisterhood", and that "buddying-up" between sex workers is needed. Researchers reflected on the need to dedicate more time to this bonding and supports that sex-workers could give each other, either through a research project like this one, or in other form.

Overall, the opportunities to be involved in research, the participatory nature of the process and the quality of the interactions with the street sex workers interviewed for this project were significant and in some cases life-changing for the researchers. We discuss some of these in the next section. With respect to this project, the data collected and the experiences of empowerment among the researchers, we summarise two take-home messages. On the one hand, the involvement of peer researchers in the research process ensured a sense of empowerment and ownership of the "stories that need to be heard" from the street sex workers. On the other hand, the quality of the data obtained in this project, as a consequence of the peer led and peer conducted interviews is remarkable, having a level of validity and honesty that would be difficult to gain any other way. Both these aspects strengthen our confidence in the data presented here as accurately representing the knowledge of the legislation and quality of life and real-lived experiences of street sex workers in Dublin and Limerick, in 2021.

LONGER-TERM IMPACTS AND OTHER CONSEQUENCES OF PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The most notable and life-changing impact of participating in this research project on the street sex workers is based on the observations of researchers that at the time of the second interview, the participants had declared a reduced reliance on drugs, an increased willingness to reach out to other sex workers and open up to offer or discuss supports needed, and an increased confidence in their identity as "sex-workers" as a valid identity, rather than a stigmatised, wrong or illegal identity.

On the part of the peer researchers, at least half of them declared a willingness to return to education, and some already enrolled before the end of the project. The sense of competence and ability to make a difference, inspired by their participation in research, was also translated in starting up local initiatives - for example the development of a new set of trainings and workshops to be given at homeless shelters in Limerick around addiction, recovery, and sex-work. The peer researchers realized their own role in raising awareness around sex work, by speaking out, by creating networks of support locally among sex-workers, as well as being capable of having larger impacts via formal workshops or returning to education. These were all unexpected positive impacts of this research project, going beyond the original remit of the research, which was to document the experience of the legislation change for street sex-workers.

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Our conclusion is that a peer participatory research framework is a powerful tool as a social intervention itself, whereby not only the participants interviewed in the research benefit, but also the entire research team, which benefits from training as well as from the experience of research itself. For the research team and project itself, the benefits of this participatory research methodology were in the high degree of validity of the data, as well as the triangulation of the information obtained from the interviewees, coupled with the observations and experiences of the debrief interviewers, as well as the wider consultative framework provided by the steering group.

We strongly recommend that future research in sex work is conducted within a peer research consultative and empowering space. Some of the researchers gained self-esteem and felt better about themselves. Some declared an increased awareness of the need they and the sex-worker they interviewed have for informal (social) and formal supports (workshops/training). These networks of support would be places where the stigma and shame of sex work are not compromising people's participation and engagement. And these networks would also benefit further participation in research.

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IN A NUTSHELL: VOICES OF STREET SEX WORKERS REGARDING THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The majority of the participants in this research were on the survival line with a combination of socio-economic factors affecting their wellbeing, even with selling sexual services. Some of the common factors affecting street sex workers include homelessness, poverty, abusive relationships, and more. The intersectionality of identities is relevant here: the participants in our research are not "just sex workers," they are "real people" who need the protection of the larger society and of the government through legislation and adequate service provision. *The additional impact and barriers imposed by the current legislation interacts significantly with the socio-economic needs and level of poverty and deprivation suffered by street sex workers.*

According to our data, if the legislation was different, our participants and many other sex workers in Ireland could perhaps achieve a better standard of living. *If the legal framework recognised the legitimacy of sex work* and worked towards protecting people in this type of occupation, sex workers would be able to access any social services without the fear of judgment, trauma triggering incidents, or stigmatisation by service providers.

Moreover, our data points to the need of service providers to *take mandatory training on the legal and socio-cultural aspects of recognizing sex work as a legitimate type of employment* and respecting one's agency to choose that occupation. Currently, service providers tend to treat sex workers as victims of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, and therefore, sex workers' interaction with service providers is affected by perceived discrimination based on their identity as sex workers. This prevents street sex workers from seeking external and professional help.

The current legal framework does not distinguish between voluntary and consensual sex work versus sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. This harms vulnerable people and prevents sex workers who might be in need of medical or economic help from accessing services and getting support, as some governmental agencies (e.g., HSE's Anti-Human Trafficking Team) portrays any sex workers as an immediate victim of an exploitative practice, which reinforces the stigma associated with sex work. The Department of Justice has denied Sex Workers Alliance Ireland (SWAI) from accessing emergency funding stating that the "Department's understanding of organised prostitution in Ireland is also informed by strong evidence from An Garda Síochána that this activity is inextricably linked with organised crime involved in human trafficking" (Moore, 2020). As can be seen from our data and wider research and policy analysis evidence worldwide, this legal framework which fails to distinguish between sex work - which is by definition voluntary and consensual - versus sexual exploitation and sex trafficking is inherently inaccurate (as street sex workers participating in this research declared the consensual and agentic choice of the occupation) and harmful (given that it prevents access to services) (Hoefinger et al., 2020; SEXHUM, 2020).

Our participants' struggles are real, and so are the struggles and problems of other sex workers in Ireland. That is why we reiterate that our data suggests that more supports, recognition and legitimacy needs to be given to sex work - more generally, and street sex work- more specifically.

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This is in contradiction with the existing laws and indicates that Ireland should refrain from introducing new laws that criminalise or penalise directly or in practice the consensual exchange of sexual services between adults for remuneration in Ireland.

Moreover, the legal and policy discourse should refrain from portraying all sex workers as victims of exploitative practices as this is simply untrue. Instead, legislators and policymakers should consult and include sex workers in the processes of drafting laws and policies that concern sex workers' wellbeing. The data presented in this research, given the participatory role of sex workers and the consultative role of sex worker support agencies, can be considered to express the voices of sex workers and street sex workers in Limerick and Dublin, between 2019-2022.

We further discuss specific "Policy Recommendations" based on the data presented here, in the respective section of this report.

STREET SEX WORKERS' NEEDS AND RESPECTIVE SUPPORTS

To sum up, the street sex workers participating in our research described serious (chronic) conditions of poverty and insecurity in their lives. The overall socio-economic conditions were captured across themes where participants described the need for income from sex work "just for survival." Nevertheless, it is important to note here that this is different from survival sex work, as our participants stated that they never exchange sex or sexual favours for any other type of compensation than monetary. This nuance further reiterates that street sex work is no different from what is understood as wage labour under capitalism (See Section 1).

At the same time, there were several psychological mechanisms that are at play and affect our participants' lives: on the one hand, support that participants needed to cope and make sense of their lives (resilience, motivation, confidence), but on the other hand, supports needed to break the vicious cycles of addiction, fear, and unhealthy relationships with people in their lives. Participants were also torn in seeing sex work as both "shameful" (something to be kept secret from others, something they do not want to be associated with) and "honourable and honest work" (because it is "work" and "service", rather than being a criminal activity such as begging or stealing).

Our data revealed a combination of socio-economic and psychological issues that combined to create a particularly damaging combination of stressors and traumas which have pushed and are pushing participants into a "no other choice" perception of their circumstances. Multi-generational trauma, abuse, and poverty were present in our data both in the past of the participants and in their foreseeable future. As noted earlier, the fact that two of the 25 people participating in our research have lost their lives during the course of the project is further proof to the high co-morbidity existing in street sex workers' lives.

Our analyses identified legal issues and concerns about the trustworthiness of the agents of the law. *Our data indicated a high level of misinformation about legal rights and very problematic relationships between sex workers and the Guards who are not experienced by the sex workers as*

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"protectors" (but on the contrary as powerful antagonistic and disruptive forces in their work lives). Sex-workers interactions with the "law" are not experienced positively. However, gaining insights into the legal situation and having clarity about what is legal, and what is not was perceived as empowering by all participants. The research space facilitated by peer sex-worker researchers was further identified as ideal for such dissemination of information about the legislation, as questions and answers, fears and doubts were addressed in a safe and non-judgemental space.

Recommendations for Supports

When it comes to understanding the lives of street sex workers, it was evident from the data that legal supports are needed: these were related to knowing their rights, seeking Garda protection, securing good working conditions within the law. Beyond the legal supports, there is ample evidence that our participants also need a range of other more comprehensive supports, to ensure a decent quality of life. *We summarise a few types of supports, based on the participants' expressed concerns as follows:*

Psychological supports are identified to help street sex workers to deal with the severe traumas experienced since childhood, as well as the ongoing trauma of highly insecure lifestyles, to support with drug addiction, restore their self-esteem and confidence, and build their capacity to have healthier relationships.

Social supports are recommended so that street sex workers can be supported in their work, for example, peer-led networks, or social spaces where sex workers can exchange information around safety, clients, or other relevant issues that they collectively confront. Such social supports could address being able to work together, protecting each other, or at least having a protective network or safe location. Additional social supports could also engage family members or partners, which are often described as both the cause and the motivation for them to "keep going".

Economic supports should address in particular the issue of homelessness, but also re-skilling, returning to education and exploring "other ways of making money," since there is a clear message of "work ethic" in our data. Sex workers are not "afraid" of working, but they are afraid to go to work in the current street contexts of danger and instability, where clients are chased away by the Garda, where they are not fully aware "why they are picked up" by the Garda, and where the stigma of sex work prevents them from accessing other supports or services needed, such as health.

Legal supports are needed in light of the general misinformation about the law among street sex workers. There was a clear concern that clients were "afraid" to be arrested, which endangers sex workers' chances to make money and survive from day to day. There was also clear concern about the illegality of working together, or having a place to work from, which would ensure more safety and offer protection in numbers and by a stable identifiable location. There were also requests for sexual health protection (e.g., that clients should be obliged by law to wear condoms).

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

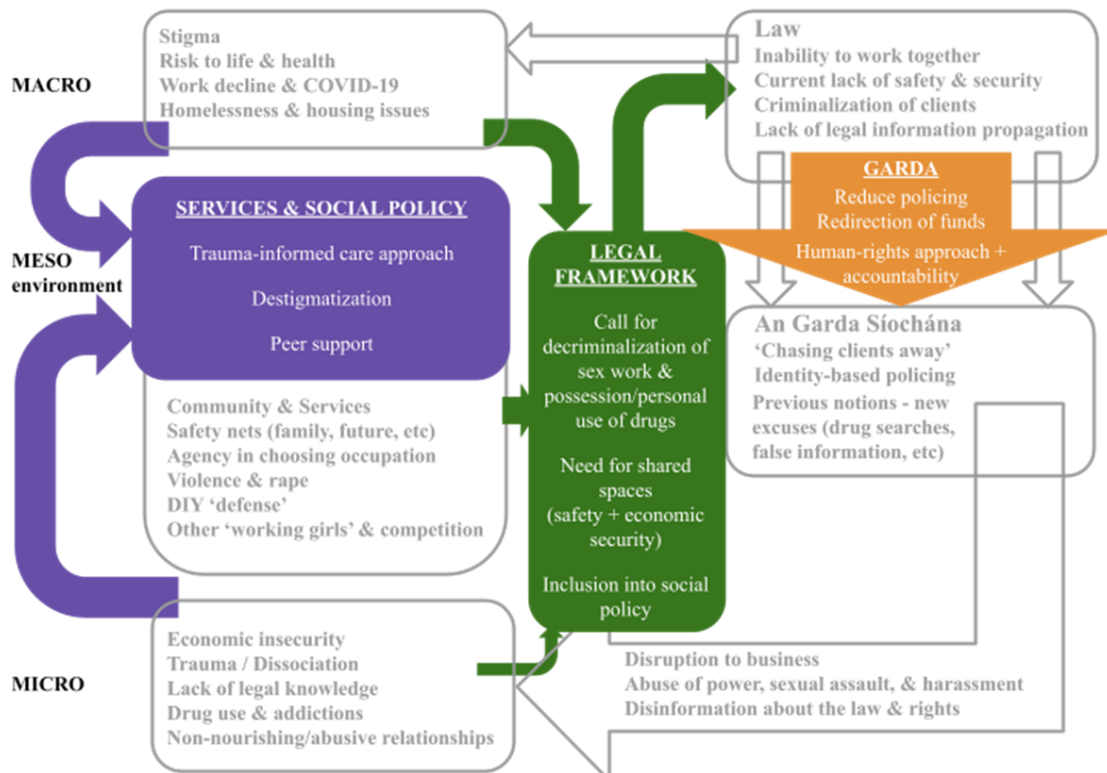
The overall analyses of the data collected for this project, the consultations with the peer researchers, the steering group, as well as the feedback gathered through the 2 conference and dissemination events in 2019 and 2021, support the following general recommendations. We present a Figure below that illustrates how the major themes coming out of the thematic analyses relate to the type of interventions necessary to improve the quality of life of street sex workers.

There are 3 main categories of interventions that connect the "Law" and the "An Garda Síochána" with the lives of sex workers at the macro, meso, and micro levels identified in our analyses.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE EFFECTS OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON THE MACRO, MESO AND MICRO-LEVEL FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF SEX WORKERS

The second set of relationships are illustrated in the green arrow in Figure 2, where we capture the impact of the legislation on 1. the macro-level stigma and wider socio-economic conditions that affect street sex workers; 2. the meso-level environment of street sex-work, which is dominated by lack of access to services or supports, severe lack of safety in everyday life, the presence of violence and lack of protection, and the lack of peer-networks to provide a safety net in the job; 3. the micro-level challenges that affect some individuals more than others, related to economic, psychological and interpersonal problems.

Figure 2. How the themes are connected to policy implications and recommendations for the well-being of sex workers in Ireland.



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In relation to the Legal framework that should facilitate more protection and promotion of street sex-workers overall quality of life, we recommend:

Decriminalisation of sex work

The government should fully decriminalise sex work, including the purchase of sexual services, and ensure that sex workers do not face discrimination in law or practice. This means that all existing laws that criminalise or penalise directly or in practice the consensual exchange of sexual services between adults for remuneration should be repealed, and the government should refrain from introducing any new laws of such nature in the future.

A clear distinction between sex work versus sexual exploitation and sex-trafficking

The full decriminalisation of sex work should be accompanied by further clarifications of the fundamental differences between sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, and sex work. These legal definitions should be emphasised in the law and the laws combating sex trafficking and sexual exploitation should be strengthened. *Laws that clearly distinguish between sex work and crimes like human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children help protect both sex workers and crime victims.*

This differentiation and change in the legal framework are crucial for the following reasons:

- It would help to *overcome the social stigma surrounding sex work.*
- It would facilitate and grant access to justice for victims of the sex trade as well as sex workers who face crime or violence against them.
- It would facilitate sex workers' ability to organise, advocate for their rights, or to work together to support and protect themselves.
- It would ensure that the officers do not directly or indirectly punishing sex workers.

Decriminalisation of possession and personal use of drugs

Our data suggests that sex workers would be better protected if Ireland adopted the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use. This is needed, given that some sex workers either actively use or are coping with past addictions, because of the vicious cycle of "needing to use in order to work", and "working to be able to continue using." *A Citizens' Assembly on drug use in Ireland should be held as soon as possible; any delays of this assembly will cost lives.*

Decriminalisation as proposed here would facilitate the establishment of trusted and effective specialised social and healthcare services to support people whose wellbeing is affected by issues of addiction. Two clarifications are needed:

1. The recommendation to decriminalise the possession and personal use of a limited amount of drugs would not affect the law that makes the possession of drugs for sale or supply a criminal offence. The matter of advising on how the laws on possession of drugs for sale or supply should be revised and/or reformed is out of the scope of this research.

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2. The voices of street sex workers from our project complement the substantial evidence on the need to decriminalise possession of drugs for personal use, collected by the working group led by the Department of Health and the Department of Justice and Equality established in 2017. This legal change would help sex workers but also support many vulnerable individuals and communities in Ireland.

Consultation and Inclusion of Sex Workers in Decision Making for Social Policy

Effective and sustainable policy inclusion of sex workers requires *the meaningful participation of sex workers in the development of laws and policies that directly affect their lives and safety*. This needs to be secured and ensured by the Department of Justice. There are two relevant points that our data speaks to regarding the situation of homelessness of the street sex-workers, as well as their need to ensure that work can take place in a secure environment.

Addressing the issue of homelessness

Since *homelessness and the housing crisis* across the Republic of Ireland have been documented as an important factor exacerbating most of the struggles that local minority groups and vulnerable populations face, the Department of Justice - as well as other government departments and agencies - should further press for timely, sustainable and fair solutions related to homelessness and lack of affordable adequate long term accommodation.

The Department of Justice and other governmental and publicly funded bodies, including the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Health Service Executive, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, etc. should work together as opposed to perpetuating the silo-mentality approach and demand reform from the Government of Ireland regarding *emergency accommodation* that would include making the homeless hostel beds free of charge and developing more subsidised housing.

Need for shared spaces to provide safety at work

The government should also strengthen services for sex workers and ensure that they have safe working conditions. Regulations and controls on sex workers and their activities need to be non-discriminatory and otherwise comply with international human rights law. For example, restrictions that prevent those engaged in sex work from organising collectively, or working in a safe environment (such as a shared house), are not legitimate restrictions. Hence, the Department of Justice should consider revising and/or fully reversing the current legislation regarding brothel keeping and other sections of the law that prevent sex workers from working together as a response to their need for safe working spaces.

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2. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LAW AND AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA

The first connection is the relationship between the "law" and the agents of the law, implementing the new legislation at street level (this is illustrated by the orange arrow in Figure 2). Specifically, we wish to emphasise that policing vulnerable and marginalised groups as a way to ensure their wellbeing does not work, according to our data. Full decriminalisation of sex work in Ireland should be the first step in helping ensure the Gardai are not directly or indirectly harming sex workers. We also recommend:

End to Policing of Sex Workers by An Garda Síochána

We call for an end to the policing of sex workers by An Garda Síochána. We demand an immediate end to all patrols targeting street sex workers. We recognise that there are already mechanisms in place to report misconduct and power abuse of Gardai, but recommend an independent investigation into why these structures fail to hold Gardai responsible and reach any satisfactory resolution for victims of Gardai wrongdoing. One way to protect the well-being of sex workers in Ireland is to reduce unnecessary contacts between sex workers and Gardai, and minimise policing of these communities.

Redirection of An Garda Síochána Funding to Supports for Vulnerable Communities

Moreover, we encourage the redirection of funding from An Garda Síochána to sex worker led organisations and services that work to ensure sex workers' well-being through ensuring they have equal access to psycho-social, socio-economic, healthcare and legal supports. This investment should further focus on vulnerable communities that are disproportionately represented in street sex work; so that this initiative paves the way to future strategies to address conditions of deprivation and poverty (direct funding, e.g. Welsh Basic income pilot for care leavers). Far from treating street sex workers with trauma-informed low-threshold care they deserve and need, the Gardai are abusing their position of authority. This raises the question of whether the training of the Gardai about the knowledge of the law and their duty to respect sex workers' dignity as human beings is effective. To our best knowledge, the training delivered to An Garda Síochána by Ruhama is fundamentally harmful to the well-being of sex workers and does not prove effective. We suggest that: 1) the Department of Justice, law enforcement, and criminal justice agencies and bodies engage with sex workers and sex-worker-led organisations on any decisions that have the potential of affecting sex workers' wellbeing; 2) a full independent investigation is carried out into why and how financial investments in Gardai training regarding sex workers is done and by whom.

Statement on Human Rights-Based Approach

The central purpose of any government agency should be the protection of the human rights of all. However, we do not exist in the ideal world and it is clear that a wholesale review of policing in Ireland is both desired and required. Sex workers are first and foremost people and the State should protect their rights, safety and well-being. This means that the State should address the

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barriers that sex workers routinely face in realising their rights and must refrain from any discriminatory treatment of sex workers or interference with their constitutional right not to be subjected to inhumane or degrading treatment. According to its mission statement, the Department of Justice works to advance community and national security, promote justice and equality, and safeguard human rights, to achieve a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland. The Department should consider further steps of ensuring making local communities safe and inclusive for sex workers.

We recommend that the Department of Justice works with sex workers and sex-worker-led organisations to ensure the legal framework that would speed up the implementation of the Human Rights-based approach in Ireland. One particular focus relevant for sex workers would be a revision of existing legislation protecting one's bodily integrity (Article 40.3 of the Irish Constitution) to ensure that one's bodily integrity rights are strengthened and free from state interference: 1) removing Article 40.3.3.; 2) removing any parts referring to the justification of such interference from the legal interpretations of Article 40 of the Irish Constitution (e.g. "You have a right not to have your body or person unjustifiably interfered with. A person can only interfere with your body with a valid justification and in a proportionate manner;" Citizen Information, 30 October 2020). We further encourage strengthening one's bodily/personal integrity and autonomy through ensuring that Irish law reflects human rights principals of bodily autonomy, and people in Ireland would be free to bring informed choices on how to govern what happens to their body without external influence or coercion. Bodily autonomy as the right to governance over one's own body would subsequently help ensure that fundamental human rights of other groups that are currently vulnerable to injustice inflicted by the state are properly protected. Specifically for women, nonbinary, trans and intersex people, as well as for people with disabilities, this means making decisions about one's physical self that translates into the freedom to take up space in the world.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING MORE INCLUSIVE SERVICES AND SOCIAL POLICIES

The third set of connections between the legislative framework and the quality of life of street sex-workers are depicted in Figure 2 in the purple arrows. These refer to a set of actions that would enhance the meso and micro level environments, by facilitating adequate services and social policy provision to protect sex workers. These include the normalisation of a trauma-informed care approach, a campaign to destigmatise the occupation of sex work, and the facilitation of peer-support networks, easily accessible and safe for street sex workers to use.

Trauma-informed care approach

Providers of Social Services should undergo training on the trauma-informed care approach of working with people with complex needs, such as street sex workers. Compliance should be monitored by the Department of Justice, and to ensure the success of this intervention, the

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Department of Justice should partner with the National Domestic Violence agency, the National Social Inclusion office, and the Irish Council for Social Housing, as well as any other relevant non-governmental organisations and create the standardised online and/or in-person training similar to the Children First mandatory training developed by Tusla.

Trauma-informed care training should educate employees working in social services about how trauma affects people, how to support people who have suffered trauma in the past (suffering from PTSD), or how to intervene in supporting people whose lives continue to present ongoing traumatic experiences (such as being homeless, experiencing violence, dealing with extreme poverty). This training would enhance the capacity of service providers to better support various vulnerable, stigmatised, and marginalised populations within Irish society, not only the street sex-workers.

This training should be accompanied by clear emphasis on the differences between sex work versus sexual exploitation and sex trafficking with the clarifications of the required response to the illegal and harmful exploitative practices. The current confusion of terms and conditions of sex-work (between the voluntary and the exploitation/trafficked situation), lead to an overall failure to respond adequately to either the vulnerable street sex worker (who needs protection in pursuing their job with some safety measures in place), or to the victims of exploitative practices that need to escape their situation altogether.

A trauma-informed care approach in provision of social services, combined with an increased accountability of An Garda Síochána in cases of misconduct, would result in more overall support and transparency of those supports for the survivors of exploitative practices and/or violence, beyond the sphere of sex-work.

Destigmatisation of Sex Work in the Policy and Public Discourse

To sustain long-term change, given the widespread stigma attached to sex work that persists and the structural marginalisation towards most sex workers, we formulate a general recommendation that the discourse around sex work is actively influenced towards destigmatisation of the occupation, humanisation of the workers, and the overall concern with the well-being of sex workers. In all areas of life, street sex workers identified stigma as a barrier to find safe spaces in their own families, publicly, or when needing to access particular services.

Sex workers identify their need to be treated and considered as "human beings making a living". Our research speaks to how the severity of this need for basic validation of their humanity, as expressed in one quote "we are actually good people". This raises a challenge to the whole society to change their understanding of sex work in the context of basic human right, rather than the historical moral judgement around "bad choices" or "moral contamination."

Sex workers in this project do not wish to be reduced to their work identity, which appeals for a more general campaign of fighting stigma and discrimination based on any identity categories. Thus a focus on principles of dignity and respect, equality, inclusion and diversity should result in

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more *socially inclusive policies*, targeting a range of issues: migration policies, programmes to combat stigma, guaranteed minimum income standards, educational and childcare supports and long-term stable funding for sex workers organisations.

Peer-Support Networks and Safety Nets

This recommendation is based on the voices of street sex workers as well as the peer researchers participating in this project for whom the research interviews provided a safe space for validation, information exchange and solidarity. This identified a major gap in the every day experience of street sex workers who feel isolated and alone, unprotected and chased into a "no other choice" mode of living. We recommend that the legislative framework is reviewed and other social policies revised to make provisions for the establishment of peer-support networks, peer-led community organisations and peer supports.

The most significant positive impact of this research was in the psychological empowerment it generated among sex workers. Participant street sex workers felt better about themselves after having had the chance to speak about their experiences, to identify themselves in another person who was equally struggling with similarly complex needs and life difficulties. The interviews provided a space where they could be proud and feel worthy because "being a working girl is not the worst thing in the world". Similarly, the peer researchers felt empowered because they realised the huge impact of their support on the interviewees. The peer researchers voiced the need for more time and more formalised supports in which they could support each other among sex workers. The formalization and financial supports for these peer networks and investment in sex workers' ability to train, coach and mentor each other, as well as increasing the capacity of participating in research or policy matters, are strongly recommended.

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Table 3. *Summary of Recommendations*

Recommendations concerning the Effects of the Legal Framework on the Macro, Meso and Micro Level Factors Affecting the Quality of Life of Sex Workers	
1	Call for decriminalisation of sex work
2	Call for decriminalisation of possession and personal use of drugs
3	Clear distinction between sex work and sexual exploitation or sex trafficking
4	Consultation and Inclusion of Sex Workers in Decision Making for Social Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addressing the issue of homelessness - Need for shared spaces to provide safety at work
Recommendations regarding the Relationships between the Law and An Garda Síochána	
5	End to Policing of Sex Workers by An Garda Síochána
6	Redirection of An Garda Síochána Funding to Supports for Vulnerable Communities
7	Statement on Human Rights-Based Approach
Recommendations regarding More Inclusive Services and Social Policies	
8	Trauma-informed care approach
9	Destigmatisation of Sex Work in the Policy and Public Discourse
10	Peer-Support Networks and Safety Nets

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ANNEX 1: Table 1. *Steering Committee Members*

Amy Healy	Postdoctorate Research Fellow, MIC, Sociology
Anca Minescu	Research Supervisor, University of Limerick
Ann Mason	Manager GOSHH (Gender, Orientation, Sexual Health, HIV)
Becky Leahy	Chrysalis Drug Project Sex Work Project, Support Worker
Billie Stoica	Research Coordinator – GOSHH (Gender, Orientation, Sexual Health, HIV)
Julie McKenna	NOVAS Ireland, Manager of Community Detox Team, Dual Diagnosis Team and NOVAS Respite Service
Kate McGrew	SWAI, Executive Director of Sex Workers Alliance of Ireland
Lynn Collopy	Ana Liffey Drugs Project Project Worker
Michelle Ryan	Research Team, University of Limerick
Miriam Ryan	Chrysalis Drug Project Sex Work Project Case Management/Outreach Worker
Neasa Ní Fheintheadha	Ruhama, Volunteer Manager
Dr Patrick O'Donnell	GP & Clinical Fellow in Social Inclusion, School of Medicine, University of Limerick
Rachel O Donoghue	Ana Liffey Drugs Project, Manager
Rory Keane	HSE (MWRDAF), Regional Drug Coordination Unit
Sinead Carey	Project manager at Novas Ireland; Head of Homeless Services, COPE Galway

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ANNEX 2: Supplementary Material for Data Analyses

Table 2. *Thematic analysis of the data: The six main themes with the corresponding sub-themes and how they relate to Figure 1 of this report*

THEMES (grey background) Subthemes in bold	Detailed coding of the Sub-themes	Files (# interviews out of 50)	References (# of quotes)
Macro level “Conditions and Context of street sex work”			
Stigma	Duality of existence, secrecy, and stigma	35	95
Risks to life and health	Risks and dangers - life and health	23	77
Work decline & COVID	Inconsistency of work and work decline (including clients' fears and COVID-19)	28	91
Homelessness & housing issues	Housing, hostels, and homelessness	18	56
Meso level “ Strategies of survival and safety nets”,			
Community and Services	1 Community, check-ins, and word of mouth	24	62
	2 Regulars (safety and financial security)	22	47
	5 Better information propagation services	9	15
	6 Peer support and Better awareness among the service providers	18	47
	4 Need for shared spaces and working together (‘Safety in numbers’)	27	65
Safety nets (family, motherhood, future)	4 Motherhood	28	86
	5 Strengths and resilience - loved ones, faith, providing for or helping others	25	68
	6 Caring families and relationships	17	36
	7 Future plans and aspirations	13	22
Agency in choosing an occupation	1 Agency in choosing occupation ('a legitimate job') - opposition to illegal activities or begging (not harming anyone but myself; it's a service; it's a hard job; bodily autonomy)	18	45
	4 Clients - feeling desired, violence, disgust towards clients	26	60
Violence and rape	3 Violence and rape	18	55
DIY ‘defense’	3 ‘Gut feeling’ or luck	7	12

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Table 2 [continues]. *Thematic analysis of the data: The six main themes with the corresponding sub-themes*

	7 DIY 'self-defense' - carrying various objects to feel safer	7	9
Other 'working girls' and competition	5 Other working girls - support, competition, or violence	19	66
Micro-level "Individual struggles with the nature of sex work"			
Economic insecurity	1 Main motivation - survival. Fast money but hard money, money for surviving, or addiction	35	140
Trauma/Dissociation	2 Dissociation, 'getting used to pain,' shame, disgust	24	60
Non-nourishing/abusive relationships	4 Non-nourishing or abusive relationships - children, parents, and partners	14	48
	5 Troubles of loved ones	9	17
Drug Use and Addictions	1 Drug use	33	133
AN GARDA SIOCHANA			
"Chasing clients away"	2 Guards as antagonists or indifferent	17	26
Previous notions- new excuses	4 Decent or neutral officers (recent change...)	11	18
Identity-based policing	5 Female officers - misuse of power and moral judgment	4	11
Disruption to business	1 Gardai as a disruptive agent - two-fold loss (waste of resources and threat to business)	18	29
Abuse	3 Abuse of power, sexual assault, and harassment	13	31
Disinformation	5 Disinformation about the law - lack of information propagation and Gardai manipulations and misuse of law	9	18
LAW			
Inability to work together	6 Shared spaces - an ideal scenario that the law turned into a nightmare	7	13
Current lack of safety and security	4 Lack of safety. Safety and security - diametrically opposed effects and feelings	12	22
Criminalisation of clients	3 Call for decriminalisation	14	22
Lack of legal information propagation	2 Knowing your rights gives confidence	11	32

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Figure 3. Frequency of the six themes - Macro/Meso/Micro level forces, Law, and An Garda Síochána, - with which they appeared over the 50 interviews with our participants.

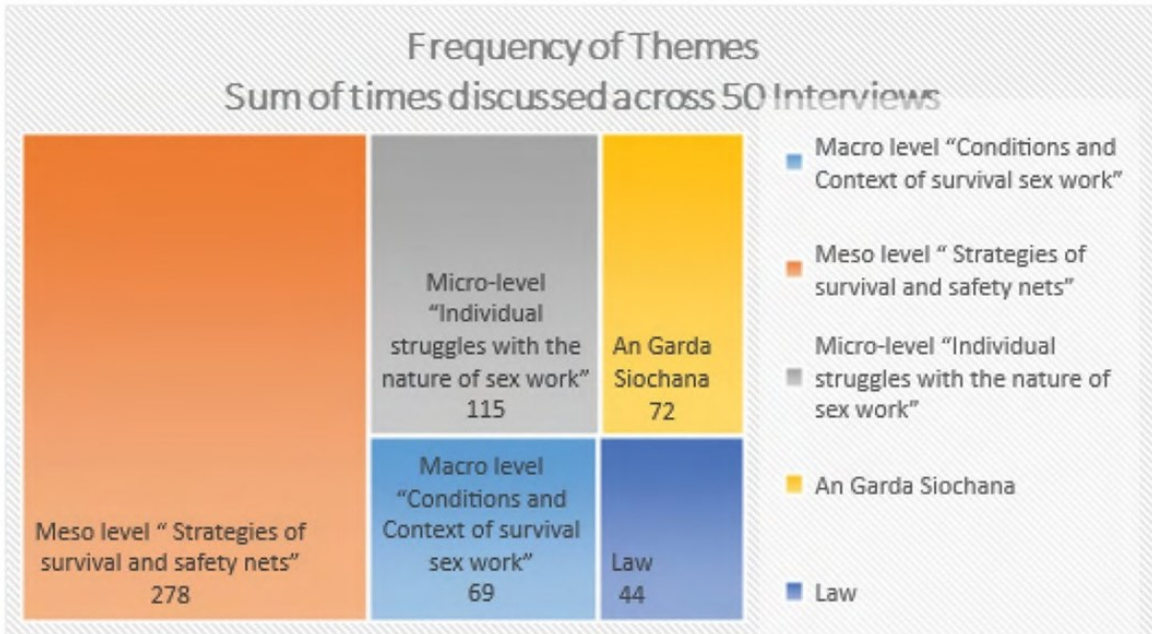
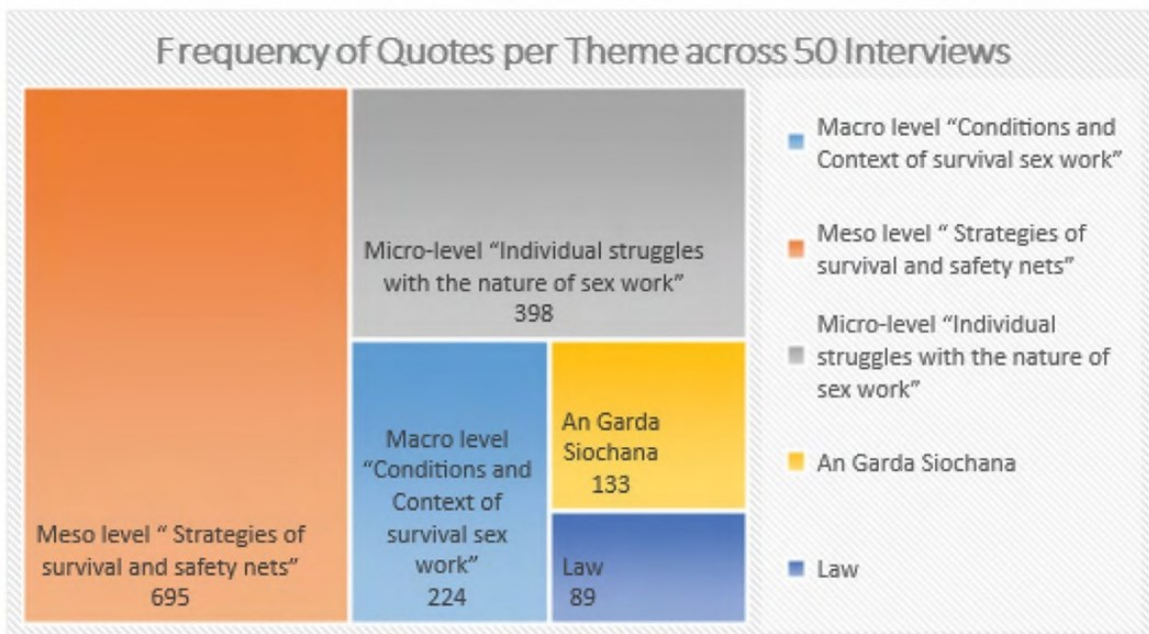


Figure 4. Frequency of the subthemes from the corresponding six main themes - Macro/Meso/Micro level forces, Law, and An Garda Síochána, - with which they appeared over the 50 interviews with our participants.



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ANNEX 3: Dissemination and Training Events

Conference Day Schedule 10 December 2019



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH



Training and Research Conference

“Working it”

Exploring ways to work with people who sell or exchange sex
10th December 2019

University of Limerick - [The Pavillion](#), UL, Limerick

[Parking](#) is available.

Time	Sessions	Speakers
10.15 – 10.30	Registration & Welcome	
10.30- 10:50	Introduction to “Working it”	Anca Minescu, UL
10.50-11.20	The Law on Sex Work in Ireland Today	Adeline Berry, SWAI
11.20 - 11.35	Break	
11.35-11.50	Trauma from a Psychological Perspective - UL Psychology	Dr. Patrick Ryan, UL
11.50-12.20	Harm Reduction with Sex Workers	Miriam Ryan, Chrysalis Community Drugs Project
12.20-12.40	Case Management Systems	Nease Ní Fheinneadhá, Ruhama
12.40-13.00	Male Sex Workers	Diego Caixeta, HIV Ireland
13.00 - 13.45	Lunch	
13.45 - 14.05	Male Sex Workers	Sinead Carey & Julie McKenna, Novas

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<p>14.05 - 15.20 Trauma Informed Practice Workshop</p>	<p>This workshop will explore trauma and trauma informed care, and the implications of this knowledge for undertaking research with vulnerable or discriminated against communities.</p> <p>In this workshop, participants will collaboratively develop trauma-informed care guidelines for undertaking research with sex workers and other vulnerable or discriminated against communities.</p>	<p>Aoife Dermody, Quality Matters</p> <p>Priority will be given to those who are involved in 'Working It' but there will be space for up to 25 people in the workshop.</p>
<p>14.05 – 15.20 Working With Sex Workers Workshop</p>	<p>This workshop will explore working with sex workers from the point of view of practice and best practice.</p> <p>In this workshop. Participants will collaboratively explore actual opportunities within their current workplace to engage in trauma informed, low threshold, harm reduction, work with sex workers.</p> <p>We will also be exploring values and assumptions that inform how we work with sex workers.</p>	<p>Susann Huschke, UL and Billie Stoica, GOSHH</p>
<p>15.20 - 15.30</p>	<p>Summary & Next Steps</p>	<p>Billie Stoica, GOSHH & Anca Minescu, UL</p>

Contributors

CHRYSALIS <https://chrysalissexworkproject.ie/> Stay Safe Work Wise
GOSHH <https://goshh.ie/> Gender, Orientation, Sexual Health, HIV
NOVAS <https://www.novas.ie/> Social inclusion through Housing, Health, Recovery
 Psychology, UL <https://www.ul.ie/psychology/>
Quality Matters <http://qualitymatters.ie/about-us/> Supporting Improvement in Social Services
RUHAMA <https://www.ruhama.ie/> Supporting Women Affected by Prostitution
SWAI <http://sexworkersallianceireland.org/who-we-are/> Sex Workers Alliance Ireland



APPENDIX

Short Project Description: "Working it" - Sex Workers' Experiences

How Sex Workers understand and experience the 2017 Change in Legislation around Sex Work (GOSHH-Psychology Collaboration funded by the Dormant Accounts Scheme, Anti-Trafficking, 2018)

This research project, "Working It", aims to discover street workers' knowledge and experience of the current legislation around sex work in Ireland (since the 2017 Criminal Law Act). We are interested in how sex workers organise their work within this legal context, using (or not) their social networks and psychological resilience skills. There will be a comparative aspect to this study in terms of location, by recruiting participants from Limerick and Dublin. We also compare participants' experiences before and after a sex-worker-led intervention where they will find out about their rights and choices, resulting from the new legislation.

The study is important because until now, street workers' voices have largely been silent in the national discussion around legislative changes governing sex work. It is crucial to understand how sex workers experience the law, and how the law impacts on their lives, while considering their voices, their interpretations and their own positioning in society, from a psychological perspective. Given that there is an upcoming legislative review, we are hoping the results of this research will feed into the review process. In addition to the potential legislative impact, our research aims to develop a trauma-informed, low-threshold, psychological best practice toolkit to guide future research conducted with sex workers.

This study is a partnership between GOSHH (Gender, Orientation, Sexual Health, HIV) and Psychology, at University of Limerick. The project takes place between September 2019 and May 2020, with funding from the Dormant Accounts funds of the Anti Human Trafficking Unit in the Department of Justice, Ireland.

The research team is led by Anca Minescu and Billie Stoica. Research assistants: Tainara Paulon and Farah Mehnaz (Global-MINDS students) Arpad Volgyesi (Erasmus Visiting Fellow from ELTE University, Budapest) Michelle Ryan (Research Fellow, LIT)

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Conference Report compiled by Tainara Paulon and Billie Stoica

CONFERENCE REPORT

"Working It" Training and Research Day Date: December 10th 2019

Location: The Pavillion - University of Limerick

Report on the Training and Research Conference 'Working It', Prepared by Tainara Paulon

Number of participants in attendance: 54 (Number registered: 71)

Introduction to Working It Project - Dr. Anca Minescu - Psychology Department UL

The conference started with a brief introduction on the project. Dr. Minescu introduced the aims of the research: to understand the impact of the new law on the daily work and life of sex workers. Work to date includes a literature review on "How to do Research with Complex Needs Population", and a literature review on the "Psychological Profile of Street Sex Workers". Dr. Minescu highlighted how the field of psychology tends to patronise and pathologise sex workers, whilst focusing on the co-morbidities presented in different bodies of research (mental illness, drug addiction, homelessness, lack of access to health and social care etc).

Dr. Minescu introduced the founding principles of the partnership for the current project: to bring a neutral and more realistic understanding of the experiences of the participants- street sex workers, by using psychological methods and knowledge.

The Current Irish Legislation Governing Sex Work- Adeline Berry Sex Workers Alliance Ireland (SWAI)

Adeline Berry discussed the impact of the 2017 Criminal Law on the work and daily life of sex workers. The new law criminalises buyers of sex work but not outdoor workers. In reality, sex workers still face criminality and illegality in other areas of sex work.

Sex Workers are not allowed to work in pairs, which creates unsafe working conditions. Several 'abolitionist' groups want to end sex work, but they are not asking the sex workers what they want or what they need. Sex Worker voices are being left out of the current legal and social discourse. Sex workers need safety in their working conditions, as they have to negotiate a very precarious socioeconomic position, in addition to coping with a range of personal circumstances, including very traumatic experiences.

There are multiple realities that impact sex workers' lives; immigration, lack of access to several services, housing, better working conditions.

Trauma and Psychological Perspective - UL Psychology - Dr. Patrick Ryan

Dr. Ryan discussed the traumatic impact and ways to manage it, from a clinical psychological perspective. One interesting finding is that a smaller percentage of people have long-term trauma after going through a traumatic event, compared to those who experience short-term trauma. In the case of long-term trauma, the person remains hyper-alert and identifies their surroundings as dangerous/threatening, which makes participating in "normal life" very difficult and demanding.

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Their brain and body keep making them believe they are in the moment of the traumatic episode they had experienced in the past.

Dr. Ryan led the conference audience into grounding exercises, illustrating how important it is to know how to manage one's responses. Dr. Ryan emphasised the physical embodied aspects of responding to trauma and fear.

The next 3 presentations addressed the type of services and responses, range of supports, and ways of accessing those supports for sex-workers, based in 3 organisations:

- Harm Reduction with Sex Workers - Miriam Ryan CHRYSALIS Community Drugs Sex Work Project
- Case Management Systems - Nease Ni Fheinneadha RUHAMA
- Male Sex Workers - Diego Caixeta HIV Ireland

WORKSHOPS

Trauma-Informed Practice and Research was delivered by Aoife Dermody, from QUALITY MATTERS

This workshop was focused on understanding trauma and how to do research with populations affected by it, how to work and understand the different ways trauma can present itself, what kinds of situations, places, actions can trigger trauma responses, being them hypo or hyper, an after effect of fly, freeze and fight. She introduced different scenarios to give participants examples of how trauma can be triggered in many ways and how various responses they can bring up. How to be prepared for it once you're conducting research/interviews with complex needs population.

Working with Sex Workers was delivered by Billie Stoica Gender, Orientation, Sexual Health, HIV (GOSHH) & Susan Huschke UL

This workshop was a practical introduction to thinking about how frontline staff can create a sex worker-friendly environment in work contexts. It allowed an opportunity for participants to reflect on the information they had received and relate that to their knowledge of their agencies, clients, and service users. The participant sex workers and associations representing them spoke about what sex workers need from agencies. Many different topics of potential discussion were introduced as well as ways to approach people around the subject of sex work. Participants discussed concerns they may have about offending their service users, as well as assumptions made around stigma and sex or people's reasons for sex work. This discussion also highlighted staff's personal perception of sex work so they could have a more open approach to these discussions with clients and service users in the future.

Participant Feedback after attending "Working It Training and Research Day", 10 December 2019,
Prepared by Billie Stoica

Background:

71 people signed up for the day. 49 of these signed in. A further 5 people joined on the day. Altogether 54 people attended. 23 of these completed their feedback forms.

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Results:

One of the goals of the day was to provide training to both researchers and practitioners about sex work. The first question we asked was about usefulness.

1) Personally for me this day was:

1) very useful; 2) mostly useful; 3) partly useful; 4) not useful

Results from 24 answers showed a score of 1.3 which is much higher than our quality goal of 2. This means that the participants that completed the feedback form thought the day was either very useful or mostly useful.

One of the goals of the day was to foster and broaden people's collaborative experience with regards to sex work. We aimed to have a good mix of participants from different areas, backgrounds, and disciplines. The second question we asked was about that mix.

2) I thought the mix of the participants was:

1) very useful; 2) mostly useful; 3) partly useful; 4) not useful

Results from 24 answers showed a score of 1.4 which was higher than our quality goal of 2. This means that the participants that completed the feedback form thought the mix of participants was either very useful or mostly useful.

Comments included:

- Interesting mix of research and practitioners, fantastic variety
- Mix was great, informative, heartbreaking, and inspiring
- Mix of agencies and sex workers attending

One of the goals of the day was to ensure an interactive and equal space. The third question we asked was about the opportunity to speak.

3) I had sufficient opportunity to speak during the day:

1) definitely; 2) rather yes; 3) rather no; 4) no

Results from 23 answers showed a score of 1.5 which was higher than our quality goal of 2. This means that the participants that completed the feedback form felt they had enough opportunity to speak.

However, one person chose not to answer that particular question and 2 others marked rather no. This was our lowest score. In the future, our quality would benefit from shorter presentations and more opportunities to ask questions and engage more interactive workshops, or more regulatory activities.

One of the goals of the day was to find a suitable venue. The fourth question we asked was about participant's experience of the venue.

4) I am .. with the venue:

1) very satisfied; 2) mostly satisfied; 3) partly satisfied; 4) not satisfied

Results from 24 answers showed a score of 1.5 which was higher than our quality goal of 2. This means that the participants that completed the feedback form were generally satisfied with the venue. 2 people marked partly satisfied.

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In the comment boxes, the venue was mentioned. It was suggested that the venue was too far from bus routes to be accessible without a car. We had thought about this, but given the excess of numbers we had subscribing to the day, we were left with few options this close to Christmas to find a city centre alternative. In the future, it would benefit us to take into account the apparent hunger for discussions of this kind and chose a bigger venue, which is central, from the outset.

We also had comments about the food. Participants were very satisfied with the food. One person even went so far as to draw an extra box and label it excellent, and give it a tick! Someone else commented that lunch was wonderful. A further comment suggested the coffee was too weak.

One of the goals of the day was to bring together a wide variety of expertise to explore knowledge from many angles. Our fifth question was in relation to the level of expertise from the speakers.

5) The length of the workshop was

1) ideal; 2) ok; 3) too short 4) too long

Results from 23 answers showed a score of 1.4 which was higher than our quality goal of 2. Two people marked the workshop as too short and one person put N/A because they did not have the opportunity to do the workshop as they had to leave. Time management and workshop length were mentioned in comments:

- Time management, (x3)
- The trauma-informed workshop was so good, it would have been great to have the whole time available.
- It could easily have been a two-day training. (x2)

6) The expertise of the speakers was:

1) very good; 2) good; 3) moderate; 4) sufficient 5) inadequate (assessed on a sliding scale).

Results from 24 answers showed a quality score of 97%. This surpasses our quality target of 85% by 12%. Comments included:

- Very informative, speakers were very insightful
- The experience and views of people who work with/for sex workers
- Good spread of knowledge, very interesting speakers.

In particular, the sharing of personal experiences by speakers was deemed valuable:

- The learning was incredible. Sharing people's experience was humbling. Thank you
- Learning about the other services available. Hearing first-hand accounts
- Addy's piece on the challenges faced directly by sex workers.
- Hearing from Adeline and front-line workers.

One of the goals of the day was that at the end of the day people had had an opportunity to engage in the conversation about sex worker and sex workers needs in a way that they could learn from and pass onto others. This included information about harm reduction work, trauma informed practice and the issues facing sex workers in Ireland today. The last sliding scale question we asked was about the day as a whole.

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7) Overall I think the day was:

1) very good; 2) good; 3) moderate; 4) sufficient; 5) inadequate (assessed on a sliding scale).

Results from 24 answers showed a quality score of 98%. This surpasses our quality target of 85% by 13%.

In particular, people enjoyed the trauma-informed aspects of the conference, including Patrick Ryan and Aoife Dermody:

- The talk about trauma
- Trauma-Informed workshops
- The trauma piece
- Listening to Dr. Patrick speak found great ways to sit with a person
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Patrick Ryan
- Trauma-Informed Framework

People also pointed out the way we discussed issues and worked together was of benefit to them:

- Interaction between people
- The down to earth approach regarding research and limitations
- Collaboration / shared experience
- Lived experience
- Grounded in reality

People took care to point out their most valuable learning which differed greatly:

- Stigma
- General info on sex workers and the law
- Male sex workers
- Listening to the opinion of others and views of SWAI and sex workers
- Spreading awareness - having / starting the conversation
- Educate people about sex work. Having the conversation openly about sex work. It was amazing!
- Learning about other agencies like Chrysalis, HIV Ireland, and Ruhama

Issues we had included:

- Time management
- Not long enough for workshops
- Not enough opportunity to do workshops
- Venue too hard to get to without a car
- Speakers reading from notes (not a criticism)
- More regulatory activities - it's an emotional learning topic (eg movement, singing, play, breathing)
- Not enough sex worker voices. This was mentioned twice. It is unknown whether these comments were made by sex workers or other participants. We had 13 of 65 people registered, known to the conference organisers as sex workers. 3 people present were out

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and active members of SWAI. Not all Sex Workers present identified themselves as sex workers to the rest of the participants.

If we were to do this again we can improve quality by:

- Choosing a bigger more central venue earlier in the process.
- Having a dedicated timekeeper and leaving spaces in the schedule for discussion
- Having more opportunity to speak
- Having more interactive presentations
- Work with SWAI to see if it is possible to increase sex worker voices during the day
- Feedback rates on the day were low, consciously requesting feedback might be more effective

Two people also noted that they would like more practical advice on how to start conversations with sex workers and how to do harm reduction work with sex workers. It is possible that this could be considered as both training, and a resource, to be developed.

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Conference Day Schedule 10 December 2021

‘Working It’ Report Launch

“I Must Be Some Person”

Findings and Recommendations from the Peer Participative Research Project with Street Sex Workers in Limerick and Dublin, Ireland.

10th December 2021

Over zoom - registration through Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/working-it-report-launch-i-must-be-some-person-tickets-223186054497#>

Time	Sessions	Speakers
10.00-10.15	Introduction to the day	Dr. Anca Minescu
10.15-10.30	The Process: How we conducted the research?	Billie Stoica
10.30-11.00	Panel discussion facilitated by Billie Stoica	Tainara Paulon, Trish Leahy, Nichola Clifford
11.00-11.15	The Findings: What the street sex workers in Limerick and Dublin said?	Anastasiia Zubreva
11.15-11.45	Panel Discussion facilitated by Anastasiia Zubareva	Kate McGrew, Prof. Teela Sanders, Professor Graham Ellison
11.45-12.00	BREAK	
12.00-12.15	The Recommendations: What we should do to protect and increase the well-being of sex workers?	Dr. Anca Minescu
12.15-12.45	Panel Discussion facilitated by Anca Minescu	Luca Stevenson, Dr. Amy E Healy, Linda Kavanagh, Dr. Patrick O'Donnell
12.45-1.00	Summary & Next Steps	

“This event presents *how* we conducted the research, *what* the street sex-workers had to say about the 2017 legislation and the way they organise their work, and *why* protecting the well-being of sex-workers should be accompanied by specific adaptations of the legislation, service provision and societal attitudes towards sex-work (implications and recommendations for various stakeholders).

Experts from academia and the field, from sex-worker organisations, and supporters are invited to join the research team on the day. The formal report will be published in January 2022.

We dedicate this event and the final report to all of the sex workers who participated in this journey with us, and, especially, the ones we lost along the way. You are loved and missed.

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Contributors:

Dr. Anca Minescu is a lecturer in social and political psychology, at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Her expertise is in intergroup relationships, prejudice and discrimination, cultural diversity and intercultural competence. She works in international networks and consortia, and is the European coordinator of the Erasmus Mundus Global-MINDS Master in Psychology of Global Mobility, Inclusion and Diversity in Societies. In European and Irish funded projects, she works with interventions to decrease discrimination, support the social inclusion of refugees and migrants, develop intercultural competencies. She supports marginalized and stigmatized groups through collaborative research with stakeholders, such as the project "Working It" with street sex-workers, co-designed and co-delivered with GOSHH - Gender Orientation Sexual Health HIV, Limerick.

Billie Stoica is a human rights and community activist for 30 years. Experienced in working with issues of gender and orientation, sexual health, HIV, Hepatitis C, substance use, homelessness and sex work. Billie is currently working with Limerick City Community Development Project as the team leader of Drugs Education Prevention Strategy in Limerick City. Billie was a member of the Working It design, data collection, and analysis teams.

Anastasiia Zubareva is a social psychologist whose research interests include intergroup dynamics, diversity, social exclusion and inclusion, prosocial behaviour, radicalization, and sustainable development. She earned her BA in Sociology from New York University Abu Dhabi and her MSc in Social Psychology from the University of Limerick, where she works as a research assistant at the Department of Psychology. In her research, she partners with various NGOs assisting ethnic minorities' integration and marginalized groups' rights.

Tainara Paulon is a Brazilian psychologist who has been advocating for survivors of gender based violence and human trafficking since 2010. She likes to create bridges between community action and academia through participatory methodologies in order to empower vulnerable women. She has an Expert Diploma in Forensic Psychology from University of Seville, a Masters in Psychology of Global Mobility, Inclusion and Diversity from University of Limerick, and is part of the Center of Community Research and Action at University of Seville (CESPYD). Tainara was a member of the Working It research design team.

Trish Leahy is a human rights and community activist for 17 years. Trish was the Lead Researcher in Limerick and part of the Working It design, data collection, and analysis teams. Trish was a peer researcher in the IHREC report 'A Human Rights perspective on the Lived Experiences of Homeless People in Limerick'. Trish co-designs and facilitates training for service agencies in best practice around street sex work.

Nichola Clifford is a human rights and community activist for 18 years. A passionate advocate for disability rights, Nichola volunteered with Recovery through Arts and Drama in Dublin. Nichola was a member of the Dublin based Working it Research Team and was a member of the design, data collection, and analysis research teams. After completing an access program with Trinity College, Nichola is currently studying on an applied social studies degree in TU Dublin.

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Kate McGrew is a human rights and community activist for over 25 years. Kate is a sex worker, performing artist and activist who was Director of Sex Workers Alliance Ireland for 6 years. She currently sits on the board as Co-Convener for the European Sex Workers Alliance. Kate was a member of the Dublin based Working it research team and was a member of the research design, data collection, and analysis teams.

Professor Teela Sanders is a Professor of Criminology at the University of Leicester. She is a leading international scholar in research on the intersections between gender, regulation, governance and crime, specifically in the sex industry. She has received a Leverhulme Research Fellowship for 2019-2021. She is currently working on an ESRC international project: 'Understanding sexual violence in sex working populations: Law, legal consciousness and practice in four countries'. Teela is a long standing member of the NPCC Sex Work and Policing group in the UK.

Professor Graham Ellison is Professor of Criminology in the School of Law, Queen's University Belfast. He has conducted a number of studies into sex work including a four-city comparative study of commercial sex in Belfast, Manchester, Prague and Berlin with Professor Ron Weitzer in 2014/ 2014. More recently, he was the Principal Investigator in the Northern Ireland Department of Justice funded study into the operation of sex purchase legislation in Northern Ireland since its implementation in 2015. Currently he is a co-investigator on an ESRC funded study to better understand violence experienced by sex workers in Northern Ireland, GB, Nevada (US) and New Zealand.

Luca Stevenson is a sex worker and Operations Officer of ESWA, the European Sex Workers Rights Alliance, a network of more than 100 organisations working with or led by sex workers in Europe and Central Asia. Luca has worked extensively across Europe with sex workers from various backgrounds including migrant and LGBT sex workers. He is also currently Responsable de Mission for 'Jasmine', a project of Medecins du Monde France which aims to address and reduce violence against sex workers.

Dr. Amy E. Healy is a comparative, quantitative sociologist at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Her research focuses mainly on social exclusion, and she has published across an array of related topics including work precarity, exploitation / human trafficking, and food poverty.

Linda Kavanagh is a human rights and community activist for 10 years. Linda manages the communications for SWAI as well as the day-to-day admin tasks for the organisation. Linda was a board member and co-convenor for the Abortion Rights Campaign. Her aim is to change the conversation around sex work in Ireland. Linda was a member of the Working It research design, data collection, and analysis teams.

Dr. Patrick O'Donnell is a GP in Limerick city and a teacher and researcher at the University of Limerick School of Medicine. Patrick's main research interests are social exclusion, health equity and the provision of healthcare to people from marginalised groups. He is involved in teaching about the healthcare needs of people from marginalised groups to students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels around the country.

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ANNEX 4: Supplementary Materials for Literature Reviews, prepared by Diana Lizarazo, Aigerim Balkhashbayeva, and Orla Regan

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ANNEX 5: Supplementary Materials Regarding Peer-Participatory Research, prepared by Farah Mehnaz

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