

# **The Griffins Society Visiting Research Fellowship Programme**

Provision of Support for  
Imprisoned Adult  
Female Street-based  
Sex Workers

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**The Griffins Society**

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Supporting women through  
the criminal justice system

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Development Of Group And One To One Support  
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Workers To Develop A Policy & Strategy Of Supporting Sex Workers In Prison  
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General Issues

# 1. Introduction

The focus of this research is to look at what specialist support services exist for imprisoned street-based sex workers. The Introduction outlines the issues facing sex workers<sup>1</sup> today, how women receive support in prison and goes on to explain my interest in this field, stating the main aims of the research.

## Imprisonment Of Sex Workers

There are hundreds of agencies and projects that support and provide services to sex workers in the UK, many as part of a wider holistic provision. Some of the specialist projects also support sex workers when they are in prison. The likelihood of an adult female street based sex worker finding herself in one of the 15 women's prisons in England has increased in recent years due to a number of factors. Direct imprisonment for street prostitution was discontinued in 1983, however, when Anti-Social Behavior Orders (ASBOs) were introduced, street based workers could be served these for activities relating to their work. A breach of an ASBO can result in up to five years in prison. The imposing of fines as punishment, initially thought to be positive alternatives to prison by some, has actually resulted in more imprisonment through non payment (Phoenix, 1999: 104). In addition, the source of income to pay the fines is often the sex work itself and this or other illegal routes to acquire the funds e.g. theft, can then also result in imprisonment. There is a high use of drugs amongst street based sex workers (Sanders, 2005: 19), so they also then face drug related charges. Alongside this, there has been a doubling of the female prison population in the last decade, with a fifth of women on remand. The rise in the population is attributed to 'a significant increase in the severity of sentences' (Prison Reform Trust, April 2006: 15). Of the total prison population of 79285 (as at 22-09-06), 4572 (5.7%) were women & girls (Prison Service, September 2006).

## Support In Prison

For as long as there has been incarceration, the external community, whether as individuals or as formal/informal organisations, has been involved in providing support to prisoners in one way or another. This may be advocacy work, legal advice, befriending, health care, maintaining links with families or practical issues such as housing, employment, debt advice or education. It is understood that anyone in prison is likely to need support in one or multiple areas of their lives, as many people in society do. However there is an over representation of people with social needs in the criminal justice system, therefore a higher level of needs within the prison population. In terms of mental health alone, women in prison suffer from numerous mental health problems - two thirds of women show symptoms of at least one neurotic disorder and more than half are suffering from a personality disorder (Singleton at al, 1998). Many women in prison will have a variety

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1. I refer to the women in the research as 'women in prison', 'prisoners' or 'sex workers', as opposed to 'prostitutes' or 'offenders'. This places the discussion within a frame of equality and is a more helpful way to conduct the debate. It is preferable to see the women as workers and therefore due the same rights, respect and protection as that of other workers. The abolition of the term 'common prostitute' within the criminal justice system has long been campaigned for.

of support needs and as a result will often be seeking to access community and voluntary sector organisations whilst in prison.

## Support Needs Of Sex Workers

Whilst sex workers are not unique in their needs or less diverse than any other female prisoners, in the context of their work, there are particular issues that lead them to have specific needs. Alongside the high possibility of drug use, there are often other social factors that need addressing to enable positive resettlement outcomes, that can allow either safer working practices or a change of employment if wanted. These problems can, but do not always include the lack of suitable (safe) accommodation, poverty, dependence on other substances e.g. alcohol and manipulative relationships. When these situations are compounded by punitive legislation, negative public and local community response and alienation from society, the women can become vulnerable to negative impacts on their mental and physical health and safety and even life expectancy. In Britain, female sex workers are 12 times more likely to die from violence than other women of a similar age (Sanders, 2005: 73).

The criminalisation of the conduct associated with their work and the stigma faced from society's attitude, means that their ability to access services generally can be seriously hindered, as they do not always experience equality of treatment from mainstream general services in the community, particularly when reporting violent and sexual assault (see Sanders 2005: 89). Therefore, specialist projects, working alongside more general services, are best placed to understand and deliver support that meets the needs of the women whilst they are in prison and on release.

## Interest In Subject Field

I worked in the voluntary sector as a support worker for the socially excluded for many years and now work as a resettlement services co-ordinator at a female prison. I live in an area where prostitution is visible and gets sporadic media and community attention. In recent years there was a high profile murder of a female sex worker in this area. This has made me more aware of the many problems that women involved in the sex industry – particularly street-based work – can face and makes me question whether enough is done to meet those needs should the women find themselves in prison.

I am aware from my current work, that female prisoners may sometimes find it difficult to access support, which can be attributed to a variety of reasons, including availability of information, literacy levels - more than half of all prisoners are at or below the level expected of an 11 year old in reading (Home Office, 2003) - confidence to access support and facilitation of support services by the prison. For sex workers, there may also be a reluctance to identify oneself as a sex worker and the issue of whether the prison system has an awareness of their support needs.

I have concentrated on adult street based sex workers because they currently face prosecution due to the visible nature of their work. They are also more targeted for public comment, which shapes the atmosphere of the communities and will be the arena into which they will be released from prison.

## Area Of Focus

The aim of the research was to look at what specialist support services exist in prison for street-based sex workers. The main focus was:

- To ascertain what specialist services exist in prison for sex workers
- To explore how the services are accessed and delivered
- To assess the awareness amongst prison based staff<sup>2</sup> of the needs of sex workers in their care
- To examine prison-based strategies for supporting the needs of sex workers in their care

## Framing The Research

The backdrop to the research is the government's recently launched Prostitution Strategy (Home Office, 2006), which following the Paying the Price consultation paper (Home Office, 2004) has been met with much debate. The debate has been about both the specific content and implications for sex workers and in more general terms, about the alleged coerciveness of the government's social policy agenda. It is this dialogue amongst sex workers, projects, service providers, the criminal justice system and the wider communities which provides a context for this report.

Having outlined many of the issues that street-based workers can face, it is important to recognise that there are sex workers who are not part of the criminal justice system, who are not coerced into the line of work, who are not victims, who are not drug users and who do not identify that they want to move away from or seek support for any issues relating to their work. They are equally capable of articulating their views and whilst sex workers who had not been in prison were not the focus of the research, they may have been involved through now being staff members at the projects that contributed their views.

The report will follow in chapters. Chapter 2 will explain the methodology used in the study. Chapter 3 will give an overview of the current debate and legislation affecting street based sex workers and Chapter 4 will show the findings from interviews with staff from the criminal justice system, sex workers and service providers. I will then summarise my findings and give my conclusion, making recommendations that have been drawn from the study, including suggestions for further areas of investigation.

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2. Prison based staff refers to the Prison Service Personnel, plus the staff who work in the various teams within the prison on a daily basis: CARAT teams, Probation, Healthcare, Chaplaincy and Psychology.



## 2. Methodology

Detailed below are the methods used to collate the research data, with brief details of any difficulties encountered whilst carrying out the research.

### Research Groups

To meet the research aims listed in the Introduction, I wanted to ascertain the views and experiences of four specific groups:

- Sex Workers in prison
- Prison based staff
- Specialist project Staff
- Sex Workers who had been in prison, now accessing specialist projects in the community

Academics and commentators on both sex work and the criminal justice system were also consulted and references are given where necessary.

A questionnaire was devised for each group, only differing slightly, for example questions to enable prisoners to talk about their experience and knowledge of services, compared with questions to ascertain the awareness of sex workers' needs by the prison based staff. The participants were able to read (or have read to them) an information sheet and questionnaire prior to completion and the questionnaires were completed by email, post, telephone interview or face to face interview. Sex workers in prison that participated were all interviewed face to face. Some sex workers in the community anonymously completed the questionnaire and passed it to me via project staff.

### Prison Research

The research was cleared by the Prison Service Efficiency Strategy & Research Planning Group in line with a Prison Service Order on research taking place in prisons. This process delayed the start of my research by a few months.

There are currently 13 public sector and two privately run women's prisons in England. The Research Planning Group asked that I did not contact HMP Holloway, as they were constrained by large pieces of work at the time. The remaining 14 prisons were contacted and I requested to visit the prisons and complete the questionnaires in interviews with staff and prisoners, to be organised via my liaison with identified staff.

The dispersal of women's prisons around the country is extremely wide, with them often taking in women from a huge geographical area outside of their immediate location. This obviously has implications for visiting prisons to conduct research. The working day in a prison is bound by shift patterns and a tight regime, so there are limitations on both staff and prisoner availability and also on travel arrangements to visit.

Communication with prisons varied significantly and some of the frustrations were met from the start, when switchboards could not confirm the contact details of staff members or confirm they even worked there. Some prisons passed the task of facilitating my visit, to either over-stretched staff, staff that had not been sufficiently briefed on my requirements, staff that did not regularly interact with or have the experience to enthuse participation by prisoners or their colleagues, or staff that simply failed to respond to my request. I cannot assert whether these problems reflect purely practical issues for those prisons or is a general problem of disinterest in the subject. The arrangements to visit and/or the return of questionnaires from staff wavered as communications faltered or staff simply did not respond to the contact person's request for their participation; in one prison an email went out to over 50 staff and only one person responded.

However, where communication was good, there was great enthusiasm and support and my visits were well facilitated and it rapidly became obvious to me that I had to work with whoever I could to carry out the research. The final result of contact with prisons is detailed in the Findings in Chapter 4.

## Interviewing Sex Workers In Prison

The final contact point for interviewing prisoners varied from prison to prison. It is usual that the prison psychologist oversees such work as per the Prison Service research procedure and most prisons that responded provided a contact in the Psychology department and/or the Resettlement department. Other contacts included prison officers and staff from the CARAT (Counselling, Advice, Referral, Assessment and Throughcare) substance misuse teams, particularly as the workers from these teams would often receive information from the prisoners regarding any sex work involvement as part of the initial CARAT assessment, for example, when asking how the woman funded her drug habit.

Interviewing the prisoners was always going to prove difficult. This was due mainly to the fact that women may not wish to disclose their working status. So to engage prisoners in an interview asking about the support they had received whilst in prison, meant a combination of factors coming together in the first place. It required prisons to recognise the demographics of the women in their care (one prison stated they did not have any sex workers in their prison – the implications of this assertion are considered in the Conclusion), then prison based staff to know if there were women who were comfortable to disclose or already had disclosed that they were involved in sex work and then to speak with them about contributing to the research. Participation was also invited via a poster display, asking for interest in talking about their experiences as part of a research project. The poster was devised in collaboration with women using a sex workers' project, who gave suggestions as to what wording they would respond to. Prison staff contributed their views too.

The women were interviewed in a confidential space, for example association rooms, private visit rooms and department meeting rooms. There was not a member of staff present during the interview and apart from the contact person in each prison, the accompanying member of staff that brought the women to the interviews were not aware of the research subject, to ensure confidentiality for the woman.

## Interviewing Prison-based Staff

The majority of questionnaires were completed by email, due to staff time constraints, but I was able to interview some prison based staff face to face.

## Specialist Projects

Contacting the projects which work with women in prison was done by identifying organisations through my existing knowledge base, information on the internet, information from groups such as the UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UKNSWP) and also from the information from prisons and the women themselves.

## Interviewing Specialist Project Staff

Questionnaires were completed by six projects, with staff interviewed both over the phone and face to face in three of the projects. This was due to the heavy workload that many projects had. All staff were very helpful in facilitating my visits and the projects welcomed the research.

## Interviewing Sex Workers Accessing Specialist Projects In The Community

I was invited either to leave questionnaires for women to complete in their own time and pass to me via project staff or to visit the projects during their drop-in sessions and interview women face to face.

## Chapter Summary

I have shown the methods used for acquiring the research data and mentioned some of the difficulties that arose from communication problems, the geographical spread of the prisons and their catchment areas, plus the time constraints of staff and projects. I consider the four groups to be best placed to provide the information required. Chapter 4 will show if that is the case, but first Chapter 3 will outline the current debate that frames the research.

### 3. Current Debate

As mentioned in the Introduction there has been a very current debate regarding sex work. This is due to the government's launch of its Prostitution Strategy in January 2006 and the preceding consultation process under the Paying the Price document of July 2004. In this chapter I will give a brief overview of some of the concerns raised about the strategy in particular reference to street workers. This will then enable the Findings in Chapter 4 to be framed in a context of current thinking.

The key objectives of the Prostitution Strategy are to:

- challenge the view that street prostitution is inevitable and here to stay
- achieve an overall reduction in street prostitution
- improve the safety and quality of life of communities affected by prostitution, including those directly involved in street sex markets
- reduce all forms of commercial sexual exploitation

The development of a strategy was initially welcomed by many. Positive outcomes of the strategy could have been (for street based workers in particular) working more safely, access to support services, addressing the social issues that can be associated with street based sex work and the end to the criminalisation of sex workers. And many of those involved in the field of sex work, whether as an occupation or through policy and research, note that the Strategy does have some strengths: it shows some recognition of the violence that can be faced by some sex workers; it makes an attempt to define the legality of working in brothels; it highlights the need to address child prostitution; it looks at trafficking; and it also gives a commitment to the removal of the term 'common prostitute'. However, many feel the strategy as a whole cannot work due to a number of factors.

Primarily, it is felt that there is a lack of historical context to the strategy so lessons cannot be learnt from the past (Soothill et al, 2004: 6). There has been much legal debate and legislation on prostitution in the past, but this is not made use of in the Strategy (Brooks-Gordon, 2006: 46). And perhaps a national audit of this previous research and findings, along with what currently works in service provision would have been of benefit prior to any consultation or strategy taking place, a point that has been raised by several academics at recent conferences on prostitution.

Another major concern is that the first of the key aims implies that at some point street based sex work will be eradicated. This contradicts the vast research gone before, which shows that one of the core reasons for involvement in sex work can be poverty and the work for many is a survival technique (Phoenix, 1999: 76), so unless this and other impacting social issues are to be completely eliminated, sex work will always remain as a source of income.

The Strategy states: 'Street prostitution is not something that can be tolerated in our towns and cities' (Home Office, 2006: 1). There have been endless attempts to address the issue of visible street work and Dr Joanna Phoenix (speaking at a conference) feels that the strategy appears to be 'a criminal justice response for policing the visible aspects of street prostitution'. She remarks that whilst regulations have changed over the last 10-15 years, it remains 'punitive and controlling' and the strategy is in fact 'much tighter in its regulation' despite a rhetoric of welfare.

A large emphasis is also put on the disruption of sex markets and targeting demand (see Strategy point 4.1). This disruption is centered on taking action against kerb-crawlers and conducting crackdowns. Many women and organisations cite this action, when used sporadically in the past, as making the work less safe. For example, Niki Adams of the English Collective of Prostitutes argues that ‘The streets are saturated with police... women have less time to check out clients and are forced further underground’. The increased risks are recognised in the Strategy, yet such enforcement actions still remain as a firm focus of it (Brooks-Gordon, 2006: 63).

Routes out of prostitution are included in the strategy, but no additional funds given to address the fundamental issues that lead women into sex work and there is no recognition that some women feel positive in engaging in sex work and do not want to move away from it. Where women can access support, the engagement in services is often very much tied into sanctions, so voluntary engagement is limited.

There is also a refusal to set up managed zones (Brooks-Gordon, 2006: 67), again despite previous research into some European models, showing that they can bring a reduction in violence and protect the clients and communities too. A recent consultation in Liverpool with sex workers and the community for a managed zone pilot project, was met with overwhelming support and could have been an innovative move, but it was not supported by senior police or accommodated by any changes to the law, so did not go ahead.

Many have shown disappointment at the overall tone of moralism that is present in the Strategy and that the Strategy is approaching sex work from a criminal justice stance. The view that ‘sex work cannot be tolerated’ can be interpreted as the Law and the Government setting moral guidelines, which is not its responsibility (Brooks-Gordon, 2006: 69).

It could be viewed that the Strategy is a missed opportunity and because of the lack of use of previous research, findings and past debate and legal dialogues, the resulting document falls far short of offering any positive change for women involved in street-based sex work. Whilst some strengths have been shown and welcomed, overall it is viewed by many academics, sex workers and project workers as the further criminalisation of both sex work and the women involved in it.

The danger is that unless sex workers cease being socially excluded by the law, language and policies used about and against them, we will see more women not getting the support they require, more women prosecuted, more women locked up and more women working less safely facing rape, assault and possible murder.

This chapter has given a very brief overview of what problems arise from the strategy. The following Findings will look specifically at how support is accessed by those that become part of the criminal justice system and will lead on to my Conclusion and Recommendations.

## 4. Findings

This chapter analyses the responses given to the questionnaires and in interviews, concentrating on the main focus of the research:

- To ascertain what specialist services exist in prison for sex workers
- How was the service accessed and delivered
- What was the awareness amongst prison based staff of the needs of sex workers in their care
- What strategy did prisons have for supporting the needs of sex workers in their care

There are particular factors to take into account in regard to the responses, which are detailed below.

### The Number Of Prisons That Responded

• Total of female prisons contacted	14
• No response	4
• Declined to participate, due to work constraints	1
• Initial response from prison, but no staff questionnaires or access organised	3
• Response from prison with staff questionnaires completed	6

Four of these prisons were visited, with a visit to another cancelled by the prison. Women were interviewed at two prisons.

Some of the women interviewed in prison had previously been in other prisons and/or had been in the same prison more than once.

I had hoped to gain responses from a wide spectrum of prison based staff in each prison, so as to reflect the knowledge base within each prison, e.g. wing officer, resettlement staff, substance misuse staff, probation, etc. However, as the communication and access arrangements varied so significantly, that was not possible. The number of staff responses and type of staff responding varied between each prison. There were 20 staff questionnaires completed across the six prisons and the responses were mixed within every one, so there may be both a definite answer and a 'Don't Know' from different staff within the same prison. In light of this, it is important to note that if there was only one response from a prison and they said No or Don't Know to any question, this may give an inaccurately negative impression of the prison's activity.

Of the six projects that responded, three of them linked to prisons that responded to the questionnaire. A total of six sex workers in the community responded from two of the projects.

Quotes by sex workers are not referenced, to allow anonymity. In all, 11 sex workers contributed, five of who were in prison at the time.

## What Specialist Services Exist In Prison For Sex Workers?

The many services provided by specialist projects to women at the point of imprisonment, whilst in prison and at the point of release were identified across all groups. This was encouraging and they were able to identify: well-being of mental and physical health (rape and abuse counseling, HIV & Aids support, substance misuse help, sexual and general health advice); housing work (including removing possessions or securing property); and legal support (including the presence of project workers at court appearances and case conferences). There is also family links work (especially checking child welfare and liaison with Social Services); specific prison support through befriending (via letter writing), provision of clothing and collection from the gate on release; and practical assistance e.g. form filling and benefit applications. A multi-agency approach through partnership work is present, through liaison with and referrals made to other voluntary, community and public sector organisations. Project drop-in sessions and outreach teams and/or vans in the community were also identified as a source of help.

All participants were asked about any links between the prison and the projects. Of the six prisons, three identified links with specialist projects, naming nine projects between them. The remaining three prisons gave a definitive No, a definitive Don't Know (which was a Governor) and a mix of Don't Know and 'Maybe via CARATs.'

Only two prisons and their corresponding projects identified having formal links through partnership agreements either directly or via Probation and a third project that linked with a prison that did not respond, also identified having a partnership agreement. The six projects that responded identified links with nine prisons.

It was striking that none of the women in prison knew if the prison had links with any organisations, despite their prison being one of those with such links. Women in the community accessing projects gave a mixed response when asked if they had been aware of links whilst in prison. Surprisingly, there were prisons with identified links to projects, which staff did not know about. There were also prisons which did not have links with projects, but staff responded that they did not know if there was a link or not. The consequences of this are elaborated under the sub heading 'Communication in Prisons' in the Conclusion.

An unexpected finding was that the two members of staff with what appeared to be the least knowledge - i.e. they answered 'Don't know' as oppose to 'No', to the majority of questions - were a prison officer and a Governor. The two members of staff with the most knowledge were a CARAT worker and a Head of Resettlement.

## How Was The Service Accessed And Delivered?

The attendance at the prisons by most projects was in response to referrals or direct contact by the women in prison. One identified that they found out who of their client group has been imprisoned and then made an appointment via the Resettlement team to see them.

Access routes to the projects for the women in prison were identified by all groups as: referral by Personal Officer; referral by Resettlement staff, Chaplaincy team, CARAT team and health staff; picked up on OASYS plan (Probation pre-sentence assessment system); via Wing applications; and via drug agencies working in

the prison and through self-harm programmes. There was also direct contact made by the women (this is sometimes because the women have prior knowledge of the projects or had been accessing the project at the time of imprisonment – some projects provide legal support and a court presence.)

Worryingly, one staff respondent thought access to services was hit and miss and relied on the women asking for support, rather than being offered support by the prison. One member of staff said *'It is not my place to advise if raised in general conversation'* because they felt they didn't have enough knowledge. Other staff stated they would ask what support was available through other departments. However, staff and women identified leaflets and posters in the prisons as information sources and some women cited word of mouth as the source. Incidentally, no prison identified that services or information was available in multiple languages, but two said Language Line translation services could be used if needed. Importantly, all the sex workers said they would be encouraged to ask for support if they were made more aware of what was available whilst in prison and thought that phone numbers of support services would be useful to them.

Projects delivered support through going onto wings or using quiet areas, e.g. chapel. Others used the prison legal visits system to see individuals, but two projects stated that the telephone based booking system at one prison was so poor that they rarely got through. Innovation was shown when a group of four women got together and organised an outside agency to visit them. Seven women attended for a few weeks and shared their experiences of sex work. But the woman stated that they had to fight for the sessions to happen.

## What Was The Awareness Amongst Prison-based Staff Of The Needs Of Sex Workers In Their Care?

Staff were asked what they felt the issues were for sex workers, particularly in relation to being in prison and in terms of their resettlement needs. They said issues faced included sexual abuse, peer pressure, self-esteem and emotional issues, stigma and lack of confidence to disclose. They identified areas where support could be provided. This included protection from pimps and the need to avoid drug sources. Staff believed that the people who may control elements of the women's work would be waiting for them on release either at the gate or back in their home area. It was also known by staff that women were often targeted by dealers at transport depots or again would be present in their home areas, therefore difficult to avoid. Alternative accommodation was suggested as part of the solution to this.

Alternative forms of income/lifestyle were seen as an area that should be promoted, as well as the need to provide counseling, health advice and STD<sup>3</sup> screening. One member of staff suggested workshops to work with families (families may not have an awareness of a woman's sex work prior to imprisonment). Another raised the need for work with legal representatives to support foreign nationals around trafficking

Some prisons identified sessions that were run in their prison, which they thought may be useful to sex workers: Domestic violence groups, drug awareness, employment and training, developing work and life skills, abortion counselling, Short Duration Drug Programmes (one prison said the tutors discussed the issue of coercion into

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3. The women in prison did not confirm that STD testing was offered as standard to all women in prison. Some said that they had to ask healthcare staff for testing to be done.



sex work as part of these sessions), plus the links they had with the Drug Intervention Programmes.

Staff awareness of the issues faced by sex workers and staff attitudes to sex work varied. Where awareness existed, it was very insightful and valuable. There was recognition by three staff that some women did not want to move away from sex work and that there also needed to be a decriminalisation of the work. But of the actual prisons, none provide staff training on sex work awareness. All prisons, projects and sex workers agreed sex workers would benefit from prison staff having more awareness and three projects said they would be happy to provide training. One member of prison staff thought that awareness of sex work would be an issue under equalities policies and expected that it would be part of the prison's Diversity Policy, but did not know if this was the case or not.

This lack of awareness training clearly left some staff to their own opinions and as one staff member pointed out 'It could lead to pre-judgements'. They said there was sometimes a sense of 'how could they do that?' amongst staff. This attitude was hi-lighted by a member of prison based health staff, who referred to a sex worker as 'a real scuzbag' and said that the woman had asked for condoms in the week of her release, with 'staff knowing full well she was going to go out and use them that night'. She didn't know if the woman was issued them or not. But other staff said that they recognised there may be a stereotypical attitude and that 'they were just beginning to learn about the subject.' There were also staff who thought that there may be some embarrassment for colleagues to discuss the issue either with each other or the women in their care.

Sex workers' experience of attitudes and awareness was equally varied and sometimes a disclosure did not get a response. Some said that they had disclosed to staff (health and wing officers) that they were sex workers, but did not have a response or offer of any support: 'I mentioned it to the officers on Reception and on the detox wing and got a blank expression.' Many of the women cited the CARAT teams as the most responsive and saw them as a totally separate part of the prison support system. Some got a different response depending on which officer they spoke to, with one woman feeling that it would be easier to speak to female staff.

The issue of making 'pre-judgments' as pointed out by staff, was reflected by a woman who said that she had been asked by a member of staff how she obtained her income; when she stated 'I am working the streets', the staff member had written down 'crime'. Equally, the personal opinions of staff were often overheard by the women: 'Some officers can be horrible, they shouldn't laugh or be joking and sneering when they know a lass can hear. They say "God it's disgusting" "Dirty bastards"'. This was reflected by another woman stating that she had over heard an officer saying 'I don't know how they can do it'. This woman said that 'Staff need to be aware that the women can be affected by comments like that.'

The women gave examples of issues that sex workers may face when in prison and that staff needed to know. Trauma was a concern that one woman identified as being an immediate area needing attention. She pointed to the effects of completing detoxification, as this was the point at which the emotion and feelings came back and that women could feel a variety of emotions due to previous experiences or the experience of sex work itself. She felt this was the time when counselling should be provided and would be most beneficial. There was a high level of concern shown by the women, that staff needed to understand the severe dangers that the women could face as sex workers and the experiences they may have had. The was illustrated by one woman who said she had experienced directly and indirectly rape, murder, assault, kidnap, had been tied up against her will and her 'friend had been murdered, stabbed 21 times and died in a coppers arms'.

Risk was identified too. The danger from other sex workers was mentioned, as some women had been assaulted whilst working: 'one girl CS gassed another on the street'. A member of staff had also mentioned this, stating it could be possible in local prisons that women would come across perpetrators of such incidents whilst in custody.

Youth involvement in sex work was highlighted by several women and they were concerned that there needed to be some specific advice given to young women around safer working, as they may not be as 'street-wise' as the older women and that some of them 'enjoyed the thrill of being chased by the police' and may not understand the realities and/or dangers if new to the work.

One project worker summed up the areas of support that they felt women needed the most assistance with when in prison '(they need) help with all the problems they've left behind on the out....they feel so helpless to do anything from there.' They went on to give an example: 'Social services is a huge one when kids are taken into care, for them to get through on the phone to their worker is nearly impossible'.

## What Strategy Did Prisons Have For Supporting The Needs Of Sex Workers In Their Care?

None of the public sector prisons said that they had a specific policy on supporting sex workers, with some staff not knowing either way, though one staff member stated that there was a sexual abuse policy which may cover some aspects of sex work. One of the private prisons (which did not respond) had a policy which a partner project identified but did not expand on. The other private prison was developing one as part of a specific pathway to reduce reoffending, which they said was in response to the Prison Service's Women and Young Persons Group Strategy and Resource Guide that was published in July 2006.

Lack of policy was compounded by no prison having a specific strategy to deliver support and the access to any support varied and was wide ranging, as specified in the second focus area. On this specific question of strategy, prisons cited CARAT teams, Probation, self-harm work, healthcare departments, Foreign National work and child protection work as being the main areas where the issues of sex work were identified and dealt with.

None of the prisons had any specific funding to support sex workers and of the projects, only one had had specific funding for working in prisons (via the National Offenders Management Service). One prison thought that the Primary Care Trusts and Carat teams may be able to access funds.

The findings in this chapter are drawn together from a number of questions asked of all the groups and have reflected the wide range of experiences and knowledge that each group has. What was apparent was the desire by all for more to be done and the very real need for that to happen. The Conclusions follow, with Recommendations and areas for further investigation.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings have led to a number of conclusions and they in turn provide evidence for recommendations that can improve and develop support. Conducting the research has been an insight into the needs and hopes of women in prison and also shows the commitment by many staff to want to know and do more for the women. But it also shows many gaps in knowledge and flaws in communication within prisons, which can lead to a gap between the delivery and the receipt of support that is already available. It also highlights both support that is not present and how support could develop further.

The very mixed response to the research by prisons in term of both initial engagement, facilitating support and communication, has meant a lower than hoped for sample. However, the data that was gathered gives a clear indication that there are a number of factors present, at least in the six prisons that responded.

- The knowledge amongst prison staff that there may be sex workers in their care varies within prisons.
- The consistency of knowledge amongst prison staff on what support and services may be available in their prison varies and the level of knowledge is predominantly weak.
- None of the contacted prisons have a policy or definitive strategy for meeting the needs of sex workers. Some staff did not know if there was a strategy or policy within their prison.
- None of the prison staff have had awareness training on sex work and the related needs of the women.
- None of the prisons have funding to support sex workers.

However:

- The majority of the projects did not have specific funding for work in prisons.
- All prisons wanted more services, better links and awareness.
- All projects wanted to deliver more services to women in prison and resources.
- All sex workers wanted staff to have more awareness and to provide more information on support services.

## Strategy Needed

It is important that the findings do not lead to the assumption that a woman's engagement in sex work must be known by the prison. Sex work is a sensitive subject and women may wish to protect their privacy. It would not be appropriate that their involvement is questioned as part of any prison induction process. What is needed is a clear awareness that some women may be sex workers and that some of these women may want to access support. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the prison service to ensure that support is available and that it is easily accessible, as would be expected of any other support request or need that was identified. A strategy to support sex workers in prisons is needed, so that the many possible issues a woman faces can be addressed when her status is disclosed. In addition a voluntary confidential service should be available, so that the woman can disclose to those other than prison staff if required. This could then create a more comfortable environment

for those women who wish to disclose and discuss their needs further. In consultation with sex workers and projects, the strategy should have a starting point of support and not be bound by any moral judgement or an expectation that the women should move away from sex work unless she chooses to. It also needs to acknowledge that some women will not ever wish to disclose, but may still want support in associated areas. It should not single out sex workers or slot them into a homogenous group, but provide a simple mechanism for ensuring provision of the broadest and best possible support and advice to meet the women's complex needs.

### Communication In Prisons

Communication in prisons needs vast improvement. This is evident from my own experience of contacting prisons to conduct the research and the experience of some projects trying to gain access to deliver support. It is also concerning that there is such a mixed knowledge amongst staff about available services in prison, which is reflected in the experience of women wanting to access services. If staff, researchers, support projects and women in prison do not or cannot get access to the information they need, prisons are not providing the best care and are not contributing fully to a reduction in re-offending.

Switchboard staff are often the first point of contact at a prison and those calling need to have clear and correct information to assist their needs and know that the person answering the phone is capable of answering queries in a swift and professional manner. Equally, the legal visits booking lines need to be adequately staffed, as they are often the lifeline between the legal and support services and the prisoner.

Staff training needs to include awareness of the needs of the women and this can help prisons recognize the demographics of those in their care. For prison staff to either not know or assume that there are not sex workers in their care, could make the difference between helping a woman and leaving her in distress. The awareness should also include what services are available. When staff in prisons that do have links to projects state that there is not a link or that they don't know, then the question has to be asked, why don't they know? Equally worrying, is when staff at prisons that do not have links, state that they don't know either. The repercussions of this are that they either give incorrect information to women in their care or assume that women can get and maybe are getting support, when in fact they are not.

Everyone inside a prison should at least be able to identify a source of information on support services, be that source a Resettlement Governor, the prison freephone numbers to support organisations, the Voluntary/Community Sector Co-ordinator, a Directory of Support Services, even a designated notice board where support services are advertised.

Policies, strategies and available support for prisoners need to be known. Prison Service Order 4190: Strategy for Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector, has three main purposes: improved support for prisoners and their families; integrating the voluntary sector into prison work; and making full use of the resources available. There should now be a contact person for the sector in all prisons and a Directory of Services available to all staff and prisoners, stating what organisations link with the prison, when they are in the prison and how they can be accessed. At the very least this provides a point of reference for all as to what support is available.

## Strengthening Partnerships

The voluntary sector contact, alongside other resettlement and support staff, can help develop existing links and secure new links. This enables the prison to have some role in shaping the experiences of the women post release and in engaging in dialogue with the communities which they release sex workers back into. Many resettlement policies and more recently NOMS, talk of a seamless, ‘through the gate’ approach to supporting offenders. Working arrangements should be formalised in partnership agreements and the projects welcomed into prison meetings and involved in policy and strategy decisions.

## Geographical Location Of Women’s Prisons

The wide dispersal of prisons means that not only are women kept far from their homes, but services are limited in providing support in some prisons. The cost of travel or the time taken by a member of staff to visit prison is resource heavy and should be considered in terms of funding to services by NOMS, charitable trusts and the prison themselves. The spread also impacts on the distances women must travel on exiting prison and it is rare that a service can meet the woman at the point of discharge. But where they can, the prison should accommodate this valuable resource and work in partnership to confirm release details and appropriate times to match up with public transport if no other transportation is available. As one project commented ‘Don’t release women on a Friday, when it is so much harder to get them a place to live and their prescriptions sorted’.

## Concluding Thoughts

I hope that my report will add weight to the views that: we should and can support sex workers if they require it; currently there is more to be done in that area; support should not be bound by any moral or punitive stance; and it should certainly not be conditional on moving away from the employment, however, the women who have specifically chosen to do so should receive the assistance they need to leave sex work.

Sex workers do not need to be ‘rescued’, they simply need to be able to access the services they require, when and if required. Projects clearly want to assist the women at all stages of their involvement in the criminal justice system and should be accommodated to do so in every way by the prison service. They can provide vital help that may not be available elsewhere and which could massively contribute to positive resettlement. For example, for many women – not just sex workers - accommodation is often lost at the point of imprisonment, yet projects have shown that they can play a role in securing both the property and/or relevant benefits to prevent homelessness. They have also stated that they can meet women at the gate, a very vulnerable time for women, sometimes released miles from home and often in need of immediate assistance to avoid contact with potentially damaging individuals.

This research shows that sex workers have a voice and are able to participate in the current debates and research so prolific in the field. The insight shown by sex workers about the many issues of which prison staff need to be aware, illustrates this point well. The particular issues hi-lighted about their younger counterparts, shows that they must have a central role in helping to develop training, as they hold vital knowledge and will ultimately be the recipients of the improved staff awareness.

If the expected outcome of the Governments Prostitution strategy is to see the further criminalisation of sex workers, then alongside the campaigning and work for the rights of sex workers, there also needs to be clearer awareness of needs and a strategy for supporting sex workers when they end up in prison.

## Further Areas For Consideration

### International Perspective On Supporting Women In Prison:

There has been much research into different models of work with sex workers in the community. It would be interesting to know what methods are used to support the women whilst in prison around the globe. I did make some enquiries to international sex worker projects, but did not have any response at the time of writing this report. Possible contacts are: EUROPAP (European Network for HIV/STD Prevention in Prostitution) who conduct research in EU countries, ICRSE (International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe) who have been at the forefront of the Declaration of the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe which many feel the UK should sign up to, NSWP (International Network of Sex Work Projects) and TAMPEP for migrant sex workers.

## 6. Recommendations

### Awareness Training For Prison Based Staff

Clearly prison staff and women would benefit from prison staff receiving awareness training and there are projects willing to help develop this. It could be developed as a pilot project initially and then rolled out across all prisons and incorporate specific training for male sex work awareness and youth & juvenile awareness training. (Barnardos are one of many groups active in tackling child exploitation in the sex industry.)

### Safer Working Awareness Groups For Women In Prison

The vital information that is needed to be shared to aid safer working practices, can be provided in many ways and both group and individual's sharing of knowledge and experiences could be used. Some women will respond to sharing their views in a group setting and prefer information from their peers; others would perhaps benefit more from one to one advice and/or leaflets. Any group work would need to be well supervised by a professional to prevent misinformation being shared and to ensure a safe emotional environment.

### Expansion Of The Ugly Mug Scheme Into Prisons

The Ugly Mug scheme is a book of descriptions of perpetrators of violence or assault that working women have encountered. Many projects use the file in their offices and on outreach vans. It is updated regularly and is essential information that the women share with each other and can lead to prosecution of the assailants. It is useful in prisons for women to both update and for them to see before release, to brief themselves on current threats. Projects are already looking to encourage all projects to use such a scheme. Developing a procedure to ensure that the files are regularly brought into the prison for the use of the women, could prevent potentially life threatening incidents for them and others.

### Development Of Group And One To One Support

All prisons should have at least one specialist sex worker project providing advice and support to the women in its care. The possibility of both group and one to one work should be investigated with the women and the projects and facilitated in a sensitive and confidential manner and if necessary utilise the legal visits system. Anonymous access is needed too and could be aided by freephone numbers and facilitation of groups via counseling departments in prisons i.e. a booking system that would not require wings staff or other women to know what the sessions are for.

## Area Networks Of Services Supporting Sex Workers In The Release Areas Of Each Prison

As many prisons release to areas wider than their immediate vicinity, it is important that the women have equality of access to support projects and this can be helped by a network developing amongst the specialist projects to ensure whoever may contact them, is signposted to a more geographically relevant project if necessary. A network would also be able to offer a consistent service in the prison and it would make regular meeting with relevant prison staff possible. They could provide the expertise for developing the other recommendations and could also attract regional funding for such partnership work.

## Women And Young Persons Group, Women's Team, Projects, Prison-based Staff And Sex Workers To Develop A Policy & Strategy Of Supporting Sex Workers In Prison

A coherent policy should be developed to enable at the very least, a professional response to the needs of sex workers in prison and to clearly show what procedures should be followed should a disclosure take place. It should also be clear in leading to a strategy for raising awareness of needs, address the sensitivity to non-disclosure and provide a framework for developing a confidential route for women wanting support. It should seek to secure partnerships with external agencies that support sex workers and to contribute to establishing a network of projects in the release area.

## The Full Implementation Of PSO 4190 In All Prisons

This order is there to benefit prisoners and their families, staff and partner organisations. However, the variables between each prison are great, for example, very few prisons have stand alone full-time voluntary sector coordinators. The order's requirements are vital tools in assisting with the knowledge of what services are available in each prison. Requirements to provide professional working relationships with projects through partnership agreements; meetings to discuss those relationships; and named points of contact in the prison for projects are vital to aid communication and to facilitate the services. Without these things, the barriers highlighted in the research will continue and will cause frustration to all those involved.

## Funding Of Sex Worker Projects To Deliver Work In Prisons

The voluntary sector is facing a very testing time in general in terms of funding and the advent of NOMS provides both opportunities and challenges for projects to secure funds to deliver their services. More imaginative and joined up approaches need to be taken and partnership work amongst the projects and across other providers could secure funds previously unavailable. CLINKS is an organisation working to support projects that work with offenders and their families and are an excellent source of information on funding and other voluntary sector organisations. The support needs of sex workers must be budgeted for by establishments and interventions can be clearly located within many of the Reducing Re-offending Pathways, which now form part of the NOMS framework for supporting prisoners.



## Strong Range Of Counseling Services In All Women's Prisons

It is evident from the demographic of women in prison, that it is not just sex workers, but all women in prison, who can be strongly in need of counseling to support their mental well-being. It should be standard that they are provided with support for abuse, bereavement and domestic violence, as well as other specialist services and more general counseling. The Prisons Service's Safer Prisons Group could perhaps lead on this.

## Sex Worker Link Person In Every Prison (Including Male Prisons)

Some prisons may already have an individual member of staff in their midst, who happens to have a good knowledge of services available and a professional understanding of the issues and needs of sex workers, but the research showed that this is not a standardised thing. The person does not need to be a prison service employee; as long as they are identified to staff and those in prison as a source of help and information and that they can be a lead in taking forward developments, such as those proposed in this section.

## General Issues

Points were made in the conclusion about communication in prisons, release arrangements for prisoners and the difficulties faced due to the geographical location of women's prisons. These issues, whilst not specific to sex workers, are highly important and have a direct impact on the care and welfare of prisoner and also on the public image of the prison service. The points should be looked at further and addressed as a matter of urgency.

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