

Research Paper

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Resettlement experiences of street sex-working women on release from prison

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1 Introduction

Street sex-working¹ women in the United Kingdom are twelve times more likely to be murdered than other women of the same age (Salfati 2009). This group of women face extreme and targeted violence towards them during the course of their sex working (Incardi & Surratt 2001, Jeal & Salisbury 2004, Monto 2004, Penfold et al 2004, Phoenix 2007, Surratt et al 2004 and UKNSWP 2008). The vast majority have also been subject to extensive experiences of violence and abuse throughout their childhood and adult lives (Choi 2009, Covington 2000, Farley 2004, Monto 1998 and Surratt et al 2004). This trauma is compounded by poor mental health, periods of homelessness and high levels of substance misuse (Atkins 2010, Gilchrist et al 2015, Home Office 2006, Jeal & Salisbury 2004 and Pauw & Brener 2001). Street sex workers occupy a marginalised position within society and are all too often seen as to blame for their circumstances and the attacks perpetrated against them (Hester & Westmarland 2004, Jeal & Salisbury 2004, Kinnell 2008, Sanders & Campbell 2007 and UKNSWP 2008). Street sex-working women frequently come into contact with the criminal justice system and many have histories of repeated imprisonment, often as a result of acquisitive crimes committed to fund their addictions (Covington 2000, Gilchrist et al 2015 and Stevens et al 2007).

Since 2010 I have been employed as a Criminal Justice Caseworker at One25, a Bristol-based charity reaching out to *“women trapped in, or vulnerable to, street sex work”* (One25 2017). Both in prison and in the community, I provide intensive, one-to-one support to street sex-working women in the criminal justice system. During the period of my employment I have witnessed women leave prison and return to street sex work the same day. I have visited women in prison who have told me that they are afraid of being released and of returning to the dangers awaiting them in the community. In court, I have heard magistrates and judges recalling street sex-working women to prison for ‘their own safety’ and to receive ‘help’. Recently, a young woman I had supported for several years took her own life in prison, despite having a supportive family and plans in place to go into rehab after release.

¹ I have chosen to use the term ‘sex worker’ given the stigma and negative connotations that are associated with the label ‘prostitute’ (Harding and Hamilton 2008, Cusick et al 2003, Campbell and O’Neill 2006).

My casework knowledge has shown me that leaving prison is clearly a challenging process for women. For street sex-working women in particular, these challenges are exacerbated by the complexity of their needs. I have chosen as the focus of my research project the 'Resettlement Experiences of Street Sex Working Women on Release from Prison'. Through this qualitative study I explore the lived experiences of street sex-working women,² alongside the views of professionals from community-based projects who have supported this group in the transition from custody to the community. In doing so, I ask the following questions: 'What are the resettlement needs of street sex-working women on release from prison?' and 'What factors are helpful to the resettlement process and what are any areas for development?' Not only does my study consider the challenges facing women on the day they leave prison, but it also considers the wider resettlement process: what preparation and planning takes place prior to release and the experiences and difficulties encountered by women once they have returned to life in the community. My hope is that the findings and recommendations that emerge from my research will improve the provision of resettlement support for this service user group. Due to the stigma and judgements imposed upon them by a society that would prefer them to remain hidden and out of sight, street sex-working women are silenced (Farley 2004 and Kinnell 2008). By listening to the experiences of women and through telling their stories, I hope I enable their voices to be heard (Carlen & Worrall 2004).

² Throughout this written report I will also refer to the street sex-working women who participated in my research project using the terms 'service user participants' and 'service users'. This relates to the support they receive from the sex work project in their area and is way of distinguishing them from 'practitioner' or 'professional' participants.

2 Literature review

This literature review examines the relevant theory and research underpinning my study into the resettlement experiences of street sex-working women on release from prison. In doing so, it explores the multiple and complex needs of women in the criminal justice system, their pathways into offending and the impact of imprisonment on their lives. Relevant legal and policy frameworks are considered, with attention paid to current political climates and the recent implementation of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda. I examine the concept of 'resettlement' and transitions from custody into the community, while identifying the services deemed vital in supporting this process. I also consider the needs and circumstances of street sex-working women as a specific group and highlight the particular vulnerabilities and risks they face. Issues of diversity are seldom addressed within the relevant UK based literature. Where reference has been made to demographics or social divisions (for example: age, ethnicity or employment status), interpretation is rarely provided as to the significance or impact that such divisions may have for individuals and their experiences. Consideration of issues related to sexuality and disability are also notably absent. The disadvantage faced by minority groups, and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women in particular, was highlighted in a Home Office commissioned review of 'Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System' in 2007 (Corston). Poverty and social exclusion were heightened among BME women, who were also identified as being more likely to be incarcerated and *"their disadvantages continue in the criminal justice system where they are further marginalised"* (Corston 2007 p27).

2.1 The Impact of Prison and the Criminal Justice System on Women

a) Background

The ever-increasing incarceration of vulnerable women with multiple and complex needs *"for minor, non-violent offences"* (Corston 2007 pi) has attracted widespread concern within contemporary criminal justice literature (Carlen & Worrall 2004, Corston 2007, Covington 2002, Player 2005 and Trebilcock & Dockley 2015). Women's involvement in the criminal justice system can more commonly be characterised *"by issues of survival (of abuse and poverty) and substance abuse"* (Covington 2002 p4). This involvement has been linked to women's life histories *"marked*

by family dislocation and loss, extreme violence, illness, injury and addiction" (O'Brian 2006 p104) and the complexities of the issues they face. It has been well-documented that significant numbers of women in prison have experienced high levels of self-harm, poverty, childhood abuse, homelessness, time in local authority care, poor physical and mental health and low levels of educational achievement (Corston 2007, Covington 1998, Frazer 2016, Doherty et al 2014, Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007, Gelsthorpe & Wright 2015, Penal Reform International 2013 and Sheen 2002). For many, backgrounds of *"severe social exclusion"* (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007 p200) are compounded by imprisonment, as time spent in custody only serves to further disadvantage *"an already vulnerable population"* and reinforce *"social structural problems and societal inequalities"* (Van Ginneken 2015 p353). Thus, given *"that most women in prison have grown up in multiple disadvantaged environments"*, they find themselves having *"spent much of their lives struggling to live within the law"* (Carlen & Worrall 2004 p42).

Women often occupy marginalised positions within society, their socio-economic dependence on men reinforced by patriarchal norms and repressive policy agendas (such as the Welfare State's endeavour to confine women to roles of housewives and carers) (Dominelli 2006 and Orme 2002). Feminist academics within criminology assert that *"the study of 'deviant' or 'delinquent' women"* (Gelsthorpe & Wright 2015) is irrevocably connected to *"the social control of women"* which, it is argued, is significantly different to that of men, *"being that women are socially regulated in many more informal ways outside the criminal justice system"* (Carlen & Worrall 2004 p12). By transgressing the expectations embedded within their gender, women are judged more severely by society, experiencing heightened levels of stigma and shame (Baldwin 2015, Bateman & Hazel 2014, Carlen 1988 and Covington 2000) and rendered *"doubly deviant, offending against both the law and their womanhood"* (Carlen & Worrall 2004 p2). Consequently, *"prison is disproportionately harsher for women"* (Corston 2007 p3) and women are subject to greater control, not only in an attempt to enforce 'femininity' (Carlen 1983, Eaton 1993 and Worrall 1990), but because the prison setting *"is unable to respond to their needs because it is designed primarily for men"* (Eaton 1993 p41-42). Although, statistically, women are less likely to reoffend than men and tend to commit less serious offences, women in custody have *"poorer outcomes than men in relation to prison misconducts and higher rates of self-harm"* (NOMS 2015 p5).

b) Pathways Into Offending and Experiences of Custody

In 2002 central government commissioned a report by the Social Exclusion Unit entitled 'Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners', which highlighted the significant impact that *"a lifetime of social*

exclusion” has on many prisoners and their chances of future recidivism (SEU 2002 p2). This exclusion, which for women is so often established *“in childhood and early life from the people and places which would encourage the development of an autonomous self”* (Eaton 1993 p15), can, in adulthood, replicate patterns of early experiences, limiting the ability to form positive self-identities (Eaton 1993). Similarly, Carlen’s body of work in the late 1980’s concluded that when women *“perceive themselves as being marginalized and, therefore, having nothing to lose”*, they risk deciding *“that law-breaking is a preferable alternative to poverty and social isolation”* (1988 p13). Although causality may be difficult to establish (Corston 2007), the existing relationship between victimisation and women’s involvement in the criminal justice system has been widely acknowledged (Bateman & Hazel 2014, Chesney-Lind & Pasko 2012, Feilzer & Williams 2015 and Stevens et al 2007). A European study conducted by Stevens et al (2007), ‘The Victimization of Dependant Drug Users’, found that, especially for women, *“experiences of violence and abuse may constrain the circumstances of victims and diminish their ability to reject illegal solutions to the problems they face”* (p401).

Extensive physical and sexual abuse is prevalent in the life histories of women in the criminal justice system, with 53% of women in prison reporting having been abused as children (Ministry of Justice 2012) and 46% having experienced domestic violence (Corston 2007). Covington and Bloom argue that women *“are trauma survivors when they enter the system, and then they are at risk of re-traumatization in the system”* (p11 1999). Perceived problematic behaviour in prison can provoke punitive responses without due consideration being given to the traumatic life experiences that may have led to such behaviour (Gray 2015). Often this is exacerbated by *“periods of cell-based confinement”* which provide *“excessive time to dwell on past events”* (Gray 2015 p443-444). This is one example of how *“incarceration can be traumatizing in itself”* (p11 Covington & Bloom 1999). Arguably, it is therefore vital that this trauma be recognised within criminal justice interventions, especially given the high incidence of suicide and self-harm that occurs in the female estate in response to such challenges, with women, who represent 5% of the total prison population, accounting for 23% of all incidents of self-harm and an increasing rate of self-inflicted deaths (Bateman & Hazel 2014, Corston 2007, Doherty et al 2014 and Ministry of Justice 2015 & 2017). Baroness Corston’s review, ‘Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System’ (2007) asserts, *“prison cannot be the right place for managing the types of behaviours which stem from deep-rooted long-term complex life experiences”* (p12), calling into question the suitability of custody as the appropriate environment within which to address such issues.

Corston also identified extensive levels of complex poly-drug use among imprisoned women, finding that 70% required detoxification on entering custody (2007). *“Prolonged and regular poly-drug use”* is seen to have *“particularly strong associations with offending”* (Foster 2000 p319). The correlations between criminality and substance misuse have generated much support within academia (Baldwin 2015, Covington 2000, Eaton 1993, Foster 2000, Incardi & Surratt 2001, Laux et al 2008, MacGregor 2000 and Malloch 2003). Stevens also highlights the importance of considering political context, attributing the shift in responsibility for what is deemed ‘drug-related crime’ from the Department of Health to the Home Office in 2001 as central to the development of the heavy coercive measures characteristic of current policy (2007). Through her body of work promoting trauma-informed approaches with women and girls in the criminal justice system, Covington describes how *“a history of abuse dramatically increases the likelihood that a female will abuse alcohol and other drugs”* while simultaneously increasing *“the likelihood of incarceration within the Criminal Justice System”* (2000 p26). The inter-relationship between negative life experiences and addiction (Doherty et al 2014) is manifested through women’s use of substances to self-medicate or ‘cope’ with the pain of trauma (Baldwin 2015, Covington & Bloom 1999, Doherty et al 2014, Laux et al 2008, Malloch 2003, Sandwith 2011 and Stevens et al 2007). The all-encompassing nature of addiction traps women in cycles of criminal activity and imprisonment, as they resort to illegal means in order to fund their substance use (Baldwin 2015 and Covington 2000). Becoming entrenched in a lifestyle of addiction and criminalisation renders women increasingly powerless and heightens the stigma, shame and social exclusion they experience (Baldwin 2015, Eaton 1993 and National Treatment Agency 2010).

Some women view the prospect of custody as a period of respite and a means by which to achieve positive change (Corston 2007, Eaton 1993, McIvor 2009 and Van Ginneken 2015). Rebekah Bradley and Katrina Davino highlight that, although *“women may experience prison as relatively safe”*, this perception of safety *“needs to be placed in the context of the often-severe interpersonal violence that has been pervasive throughout their lives”* (2002 p356). While for some women *“their first experience of feeling safe is in a correctional setting”*, for others their very contact with the Criminal Justice System can be traumatising, triggering *“memories of earlier incidences of abuse”* (Covington 2000 p27). This is particularly true for women active in addiction, as the process of detoxification may *“bring back past emotions related to why they had first*

started using drugs” and lead to a deterioration of mental health and to incidences of self-harm (Clark 2006 and Keil & Samele 2009 p36).

In response to a lack of adequate service provision in the community (Corston 2007), alongside attempts to acknowledge the complexity of issues experienced by women in the criminal justice system, sentencers are justifying their decisions to imprison increasing numbers of women by claiming, *“that prison can achieve social goods other than punishment”* (Carlen & Worrall 2004 p93). Carlen and Worrall view the *“change in judicial belief about what prison can achieve for women”* to be in violation of the principle of proportionality (2004 p48). Given the inherently complex and contrasting experiences of women in custody, there is evident cause for concern if sentencing decisions are overly reliant on the assumption *“that the structure and security of prison will provide a conducive atmosphere to begin addressing problematic issues and avoid recidivism”* (Atkins 2010 p18). Corston echoes these concerns, stating that, *“the practice of sending a woman to prison as a “place of safety” or “for her own good” is appalling and must stop”* (2007 p9). Rather than looking to prison in order to meet their needs, she proposes bolstering community resource, as a more appropriate setting to deliver support, and in order to avoid the unnecessary further criminalisation of this already vulnerable and excluded group (2007).

c) Legal and Political Context

When reviewing the legal and political context of my study, I consider recent political history and governmental approaches to reducing reoffending, in particular for individuals who continue their criminal involvement after release from prison. I explore the backdrop to The Corston Report, its findings and the extent to which recommendations have been implemented in the ten years since its publication. I also consider the current legal and political climate in light of the introduction of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda and the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014.

In 2004 the Home Office and newly established National Offender Management Service (NOMS) published the National Reducing Re-Offending Plan, a document which encompassed many of the recommendations found within the Social Exclusion Unit’s 2002 report and provided long-awaited recognition of the practical needs of ‘ex-prisoners’, focusing on *“the ‘resettlement’ of prisoners after release”* (Maguire & Raynor 2006 p22). Central to the national strategy to reduce re-offending was the identification of seven key support needs and the practical provision required under each:

1. Accommodation
2. Education, Training and Employment
3. Health
4. Drugs and Alcohol
5. Finance, Benefit and Debt
6. Children and Families
7. Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour (Maguire & Raynor 2006 and Moore 2011).

Two additional areas were later identified in direct response to the 2007 Corston Report's recommendations, in order to further develop the delivery of resettlement services to women at a local and regional level:

8. Support for women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence
9. Support for women who have been involved in prostitution (Corston 2007 and Ministry of Justice 2014).

Despite the move to establish increased opportunities to better meet the needs of individuals within the criminal justice system through the 2004 National Reducing Re-Offending Plan, there remained an absence of adequate gender-specific support³ or services, coupled with *"a period of unprecedented growth in the female prison population"*, with criminal justice policies conveying *"contradictory messages about the use of custody for women"* (Player 2005 p421). At the request of the Home Secretary and following news of the tragic deaths of six women in HMP Styal, in 2007 Baroness Corston conducted a review of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system. This review and its subsequent recommendations would prove to be instrumental in raising awareness of the needs of women and bringing these issues to the forefront of political discourse and agenda. Corston called for a *"radically different approach"* towards the treatment of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system (2007 p4). She highlighted the *"chaos and disruption"* caused by repeatedly sentencing women to short periods in custody for relatively

³ 2007 saw the introduction of the Equality Act that requires the differences between genders to be taken into account in service design and delivery and for needs to be responded to accordingly. There are distinct differences between the needs of men and women in the criminal justice system. Therefore, there is a need for gender-specific services, designed with these specific needs in mind (Corston 2007 and Covington & Bloom 1999).

minor offences, *“without any realistic chance of addressing the causes of their criminality”* (2007 pi) and proposed substantial reforms: to limit the use of custody solely to women committing more serious violent offences, to develop ‘one-stop-shop’ women’s centres for individuals seen to be at risk of offending and to vastly improve prison conditions to meet the gender-specific needs of women (2007).

The Government’s ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ agenda has set out proposals which have been enshrined within law with the passing of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (Annison et al 2015 and Ministry of Justice 2014) and have brought about *“far reaching changes”* aiming to ‘transform’ *“the way that offenders are rehabilitated and reduce the risk they reoffend”* (HM Inspectorate of Prisons et al 2014 p5). A renewed emphasis on preparation for release and continuity of service provision is catered for through the introduction of resettlement prisons for those serving short custodial sentences or with less than three months until their release date. Those deemed ‘high risk’ will still receive supervision, but under the newly formed National Probation Service. For the first time, prisoners sentenced to short-term custody will be required to adhere to 12 months of compulsory supervision, overseen by voluntary and private service providers commissioned through regional Community Rehabilitation Companies (Annison et al 2015, HM Inspectorate of Prisons et al 2014 and Ministry of Justice 2014). This post-release supervision for short-term prisoners *“is mandatory under the Act and subject to enforcement and breach proceedings, with custody a possibility on conviction”* (Annison et al 2015 p22-23). One hope is that the provision of post-release support to short-term prisoners, who may not have previously received formal assistance, will yield positive outcomes by reducing re-offending rates (Hall 2015). The Ministry of Justice has anticipated that women *“will benefit particularly”* from the introduction of the new mandatory supervision requirements under Transforming Rehabilitation given that they are *“overrepresented among those serving short term sentences”* (2013 p3 and NOMS 2015). While this may present greater opportunities for women to access support, *“the use of breach for failures to comply may well bring women into additional conflict with the justice system”* (Annison et al 2015 p34) by increasing *“the risk that women are returned to court, and possibly prison”* (Trebilcock & Dockley 2015 p224). Availability and quality of service provision can depend greatly on geographical area, creating an already varied response to the implementation of Transforming Rehabilitation (Annison et al 2015 and Frazer 2016). There is growing concern that these new reforms will increase the likelihood of women being imprisoned due to *“the tendency for sentencers to conflate women’s ‘risk’ levels (often low) with their ‘needs’ (often many, and varied)”* (Gelsthorpe & Wright 2015 p48). This leaves more women susceptible to

being “*shifted up the sentencing tariff*”, particularly where it may be “*felt that the woman could benefit from supervision and assistance under a probation order*” (Player 2005 p425). Such responses are “*disproportionate to the risk of harm and potential recidivism actually posed by women*” (Gelsthorpe & Wright 2015 p48).

While any impact of the newly-published National Offender Management Service report ‘Better Outcomes for Women Offenders’ is too early to identify, the commissioning principles set out in the document do show some promising recognition of “*the need for the delivery of services and interventions to be responsive to individual needs and characteristics*” and setting out intentions for future service delivery that ensure “*resources are targeted on areas that are most likely to make a difference to women’s lives, both with regard to reducing offending, and helping women live safer, more fulfilling lives in the community*” (2015 p3).

2.2 The Resettlement Process

I consider the needs and difficulties encountered by women on release from prison into the wider community. I also explore the extent to which adequate support is in place to assist during this transition.

“*Managing the transition from custody to community is widely recognised as a particularly vulnerable time for offenders*” (Meek 2011 p362) and the challenges associated with release have been well documented and include: addiction, homelessness, physical and mental health, relationships, institutionalisation and educational needs (HM Inspectorate of Prisons et al 2014, Covington 2004, Doherty et al 2014, Keil & Samele 2009, Lewis et al 2007, Mclvor 2009 and SEU 2002). Such challenges are exacerbated by the way in which imprisonment can “*further marginalize already socially excluded women*” (Mclvor 2009 p349), leading to “*debilitating feelings of isolation and loneliness*” (Bateman & Hazel 2014 p42). Addressing the multiplicity of needs facing women is thought necessary not only to aid “*successful transition into the community*” (Covington 2004 p5), but also to reduce risk of re-offending (HM Inspectorate of Prisons et al 2014, Covington 2004, Feilzer & Williams 2015, Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007, Millie 2006 and SEU 2002) and maintain “*motivation (or ‘hope’)*” (Maguire & Raynor 2006 p25).

The importance of ensuring appropriate accommodation has been repeatedly identified as particularly significant for those leaving custody (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007, Niven & Stewart

2005 and Mclvor 2009). Without safe, appropriate accommodation, there is an increased risk of reoffending, as women may commit crimes *“out of desperation to have a roof over her head, albeit in a police or prison cell”* (Earle et al 2016 p2). Time spent in custody is also thought to increase the risk of homelessness while homelessness increases risk of offending and imprisonment, thus creating an ongoing cycle (Earle et al 2016). Research findings have also shown how *“many prisoners, women in particular, did not have stable accommodation before custody”* (Niven & Stewart 2005 p4) and suggested that some *“will have entered prison as a direct result of being homeless and unsupported”* (Carlen & Worrall 1987 p187, Carlen 1996 & Phoenix 1999). For those with substance misuse issues, *“the risk of further drug use was the challenge most commonly anticipated by women”* on release, *“followed by obtaining suitable housing”* (Mclvor 2009 p350). Niven and Stewart’s research into ‘Resettlement Outcomes on Release from Prison’ found that *“problem drug users who had an address arranged on release were much more confident of staying off drugs”* (2005 p5), illustrating the central importance of housing for this group. Women accommodated in areas *“characterised by high levels of drug use”*, are more likely to relapse into substance misuse on release (Mclvor 2009 p351), while others report remaining in abusive relationships for fear of becoming homeless or because they have nowhere else to go (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007 and Mclvor 2009). Safe and secure environments are vital given the prevalence of trauma and victimisation that feature in the life histories of women (Bateman & Hazel 2014, Covington 2004 and Eaton 1993). Yet, while *“the role of housing in resettlement cannot be overstated”* (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007 p208), provision remains problematic and inadequate (Clark 2006, Mitchell & McCarthy 2001, Niven & Stewart 2005 and Sandwith 2011).

Studies conducted within custodial settings have voiced the concerns of prison staff regarding the deleterious impact of short-term sentences (Carlen 1983, Carlen & Worrall 2004, Malloch 2003 and Trebilcock & Dockley 2015), suggesting *“the women they have to deal with are already so damaged that it is extraordinarily difficult for them to achieve anything approaching genuine rehabilitation”* (Carlen & Worrall 2004 p73). The Howard League for Penal Reform’s report ‘No Winners: The reality of short term prison sentences’ emphasises the shortage of support available to prisoners, the lack of time and resource available for staff to deliver support and how this contributes to cycles of repeated offending and imprisonment (Trebilcock 2016). It is unsurprising therefore, that the expectations of women on release are *“that their problems would still be all piled up waiting at the gate’ for them until they were liberated”* (Carlen 1983 p144-145), an observation made by Carlen over thirty years ago that still retains its relevance today. The custodial environment is deemed by some as not conducive to supporting transitions into

'non-offending lifestyles' post-release, as incarceration reinforces negative identities, stigma and shame, leads to deterioration of mental and physical health and can compound problematic coping mechanisms, such as substance misuse (Frazer 2016, Doherty et al 2014 and SEU 2002). In this way, *"the prison setting by its very nature may be considered a more problematic context in which to seek support"* (Clinks 2016 p22) and one which can render women *"disorientated and disempowered"* on release (Eaton 1993 p55). Barriers to accessing essential services after leaving custody can also impact greatly on resettlement outcomes. De-prioritising prisoners, excluding them from services and perceiving them *"as having 'dropped out of treatment' through their absence"* (Mitchell & McCarthy 2001 p207) have all been evidenced, *"despite high levels of need"* (SEU 2002 p3). Lack of continuity of support staff can also prove challenging (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2014), as *"the need to keep re-telling their stories... may also serve to re-traumatise them"* (Frazer 2016 p28).

Framed by a critical understanding of the links between social, gender-based and material inequalities and the operation of criminal justice, Carlen & Worrall (2004) argue that interventions to prepare women for release generally focus on *"the prisoners' attitudes to their criminal behaviour"* rather than *"addressing the roots of oppression outside the prison"* (Carlen & Worrall 2004 p20). There is also an over-emphasis on what Carlen and Worrall describe as *"the moral (or capitalist) imperative to produce disciplined members of the work force"* (2004 p67). Employment is not identified as a priority by many women on release, and *"not feasible if they were still trying to deal with drug or alcohol problems"* (McIvor 2009 p353).

The complexity of the women's lives calls for a *"co-ordinated multi-agency response, within prison, across the crucial transitions between community and custody and sustained long after release"* (SEU 2002 p5), recognising the importance of a relationship-based approach (Bateman & Hazel 2014, McIvor 2009 and Malloch et al 2014) while taking into account *"the interconnected impact of trauma and addiction on reintegration readiness"* (Doherty et al 2014 p580). *"Relapses into prior patterns of behaviour"* are common (Maguire & Raynor 2006 p25), requiring a flexible and understanding response to the often chaotic lifestyles of women in the criminal justice system (Trebilcock & Dockley 2015).

Bain and Parkinson suggest that, *"the word resettlement has its problems in that it conjures up images of individuals integrated before they were sentenced, in supportive and stable communities"* (2010 p69). Therefore, it is imperative to consider what women are being

'resettled' to (Carlen & Worrall 2004, Eaton 1993 and Moore 2011), given that *"community context... can have an important impact on post-release success or failure"* (O'Brian 2006 p100).

2.3 The Realities of Street-Based Sex Work

I explore literature concerned with the needs and vulnerabilities of street sex-working women, in particular, issues of personal safety and the risk of violence. I then consider how the position street sex-working women are forced to occupy within society exacerbates these risks and fails to protect them from the dangers inherent within their lives. I also present some of the methodological findings related to research that has been conducted within street sex-working populations. The knowledge I have gained from this process has gone on to inform the decisions I have made around my own chosen research methods.

There is a significant body of evidence supporting the existence of extremely high levels of *"frequent and often severe"* (Monto 2004 p176) violence perpetrated against street sex-working women (Incardi & Surratt 2001, Jeal & Salisbury 2004, Monto 2004, Penfold et al 2004, Phoenix 2007, Surratt et al 2004 and UKNSWP 2008). Jeal and Salisbury's study of female street-based sex workers found that *"assault, including rape and use of weapons such as guns, machetes and chainsaws, had been experienced by 73 per cent"* of participants (2004 p149) and the extent of such violence is seen to significantly increase mortality amongst this group (Jeal & Salisbury 2004 and Surratt et al 2004). These experiences are often survived *"by self-medication"* (UKNSWP 2008 p13), and substance misuse including intravenous drug use, is prevalent, with as many as 95% of female street sex workers heroin and crack cocaine users (Atkins 2010, Gilchrist et al 2015, Home Office 2006, Pauw & Brener 2001, and Jeal & Salisbury 2004). The frequency of these incidents yield enormous implications for the emotional, physical and mental well-being of street-based sex workers, by impressing *"upon the woman that she is utterly worthless"* and leading to a construction of self that accommodates or normalises such treatment (Farley 2004 p xx). *"These encounters also serve to extend and deepen the patterns of violence and abuse that were experienced by many women in childhood"* (Surratt et al 2004 p55), as the life histories of many include extensive accounts of abuse both throughout childhood and into their adult lives (Choi 2009, Covington 2000 and Monto 1998).

Street sex-working women are very likely to be homeless, in regular contact with the criminal justice system (Covington 2000, Gilchrist et al 2015 and Stevens et al 2007) and *"embedded in the*

same violent social spaces where street violence and other subcultures of violence exist" (Surratt et al 2004 p45). It is not unusual for women to be found sleeping in public parks, vehicles and crack houses and they *"currently form one of the most excluded and marginalised groups of homeless people... less visible, and less catered for"* (Davis 2004 p4). As such, they are considered *"even more highly vulnerable to victimization"* (Stevens et al 2007 p404) and are likely to relapse into substance misuse and return to street sex work on release from prison, unless, at the very least, *"suitable, stable accommodation"* is secured (Davis 2004 p21).

The criminalisation and enforcement associated with street sex markets in the United Kingdom is justified on the grounds of 'morality' (Ashworth 1999). This does little to enhance the safety of street sex workers (Penfold et al 2004) and *"is not designed to protect the vulnerable, nor to deter or restrain the violent"* (Kinnell 2008 p xxi). The implications for street sex-working women are serious, as they are *"forced to work in more isolated and dangerous environments"* (Pauw & Brener 2001). Without the protective measures that would reduce the dangerous conditions in which they work, street sex workers are rendered responsible for their own safety (Sanders & Campbell 2007 p13). Policing guidance recognising the support needs of those involved in sex work (ACPO 2011 p7) has done little to diminish the risks they face. Street sex-working women also face extreme stigma due to their visibility on the street (UKNSWP 2008). As a result, this group often feel *"ostracized from society"* (Stevens et al 2007 p388) which acts as a barrier for individuals accessing mainstream services and support (Gilchrist et al 2015) including law enforcement agencies who are viewed as *"being likely to mistreat them and to deal with them unfairly"* (Stevens et al 2007 p388). This isolation further compounds the marginalised position street sex-working women occupy within society.

Researchers who have sought to include the perspectives of female street sex workers recognise the challenges involved in recruiting individual participants from this service user group. Many of these women are transient, regularly homeless and exist in cycles of non-engagement with services, often determined by their substance misuse. Consequently, sample sizes are often relatively small (Harding & Hamilton 2009) and seldom representative, as those respondents who lead *"less chaotic lives"* are more likely to be reachable and able to participate (Jeal & Salisbury 2004 p518).

Throughout the literature, sex work projects have been used to facilitate the recruitment of street sex worker participants via outreach services, drop-in centres, word of mouth and kerb-crawling (Jeal & Salisbury 2004, Jeal & Salisbury 2007 and Penfold et al 2004). These sampling

strategies also acknowledge the socially excluded position of street sex-working women and the significant role that sex work projects play in enabling these women's voices to be heard.

Qualitative research methods are often favoured when conducting research among female street sex workers, allowing for the subjective experiences of individuals to be explored (Harding & Hamilton 2009 and Sanders & Campbell 2007). The role of the researcher is paramount in enabling interviews to be conducted "*in a consciously engaging and sensitive way*", acknowledging potential emotional and psychological implications for participants (Harding & Hamilton 2009 p1123). Adopting a "*non-judgemental attitude towards sex work*" (Pauw & Brener 2001 p467) is of great importance when conducting research with street sex-working women, given the stigma and shame they so often experience, ensuring participants are treated with dignity and respect.



3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The questions that formed the basis of my research: ‘What are the resettlement needs of street sex-working women on release from prison?’ and ‘What factors are helpful to the resettlement process and what are any areas for development?’ are exploratory in nature. Therefore, when considering research design, I deemed qualitative methodology, through use of semi-structured interviews, was best suited (David and Sutton 2004). Qualitative research is concerned with meanings, interpretation and social context (May 2001). In recognising the perspectives of individuals (Bryman 2008, Carey 2009 and May 2001), and by providing a platform from which they can be empowered to *“speak for themselves”* (Atkinson 1992 p310), qualitative methods give participants an opportunity for their voice to be heard (David & Sutton 2004). It is this potential to empower, together with feminist approaches which *“give the subjective situation of women greater visibility”* (Carey 2009 p101), that held particular personal appeal when contributing to decisions around my research design. In its broadest sense, feminist methodology calls for *“recognition of forms of gender inequality and exclusion”* along with *“a realization of both implicit and explicit forms of discrimination as well as subjugation to often punitive policies”* (Carey 2009 p101).

The Griffins Society Research Fellowship Programme provides front-line practitioners with the opportunity to conduct small-scale research projects into the treatment of women or girls in the criminal justice system (The Griffins Society 2017). I am a qualified Social Worker and since 2010 I have been employed as a Criminal Justice Caseworker at One25, a street sex work project in Bristol. Within this role, I provide intensive, one-to-one support to One25 service users who are in regular contact with the criminal justice system, whether in custody or the community. Social Work views the individual as inseparable from their position within wider social and political contexts (Weisman 2016). The standards of proficiency to which all social workers in England must adhere include promoting *“social justice, equality and inclusion”* and using *“practice to challenge and address the impact of discrimination, disadvantage and oppression”* (HCPC 2017 p8). In keeping with the core values of my profession, my primary concern lies with *“the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty”* (Weisman 2016 p2). It is this potential to be able to contribute to achieving individual and structural change

that was one of the main motivating factors behind my decision to apply for the fellowship programme.

Epistemology is *“a theory of knowledge”*, its origins and how it is acquired (Weisman 2016). At the core of feminist standpoint epistemology, is the belief that *“an individual’s lived experience, her place in the world and culture, inform and builds not only her reality but also how she understands of her social position of the larger socio cultural world”* (Weisman 2016 p2). Central to this approach is a commitment to being *“women-centred”* (Fawcett & Hearn 2004 p206), consideration of *“issues of power, oppression and empowerment”* (Fawcett & Hearn 2004 p208) and how these are shaped by their *“historical and cultural context”* (Steinberg 1994 p296). In this respect, while there are many and varied approaches to social research, adopting aspects of feminist standpoint epistemology, with its similarities to my professional and personal values, felt particularly relevant given the pervasive oppression and discrimination faced by street sex-working women. I hope that in giving my research participants a voice and by listening to their stories, much can be gained and learned from their knowledge and experiences.

3.2 Data Collection

a) Access and Sampling

I had originally hoped to carry out interviews with service user participants in both custody and community settings and to include the perspectives of staff from Community Rehabilitation Companies, the National Probation Service and other professionals who have had experience of supporting street sex-working women around release. However, it quickly became apparent that these aims were overly ambitious given the scope and time frame of the fellowship. I was also advised that I was unlikely to be granted the necessary ethical approval from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) given that my research is a small-scale project. Instead, I used purposive sampling techniques with a view to accessing potential participants as follows:

- 16 women living in the community with histories of involvement in street sex work who have also had multiple experiences of custody
- 8 professionals from community-based support projects who have experience of supporting women from this service user group around release from prison

The revisions made to the proposed participant population no longer necessitated NOMS ethical approval where service user participants were not currently subject to supervision under the National Probation Service. While my revised project did represent a slight shift in focus in terms of the inclusion of professional participants, I wanted to ensure that the voices and lived experiences of service user participants remained prominent throughout.

I forwarded an outline of the aims of my study along with information sheets for potential service user and professional participants [Appendices A & B] via email to Women's Breakout, for circulation to their 59 member organisations. Women's Breakout is a national umbrella organisation aiming to influence policy and practice and that provides "*a collective voice*" for those who support women who "*are in contact with, or at risk of becoming involved in, the Criminal Justice System*" (Women's Breakout 2017). Invitations to participate were also extended via email to known sex work projects throughout England and Wales. I was keen to include participants from as wide a geographical reach as possible, in the hope that this could produce a variety of responses and some potentially interesting comparative data between regions. I was aware that given my current employment as a front-line caseworker in a street sex work project, I already have some access to my research field given my pre-existing knowledge of the service user group and my relationships with community project staff. For this reason, some professional participants may have been more likely to respond. Some were also already familiar with One25 and The Griffins Society, which I feel increased the response rate. I relied on staff within community projects to promote my study and act as gatekeepers, in facilitating the time and space for me to be able to interact with potential participants and conduct interviews.

In order to recruit service user participants, at the request of one of the projects, I produced a poster to advertise my research prior to my arrival that I then adapted for use in each project I subsequently visited [Appendix E]. I was aware that the often nocturnal and chaotic lifestyles of this service user group may reduce my access. As such, "*opportunistic*" sampling methods are seen as necessary when seeking to contact street sex worker populations (Day & Ward 2004 p144 and Jeal & Salisbury 2007) given that they "*are extremely difficult populations to access*" (Jeal & Salisbury 2007 p877). One project felt that the most suitable means by which to contact this service user group was for me to join their outreach team for a night shift. This may have produced a wider and more representative sample as I would have been able to include the perspectives of women who may be experiencing significant barriers in accessing services in the day. Women who are actively street sex-working on a very regular basis commonly have higher

levels of substance misuse and higher levels of unmet need, including homelessness and debilitatingly poor physical and mental health (Jeal & Salisbury 2004). As such, their addiction usually takes precedence and appointment-based systems and daytime services are often extremely difficult to access. These women are often the most entrenched and least visible of this service user group (Jeal & Salisbury 2004 & 2007 and UKNSWP 2008). Street sex work markets, or 'beat' areas, are notoriously characterised by on-street violence, anti-social behaviour and the sale, purchase and consumption of illicit drugs (Monto 2004, Stevens et al 2007 and Surratt et al 2004). Street sex work project outreach teams are not exempt from these potential dangers and as I was pregnant at the time of conducting my fieldwork, from a health and safety perspective, it was felt that the potential risks of my joining a night outreach shift could not be justified.

Overall, my final sample comprised six professional participants (five from sex work projects and one from a housing project supporting women at risk of offending) and nine service users, all except one of whom were recruited through drop-in centres. Geographical areas covered were all within England: London, the North, North East, North West and East Midlands. I received more positive responses from community-based support projects but due to the busy workloads of staff, only six professional interviews were completed in the given timeframe. Although my sample was small, this enabled me to conduct my interviews in greater depth and use the relatively little time I had to gain a rich understanding of the stories and experiences of my participants.

All those who took part in my study were over the age of eighteen. Apart from ensuring that participants met my eligibility criteria (being either women living in the community who have been to prison and been involved in street sex work or professionals from community-based support projects who have experience of supporting this service user group around their release from prison), I did not specifically ask individuals for personal details relating to their background or how they defined themselves in terms of social divisions or categories (such as ethnicity, sexuality or disability). In some incidences, this information was offered voluntarily during the course of interviews. The focus of my research has been to explore the common experiences of participants. My small sample size has meant that wider generalisation relating to social divisions has not been possible. I hope that through my chosen methodology, I allowed each participant the freedom to identify which parts of their lives and aspects of their experiences have been of greatest significance to them as individuals and how this has impacted on the process of resettlement.

Drop-in centres operated by street sex work projects offer a safe space where service users can receive practical and emotional support around their needs (such as accessing sexual health services, a hot meal and housing and benefits advice). I visited three drop-in centres with the aim of recruiting any service users in attendance that fitted my eligibility criteria. This means of recruitment was somewhat unpredictable and did raise some ethical concerns that I have highlighted later in this chapter. I also found that my poster evolved into a useful tool to help initiate conversations with service users about my research. Although I met more women who fitted my criteria than I interviewed, not all were willing to participate and, for some, it was evident that addressing their immediate support needs was the main priority. The projects also assisted me in accessing my participant sample by setting up individual appointments with women to carry out interviews outside of a drop-in space. Despite having several appointments booked, only one service user was interviewed in this way.

b) Interviewing

I devised an interview schedule that formed the basis of my semi-structured interviews [Appendix C]. This interview schedule reflected my research questions and provided focus. Within this structure I used an open questioning style that allowed participants to express themselves more freely, in keeping with the exploratory aims of my research (Jones 1985 and May 2001). Participants in this method are viewed as more than merely sources of data (Robson 2002) and instead, the interview is seen as a *“social process between two individual human beings”* (Jones 1985 p259). When seeking to include the perspectives of vulnerable participant populations, semi-structured methods can also prove useful in creating informal, non-threatening interview environments (Dalla 2002). One of the service user participants struggled with the interviewing process, saying that she found answering questions of any sort off-putting. Instead, at the end of our interaction, she chose to write a poem to be included in the research report [Appendix G].

I conducted interviews in the workplaces of professional participants and in drop-in centres that were familiar to service user interviewees. While I hope these settings did have the advantage of creating *“comfort and security”*, the drop-in centres in particular were busy and *“prone to interruption”* (David & Sutton 2004 p90). During the course of the interviews, participants disclosed various aspects of their past experiences including: involvement in sex work, histories of domestic abuse, their criminal record and difficulties with poor mental and emotional health. Where possible, I sought to maximise privacy, especially given the sensitive and personal nature of some of the interview content (Bryman 2008), by offering each individual the option of finding

quieter space within the immediate vicinity where possible. Several participants stated they weren't concerned if they were overheard by others but for others this privacy was clearly very important.

All participants consented to my use of a digital voice recorder to document their interviews, a practice which is *"highly recommended in terms of capturing the fullness of the interaction"* (David & Sutton 2004 p90). The interviews varied in length, from 20 minutes to over an hour as I let myself be guided by the participant as far as possible, taking into account the amount of time they could spare or the extent to which they felt able to engage in the interview process.

The quality of relationship between the 'researcher' and 'researched' is emphasised by feminist epistemology (Fawcett & Hearn 2004) and is key to establishing *"the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives"* (Oakley 1987 p264). Such relationships remain *"frequently characterised by disparities of power and status"* (BSA 2002 p3). I used my relationship-building skills, acquired predominately through my experience supporting women with histories of street sex work, to build a rapport with participants. I hope that by doing so, they felt valued and able to be as open as they could during the interview process (Bryman 2008, May 2001, Marsh 1982 and Trevithick 2005). I informed participants about my dual role as a front-line practitioner and researcher in the hope that this would help establish trust and minimise any perceived hierarchy, aided by the fact that I already had some insight into my research topic and experience in the field. Despite some geographical differences, I am familiar with informal language that is used to describe drug use, sex work and the criminal justice system, so participants were free to express themselves using the words and phrases that they felt most comfortable with without fear of being misunderstood.

3.3 Data Analysis

I sought to maximise the quality of my data by transcribing each interview *verbatim* (Sacks 1998). I carried out a thematic analysis, which *"provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data"* (Braun & Clarke 2006 p5). After familiarising myself with the content of each interview and assigning each piece of data a descriptive code, these codes were then applied to the data contained within each interview. Thus I was able to identify recurring patterns, or key 'themes' across the whole data set. I used an inductive approach due to the exploratory nature of my study, identifying themes wholly from

the content of the interview transcripts rather than applying a set of pre-defined themes (Robson 2002 and Braun & Clarke, 2006). The identified themes and emerging data were then reviewed and given titles (for example: 'trauma' or 'housing'), ready for further analysis and consideration within the 'Findings' chapter of my written report.

Drawing on knowledge gained from my literature review, I also examined each piece of data for emergent findings and considered the position of these findings within the wider evidence-base surrounding my study. Given my study's relatively small sample size, I have endeavoured to remain cautious when considering how to report my findings and not 'over-generalise' and, in doing so, dismiss the unique experiences of each individual (Fawcett & Hearn 2004).

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Reflections

The Economic and Social Research Council (2017) advises social science researchers to consider six key ethical principles:

1. Research should aim to maximise benefit for individuals and society and minimise risk and harm
2. The rights and dignity of individuals and groups should be respected
3. Wherever possible, participation should be voluntary and appropriately informed
4. Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency
5. Lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined
6. Independence of research should be maintained and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided they should be made explicit

I have been guided by these principles when considering the ethical implications of my research, together with The Research Ethics Guidebook (2016) and the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (2002). I applied to the ethics committee at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge and was granted ethical approval prior to commencing my fieldwork.

The information sheets and consent forms I produced for potential participants [Appendices A, B and D] state the aims, methods and intentions of my research. I also invited individuals to contact me if they had any further questions. As a result, one of the sex work projects requested I attend

a preliminary meeting before they agreed to participate, so they could meet me, clarify how I intended to recruit service user participants and gauge my level of understanding around the needs of street sex-working women.

In my dual role as Social Work front-line practitioner and researcher, I am required to abide by the Health and Care Professions Council's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2017). These standards include keeping information about service users secure, respecting privacy and dignity and treating information as confidential except in circumstances where "*it is necessary to protect public safety or prevent harm to other people*" (HCPC 2017 p7). Individuals were informed of these safeguarding obligations prior to the interviews taking place [see also Appendix D].

In order to protect the anonymity of my research participants I assigned each individual a code (for example: 'SP5'). I have also not referred to specific agencies by name, but instead by geographical region and type of organisation (for example: sex work project in North West England). One participant who was living in a refuge for women fleeing domestic abuse, required reassurance from me during her interview that details she had disclosed about the name of the refuge would not be included, to ensure her on-going safety and anonymity. I sought explicit consent from professional participants to be able to refer to them using their job title, as I was aware that some roles are unique within regions and areas of work and that this could therefore be revealing [Appendix D]. Most service user participants talked freely during their interviews about their previous criminal offences, places they had lived or significant people within their lives. I was careful to ensure that any descriptions of events or circumstances extracted from the interview transcripts were anonymised so that they would not identify participants or others. During the course of my fieldwork, a number of professional participants chose to disclose their own histories of contact with the criminal justice system and past involvement in sex work. In this way, these individuals became both service user and professional participants. In each incidence, we discussed how they wished this information to be used, if at all, in my written report.

I used a password protected Digital Voice Recorder during interviews with participants. The data was stored in password protected files using participant codes and then transferred onto a password protected encrypted USB drive. All confidential waste was shredded. After the agreed two-year retention period, all stored data will be securely disposed of.

I made clear to all participants that their consent to participate in the study could be withdrawn at any time. For one service user participant in particular, it was necessary to reiterate the

independence of my role as a Griffins Research Fellow, as she was concerned they may be negative implications for her if she spoke about her past experiences of custody. Project staff acted as 'gatekeepers' for me accessing my service user sample. When recruiting some service user participants within drop-in settings, I initiated conversations to determine if individuals were eligible or willing to take part in my study. For others, project staff identified individuals as having spent time in custody and asked them directly if they would be willing to participate. This did present some difficulties. I was concerned they would feel pressure to consent, given their relationship with the project and a possible need to 'repay' the support they receive. Also, by identifying potential participants before any agreement to take part, the woman's choice to disclose having spent time in custody was taken away from her. I was very clear with individuals that they should only speak to me about my project and agree to be interviewed if they wanted to. After reiterating this, three women decided they would prefer not to be involved. Rigorously adhering to this "*principle of informed consent*" (David & Sutton 2004 p18), is not only good practice ethically, but also empowering, particularly for women with histories of street sex work and complex trauma who may have experienced little control around decisions about their lives.

Two service user participants requested that they be interviewed at the same time and later in the interview a professional participant also joined us. During another interview, a service user requested that a worker from the sex work project also be present while she was interviewed as she was clear she only felt able to participate with this added emotional support. I am aware that this may have impacted on how open participants were during my interaction with them and on the content of the information they provided. However, I felt it important to respect these wishes.

Asking participants about their experiences of release from custody and their experiences of resettlement did involve some women describing difficult and painful events in their lives (including incidences of self-harm, past abuse, bereavement, children being removed and estrangement from family). Using my existing skill base supporting this service user group, I felt I responded sensitively and appropriately. I also avoided dwelling on these events (McLeod 2003) and ensured that participants knew how to access follow-up support where needed.

Due to my existing practitioner role at One25, I already support many of the Bristol service users known to the project who have been released from custody. For this reason, I was unable to include any service user participants in my sample who I have previously supported in a casework

capacity. Doing so may have led to a lack of clarity between my roles that may have affected the quality of my research and how the participants responded during interview.



4 Findings

This chapter sets out the main findings of my research, following a process of thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. I have presented my findings under the main themes identified. I have included direct quotes throughout so that the views and experiences of participants are reflected as accurately as possible (Atkinson 1992 and Finch & Mason 1993).

This study focuses on the experiences of street sex-working women leaving prison. By virtue of the fact that they are women, they will also share experiences with other women leaving prison. However, through this chapter, I also identify where these experiences differ, and where findings specifically relate to the needs and experiences of street sex workers. I refer to individual participants by code [Appendix F]. The descriptions have been anonymised to protect the identity of organisations and individuals.

4.1 Housing

All participants identified the importance of women needing a home to go to on the day of their release from prison. All service user participants had experienced being homeless when leaving prison, with some having also been homeless when they entered the prison system. This was identified as particularly relevant for street sex-working women, many of whom have experienced regular periods of homelessness in the community (Sandwith 2011 and Davis 2004). In terms of eligibility, one service user described how she had received little support until her circumstances significantly deteriorated:

SP5: *Nothing was done, they just let me out onto the streets... Until I went downhill and started committing suicide – that's when they decided to help me*

Being housed immediately after leaving prison was seen by both service user and professional participants as key to ensuring that other vital services, including support around health and addiction, were put in place. Two service users stated that not having supportive family relationships during times when they were released homeless compounded their feelings of social isolation. This also further reduced their accommodation options as they were unable to stay with family members until alternative accommodation could be arranged.

Professionals interviewed told me of some of the reasons why women struggled to access housing on leaving prison. These reasons included a lack of housing providers, women serving short prison sentences where there was very little time to arrange accommodation and a denial of provision due to women's past criminal records (in particular anti-social behaviour and arson offences).

Both service users and professionals discussed the need for housing to be arranged in advance of leaving prison. However, with lengthy assessments and waiting times in local housing and council offices on the day of their release, the very systems set up to support the homeless to access housing, seemed to prevent women from doing so:

PP4: *You shouldn't have to wait for an individual to come out on the day, then present them at housing and sit there for four or five hours. You should be able to make that referral beforehand, get something already set up*

Leaving prison homeless was viewed by many participants as having a direct impact on re-offending rates:

PP4: *Lots of people just commit crimes to get a night in a police cell, somewhere safe to sleep*

For street sex-working women, homelessness also increased the likelihood of returning to street sex work:

SP8: *If you come out and you're homeless, it's like 'Oh I'll go do a punter just so I got somewhere to stay'*

An inter-relationship between homelessness, drug use, crime and sex work was also discussed by both service users and professionals:

SP6: *When you come out of prison, you come out and you've got really hardly any money, you've got nowhere to go... So I think most people end up back on drugs, or back to prostitution... because they have to because they've got nowhere to go*

SP6: *Well, when they've got nowhere to live, they've got nothing have they?... So they're gonna resort to like either shoplifting, drugs, prostitution... They're gonna come back out and the only way they know to survive is what they went to prison for*

For those women who were not homeless on the day of their release, some professional participants expressed concern around inadequate risk assessments being carried out, especially for street sex-working women some of whom left prison to live with 'punters' (purchasers of sexual services) or returned to live in unsuitable accommodation in unsafe locations:

PP3: *We've had women going back to hostels where you know the rape might have happened just around the corner... or perpetrators are just around the corner as well. Sometimes it's not suitable for them, it's just 'You'll do, there's a bed, there you go'. There's no kind of thinking around the history of that woman, what might be best for her*

PP4: *If you're homeless you're possibly going back to the same old crack houses, going back to dangerous and violent partners... going back to crime*

Geographical areas were also seen as having a significant impact on a woman's chances of abstaining from drug use, crime and sex working, especially if hostels were situated close to active street sex work markets or if women had previous associations with other service users in the same accommodation.

4.2 Substance Misuse

Given the prevalence of substance misuse among street sex-working women (Atkins 2010, Gilchrist et al 2015, Home Office 2006, Pauw & Brener 2001, and Jeal & Salisbury 2004), being able to access specialist substance misuse support around these issues, both in prison and in the community, was seen as a priority. Not having opiate substitute prescribing services arranged in time for the day of their release had been experienced by some participants. All of the service users interviewed had substance misuse issues. All professional and service user participants viewed support around substance misuse as one of the most important aspects of release planning and support. Some service users had only received advice around harm minimisation (for example, safer injecting practices), whereas they would have valued more in-depth support around their addiction and motivation to remain abstinent. Narcotics Anonymous and abstinence-based housing were both cited by service users as useful sources of support. One sex work project worker felt that there is an over-reliance on substitute prescribing, which she viewed as doing little to address the underlying causes of addiction among women leaving prison:

PP5: *The women we work with need intense counselling to deal with the issues that have led them to take drugs... Just by scripting... I just think it's putting a band-aid on the wounds*

Overdose, with potentially fatal consequences, was identified as one of the dangers facing women in the community immediately after the day of their release, especially where their tolerance levels to substances were lower after spending time in custody. Also, if women returned to the same environment, this was seen to increase the risk of relapse:

PP5: *What usually happens is that a woman will be released and they'll go back into the same environment, same friends and then what usually happens is – 'Oh go on, just have one pipe, or just have one needle' and then they're back to square one again within a week*

Two participants highlighted the need to establish support networks, lifeskills and alternative communities away from drug use and street sex work in order to achieve or maintain positive changes after leaving prison:

SP6: *Their friends would have been associated with taking drugs, so therefore, when they come out, the only people they can really turn to is the friends that they had when they were using*

PP3: *If women want to move away from sex work and drugs and their old group of friends, what are they going to? Isolation, boredom, loneliness*

Many of the service user interviewees disclosed their apprehension around leaving prison due to a fear of relapsing into substance misuse:

SP5: *In some way I wanted to stay in there cos I didn't want to go back to drugs*

For others, the main preoccupation whilst in prison and the primary focus on the day of their release was to obtain and use substances.

Having substance misuse issues presented difficulties for women being able to access the services and support that they needed. For one service user, feeling motivated to access services was identified as having an impact on her ability to accept the support that was made available to her on leaving prison:

SP9: *I was too into my drugs still... I didn't really look for support then, I wasn't ready*

Similarly, another woman described needing to arrive at a point where she was ready for change, where her dissatisfaction with her circumstances acted as a catalyst for this change to happen:

SP1: *In amongst my drug taking and drinking. I was getting fed up with it. It wasn't working, this wasn't working and I was kind of in a right mess*

For some service users, being entrenched in periods of heavy drug use led to disengagement from mainstream services and sex work project support. Where street sex-working women were active in high levels of addiction, they were also likely to be extremely chaotic, nocturnal and hard-to-reach. As a result, women would frequently miss appointments and were difficult to contact, particularly as they may not own a mobile phone or have a fixed address. Rather than service providers understanding this chaos as a symptom of a woman's circumstances or the severity of her issues, sex work project staff had concerns that disengagement was misinterpreted by service providers as an unwillingness to access support or an absence of desire to change. This resulted in women being discharged from much-needed support, requiring repeated re-referrals back into the same services. Women also encountered waiting lists, strict appointment-based systems and lengthy assessment processes which were generally inaccessible to them given their circumstances. Professionals observed how that unsuitable service design and inadequate resources left women without support in place to meet their needs.

The difficulties associated with detoxification from illicit and prescribed substances while in prison were identified as an area of concern by both service users and professionals and were attributed to an increased likelihood of relapse into substance misuse on release. Four service users discussed the difficulty of adhering to prison regimes and engaging with support while they were detoxing, due to low levels of motivation, physical pain and poor mental and emotional health. Nightmares, flashbacks and negative memories, were experienced by service users as a direct result of detoxing:

SP9: *It's all your emotions, it's the underlying of why you are using and just everything and when you stop using, all that comes up and it can be raw*

Three service users stated that they had self-medicated while in prison to help cope with the negative effects of detoxing. One woman described how illicit drugs were easily available to her, which enabled her to self-medicate:

SP9: *You can get drugs inside just as much as you can outside, probably easier to be honest... I've seen it and I've done it*

The impact of detox was also seen as particularly significant because as one professional described, it can have a profound effect on an individual's ability to meet the expectations of prison life and their ability to take up the support necessary to prepare them for leaving prison:

PP4: *How can you get up and go to work and do your education when your mind and soul is being flooded with all this stuff and all these feelings that you've not been able to feel and hear and understand for many, many years because you've been blocking it and blocking it?*

One professional called for greater awareness among staff to improve support for women detoxing in prison and the continuation of this type of support once back in the community:

PP4: *I think people, professionals need to start listening... to the impact of what that period in prison, becoming abstinent actually does to them, what it raises up from their past as well and the things they have to live with and carry is a huge burden for them and then to come outside and have to find their way around somewhere to live, accessing services... on top of all that*

4.3 Trauma

Despite histories of profound trauma being prevalent among street sex-working women in prison (Covington 2000 and Surratt et al 2004), participants highlighted that there is insufficient trauma specific support in the custodial setting. Four professionals felt that this was something that should be addressed before the day of release and then continued in the community. This was viewed not only as key to enabling women to make positive changes in their lives, but also valuable from a socio-economic perspective and beneficial in terms of reducing re-offending:

PP5: *If there was intense counselling inside, which would then have to continue on the outside... to be able to continue to address the issues that they're running from. And I think that would be so cost effective*

One professional recognised there are challenges to delivering in-depth therapeutic support during short sentences:

PP4: *That would be a prime period, a prime time really to start addressing some of the individual's trauma, PTSD... But because they're in there for such short periods of time I don't think anybody wants to touch it, you know? And then they come out and it's still not touched*

While in custody, street sex-working women may disclose crimes perpetrated against them, such as serious sexual assaults and rape. One project worker highlighted that these women did not always receive specialist support or the advice they needed around their options to report crimes to the police.

One service user described finding it difficult to trust professionals in prison settings, making it very hard for her to feel safe enough to make disclosures or access support around her needs. Another gave an example of a lack of understanding among professionals in the criminal justice system in relation to trauma, when she felt pressured to talk about her past abuse to her probation officer:

SP9: *After I finished talking to them I went and used. My head was done in. My head was battered... they really did upset me, like I was really, really upset. So the only thing I could do was to go home and use*

The Samaritans 'Listener Scheme', "a peer support service which aims to reduce suicide and self-harm in prisons" providing "confidential emotional support to their fellow inmates who are struggling to cope" (Samaritans 2017), and prison chaplains were both given as examples of support that had helped service users manage their past trauma. Yet, overall, service users agreed that there was little in the way of therapeutic services available to them in prison or the community.

4.4 Additional Dangers Facing Street Sex Workers

The violence inherent within street sex work (Incardi & Surratt 2001, Jeal & Salisbury 2004, Monto 2004, Penfold et al 2004, Phoenix 2007, Surratt et al 2004 and UKNSWP 2008) was recognised by both professionals and service users. The violence referred to by participants was not only the violence that could occur during the course of sex working, but also within interpersonal relationships and as a result of involvement in substance misuse and crime. This

violence was identified as posing a significant risk to the personal safety of street sex-working women, both on the day of their release and thereafter.

One project worker explained how women are targeted specifically because they are street sex working and visible on the street. She also described the violence that can occur between street sex-working women themselves, out of desperation to fund their high levels of addiction:

PP2: *We've heard a lot about women being threatened – female sex workers threatening others when they're out working with metal bars saying, 'Give me all your money'*

Service user interviewees were acutely aware of the dangers facing them through their involvement in street sex work:

SP9: *I've been in really, some really bad situations and with bad people and I'm really surprised that I'm still here to be honest*

However, several service users described what they felt was the inevitability of returning to street sex work if they relapsed into substance misuse on leaving prison:

SP7: *At night time you're back out on the beat again, aren't you? Cos you need the money*

One woman explained that this was a repeated pattern during a long period of her life:

SP1: *Every time I returned I would go back to King's Cross, working on the streets and then scoring and then checking who's alive and who's not made it. It was like one big vicious circle and I couldn't seem to get off it.*

Sympathetic local policing approaches, focusing on the welfare of street sex-working women rather than enforcement, were thought to increase the women's sense of safety and encourage them to report any concerns they may have or crimes committed against them. Yet, for one professional participant, it was women who had spent time in custody who were perceived as particularly vulnerable to attacks against them once released:

PP4: *They haven't been out sex working for quite some time. You don't know what's changed on the streets in the time that they haven't been there. When you're working on the road,*

you hear what's going on, you hear about all Dodgy Punters⁴, you hear about the incidences, you know what areas are safe and not safe

4.5 Prison and Safety

For most of the service users interviewed, their circumstances in the community had felt, at times, so unsafe that being in prison was viewed as a more desirable alternative:

SP8: *When you're homeless out here and like sometimes it gets that bad you just think, 'I'd just rather be in jail'... a little bit of a break from the stress*

SP1: *For me, it was more secure in prison. I had nothing out here.... when I got out I couldn't live out there, I just couldn't live out there*

One woman described the effects of feeling institutionalised by the periods she had spent in custody, a feeling that was preferable to the danger and chaos waiting for her in the community:

SP9: *Being out in the open, being in the world... it frightened me. Inside you're sort of... you've got your routine. So when you come out and you don't have that, it's quite daunting.... You don't know where to go... So I think that's probably why I ended up being in jail as many times as I did. Cos I preferred being told what to do.... whereas outside it's too much*

Not everyone saw prison as a place of safety, however. Bullying and the possibility of being assaulted by other inmates were very real fears for some women before entering custody. During one interview, a service user recounted the ways she adapted to her environment in order to survive:

SP1: *Once you've learnt the coping mechanism in prison, when you go back you know instantly how to slip into it. Whereas when you first arrive, it's not that... you learn off other girls, how to cope, what to say, what to do and how to get by... I never used to take drugs before I went to prison... I never used to [sex] work... I got to learn... I started to learn that to get by you take drugs... it was very dangerous but it got me by*

⁴ 'Dodgy Punters' (or 'Ugly Mugs') are a warning system where sex workers can report incidences which are then disseminated to other sex workers and front-line support projects to alert them to potentially dangerous individuals or known perpetrators (UKNSWP 2017)

However, adapting in this way had severe on-going consequences for her life and wellbeing. She had entered prison as a woman struggling with issues related to alcohol misuse and left addicted to drugs and becoming involved in street sex work for the first time.

4.6 Approaches to Support Pre and Post Release

All participants called for more robust and effective release planning and cited examples or had personal experience of where this had not happened, such as, appointments with housing and drugs services not being arranged or changes to release dates and times that were not effectively communicated. This left street sex workers extremely vulnerable and increasingly likely to return to sex work, drug use and crime. Service users also felt strongly that by having services in place in good time prior to the day of their release, they would feel more supported, more motivated and increasingly likely to engage:

SP6: *If they didn't leave it to last minute, maybe more people would take the opportunity up... they know they're gonna come out, they're not gonna be homeless, they're not gonna be on their own – there's support there if they need it*

Women serving short sentences or recall periods in custody were seen as less likely to have services in place for the day of their release:

PP2: *Because some of our women do really short sentences, they are not getting the support with drugs and alcohol and mental health and things like that while they are in there*

However, adequate support and service provision was not always automatically extended to those who were in prison for longer:

SP6: *If you're not doing a big, big sentence they say 'Oh well, you haven't been in prison long enough for us to find you accommodation'. But people that have been in prison for years still come out and be homeless*

Most service users described challenges around accessing welfare benefit payments, as benefit systems did not allow for funds to be made immediately available on the day of release. This lack of resource was especially difficult for women who had also left prison homeless and was thought to contribute to women's return to sex work and crime. Although some women were provided with a 'discharge grant' of around £47, this was insufficient:

SP2: *It's just not enough to last for two, three weeks until you get your money*

Very few of the service users interviewed were met by a support service at the prison gates on the day of their release, although all said they would have valued this support. Most were alone and one woman was met by her drug dealer.

Despite having been given some practical advice from support services prior to the day of release, one service user recalled finding this advice difficult to absorb in a highly pressured prison environment:

SP1: *When you're getting information, your mind's elsewhere, so really you've not heard anything... so really it's got to be kept simplified*

Sex work projects played a vital role in supporting street sex-working women both on the day of their release and on an on-going basis. Often this was carried out by a 'criminal justice worker' whose role it was to support women to access services to meet their immediate needs (such as housing, applying for welfare benefits and being seen by a GP). Sex work project support was also particularly important where services had not been put in place:

PP4: *We'd pick them up from Holloway prison, we'd present them at housing, we'd take them down to probation services – all in one day – then take them down to drug treatment services, to ensure their needs were being met and that they were going to be safe... If she's not been allocated accommodation, and we know that she is being released, we will then work with the hostels to get her in to one of the accommodations, even if it's an emergency bed*

The question was raised by some professional participants as to whether it was their responsibility or role to provide this level of support to women leaving prison. One project in particular had done so for eight years without any statutory funding. Two of the four sex work projects no longer employed a criminal justice specific worker due to lack of finance.

The 2014 Offender Rehabilitation Act and the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation agenda has placed a greater emphasis on preparing for release and extended mandatory supervision for all individuals leaving prison (Annison et al 2015, HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2014 and Ministry of Justice 2014). These reforms have aimed to increase support during the transition between custody and the community and for a twelve-month period after release. In general, sex work project staff were unfamiliar with any implications of this agenda for street sex-working women,

or, at the time of conducting interviews, felt it too soon to assess its impact. One service manager hoped that the changes would present opportunities for increased support for this service user group:

PP1: *Now that there's supervision regardless of whatever the sentence is, at least we know they are getting that intervention*

Yet, there was no mention of whether Transforming Rehabilitation had relieved any of the pressure felt by sex work projects to provide support to street sex-working women leaving prison.

One service user shared her positive experience of the support she had received from her probation officer during her transition from custody to the community. However, this support was time-limited:

SP1: *It was like a lifeline, in case anything happened I knew probation has resources and information to help me. But once you finish probation it's like, 'Arghhhh! What do I do now?!' and it's like your lifeline has disappeared*

Long-term, intensive support was seen as vital when supporting street sex-working women leaving prison. Support needed to be made available for extended periods after the day of release and tailored to meet the needs of the individual. As one professional explained:

PP2: *When I've seen it has worked, it has been one specific person or organisation that's been there to provide that full case management for that person and being able to get them fully linked in with everyone.*

For service users, it was especially important that this support continue during times of crisis or when they were experiencing particularly poor mental or emotional health.

Assisting women around practical tasks and attending appointments with them was also viewed as a necessary aspect of this support, especially for women who had long histories of repeated imprisonment:

PP5: *A lot of the women we work with need... their hands to be held... Not all the time but I would say like the first two or three times.... sit with them, talk with them until they can get into that pattern... and they become that little bit independent. But initially, they need that handholding because a lot of the women have been institutionalised*

One woman, who had experienced long-standing mental health issues, gave an example of how poor service design and inadequate resources prevented her from attending appointments and accessing support once she had left prison. As a result, she had been recalled to prison on numerous occasions. She felt that this would have been easily overcome if services had listened and been more responsive to her individual needs:

SP4: *It's hard sometimes when I get depressed I don't open mail... I've got bags and bags of mail... I've got a phone, phone me, you know what I mean?*

The service users interviewed struggled with the inflexibility of appointment-based systems with professionals seen as unapproachable and unconcerned:

SP9: *They won't think about you again until the next appointment*

Instead, participants felt that support providers needed to demonstrate an awareness of the impact of past trauma and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of street sex workers. This would then increase the likelihood of women accessing support and avoiding a return to substance misuse and crime.

I interviewed the manager (PP7) of a housing support project for women at risk of offending. She described the project's innovative and needs-led approach to supporting street sex-working women leaving prison and in the community:

Street sex-working women were identified by the project as having different needs to those of the wider population of women being released from prison: *"What we found was because of their lifestyles, access to services was still there but... they're much more reluctant to access statutory services such as GPs, dentists – because they feel discriminated against"*. They are generally unable to maintain tenancies due to a lack of lifeskills, chaotic lifestyles because of high levels of addiction and threats to their personal safety from punters and drug dealers. Street sex-working women have *"exhausted housing agencies"*, and are dismissed by these agencies because *"they don't engage"* and are *"hard-to-reach"*. The project recognises how *"just giving them somewhere to live was not the answer"*, but that street sex-working women *"needed a slightly different approach in terms of support"* and that this can only happen when they are ready and at their own pace.

In response to these needs, the project has developed a purpose built unit that street sex-working women can access from 10pm-7am for somewhere to stay. They then have access to 24 hour support, seven days a week including practical support: clothing, contraception and food. No drug use, men or punters are permitted on the premises and the building is protected by a high level of security and situated in an area that affords some privacy. There is no tenancy agreement or obligation to reside in the unit. However, as women take up the support offered and gain greater stability in their lives, they increasingly choose to stay.

The project takes referrals from the police and criminal justice agencies and provides immediate accommodation to street sex-working women on release from prison. They are met at the prison gates on the day of their release. The project's address is used as a 'care of' address to enable women to set up bank accounts, apply for benefits and be referred in GP services at the earliest opportunity and in time for their release from prison. Close links with a local drugs agency mean that women staying at the unit have easy access to needle exchange, opiate substitute prescription

and sexual health services. Very few of the women who have been supported through the unit have been recalled to prison. They are supported to attend probation appointments and court appearances. If women are arrested, the police inform project staff so support can be provided at the earliest opportunity. Thorough and detailed risk assessments and risk management plans are in place for each individual sex-working woman, to increase their safety and wellbeing.



5 Discussion and Recommendations

This research project has explored the resettlement experiences of street sex-working women on release from prison. Through the accounts of service users and professionals I was able to gather some rich and detailed data, as set out in the preceding chapter. When considering the conclusions and recommendations of my study I discuss these findings with reference to the existing literature and my two research questions: ‘What are the resettlement needs of street sex-working women on release from prison?’ and ‘What factors are helpful to the resettlement process and what are any areas for development?’ I then consider implications for policy and practice and present my recommendations.

5.1 What are the resettlement needs of street sex-working women on release from prison?

Like many women who have spent time in prison and who come into contact with the criminal justice system, street sex-working women have multiple and complex needs that inevitably impact on their transition from custody to the community (Baldwin 2015, Corston 2007, Covington 1998, Frazer 2016, Doherty et al 2014, Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007, Gelsthorpe & Wright 2015, Gilchrist et al 2015, Penal Reform International 2013, Sheen 2002 and Stevens et al 2007). However, my findings have shown that for street sex-working women, the dangers inherent in street sex work, the marginalised position they occupy within society and the stigma they face (Hester & Westmarland 2004, Jeal & Salisbury 2004, Kinnell 2008, Sanders & Campbell 2007 and UKNSWP 2008), all serve to exacerbate the intensity of their issues.

My study is limited in terms of the extent to which diversity issues have been considered. It is clear that women who have spent time in prison and street sex-working women in particular, face significant challenges throughout their contact with the criminal justice system. It would be valuable to explore further how these challenges are experienced differently by different women in the context of various key social divisions and the impact of these divisions on their lives. Also, as this has been a small-scale project, I have not had the opportunity to explore all the resettlement needs of this group in detail. My thematic analysis identified four key areas of need that were highlighted by participants as particularly significant to street sex-working women:

housing, safety, substance misuse and trauma. I have considered these areas within my findings chapter and my concluding comments are set out below.

Homelessness is common among women before entering custody (Carlen & Worrall 1987 p187, Carlen 1996, Niven & Stewart 2005 & Phoenix 1999) and the experiences of all service users who took part in this study shed light on the prevalence of this homelessness continuing after release. For street sex-working women without accommodation, their homelessness posed a direct threat to their personal safety and heightened risk of further violence and abuse as women felt they had little alternative other than to stay with punters or to return to street sex work (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007, McIvor 2009 and Sandwith 2011). Also, together with a lack of welfare benefits, leaving prison homeless increased the likelihood of reoffending, with participants echoing the experiences contained within the literature of women resorting to committing crime for *“a roof over their head, albeit a police or prison cell”* (The Prison Reform Trust 2016 p2).

The *“subculture of violence”* (Surratt et al 2004 p45) that characterises the lives of women heavily involved in sex work and substance misuse also renders them particularly vulnerable to further victimisation (Stevens et al 2007). My study contributes to the literature confirming the high levels of violence experienced by street sex-working women (Incardi & Surratt 2001, Jeal & Salisbury 2004, Monto 2004, Penfold et al 2004, Phoenix 2007, Surratt et al 2004 and UKNSWP 2008). My findings reveal how violence stems from multiple sources, including other sex-working women, purchasers of sexual services and drug dealers. Professionals and service users both drew attention to the inconsistencies in police enforcement approaches in response to the activities surrounding street sex work *“to loiter or solicit in a street or public place for the purpose of prostitution”* (Street Offences Act 1959), which remain illegal and serve to further criminalise this group of women. Across some geographical areas, local policing approaches demonstrated a concern for the wellbeing of street sex-working women which was understandably reassuring for service users. However, sex work project staff shared the view that while there remains an absence of legislation or policy that adequately ensures the safety of this group of women, they will continue to be vulnerable to attacks against them (Kinnell 2008, Sanders & Campbell 2007 and Penfold et al 2004).

Parallels can be drawn between Bradley and Davino’s study ‘Women’s Perceptions of the Prison Environment: When Prison is “The Safest Place I’ve Ever Been”’ (2002) and the data that has emerged from this research project, where service users gave clear examples of times when they had felt prison was a preferable alternative to the dangers and realities of their lives in the

community. These feelings were heightened during periods of homelessness and elevated levels of street sex work and substance misuse. This finding is an indication of the severity of the circumstances of these women and the failure on the part of society to recognise and meet their needs. The account of one service user who had been introduced to drug use and street sex work while in prison, raises concerns about the impact of the prison environment on women.

It was unsurprising that all of the service user participants in my study disclosed ongoing addiction issues given the extremely high levels of substance misuse that is known to affect street sex-working women (Atkins 2010, Gilchrist et al 2015, Home Office 2006, Pauw & Brener 2001, and Jeal & Salisbury 2004). Alongside sex work, service users cited acquisitive crime as a source of funding for their addictions (Baldwin 2015 and Covington 2000).

Through the interviews it was apparent that this group of women had experienced trauma throughout their lives and that using substances had enabled them to survive the daily reminders of their past experiences. These findings confirm the interconnectedness between trauma and substance misuse (Baldwin 2015, Covington & Bloom 1999, Doherty et al 2014, Laux et al 2008, Malloch 2003, Sandwith 2011 and Stevens et al 2007). Street sex-working women in particular are highly susceptible to re-traumatisation given the inescapable violence and abuse present in their lives. As such, they are increasingly likely to become trapped in cycles of addiction, sex work and crime.

5.2 What factors are helpful to the resettlement process and what are any areas for development?

This research has reinforced that women need to be supported around their time in prison, the day of their release and their return to the community, in order to reduce reoffending rates and to improve their health and wellbeing (Covington 2004, Feilzer & Williams 2015, Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007, HM Inspectorate of Prisons et al 2014, Millie 2006 and SEU 2002). In my study participants discussed what support they felt that street sex-working women needed through this process of resettlement and how this support could be designed to best meet the needs of this group. Again, this has been divided in to four key areas: support around housing, support around substance misuse and support around the impact of trauma, with consideration given to issues of safety throughout.

My findings confirmed the existing body of literature, in emphasising the need for women to be allocated safe and supported housing on the day of their release (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe 2007, Niven & Stewart 2005 and McIvor 2009). Although street sex-working women are not unique in this respect, my research highlights the need for appropriate accommodation to be made available and thorough risk assessments to be carried out prior to release, to reduce the likelihood of a return to street sex work and abusive relationships. There has been a longstanding shortage of supported accommodation for women leaving prison (Clark 2006, Mitchell & McCarthy 2001, Niven & Stewart 2005 and Sandwith 2011). This lack of resource was noted by participants and has recently been re-confirmed by recent a review produced by Women in Prison which describes *“the housing situation for women”* as *“even more desperate today than when the Corston report was published ten years ago”* (2017 p13). Housing was also described as the foundation upon which access to other essential services could be based once women had returned to the community. Without housing, women were further socially isolated and experienced a rapid decline in their health and wellbeing.

Detoxification from illegal and prescribed substances in prison can also have undeniably negative implications for the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of women with past experiences of trauma (Clark 2006 and Keil & Samele 2009). The personal accounts of participants within my study clearly demonstrate the debilitating impact that the process of detoxification can have on a woman’s motivation and ability to engage in the support necessary to prepare for leaving prison. Women were left re-traumatised and struggling to cope with the *“emotions related to why they had first started using drugs”* (Keil & Samele 2009 p36). This rendered them particularly vulnerable to relapse into substance misuse on release from prison, in order to ‘self-medicate’ and mask the painful memories of past experiences (Baldwin 2015, Covington & Bloom 1999, Doherty et al 2014, Laux et al 2008, Malloch 2003, Sandwith 2011, Stevens et al 2007 and UKNSWP 2008). The importance of harm minimisation approaches to substance misuse support was recognised by participants in my study and it was considered vital that this support be made available to women on the day of their release in particular, to minimise the very real risks of relapse and overdose. Both groups called for a greater recognition and in-depth understanding of the underlying causes behind addiction, in order for women to be supported to achieve abstinence and positive changes in their lives.

There were some discrepancies between the perceptions of service users and professionals with regard to how best to support street sex-working women around their past trauma. Professionals

suggested that periods of incarceration could be used as an opportunity to deliver therapeutic services which could then be continued in the community. Whereas, service users described their reluctance to disclose or discuss painful experiences with staff in criminal justice settings, due to feelings of distrust and lack of emotional safety. The concerns raised by service users mirror the literature, that caution should be applied when considering the criminal justice system to be “*an environment that can support change and ‘healing’*” (Malloch et al 2014 p405). Repeated experiences of trauma are inseparable from the lives of street sex-working women and their ongoing involvement in substance misuse and crime (Choi 2009, Covington 2000, Farley 2004, Monto 1998 and Surratt et al 2004). As the findings of my study have confirmed, “*failing to treat trauma-related symptoms among women involved in sex work and who are recovering from substance misuse problems can place individuals at high risk of relapse*” (Brown 2000 and NOMS 2015 p9). Therefore, it is essential that, at the very least, the impact of trauma is not ignored and is met with understanding and awareness by professionals.

An example from my findings of where service design did reflect the needs of street sex-working women emerged from the interview with the manager of a housing support project for women at risk of offending. This support was delivered in custody and continued on release into the community. Individuals were housed immediately on the day of their release, in safe, women-only accommodation. Rates of recall to prison were low and support was given around attending appointments. The project also recognised the difficulties street sex-working women encounter when seeking to access services (such as GPs or benefits) and found ways to overcome these challenges and to ensure that individuals had their needs met.

Sex work projects played an important role in the resettlement experiences of street sex-working women leaving prison. However, some projects found themselves unable to continue this much-needed support due to threats to funding and being “*unable to meet high demand*” (Women in Prison 2017). My research has demonstrated that the services currently in existence to meet the very basic needs of women being released from prison (such as housing, health and benefits) are very rarely designed with the individual circumstances of women in mind. Consequently, street sex-working women, who are often chaotic, nocturnal and entrenched in high levels of substance misuse, are unable to adhere to the lengthy assessment and appointment-based systems of the support services they require. Where support providers were inflexible in their approach and did not understand the needs and circumstances of street sex-working women, services were deemed even less accessible (Trebilcock & Dockley 2015). This research has demonstrated that

without support in place to meet their resettlement needs, this group of women are highly likely to return to street sex work, drug use and crime after leaving prison. This compounds the marginalisation they already experience and patterns of violence and abuse will continue throughout their lives.

5.3 Recommendations

This has been a small-scale study into the resettlement experiences of street sex-working women on release from prison. My findings have highlighted the needs of this service user group around resettlement and what factors have helped and hindered this process. I have presented my recommendations according to whether they relate to practice, procedures or legislation and policy. It has been beyond the scope of my research to address these recommendations in full. However, this study provides a foundation for future research into the development of policy and practice relating to street sex-working women and their experiences of custody, release and resettlement.

Practice

Recommendation 1: Street sex-working women require support around their substance misuse issues throughout the resettlement process. Where appropriate, this support should include the option to be able to access opiate substitute prescriptions in custody and in the community after leaving prison. It should also include support to address the underlying issues behind a woman's addiction.

Recommendation 2: Further consideration should be given to the practice example contained within this study with a view to replicating this model across other geographical areas. The housing support project included within this study provides tailored, needs-led support to street-sex working women in contact with the criminal justice system. This provision is a combination of many aspects of what this study has deemed good practice when supporting street sex-working women around resettlement and release from prison.

Procedures

Recommendation 3: Street sex-working women need access to safe and supported housing on the day they are released from prison. Adequate resources need to be made available to ensure this is possible and thorough risk assessments need to take place prior to release so that women are not being housed in areas, or near individuals, that may re-traumatise them or place them at further risk of violence or abuse.

Recommendation 4: Therapeutic support needs to be made available to street sex-working women in prison and continued after release in the community. There needs to be a greater awareness among professionals about the impact of detoxification from illicit and prescribed substances as street sex working women are particularly vulnerable during these times. Women should be offered specialist support to manage their trauma symptoms when detoxing. There should be different levels of therapeutic support on offer throughout the process of resettlement. This variety is important as it recognises that not all women will feel ready or safe enough to engage in intensive support.

Recommendation 5: Awareness training should be made available to all professionals who are involved in supporting street sex-working women. There are inconsistent levels of knowledge and understanding across services around the needs of street sex working women and the dangers they face. A standardised training programme for professionals would reduce stigma and help avoid any misinterpretation of women's circumstances which can act as a barrier to them accessing services and support.

Recommendation 6: Service design needs to be adapted to reflect the needs and circumstances of street sex working women. Drop-in sessions could provide an alternative to the appointment-based systems that can prevent street sex-working women from accessing the support they require. Where possible, flexible and later opening times should also be made available.

Legislation and Policy

Recommendation 7: Changes need to be made to the current welfare benefits system to allow prisoners to be able to apply for benefits before the day of their release. This would allow individuals to access benefit payments immediately on leaving prison and would enable street

sex-working women to avoid returning to sex work, acquisitive crime and other illegal activities. For those who are eligible to receive them, discharge grants are insufficient.

Recommendation 8: Street sex-working women should be recognised as a vulnerable group and given priority access to services on release from prison. Street sex-working women face extremely high levels of violence and abuse in the community. Without access to the services they require when leaving prison they are more likely to return to street sex work, substance misuse and crime, with significant implications for their physical and emotional health and safety.



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APPENDIX A Information Sheet for Professional Participants**INFORMATION SHEET FOR PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPANTS**

I am employed as the Criminal Justice Caseworker at One25 (a street sex work project in Bristol) to support women involved in street sex work through their involvement in the Criminal Justice System, both in custody and the community. I am currently carrying out a year-long research project as part of the Griffins Society Fellowship programme. This programme provides opportunities for front-line workers to carry out research and inform practice and influence policy. The title of this research is:

*“Resettlement Experiences of Street Sex Working Women
Released from Prison”*

Within the study I would like to interview women known to community-based support projects who have histories of being involved in street sex work and multiple experiences of being released from prison as well as the project workers who have supported them around their resettlement. My hope for this research is to listen to the experiences of both street sex working women and professionals to identify what factors were helpful to the resettlement process and any areas for development.

I would be extremely grateful if you would consider participating in this study. I appreciate that pressures on your time are already high so I will aim to be as flexible as possible, limiting interviews to a maximum of one hour and meeting you wherever is most convenient.

I have also provided a consent form which contains further information about what you can expect if you choose to participate in this research project.

If you have any concerns or queries about this research or if you would like to be kept informed about my findings, please feel free to contact me via One25 using the details below.

Hazel Renouf

hazel@one25.org.uk

One25, The Grosvenor Centre, St Paul's, Bristol, BS2 8YA 07920 576307

APPENDIX B Information Sheet for Service User Participants**INFORMATION SHEET FOR SERVICE USER PARTICIPANTS**

I work for a charity called One25 in Bristol that supports women who have been involved in street sex work. We run a night outreach van, a drop-in centre and have a casework team that offers women one-to-one support. I am the Criminal Justice Caseworker and I support women known to One25 through the Criminal Justice System, both in prison and in the community. For the last six years I have been supporting women on the wings at HMP Eastwood Park.

I have been given the opportunity to carry out some research in my area of work through The Griffins Society Fellowship programme. The research project I have chosen is called:

“Resettlement Experiences of Street Sex Working Women Released from Prison”

For this study I would like to interview women who have histories of being involved in street sex work and as well as multiple experiences of being released from prison. I would also like to interview community-based project workers who have supported women around their resettlement.

By listening to you talk about your experiences of being released from prison, resettlement and the support you were given I hope that this research will be able to show what works well and what needs improving.

I would be extremely grateful if you would consider being involved in my study. If you decide you are happy to be involved I will try and be as flexible as possible, not taking up more than an hour of your time and meeting you wherever is easiest for you.

I have also provided a consent form which contains further information about what you can expect if you choose to participate in this research project. If there is anything you don't understand please let me know. Or if you have any concerns or queries about this research or you would like to be kept informed about my findings, please feel free to contact me via One25 using the details below.

Hazel Renouf

hazel@one25.org.uk

One25, The Grosvenor Centre, St Paul's, Bristol, BS2 8YA 07920 576307

APPENDIX C Interview Schedule



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Participant Code:

Service User: YES NO

Post held within agency (if applicable/ consented to):

	Professional	Service User
	I would like to ask you about your experiences of supporting street sex working women around resettlement after release from prison	I would like to ask you about your experiences of resettlement after being released from prison
1.	What is your experience of supporting this service user group around the resettlement process?	Please think about times when you have been released from prison and resettled in the community. a) What were any concerns you had about being released and returning to the community? b) What did you hope for?
2.	What is your understanding of the resettlement needs of this group? (including any risks they may face or particular vulnerabilities)	What support has been most useful to your resettlement? a) How did you access this support? b) What difference did it make?
3.	What support do you think needs to be in place for this group on release from custody? a) To what extent do you feel this is already in place? b) What do you feel needs to change/ develop?	Please describe any times where you feel you did not receive the support or services you needed around the resettlement process. a) What was missing? b) What do you feel you needed in prison to prepare you for release? c) What support do you feel you needed in the community?

4.	<p>What barriers does this group face around resettlement?</p> <p>a) How do you feel these could be minimised?</p>	<p>Thinking about different occasions you have been released – to what extent you feel your personal circumstances at the time had an impact on the resettlement process?</p> <p>a) When was resettlement made more challenging?</p> <p>b) What circumstances supported the resettlement process?</p>
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Professional	Service User
Do you have any questions about anything we've discussed or anything further you would like to add?	Do you have any questions about anything we've discussed or anything further you would like to add?
<p>Do you understand what will happen to the information you have given me?</p> <p>- <i>If not, clarify</i></p>	<p>Do you understand what I will do with the information you have given me?</p> <p>- <i>If not, clarify</i></p> <p>Would you like to speak to someone about any of the things we've spoken about today? (Is there anything that you have found difficult or that you're concerned about?)</p> <p>- <i>If so, signpost to support.</i></p>

That's the end of the interview.

Thank you very much for your time.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX D Consent Forms**SERVICE USER CONSENT FORM**

Please tick to indicate if you agree with the following statements:

- I have read and the information sheet and understood the purpose of this study.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions and raise any concerns about my participation in this study.
- I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I have the right not to answer questions and to withdraw without providing an explanation at any time.
- I understand that all personal information I provide will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone else except where there is a risk of harm to myself or others.
- I understand that information extracted from my interview including direct quotes may be used in the research report but that my identity will be kept anonymous. I may either be referred to by a pseudonym or by a participant code and identifying information about my circumstances will not be shared.
- I understand that my data will be stored securely and anonymously for a two year period and that it will be securely disposed of afterwards.
- I agree for my interview to be recorded using a Digital Voice Recorder.
- After the interview I understand that I have the opportunity to access support specifically around any issues that may have arisen in relation to my participation in this study.
- I understand all of the above and I agree to participate in this study.

Signed:

Date:

PROFESSIONALS CONSENT FORM

Please tick to indicate if you agree with the following statements:

- I have read and the information sheet and understood the purpose of this study.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions and raise any concerns about my participation in this study.
- I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I have the right not to answer questions and to withdraw without providing an explanation at any time.
- I understand that all personal information I provide will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone else except where there is a risk of harm to myself or others.
- I understand that the agency I work for will not be named in the report and but that I will be identified by job title/ role except where I have specifically stated otherwise (see below).
- My job title/ role identifies me as an individual. I would like to remain anonymous within this study and therefore for my job title/ role not to be used.
- I understand that information extracted from my interview including direct quotes may be used in the research report.
- I understand that my data will be stored securely and anonymously for a two year period and that it will be securely disposed of afterwards.
- I agree for my interview to be recorded using a Digital Voice Recorder.
- I understand that if I decide not to participate in this study and the views or opinions I may express during interview will not affect any working relationship I have with One25.
- I understand all of the above and I agree to participate in this study.

Signed:

Date:

APPENDIX E Poster

Have you ever been released from prison?

What was release like for you?

What helped?

What would have helped?

I work for a street sex work project in Bristol. I would like to listen to your experiences of being released from prison, resettlement and the support you were given. I am carrying out research across the country for The Griffins Society looking at what works well and what needs improving. Your views and opinions will be kept confidential.

If you are interested or have any questions please speak to a project worker or contact me on 07920 576307 or hazel@one25.org.uk.

APPENDIX F Participant Key

PP1	Street Sex Work Project 1 North West England: Operations Manager
PP2	Street Sex Work Project 1 North West England: Project Worker
PP3	Street Sex Work Project North England: Project Worker
PP4	Street Sex Work Project London: Project Worker
PP5	Street Sex Work Project London: Project Worker
PP6	Street Sex Work Project East Midlands: Project Worker
PP7	Housing Support Project for Women at Risk of Offending: Manager
SP1	Service User 1: North West England
SP2	Service User 2: North West England
SP3	Service User 1: London
SP4	Service User 2: London
SP5	Service User 3: London
SP6	Service User 1: East Midlands
SP7	Service User 2: East Midlands
SP8	Service User 3: East Midlands
SP9	Service User: North East England

APPENDIX G Poem

“This is a short poem to tell you a bit about my life...”^{SP5}

Every inmate sit and stares

in thought of everyone that cares

my Dad who loves me with

all his heart, his advice his

direct just like a dart and

my Mum who seems

not to care but I know

she does despite her fear

to go back in time I wish

I could I'd do things

differently I know I would

ENDS