

# "The Type of Girl That Would Do That"



**Peer led research into sex work in Durham and Darlington**

**CHANGING  
LIVES**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This study sets out to understand the nature of sex work in County Durham and Darlington, and to examine interactions between sex workers and the services that they are likely to come into contact with. The study used the successful, peer-led methodology of Changing Lives' Girls Are Proud (GAP) project, to uncover truths about the lived experiences of sex workers that operate in County Durham and Darlington. The research behind this report took place in 2015.**

The study identified and trained three women, who were themselves engaged in sex work, to interview and gather data from their peers. The study found that the lack of a visible 'red light district' in these areas, does not equate to the lack of a sex industry, or that sexual exploitation does not therefore occur. All but one of the women interviewed noted that sex work in Durham and Darlington is hidden, and also appeared to believe that the residents and police force would prefer not to acknowledge its existence.

Rather than working on the street women are more likely to sell sex to drug dealers, advertise in newspapers or on-line, pick up men opportunistically in pubs, or exchange sex for drugs, alcohol or accommodation. It was discovered that women engaged in sex work are likely to experience domestic abuse and violence, as well as violence from customers. They are also likely to experience mental ill health which is often attributable to trauma experienced as children or adults.

Women who engage in sexual exchanges in the County Durham and Darlington can be

broadly defined as survival sex workers, opportunistic sex workers, escorts, or those who have experienced child sexual exploitation. Due to the complexities of these women's lives categorisations which were given for the purpose of this study are likely to change with the circumstances of individuals.

Twenty women were interviewed in this study. Internet searches using popular adult sites showed over two hundred people (male and female) advertising sexual services in County Durham and Darlington. This figure is still likely to be an underestimate of sex work in the area, due to the hidden nature of survival sex work.

The focus of this study is female sex work however it does uncover some anecdotal evidence of male sex work in these areas. A further study would need to take place to explore this in detail.

Escorts, who engage in more formalised sexual exchanges, were shown to be more likely to report feeling in control of their engagement in the sex industry than survival sex workers. Escorts also, however reported high levels of social isolation and problems with escort agencies. They were also still at risk from violence and degrading requests from those who purchased sex from them.

Evidence of child sexual exploitation was demonstrated in interviews with younger women. These women often show low levels of understanding about what exploitation is and how they had been groomed as part of their exploitation.

This study also looked at the interactions between sex workers and the statutory and non-agencies they often came into contact with. Six core services that came into contact with sex workers were identified and sixteen of their staff interviewed. The services were; drug and alcohol services; sexual health services; probation/ community rehabilitation; police; and, social services.

Women were also asked about their interactions with services and the level of support that they perceived they had received in relation to their sex work or exploitation. It emerged that professionals feel that they could do more to support the specific needs of sex workers and that they do not fully understand the available referral routes once a disclosure is made. None of the professionals interviewed had received any training in this area. Through the findings of this research, it is apparent that there is a demand for a specialised service for sex workers and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation in County Durham and Darlington.

The women reported that the men who purchase sex from them have wide-ranging jobs including plumbers, take away staff, taxi drivers and university lecturers. There were also wide ranges in the age and ethnicity of the men that bought sex. The data gathered in this study has been analysed in order to develop the following six recommendations which are aimed at meeting the gaps in service provision:

**1** Establish a specialist sex work and sexual exploitation service in County Durham and Darlington. There is a distinct need for a service which can reach and support sex workers, and those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation in County Durham and Darlington. It is recommended that funding is made available for one full time worker to develop a specialist service in Durham and Darlington. Services should be based on successful models in the wider region, and include emotional and practical support via assertive outreach. Women should be able to access long term, one-to-one support with a designated key worker and via group drop-in sessions.

**2** Up-skill the workforce in relation to identifying and responding to the needs of individuals exposed to sexual exploitation and/or involved in sex work. Statutory and non-statutory agencies should attend multi-agency specialist training on sex work and sexual exploitation. This should include but not be limited to agencies and individuals such as GPs, pharmacies, social services, accommodation services, police officers and women's services.

**3** Front line services should use available guidance on trauma-informed practice to better empathise with clients and understand their needs. One important benefit of this approach is to improve women and professionals' understanding of the links between trauma, behaviour, mental health and substance use. Using available tools and training, services may be better equipped to identify trauma, and adapt interactions and support strategies accordingly.

**4** Local police forces should engage in best practice exchange sessions or develop best practice documents to be disseminated as part of their training. For example, Northumbria Police have reported positive impacts when police officers have engaged in GAP's "sex work and sexual exploitation" training. Police in Durham Constabulary may benefit from specific in-house training on this topic and therefore should look to collaborate with GAP on the development of such a programme. Positive relationships with police can be improved in the area by the establishment of Designated Liaison Officers (DLOs), named police officers to whom the support project and sex workers have a direct link.

**5** Develop specialist sexual health services for sex workers in County Durham and Darlington. These services could be modelled on GAP's work with sexual health services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This successful model includes trained specialist nurses to which GAP staff have a direct phone number, as well as outreach sexual health clinics. Interaction with sexual health nurses should include refreshers on how and why to use condoms, in discussions surrounding contraception.

**6** Set up multi-agency operational steering group relating to sex work and sexual exploitation across Durham and Darlington. These meetings would be chaired by statutory agencies and held on a regular basis. The purpose would be to share information and create strategies to work together to support sex workers and to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation.

Designated workers from services would attend these meetings in order to promote cross-service learning. Links should be developed with other such groups in the North East in order to meet needs.

When asked what made them happy, children featured highly on the list. Over half of the women noted that it's the 'normal' things in life that make them happy. Thinking long term, it is the ambition of the majority of the women interviewed for this study to exit sex work and either re-enter education (7/20) or gain employment outside of the sex industry (9/20). Future career aspirations included joining the army, becoming a chef, working in a care home and setting up a charity to provide safe spaces for vulnerable women and their families.

Changing Lives would like to thank the peer researchers; the women that agreed to be interviewed and share intimate details of their lives; and the professionals that shared their practice in an open and candid way.

## INTRODUCTION

**There has been a long held belief that there is little to no sex work in the North East of England, due to the lack of a visible on-street sex marker (often termed as a 'red light district or 'beat') in most cities and towns across the region (with the exception of Middlesbrough and Stockton, who do have known areas from which sex can be bought). Research carried out by Changing Lives (formerly The Cyrenians) in 2008<sup>1</sup> and 2013<sup>2</sup>, however, addressed the hidden extent of female and male sex work in Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, South Tyneside and North Tyneside. These qualitative research pieces were carried out via peer led interviews, shining a light on the complexities of sex work and sexual exploitation in those areas.**

In 2010 researchers in County Durham and Darlington<sup>3</sup>, explored the sex market using knowledge from professionals within services who may interact with sex workers. Gaps in knowledge were exposed by this research, leading the authors to call for a greater exploration into the lives of sex workers in the micro-region.

Changing Lives' peer led methodology was found to be an innovative and effective way to learn about the nature and context of sex work and sexual exploitation, within a particular locality where it is otherwise hidden. This methodology has enabled Changing Lives to learn about the distinct needs of those exposed to this life and establish a support service - the 'Girls are Proud' (GAP) project - across the area. It also provided statutory partners insight into the nature and context of sex work and

sexual exploitation within their particular locality. Research carried out in this manner has further influenced strategic planning especially for Public Health and Community Safety partnerships.

It is for this reason that the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham was interested in commissioning a similar research study across County Durham and Darlington.

This study utilises peer led qualitative interviews to gather data on the nature and context of sex work and sexual exploitation existing in the area, and the lives and backgrounds of the women who engage in sexual exchanges. This study also looks at the interactions between sex workers and the statutory and non-statutory agencies they may come into contact with. In order for this to take place, stakeholders and professionals from services who may interact with these women were also interviewed. These interviews were held in order to explore professionals' knowledge of the sex market in County Durham and Darlington and how they interact with the sex workers that are involved in their respective services.

Recommendations have been developed in order for gaps in service provision to be met and for existing services to build capacity to work with these women who often present with multiple and complex needs.

**Up until recently, our understanding of the nature and context of sex work and sexual exploitation in County Durham and Darlington has been limited. Research undertaken by Hartworth et al in 2010<sup>4</sup> interviewed a range of professionals from up to 60 services in the micro-region, gathering information, opinions and suspicions on sex work in the area from professionals in the services most likely to encounter individuals exposed to this world. This research indicated that, contrary to the general public perception, a market for sex does exist in County Durham and Darlington. Furthermore, it includes both female and male sex workers.**

This research exposed limited understanding of the local sex market, leading to the perception that there were not large numbers of sex workers in the area. It was therefore recommended that further discussion with those directly involved take place, in order that understanding and awareness is increased.

Capitalising on the successful grass-roots methodology of Changing Lives GAP project's peer-led research into sex work and sexual exploitation in Tyne and Wear, we were commissioned to carry out a localised study in County Durham and Darlington.

This study is intended to influence local service delivery, rather than act as an exhaustive academic study, as is demonstrated by the numbers of individuals interviewed and practical focus of recommendations. Utilising the

existing knowledge and networks amongst sex workers themselves, this grass-roots methodology has provided an evidence base about the experiences and service needs of women engaged in sex work and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation in County Durham and Darlington. It also provides the means for women who are engaged in sexual exchanges to have a voice. This study is written in such a way to let the voices of the women interviewed take precedence, as it is their stories we relay.

In order to reach the women who were interviewed for this research, GAP needed to engage with at least one individual with experience of selling sex or sexual exploitation in the area. GAP therefore developed a working partnership with Durham Action on Single Housing (DASH), a supported accommodation project for women in central Durham. The staff identified that one of the residents had disclosed her involvement in sex work. GAP engaged with this resident and in collaboration, a drop-in was established. This woman has played a vital role in reaching out to peers with similar experiences via the drop-in.

Through engagement at the drop-in, a group of three women were trained by staff from the GAP project in basic research skills, to carry out and record interviews with other women involved in sex work or exposed to sexual exploitation. They also interviewed stakeholders; those professionals who may come into contact with this group of women. Peer interviewers were given guidance and support on how to



## BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

look after their own well-being in the process and how to refer women into the GAP project for support, should this be required.

truths about the real experiences of women as they engage in sex work or survive sexual exploitation in the region.

Using peer led interviews, a realistic picture has been developed of the lived experiences of women within the sex industry in Durham and Darlington. This study is limited to female sex workers. Anecdotal evidence was found on the male sex market in the area, but further, specific exploration would have to be undertaken in a future study to truly represent this topic.

Semi-structured interviews were used to engage twenty women who are involved in sex work and/or exposed to sexual exploitation; and sixteen professionals from six services who are likely come into contact with them. These stakeholder services included statutory and non-statutory agencies including;

- Drug and alcohol services
- Sexual Health services
- Probation / Community Rehabilitation Company
- Police
- Social Services

Stakeholder interviews were carried out in focus groups, per service, using the same semi-structured interview format.

Transcripts of the interviews were analysed and compared to provide qualitative data on the lives of the women interviewed.

During this analysis, patterns have emerged from the women's' stories. These patterns show routes into sex work and

## LANGUAGE AND DEFINITIONS

**Interviews were carried out with twenty women who define and describe their experiences and involvement in sexual exchanges in different ways. We have categorised experiences of sex work and sexual exploitation as follows:**

- **‘Survival sex work’**; women regularly exchange sex to meet survival needs, monetary or otherwise. Alternative currencies include somewhere to sleep, alcohol, drugs, food and tobacco. It is often the case that women are exposed to sexual exploitation and violence during the course of these exchanges.
- **‘Opportunistic sex work’**; occasional engagement in sexual exchanges for money or otherwise, when the need/opportunity presents itself. These women do not always perceive their activities as sex work, due to infrequency.
- **‘Escorts’**; engage in more formal, usually monetary, sexual exchanges. They may be able to charge set fees for time spent. They may work via an agency or independently or advertise services. There are some women who may describe a high level of choice in relation to this type of sex work and activities may be more organised. However, this is not always the case and there remains a risk of exploitation and violence.
- **‘Child sexual exploitation’**; any person who is under the age of 18 who has been coerced into receiving money, drugs, alcohol, power or status as a result of performing sexual activities, via exploitative situations and relationships

Women do not necessarily fall into one of the defined categories and cannot, over the course of their engagement in sexual exchanges, be classified as existing permanently within one of the above definitions. Women who are engaged in sexual exchanges, as noted in previous studies, are not of truly homogenous groups.<sup>5</sup> Due to similarities in the type of sexual exchanges women are engaged in at the time of interview, however, the above language is used for the purpose of this research.

Several of the women interviewed expressed a preference for the title, ‘sex worker’ or ‘escort’ over the word ‘prostitute’. The latter term is observed to carry negative connotations and encourage people to think of the women as ‘dirty’, ‘druggies’ or ‘whores’. Some of the women were unclear if their activities could be classed as ‘sex work’, for example when the activity is opportunistic in nature, where other forms of currency such as drugs, alcohol or accommodation were exchanged for sex instead of money, or when they see the men who they exchange sex with as ‘friends’. The quotes below demonstrate the multiple views held on terminology and definitions;

“

**I think [sex work is] a scary term... because you instantly think prostitute. You think sex for money. Whereas escorting can be about pleasing a man. It can be about pleasuring someone. It can be therapeutic in a way**

”

“

**Some people say... that ‘prostitution’ has that stereotypical old age view point, but then will also say things like, ‘sex work’ ... like it’s people’s own choice, [that] they want to do it and it’s the profession that they want to do and [that] it doesn’t [involve] exploitation**

”

One woman interviewed observed that, despite these definitions, “women have always been sexually abused” and that, “prostitution and violence go hand in hand with sexual exploitation”. Definitions and distinctions between types of sex work and the situations which lead to engagement in sex work can therefore, be easily blurred. This is demonstrated by the following findings from our research in Durham and Darlington:

- 13 women who have experienced domestic or sexual violence at the hands of family members or partners now engage in sex work;
- 5 women interviewed, who have entered sex work after first having been sexually abused by family members or ex-partners;
- 8 women who have been sexually exploited and or ‘pimped out’ by family members or partners;
- 3 women who would currently fall into the category of ‘survival sex workers’ after having previously escorted;

- 4 women who aspire to escort after having first experienced child sexual exploitation and;
- 1 woman who is currently an escort but who used to engage in survival sex work.

The themes are further explored below. The figures demonstrate how the classification of sex workers as one category or another at a particular moment of time, does not necessarily capture the complexity or the reality of women’s’ lives.

## DURHAM AND DARLINGTON: THE LOCAL CONTEXT

**All but one of the women interviewed noted that sex work in Durham is hidden and appear to believe that the residents and police force of Durham would prefer not to acknowledge that this goes on in their town. Services also pointed to the hidden nature of the sex industry in the area;**

“

**I think a lot of people don't realise that sex work goes on in their area and it's probably not something they would even think about.**

”

Rather than working from the street in a 'red light district' or 'beat' women are more likely to sell sex to drug dealers, advertise in newspapers or online, pick up men (or 'punters') opportunistically in pubs or on the street, or exchange sex for their housing or addiction needs, for example. These exchanges demonstrate the hidden nature of the market.

“

**There's lots of us, but we all live in a pond. We're hidden, we're under stones and rocks.**

”

Only one respondent interviewed did not concur with the hidden nature of the sex 'market' in Durham City. This woman solicits from the street and states that there are workers competing for the best spots in known areas from which sex can be purchased. Women do report being

approached by men in the street of Durham, whom they suspect approach them due to their visible vulnerabilities. Clients of the GAP project, in other areas of the North East, report similar experiences. Women also state that, they can sometimes tell from men's "vibes" if they are potential customers and therefore, have also approached men in the street. The above woman, for example, recollects instances in which she has picked up 'punters' from "the main street" of Durham. This interaction is similarly adopted in Tyne and Wear and is known to the GAP project as 'tapping'.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF SELLING SEX

**The majority of women describe themselves as living in Durham. Five of these could be linked to the outskirts of the city of Durham, another two, to Stockton. Almost all of the women still work in their hometown or close by.**

These women do, however, sometimes travel (or 'tour' as it can be known amongst sex workers), or have previously travelled for their work. Only four of the women stated that they solely work in their hometown or close by.

Women travel either within the region or further afield; "I've worked everywhere". One survival sex worker regularly travels to Middlesbrough for work, due to the relative ease to find 'punters' at the known area for on-street sex work, the 'beat'.

“

**You can go to the fucking Louvre and still find your gear...and it's the same when men want sex... everywhere you go, there's going to be a punter. Everywhere.**

”

## SURVIVAL SEX WORK

**Of the 20 women interviewed, 11 can be defined as currently engaging in 'survival' sex work. These women are likely to also engage in 'opportunistic' sex work, should circumstances allow for this to take place.**

Most of these women work to supplement their benefits in exchange for drugs and alcohol and to secure accommodation, however precarious. To a lesser extent, some women have exchanged sex for jewellery or clothes. One respondent works as a stripper but has been known to supply sex when the opportunity has arisen or when she has needed the money. These women are mostly aged 35-44, though there are two women aged 18-24, two women who are 24-34 years old and one woman who is nearly 50 years old.

### THE NATURE OF SURVIVAL SEX WORK

Women in this category are more likely to set their charges per service (e.g. full sex, oral, masturbation) as opposed per unit of time, in keeping with findings from previous research in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.<sup>6</sup>

The most money that an opportunistic survival sex worker has been able to charge for full sex is £150. Most other women operate on a survival basis and charge a negotiable £40-60 for full sex.

Several have been offered as little as £5 when 'punters' (by which name customers are most commonly referred) have noticed they are 'rattling' or, coming down off substances which they are addicted to.

One woman states that she has charged as little as £10 for full sex, in "desperate" times when she has needed to secure a fix quickly. One of the peer interviewers notes that those engaged in survival sex work "feel like they have a sign on their heads" and "are usually approached by the men at a vulnerable time in their life".

Survival sex workers have often engaged in other forms of sex work including performing in web cam shows, stripping, escorting, working in brothels, working in the famous windows of Amsterdam and having sex with men at parties, in exchange for drugs or alcohol.

One of the women who has worked in a brothel perceived that "they say it's safer, but it's not". This is partially due to the often obscure legalities surrounding brothel work.<sup>7</sup> Hartworth, in his 2010 studies on sex work in the area evidenced a number of brothels in the Darlington area, which were staffed by trafficked Asian women.<sup>8</sup> These women were said, by police, to have been held in the brothels under duress with both threats of and acts of physical violence. There was also evidence, at that time, of brothels in County Durham which were staffed by mostly British and Polish women.<sup>9</sup>

## LINKS TO ACCOMMODATION AND HOMELESSNESS

Eight of these women live in supported housing, which are shared and either of mixed sex (in one instance) or exclusively of female occupants. These women shared that they have often experienced homelessness or unsecured housing arrangements.

In addition, they have often exchanged sex for somewhere to sleep or stayed in abusive relationships at risk of becoming homeless; “then it was a case of ‘you sleep in my bed with me, or I’ll sleep in the bed with you’”.

One woman explicitly stated that she has acted in this way to avoid being defined as intentionally homeless; “If you have nowhere to go, how are you meant to get out of that situation when there’s no help? There’s nothing out there. Where do you go?”

In GAP’s experience, women are often approached by men on the street, while begging, and coerced into providing sex for money or a place to stay for the night.

## EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND ABUSE

Over half of the women engaged in survival sex work were sexually abused and/ or raped as children, two by strangers and four by family members. This demonstrates a high proportion of sex workers of this nature who have experienced childhood trauma of a sexual nature. This statistic reflects the experiences of GAP clients in other areas of the North East.

Another woman had not experienced sexual abuse of this manner but carries childhood trauma from being passed “from pillar to post” when family members could not cope with her behaviour. One woman reports that her schooling went downhill after being raped at 13 years old by a 24 year old man.

Almost half of the women experienced their first sexual exchanges between the age of 16 and 19,<sup>10</sup> yet it is an offence, in UK law, to purchase sex off someone who is under the age of 18. Engaging in sexual exchanges with someone who is under 18 years old is child sexual exploitation (CSE). Where a sexual exchange takes place with somebody who is 16-18 years old, the maximum sentence is 7 years and/or a fine.

These childhood experiences of abuse and exploitation (see more detail on CSE below) demonstrate the potential links between grooming, coercion and survival sex work later in life. It is therefore relevant, that the age of an individual, as well as their socio-cultural environment, may impact on that person’s ability to truly ‘choose’ to engage in sex work.

## EXPERIENCES OF ADULT ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Eight of these eleven women have survived experiences of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or domestic abuse as adults. This includes having been exploited and pimped out by ex-partners, 'punters' and in one case, a woman's father.

The latter women's sexual exchanges were characterized by the woman being sent to her father's friends and strangers, in order to fund his and his partners' crack cocaine addiction, after the death of her mother.

“

**My Dad had me doing that... you just sit [at the roundabout] in your basque, basically stockings, suspenders, basque.**

”

Five of the women interviewed had worked to fund a partner's drug addiction, with one woman reporting that "all of my exes have been pimps". Another woman was made to beg to earn money for her partner's drug addiction, as he perceived that women are likely earn more money this way than men. Almost two thirds of these survival or opportunistic sex workers had survived domestic violence and coercive control from male partners. On several occasions, this included sexual violence and rape.

“

**He nearly broke my back once because he wanted something to eat.**

”

## LINKS TO SUBSTANCE MISUSE

All eleven of the women involved in survival sex work regularly use illegal drugs. The severity of this drug use ranges from cannabis, to opportunistically taking cocaine with punters, to long standing addictions to heroin and crack cocaine.

Five women entered sex work to fund their own and/or their partner's drug use; "He wouldn't even make sure I was alright. But he made sure he got the money". One woman's male partner had also engaged in sex work, to enable both parties to be able to contribute to the cost of the dual drug addiction. This finding echoes findings from research into the male sex market in the North East of England.<sup>11</sup>

Drug and alcohol services noted in their interviews that, to their knowledge, "there's usually a partner involved", when discussing their clients' involvement in sex work. They rhetorically stated that "she's covering both habits, isn't she?" Two of the women in this category were introduced to sex work via having experienced CSE, having been given drugs at parties or 'sessions', before having been expected to pay for the drugs with sexual acts (see below for further information on this form of sexual exploitation).

The prevalence of habitual drug use amongst these women demonstrates the multiplicity and complexity of the needs of survival sex workers. Several women discuss that drugs help to get through a job. It is further said to "numb the pain" of their



past, and the stigma that they experience as sex workers, often leading to feelings of shame, embarrassment or guilt.

Two women, in addition, describe the cyclical nature of their drug use:

“

**And then the drugs stop working, don't they? They don't even numb the pain anymore**

”

“

**In a couple of hours, when it all wears off, it's all going to come right back. And then there's nowhere to go.**

”

This vicious cycle is noted by one of the professionals interviewed for this study:

“

**But if nobody's addressed the real reasons as to why you're using the drugs, to block out what's going on, [then] you don't actually want to get off the drugs.**

”

Another professional notes that, in recovery, “the good thing is, you get your emotions back, the bad thing is, you get your emotions back.” There is therefore, a need to address underlying issues and mitigate negative coping strategies.

## MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Nine of the eleven women in this category have mental ill health, often linked to past trauma. These conditions include depression and anxiety, and for one woman, has led to self-harm. Two of the women report accessing Community Mental Health Nurses (CPNs) who work with them on living with trauma.

“

**And how do you knock the feelings, once you've cut them off from your heart, from your head and your body. How do you put it all back together again?**

”

When the women were asked to describe their levels of self-esteem out of ten, levels ranged from seven out of ten, at the highest, to “nil – fuck all”. One woman reports that her involvement in sex work has “[affected my] confidence, the fact that I've had to lie to my family”. The low self-worth amongst this group of women is linked to past trauma and abuse but in addition, to the stigma attached to sex workers:

“

**Once people know you've done [sex work], they've got a low opinion of you.**

”

As with drug use, above, the emotional impact of this type of work is shown to be cyclical in nature, one woman describes this; “when I hit rock bottom, or if I feel like, what’s the point? I already feel used and I already feel damaged, so I might as well craic on.”

One of the peer interviewers stated that her self-esteem was boosted by participating in this research. Another women reported that engaging with one to one support and group activities with GAP increases her sense of purpose and confidence when interacting with other women:

“

**I haven’t been doing anything like drinking all bloody day or whatever, it got me out and about and talking to people, didn’t it?**

”

## ESCORTS

**Six women interviewed for this study fall into the category of ‘escorts’. The majority of escorts were aged 25-34, though there were two under 24 years old and one woman aged over 50. These women live around the region and usually work close to home, although some have travelled (or ‘toured’) for work in the region and beyond in the past. These women are primarily motivated by the financial gains of sex work.**

Women state that they work to supplement benefits, pay rent, travel, provide for their children or for one woman, simply as she “loves money”. In contrast to several of the survival sex workers, none of these women currently engage in sex work to fund their own or their partner’s drug addictions. Customers are widely referred to as ‘clients’, within this category.

Escorts have often taken part in other forms of sex work in the past, including pole dancing, porn, dominatrix and “slave work”. One woman used to engage in survival sex work during periods of drug use and homelessness but states that her love for money overtook her need for drugs:

“

**I stopped using and then straight away, got into escorting, then money was my new addiction... I’ve chosen the job to be my new addiction. So I wouldn’t take the drug now.**

”

Escorts are able to charge set fees for the time spent with a client. These prices range from £50-60 for 30 minutes, £100-£110 for an hour and so forth, sometimes via use of an agency. Three of the women work via agencies and comment on enjoying the professional approach that comes with this, despite having to pay up to 30% commission to the agency to facilitate the booking.

One escort reports charging more for “car meets”, a small number of escorts also offer this service online (see below for further information on escorting and the internet). Engaging in ‘car meets’ is likely to have its own particular risks as sex workers get into cars with customers who they have potentially never met before and have no background information on.

Two women only did ‘cam work’ and did not meet clients. They were paid by customers purchasing credits prior to viewing the women online.

## THE INTERNET AND THE SEX INDUSTRY

The influence of the internet has had some wide-reaching consequences for the sex industry. The internet has revolutionised the way escorts connect with their audience, linking them to a far larger client base and thus providing them with more business.

Those who engage in survival sex work may not use the internet as often, but they will from time to time make use of the many subscription free web sites, where they are able to post their personal and contact details. The widespread use of smartphone 'apps' for those who want to contact sex workers via their smart phone or tablet, has also increased.

It is possible to input search parameters on sites such as 'Adultwork.com' in order to search for women and men who list County Durham and Darlington as a place they are sexually active [to sell sex or otherwise]. To judge accurately if a personal profile describes someone selling sex, some or all of the following words or phrases were entered into the search facility; incalls/ outcalls; expenses; escorts; rates; to book; working now/today; best service [or similar, such as 'best in town'].

On 28th September 2015, a search was made on the site, using the above parameters, with the following results:

**Female Profiles – 172 profiles selling sex**

**Male Profiles – 38 profiles selling sex**

were as follows:

**18 to 30 years – 94**

**31 to 45 years – 64**

**Over 45 years – 25**

The youngest sex workers were 19 [two profiles] and the oldest 61 [two profiles].

Two escorts described themselves as 'students' and stated an age of 20 years.

Three profiles detailed black minority ethnic sex workers [two Thai and one African].

Many of the profiles also had their prices clearly set out. The amounts varied, depending on the length of time and the location, and were similar to the prices quoted by the escorts who were interviewed for this study. These prices relate to female sex workers, men are less likely to add prices to their profiles.

Profiles also feature 'reviews' from previous clients who are allowed to leave feedback on the profile [see below]. The highest number of reviews, per profile, was 422.

In addition, websites exist for sex workers and clients to engage in informal conversation with each other and amongst themselves. Escorting websites can also provide peer support amongst sex workers, as safety tips are shared.

## ESCORT AGENCIES AND INDEPENDENT WORK

There are 10 to 15 escort agencies operating in the County Durham and Darlington area. Some escort agencies will pay regard to the safety of the escorts when with their clients (for example not taking bookings from anonymous clients). Agencies are likely to be aware of the law in relation to brothels and the control of prostitution.

A 'good' agency is reported by the women interviewed to be one which is supportive of its employees and allows some independence. Such an agency would, in one woman's opinion, not put too much pressure on women to work at all costs. In addition, another escort would prefer an agency that is perhaps run by women who are not just in the industry for financial gain, but who may have had personal experience of escorting themselves.

A 'bad' agency is reported to be one which does not care about the welfare of its employees. For example, a bad agency would send women back out to work, in ignorance of a trauma which has occurred via work or an illness. Further, a 'bad' agency would make it difficult for a woman to resign from employment.

The three women who work independently run their services as businesses. Two of these women maintain taxes and accounts, one of whom pays into a pension, a mortgage and owns a car. As escorting is this woman's main source of income, the above are all paid for via escort work. The third woman charges fixed rates for services in the majority of instances,

though has been paid for sex with jewellery, clothes and shopping trips, in the past.

### LINKS TO THE VISIBLE ECONOMY

One escort noted that prices in the North East are cheaper than in other parts of the country in which she has worked, which demonstrates that the sex market is in keeping with the formal more visible economy in many ways.

“

**Everyone just seems poorer. We've got the highest death rate than the national average, the highest asthma rate than the national rate... everything is cheap. Because of that... our prices have to be cheaper.**

”

In contrast to the male sex industry in the North East,<sup>12</sup> none of the female escorts reported using social media (such as Facebook) to advertise services with one escort describing this as “too dangerous”.

This is also in contrast to younger women who are or have been vulnerable to CSE, as below. Independent escorts use websites such as Craigslist or Adultwork to advertise their services. Agencies advertise the services of the women they employ, on their websites. Photographs, prices, services offered and physical statistics of individual women, are shown on these websites. Consumer reviews are also common on escort agency websites.

Separate websites also exist in which clients can rate an escort's services, appearance and demeanour for the public to see.

One woman describes this as one of the downsides of escorting:

“

**Someone can literally go through everything... what your body looks like, whether you've shaved... what your breath smells like, what your teeth look like... whether you look like you've taken something. They'll sit there and make every assumption under the sun... and it really gets to you.**

”

## LINKS TO SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Alcohol and drug use appears less problematic with this group of women, although still a concern in some cases. In addition to the woman who had a previous habitual drug addiction, two escorts state that they use drugs for recreational purposes only. Drug and alcohol habits have proved to be the entry into sex work for two of these women. One woman says she drinks only to get through jobs but “does not need to drink”. Similarly to survival sex workers, there is a tendency for some women to drink or take drugs in order to “numb” themselves to the work they undertake.

## MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

Similarly to survival sex workers, trauma is a common feature of the escorts' pasts. Albeit for a slightly lower proportion of women compared to, domestic violence and sexual violence still feature in half of the women's stories, when discussing past relationships and upbringing. One woman has experienced 15 years of domestic violence and abuse and another who states that “nearly all” of her relationships had this abusive characteristic. Another woman had experienced severe sexual abuse and exploitation from the age of eight, at the hands of her father.

Also concerning with escorts, is the levels of stigma and isolation, associated with the job. One woman says that escorting used to make her feel good, attractive, but when people started finding out, her feelings of shame have increased, leading to social isolation. For one woman, this led to attacks in the street;

“

**I've had lots of attacks in the streets and things and it's affected the kids.**

”

The levels of social isolation felt amongst this group are high as escorts often feel like they lead double lives, with double identities;

“

**“You're constantly pretty much pretending to be someone else, so you do end up with a bit of a personality complex”**

”

“

**Outside of work, you can't really have a healthy sex life, because you're constantly acting.**

”

Self-esteem levels are higher within the escort group than the survival sex workers, however, with one woman reporting “immense confidence”, which she attributes to her work.

Despite this, confidence levels are shown to decline over time as issues around identity, social isolation, health and the realities of the job sink in: “You're a thing. You're objectified”; “Sex now is meaningless to me, I just see pound signs.”

Escorts, are shown to be less likely to know other women who are engaged in sex work, according to findings, and more likely to report feelings of isolation.

“

**No-one knows [that] I do sex work, I try to keep it below the belt.**

”

One stakeholder notes the importance of knowing people who are engaged in similar activities to oneself, in order to reduce isolation and provide peer support; “It creates a sense of belonging because there is nobody else that understands.” Amongst the escorts, over half acknowledge that they experience mental health problems, one of whom has tried to commit suicide, her mental health having been adversely affected by past trauma.

## EXPERIENCE OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE) AND GROOMING

**There have been several high profile cases<sup>13</sup> around the UK in which CSE<sup>14</sup> has taken place and been mishandled by both statutory and non-statutory agencies. These cases have brought the public's attention to situations in which children have been coerced into engaging in sexual exchanges, over prolonged periods of time. Documented failures of local authorities and services have, in part, led to the continuation of widespread exploitation, often involving highly vulnerable children and young people.**

There are common features within these cases, including but not limited to, lack of knowledge about legalities surrounding the selling and purchasing of sex and attitudes towards children and young people. This has often led to young people who have experienced this form of exploitation being defined by professionals as 'child prostitutes'.

Children and young people are often said to have 'consented' to the exchange of sex for drugs, alcohol or gifts. This consent cannot exist with the UK's legal framework. As Barnardo's<sup>15</sup> note, "any young person can be a victim of CSE....It happens when a young person is encouraged, or forced, to take part in sexual activity in exchange for something". It is illegal to purchase sex from someone under the age of 18. This therefore, renders the term 'child prostitute' obsolete. The notion that a person who is under the age of 18, can 'consent' to sexual exchanges, is therefore invalid.

Interviews carried out in this study found six women who show signs of having experienced this form of exploitation. These women are all currently aged 18-25 years old. One woman disclosed that her exploitation began when she was 15 years old and she was introduced to a party scene involving multiple older men, by a cousin. A second, transgender woman, disclosed that her exploitation began when she was 13 years old, when an older man would meet her outside of school and buy her gifts. Social Services in the area of this study also stated, in their interview, that they are aware of at least one additional case and a local police investigation into more widespread and systemic sexual exploitation.

There is much confusion amongst these women surrounding what exactly constitutes exploitation. Further, there is confusion surrounding what constitutes healthy friendships and sexual relationships:

“

**Because stuff happened a lot when I was younger, so I just thought it was normal.**

”

These women often have been groomed by, and socialise with, the men who they exchange sex with. They therefore find it hard to reconcile this idea of friendship with the realities of exploitation. Five of the women report that they are "just starting to realise" what exploitation means, the other does not talk of her exploitation in such explicit terms.



“

**I feel like I've got to do something to them, like I can't say no.**

”

Sexual health services in the area report having often had good relationships with these young people. They agree that “a lot of them don't understand” what exploitation entails and further, that they may be experiencing this. Sexual health nurses report that, in their experiences, young people can be manipulated by gifts such as “a packet of fags and a fiver” and flattery. One woman echoes this observation in her experiences and says that her exploiters give her the attention that was missing from her upbringing.

“

**Well, they pick you up, get you mortal, buy drink, buy tabs and that for you and then when they see that you're in a state, they think that they can just do what they want with you.**

”

Women have often first encountered, and continue to encounter, exploitation when at parties or 'sessions' with male acquaintances; “I think it's just like they're friendly and it comes with it”. These parties often involve drug taking and the exchange of sex for drugs. This group of women are shown to be the most likely, of those interviewed, to take New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) or 'legal highs'<sup>16</sup>. They often take these drugs with the men who they exchange sex with.

“

**I said, 'is this place [for] sex work?' And he was like, 'yeah' and I was like 'oh god, I didn't know' ... then he asked me and said 'you're a really bonny girl... do you want to see if you like it?'**

”

Demonstrating that CSE can be an entrance in to selling sex as adults, four of these women have entered into more formal sexual exchanges since experiencing exploitation, or aspire to do so in the future. For example, two women now advertise services online or in newspapers (a common means of advertising for independent escorts, as above) and regularly exchange money for sex. One woman has exchanged sex for two grams of an undisclosed drug and two women aspire to become escorts; “it just looked like fun.” This route into sex work is common amongst clients of GAP in other areas of the North East.

Over half of these women have experienced sexual abuse as children, at the hand of one or multiple family members. Three women have similarly have negative associations with their families, suggesting trauma and exposure to domestic violence and abuse in all but one instances.

One woman was recruited by an older woman in emergency accommodation:

“

**I got tricked because she told me I was going to do nannying for her.... like, we got to be friends and she was lovely, and I thought I wanted to help her, even though I had stuff in my family, I thought it would be nice to try and help someone.**

”

CSE is linked to high levels of trauma and mental ill health in adult life. This group of women report a spectrum of mental health problems including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety. One woman has thoughts of suicide and sometimes fantasises about killing her exploiter. She sees a CPN in relation to her mental ill health.

In GAP's experience, perpetrators of sexual violence are extremely clever and select their victims carefully due to their individual vulnerabilities. A woman who is already taking risks and has a history of an unstable childhood is highly vulnerable to being groomed and targeted as an adult. It is not a coincidence that further abuse takes place.

Awareness of trafficking is in higher proportion amongst the group of women who have experienced CSE. Five of these women recognised that trafficking can take place on a local, national or situational scale.

Two of the women report having experienced this as part of their exploitation, with one woman stating that she “is used to” being trafficked. In contrast, only one escort and one survival/opportunistic sex worker knew that internal trafficking takes place. This survival sex worker had also been trafficked by punters in the past.

#### LOCAL AND NATIONAL TRAFFICKING

‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, or abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments of benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purposes of exploitation

**- National Crime Agency (NCS) (2014)  
NCA Strategic Assessment: The Nature and Scale of Human Trafficking in 2013.**

Since the high profile CSE cases, around the UK it is becoming more widely accepted by the public that trafficking is not solely an activity which involves the movement of people beyond national borders. In UK law, trafficking happens on an international, national, local and situational basis. Internal trafficking is a frequent occurrence in CSE cases.

Four of the women who show indicators of experiencing CSE, have either been approached by men on social media or have approached men using these means. Social media often facilitates men their targets, in order to take them to parties, or facilitates the girls finding parties to go to.

This information is in line with the experiences of GAP clients of a similar nature, across the wider region. The frequency of using social media amongst this group is in contrast to the above categories of women who often describe this behaviour as “dangerous”.

One young woman, who reports very low self-esteem (when asked to rate her self-esteem, this woman gave the answer of “one out of ten”), describes how she finds it hard to change her behaviour. She is unclear if what she does is sex work, as it does not fit with the traditional image of sexual exchanges. She socialises with her punters and takes drugs with them: “I go out with different men all of the time so that’s how it’s affected us, because it’s hard to stop.”

These cases highlight the need for awareness raising amongst young people about grooming, sexual exploitation and safety. Further, this highlights the need for services to be trained in what CSE is, the frequency of this taking place, and how to spot it and prevent it.

## MEN WHO BUY SEX

**All types of sex worker are visited by men with a range of professions, from electricians, plumbers, taxi drivers and take away staff, to “very high class” businessmen and university lecturers. One woman regularly sees a particular lecturer, from a local university, who she describes as a “millionaire”.**

Women see customers of a range of ages, normally preferring to see older men, who are said to be often more respectful than younger purchasers of sex. Younger customers are reported to be more often embarrassed about their use of sex workers or more influenced by the media in their perceptions of what sex [with a sex worker] ‘should’ be. One woman prefers customers who are “older or someone I get on with... we’re having a bit of a laugh.”

Ethnicity of customers also ranges, with some women reporting mostly seeing men from the BME community, particularly Kurdish men. Other women state that all of the men they see are white British.

Several of the survival sex workers report that they hand out their personal phone numbers to purchasers [often described as ‘punters’ by this group of women] in order to establish a regular exchange. These women reported that they often prefer to see regular punters. This increases their feelings of safety and can often equate to a job taking up less time, as they get to know the needs of the particular purchaser. One woman from this group had just one main regular, with whom she does not always engage in full sex. She describes this man as “older” and “very lonely”, with

no family or close friends around him. “I’m his world at the moment, to tell you the truth.”

Anecdotally, it is noted by one of the peer interviewers that exploitative relationships can occur both from customer to worker or conversely, from worker to customer;

“

**Some of the girls can exploit punters: They’ll rob them and they’ll target vulnerable men as well. So it can happen from that side as well.**

”

Women who define themselves as escorts also report that they prefer to see regular customers [often known as ‘clients’] and can end up becoming a “sort of friend” or confidant to the client. It is reported that men often turn to escorts for emotional comfort, alongside sexual gratification and the fulfilment of fetishes that they do not feel able to disclose to their partners. One escort therefore describes that relationships with regular customers can become almost “therapeutic” in nature.

Despite this familiar relationship, escorts who work for agencies tend not to give out their personal phone number to clients. Instead, the agency acts as an intermediary, in order to increase anonymity, professionalism and personal safety.

Workers states that a ‘good’ customer would be one which is respectful and considerate of her needs. One woman, for example, reports becoming more literate

and has learned about business management from her clients:

“

**My growth and knowledge [about running my service as a business] has come from clients.**

”

Another woman has had a client want to marry her and within his logic, play his part in removing her from sex work.

‘Bad’ customers are reported to be those who are violent, forceful in their behaviour or that insist on degrading treatment such as “inspecting” the body of the worker, before engaging in sexual activity. More unusual activities include requests from customers for “water sports” (involving urine), and “hard sports” (involving defecation):

“

**People... ask you to do some really, really disgusting things.**

”

One escort has received the request to dress and behave like a child. Reflecting upon the high proportion of sex workers in this study who have been subject to sexual abuse as children, and who experience trauma associated mental health problems (such as anxiety and PTSD), requests such as these can be highly damaging to a woman’s mental health and recovery.

## EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

Violence, sexual assault and rape by customers are also commonly experienced by sex workers. In total, twelve of the twenty women interviewed have been physically attacked and seven women have been raped by [sometimes multiple] customers [this number does not include women who have survived sexual violence and rape as part of their experience of sexual exploitation].

“

**They've paid for your time, they haven't paid to treat you how they want to.**

”

One woman's statement demonstrates the frequency at which sexual attacks and rape have occurred in her experience; “I know it's rape when I say no.” Trauma experienced via sex work is frequent within all categories of sex worker. Two thirds of the survival/opportunistic sex workers report having been violently attacked or raped by punters. Two of the women interviewed have lost their teeth due to attacks from punters. One woman has been kidnapped and driven to a place where she was gang raped, severely beaten, tortured and then “left for dead”.

Three escorts have experienced violence, including sexual assaults, at the hands of clients. None of these incidents were reported to the police with one woman being satisfied that her employing agency barred the perpetrators.

Nine of the women have had experiences in which more men have shown up and

expected to have sex with them, than had been arranged:

“

**As soon as you go upstairs, then they're on the phone to them... they're texting straight away and the whole house is full.**

”

None of the women who this had happened to responded that they had been comfortable with this situation. Some women have been expected to have sex over and over again, without prior warning or expectation: “I'm trying all sorts [to get out of the house].”

In total, the majority of women interviewed had experienced violence at the hands of those who they exchange sex with. This includes violence perpetrated by those classed as “friends”, in the case of women who have been vulnerable to CSE. Sex workers are not only highly likely to experience violence but are also twelve times more likely than other women of the same age, to die as a result of violence at work.<sup>17</sup>

## SAFETY: AWARENESS AND STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Of the eighteen women who discussed safety as part of their interviews, only one woman was confident in saying that she has no need for a safety plan. This nineteen year old woman exchanges sex with 'friends' and associates and therefore feels that she "wouldn't let anything bad happen" to her. This is in contrast to an older sex worker who admits that, "there's no way of staying safe, you don't know what you're walking into."

Most women were all too aware of the danger they are in when engaging in sex work. One woman stated that her flatmate was missing, at the time of interview, after having gone out to do sex work. She did not know who to turn to in this situation and how to reach her friend. The threat of disappearing or experiencing violence is felt most prevalently amongst survival/ opportunistic sex workers:

“

**What's to say I'm not going to go out to work tonight and not come back? And who's going to notice if I don't?**

”

In order to try and mitigate the frequent attacks by customers, women put in place safety plans. Nine women have used taxis or drivers to wait outside or close by while they work. There is not always a trusting relationship between women and their drivers however.

For instance, one woman was driven from place to place by a driver who was 'employed' by her madam, the perpetrator of her exploitation. Escorts who are employed by agencies often use drivers who are also employed by the agency, to whom they must give a percentage of their earnings.

Weapons are most frequently carried by survival and opportunistic sex workers, perhaps due to the heightened threat felt by these often vulnerable women.

Six of these women disclosed that they have previously carried, or currently carry, a weapon. This includes knives, tear spray [commonly known as CS spray] or pepper spray, another takes a dog out with her. One woman reports having used a knife when in danger.

Three further women stated that they would not carry or use weapons [apart from "the heaviest object" in reach, in one instance].

One woman stated that she would not carry a weapon out of fear that her weapon would be used against her in any confrontation.

Another woman feels it would be futile to carry a weapon as, when she was raped by a purchaser, he acted too fast and with too much force, for her to have been able to fight back and stop the attack.

Six women operate a type of 'buddy system' in which they tell a friend (or their employing agency) that they are working and perhaps, where they are working.

Other women take a friend with them to 'out call' jobs, in order to listen for danger and act if necessary. For one woman, this 'bodyguard' role provided a route into sex work, as she saw how quickly her friend made money and subsequently entered into sex work herself.

One escort prefers not to take 'out calls' as "at least at home you know where your back door is."

Other safety strategies employed include, not working late at night when customers are more likely to be intoxicated or in large groups; not entering a building when it is felt not to be safe; working in an area in which there are lots of CCTV cameras.

One woman has her phone to hand, in case of emergency, and has on her last redial list (a) her agency (b) her neighbour and (c) the police. That police are third on this list demonstrates the lack of trust in the police felt amongst many sex workers in Durham and Darlington, as below.

Unfortunately, in the cases where sex work is controlled by another person, safety planning is not an option. One woman "would just get left in a car" by the perpetrator of her exploitation. Her only strategy for mental safety was thinking of positives and creating mental blocks:

“

**At least she didn't make me work the streets. At least I was in a house; I just shut down...I [thought] of a happy place.**

”

Escorts are in frequent communication with their agencies, to communicate whereabouts, though some women do report that they feel their employer's concern for safety and wellbeing is limited. Unfortunately for the above woman, her communication with her perpetrator was severely lacking:

“

**She was like, 'where's my money' and I was like 'I've... got blood on me, thanks, that's really nice of you.'**

”



## PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL HEALTH

**Eleven of the twenty women interviewed are registered with GPs, one of whom states that this is a recent progression in her attentiveness to self-care. The number of escorts who are registered with a GP is in higher proportion to survival/opportunistic sex workers, in line with national statistics.<sup>18</sup>**

When asked if they had disclosed their activities to their GP, only two women responded positively. This is a small proportion, causally connected to the shame, guilt and embarrassment felt by a large number of the women, about their work. One woman stated that, “there’s none of us who would tell our GP – just wouldn’t”.

One woman is known to social services due to her vulnerability to sexual exploitation via a referral from her GP. Another woman told the interviewers that her GP had previously enquired about, and subsequently reported, her exploitation. The latter enquiry was due to her contraction of a serious pelvic disease and internal damage due to “too much” sexual activity. Due to the [well-intentioned and statutory] safeguarding actions of this GP, this woman, who was held in sexual slavery, was “nearly stabbed that day” by her perpetrators, after having had received a phone call from her GP “during work hours”.

Another woman reports that she has presented to the GP with a bruised and torn cervix, due to the nature of her schedule as an escort. She worries about the long term impact of her work, on her physical health:

“

**If I’m doing a full shift, that’s got to be at least eight hours... so if I’m booked back to back, that’s sex with a different person every half an hour or every hour, it takes a toll on you physically.**

”

Almost one third of women reported regular visits to sexual health clinics for purposes such as standard check-ups and/or hepatitis immunisations. This is more prevalent in the younger women and proportionally higher in the escort group than within the survival / opportunistic sex workers.

There are mixed opinions regarding disclosing sex work to sexual health workers, one woman states that she disclosed her activities to a sexual health nurse as she thought she “would be best placed to help”. Another woman, however, felt very differently about disclosure, leading to her travelling across the region in order to attend various sexual health drops in clinics, and therefore avoid familiarity and questioning:

“

**In the past when I’ve gone to sexual health clinics... I’ll speak to someone at reception and reveal that I’m a sex worker... they’ve been a bit standoffish, or whatever, and it makes me feel guilty about talking about it. It feels like I shouldn’t tell them, when in reality, it’s really important that I do tell them.**

”

Escorts report being in a strong position to be able to demand the use of condoms, with over half of this group stating that they use condoms regularly, if not “for everything”.

One escort, for example, doesn't use condoms for oral sex. Only one survival sex worker discussed condom use, reporting that she always uses condoms, including for oral sex and masturbation. Condom use seems far less popular with purchasers however:

“

**Every day that I've ever worked, I've had someone tell me that they don't like condoms, or [that] they're allergic to condoms, or [that their penis] doesn't work if they've got a condom on. It happens a lot.**

”

Despite this, only four of the women interviewed disclosed past or current sexually transmitted diseases, including hepatitis C and chlamydia.

Sex workers are sometimes offered more money for unprotected sex. One woman, who advertises her services online, charges £40 extra for sex without a condom.

Four women have been made pregnant by customers/ perpetrators of sexual exploitation (one woman has been made pregnant on two occasions by the men who exploit her). These pregnancies have resulted in two miscarriages, one termination and two full term pregnancies and healthy children. Neither woman, who

carried the pregnancies to term, was aware of the paternity or ethnic origin of their children until after the birth.

## EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM (CJS)

Women were asked whether they would feel comfortable reporting crimes they had fell victim to, to the police. Fifteen women answered this question and of these, only five would do so. The reasons behind this low ratio stem from several factors, as explored below. One woman stated that she would go to the police “only if I really, really needed it”. Another woman stated that she would report to the police, despite having little confidence that the complaint would be listened to.

Twelve of the twenty women have had negative experiences with the police, for instance when reporting crimes such as domestic violence and rape [which has, in some instances, taken place while working]. In one such example, a sex worker reported a rape to the police, only to have the following response:

“

**Maybe we shouldn't get him done for rape, we should get him done for shoplifting, because it's the same thing, isn't it?**

”

Treatment such as this has impaired the women's perception on police attitudes towards sex workers: “They look down on us, think we bring it on ourselves.”

Another woman's past experience of reporting crimes has left her sceptical about how much help from the police would be available to her, as a sex worker. She feels like the police would not believe her, if she did try to report:

“

**I think that the police are the reason that some women don't come forward for help because of the way they treat them.**

”

There is perceived stigma and much despondency, particularly amongst survival and opportunistic sex workers, many of whom have multiple and complex needs. It is felt amongst women that:

“

**Once [the police] know your face, they're like, 'oh, it's you again...instead of saying, 'she obviously has issues and needs some help.**

”

This perceived judgement by the police, due to past actions, is a common theme. Amongst survival and opportunistic sex workers for instance, almost all women discuss past involvement with the Criminal Justice System [CJS]. The crimes reported range from “really violent crimes” to drunk and disorderly and shoplifting charges.

Three of the women have been imprisoned for their crimes. A number of women report that they entered sex work in order to avoid repeat petty offending and further involvement with CJS. One of the professionals interviewed for this report has heard similar stories from the women she works with. One survival sex worker has previously moved area to try and avoid the stigma of her criminal record and judgement she receives for this, and for her involvement in sex work.

“

**You know girls like you? We just want you out of our fucking town.**

”

Four women have had positive experiences with the police however. One woman states that this experience was with Cleveland Police. Two women have had positive experiences with police surrounding sexual exploitation.

Despite one woman reporting that she feel that police “automatically think that [sex workers] are the scum of the earth”, she has had some positive interaction with the police, particularly during a brothel raid; “I’ve been lucky, I’ve had a lot of support”. This woman states that she stays in touch with one particular police officer, who took part in this raid, in time of need. She, and another woman, perceive this more personal police relationship to be conducive to reporting and information sharing. The former suggests that:

“

**It would be nice if the uniformed police knew about us, knew we were there so we could just ring them if the other ones were on holiday.**

”

One police officer describes in his interview, that he approaches sex workers with the following attitude:

“

**How would I feel if it was my son or daughter that had been involved in the sex industry?**

”

Another woman perceives that if there was increased awareness and understanding amongst the police, about sex work in the area, there would be a decrease in violence against sex workers. This woman suggests a scheme in which police are better trained in this area and that women are given contacts numbers of named police officers, rather than the general 101 line. Further, that those women who work from home are given stickers to put up in their house, to show police support for sex workers.

One woman, who has worked in several areas of the North East suggests that “[Durham Constabulary] are about 20 years behind”. She compares this force to Northumbria Police who she states, are more “on the ball” in regard to sex work and sexual exploitation in the area. It is noted however that, within Durham Constabulary, “attitudes are changing”, prompting one woman to now feel more able to contact the police, than when she first started escorting.

It is felt amongst over one third of the women, that the police underestimate the scale of sex work and sexual exploitation in the area, thus reflecting the perception of the general public.

One woman, however, believes that the police do understand the nature of sex work in the area, yet turn a willing blind eye as “they think we bring it on ourselves”.

One woman, due to her knowledge of the scale of this activity in the area, questions this lack of knowledge amongst both the police, services and the wider public:

“

**I don't see how people can't see the problem in Durham... how can the police not?**

”

One of the police officers interviewed states that police officers carry a responsibility to know what is going on in their constabulary:

“

**I think you're in the wrong job if you don't want to know as a police officer... that's what it's all about really.**

”

## SERVICE PROVISION

**The following section details the general experiences of the professional staff employed by services that interact with sex workers. Included are generic perceived barriers to providing the appropriate and high quality services to these women (and men). The information portrayed is gathered from both the women respondents accessing services and professionals from the services. Services were selected due to their likelihood of coming into contact with those who are engaged in sex work.**

Findings echo those of the two studies into County Durham and Darlington in 2010.<sup>19</sup> This demonstrates that services are likely to be no better equipped to meet the specific needs of sex workers or those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, than they were five years ago. Issues of sexual work and sexual exploitation remain under explored. Professionals may work to the best of their ability for sex workers and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation, yet they are in need of specific training and referral pathways. Local Authority cuts to services have also limited professional ability to connect with those who engage in such activities.

“

**No-one asks as I don't come across like the type of girl [who would] do that.**

”

Eleven women [out of the fourteen who answered the question] report that they have had no explicit support surrounding their sex work, before the pilot of the GAP service. This is perhaps due to the hidden

nature of sex work in the area.

Stakeholders agree that the sex market in Durham and Darlington is “like a hidden community.” One woman, who has had specific support around her sex work, received this in Middlesbrough, from the “A Way Out” project.

“

**There is a lack of awareness with services, about what is actually going on... in Durham... you have an image of what sex work is... and you think ‘well, I’m not seeing that happen.’**

”

Discussions with professionals showed that often, those who come into contact with sex workers do not know how to approach the question of sex work. Professionals do not know whether to directly ask ‘are you a sex worker’ or how to approach the question otherwise; “Are we not asking [the questions] right?”

“

**It was really awkward when one of the male workers said, are you involved in sex work’, and the girl was kind of taken aback.**

”

Perhaps due to this self-confessed “naivety” surrounding sex work in Durham and Darlington, women often feel like services are not prepared for them to disclose their activities to them; “and she just looked at me like – kid, are you serious?” Services are unlikely to probe women about their suspected involve-

-ment in sex work and indeed, changes in their behaviour that may indicate a change in the means by which women are earning money. One service notes that, “so I thought, that well, if she wants to talk about it, she will bring it up”. This subtle point is especially pertinent in situations in which women are known to have expensive drug and alcohol dependencies and no obvious means by which to fund this:

“

**I think it’s quite interesting that we might get somebody on [probation] for shop theft or burglary. Suddenly they stop coming on to the arrest sheets... and we think they’ve done really well.**

”

Services note that they are more likely to hear “snippets and anecdotes than... any formal kind of declaration [about sex work]”. One service noted that this may likely be due to the levels of stigma attached to the industry; “They are so stigmatised. There is so much shame attached that it must be hard to even talk about it”. Another discussed that one of the barriers to disclosure is a knowledge that once offered, information cannot be taken back.

If a disclosure was given, none of the services interviewed have a specific policy surrounding sex work. Services are likely to have policies surrounding the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, but nothing specific that would guide them in how to deal with a disclosure of sex work or sexual exploitation.

One police officer notes, however, that:

“

**You don’t get much more vulnerable, to be honest [than] as an adult than doing [sex work].**

”

Despite many women reporting that they have never been explicitly asked about their sex work, one woman reflected that: “If more people come out and actually spoke about the problems, the more help we’d get.” Another woman echoes this sentiment:

“

**Obviously, that person is going to end up in a fucking vicious cycle and they are never going to get out of that cycle if there’s not any help there for anybody.**

”

Trust is a big barrier to disclosure to services with a quarter of women reporting that they fear being judged, if they disclose their activities to professionals. Two women stated that they have further had to disclose their work “over and over again” due to changes in the professionals who are involved in their care.

Despite this repetition, one of these women feels that she is “never getting anywhere” with professionals. One of the services interviewed also spoke of the missed opportunities in these instances where a person’s key worker is changed. They therefore stress the need for proper recording instruments and structured hand overs in these instances;

“

**It's important to have that continuous care, rather than that person feel like they are being pulled from one person to the next person, which is not nice. Therefore the service user just feels like a number and that they are [not] valued.**

”

The following section contains details on specific services that were either interviewed for this study, or frequently interact with the women interviewed.

## DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICES

Of all of the services interviewed, staff from this type of service seemed most aware of survival sex work in the area. The stakeholders from this category agree with the women interviewed, however, that there is much to be done in the Durham and Darlington area, to ensure that sex workers are getting the right services and referrals in the area.

Professionals from recovery services have had disclosures from “several” women on their engagement in sex work. Staff at these services also report that they hear about others who may be engaging in sex work, via gossip or rumours amongst clients. Stakeholders from this category agree that:

“

**There's more [sex work] out there, than that we know.**

”

One professional noted that the ability of current services in the area to reach sex workers is comparable to what “the recovery community was, probably 10 years ago.”

Drug and alcohol services noted that a trusting, longer term relationship is conducive to disclosure about sex work or sexual exploitation. One service stated that, once a trusting relationship is established, they may explore the means by which a client is funding their addiction. This would provide the means to discuss possible sex work. This particular service would not “bombard” people with direct questions about sex work in the initial phases of engagement. The other service interviewed however, is required to ask about sex work in the initial assessment phase and are trained in how to do this in a sensitive manner.

One particular stakeholder noted the importance of the way in which a woman or man is asked about their engagement in sex work, noting that if the question is asked in the ‘wrong’ way, a barrier can come between the client and worker. This would have the potential to further limit a client’s engagement with the service or future openness about her or his activities.

Five women who are engaged in drug and alcohol services told interviewers that their workers are aware of their sex work but are not in a position to be able to help. Women feel that, at present: “They [services] zoom in on it, but I don’t think they’re particularly bothered.” Another woman states that though recovery services may be aware of



sex work in the area, staff: “Wouldn’t have a clue how to help a girl who was vulnerable in that situation.”

This is reflected within stakeholder interviews as the professionals interviewed said that they would not know who to refer to, in order for sex workers to get specialist support, especially before the pilot GAP project. This finding echoes the position of services in Darlington in 2010,<sup>20</sup> showing that service provision has not improved for sex workers or those vulnerable to sexual exploitation during the five year period between research pieces. One stakeholder from this category in particular, demonstrated this:

“

**If you get a disclosure, it’s like, ‘what do I do?’**

”

Despite the lack of a specialist service in Durham and Darlington, one drug and alcohol worker does state that:

“

**we always try to get some sort of solution after there has been a disclosure [about sex work], rather than leaving it.**

”

## ACCOMMODATION

Eleven of the women interviewed currently live in supported accommodation and others have lived in this type of accommodation in the past. Those who discussed the support they receive/have previously received from staff within their accommodation report that they have had no specific support in their sex work. Contrarily, some have been asked to leave supported housing due to their activities:

“

**Even in refuges, if you’re on drugs and do terrible things, you get kicked out.**

”

One woman recalls telling her support worker about an incident that took place while she was working:

“

**He said to me ‘well it was your choice to go there. No one forced you and it was your decision.’**

”

## SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES

Proportionally, more women stated that they are prepared to disclose their work or vulnerability to exploitation to sexual health clinics, than other services. Sexual health professionals also note some positive progress in this area, particularly surrounding disclosure about CSE.

Professionals note particular success in this area when they have had capacity to undertake outreach work in communities with young people. Via this outreach work, professionals were able to build relationships and trust with young people, over sustained periods of time. Similarly to the experiences of drug and alcohol services, sexual health professionals note that with the provision of long term support, they have received disclosures about exploitation and risky sexual behaviours. Unfortunately, due to recent funding constraints, these services are no longer in place in the area, leading to a decline in disclosure of sexual exploitation to the professionals interviewed.

Sexual health professionals agree that “there is a missing piece” when discussing the wellbeing of sex workers or those who are exposed to sexual exploitation. They are confident in asking questions about sexual exchanges yet are at a loss when looking for the best possible referral stream. One example is given were a “young boy” disclosed that he ‘works as an escort’. The nurse to whom he gave the disclosure knows that this is not legally possible due to his age, she therefore knows an exploitative relationship is taking place,

yet has no specialised service to refer to or discuss further action with, apart from Children’s Services and the Police.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

Several women have had negative experiences with Social Services, in two cases, in times of high vulnerability in relation to the child protection of their children. One woman, in the process of having her children removed: “Felt like they just wanted to take my kids off me.”

This woman felt that Children’s Services lacked the capacity to be able to support her through the trauma of having her children removed: “They’re all about supporting the kids but they don’t really support the mothers, which is bonkers really... because it’s the mother you need to help [in order to] help the kids.”

This sentiment was echoed by one of the peer interviewers who also noted the importance of dealing with the trauma of losing a child in this way, otherwise “that hurt is going to come out at one point.” Several of GAP’s clients in other areas of the North East have had children removed due to child protection concerns. The experience is almost always devastating for the woman. Several of the women who are known to GAP, have never recovered from the trauma of this experience and have went on to have repeat pregnancies and subsequent children removed from their care.

Another woman entered sex work after leaving care and being placed in accommodation within Middlesbrough's on-street sex scene, or 'beat', by social services. She would see what was going on around her on a day and nightly basis and thought that sex work looked like an "easy" way of making money.

One stakeholder from the recovery sector noted the power of individuals with services however, particularly noting the good work carried out by one social worker in Durham, who is known to "fight corners" for vulnerable people who are known to that particular service.

#### CHANGES IN THE CARE ACT 2014

Changes to the Care Act 2014 mean that sexual exploitation falls within Safeguarding Adults legislation. This is due to the level of vulnerability and coercion that is involved in this form of abuse and the high potential for long lasting consequences. 18-21 year olds who experience sexual exploitation should be referred to adult safeguarding.

Further, statutory agencies have a duty to respond to survivors of CSE who are no longer vulnerable but whom disclose past involvement. Due to the historical nature of several CSE cases, these changes should enable social services and those associated with them, to better meet the needs of those exposed to exploitation.

#### SPECIALIST SUPPORT

Over half of the women interviewed said that they would like better long term support around their sex work, within a service which is specifically designed for this purpose. Several women discussed the changes in their lives and self-esteem, since engaging in the pilot of the GAP project in the region and participating in the interviews which contribute to this paper.

“

**It's been a nice change... at least I haven't been doing anything like drinking all bloody day... it got me out and about and talking to people.**

”

One women summarises the calls of her peers for: "Someone who really understands us, you know? On a one-to-one level, who I can talk to about anything." Services echoed that, alongside the training need, there is a greater need for a tailored support package for women and in particular, those who engage in sex work:

“

**We could've had all the referrals in the world... you weren't going to get the help that you needed.**

”

Two services also noted the lack of and need for gender specific provisions in Durham and Darlington. These provisions, as suggested by one professional, could include women's groups located in safe places, away from potential purchasers of sex or perpetrators, and which has pram

access.

It is felt that these measures are necessary in order to be able to satisfy the needs of those with sensitive issues and to mitigate further abuse or exploitation:

“

**Because we are so male dominated in terms of the people that we supervise, trying to get that balance right and get something that's sensible and suitable for women coming in.**

”

Another service agrees that the spaces used for group work or individual support should be “safe environment[s]”, which may include special provisions for vulnerable clients.

The majority of women interviewed, report that they are in need of more specific support:

“

**I think I need support with not having anyone around me. I get really lonely, because I don't have that many people involved in my life.**

”

These women would particularly like support from a service which is understanding and non-judgemental of their engagement in sex work. The women also call for a service which can provide information or coaching on surviving domestic violence, increasing self-esteem and learning self-defence.

Several note positive personal progress since the beginning of the pilot of GAP in the area: “GAP should definitely be part of this industry, like to have that support there for girls who need it.”

All of the services interviewed felt like they would benefit from explicit training on sex work and sexual exploitation:

“

**I think, as workers, it would be... good for us to like, have a better awareness of this life. Like on a course or something.**

”

None of the sixteen professionals interviewed have received any training in this area. One woman was booked on to an upcoming training on trafficking. This course does not, however, explore the broader sex market. Other stakeholders had received training on safeguarding vulnerable adults, which may touch upon sex workers but which have not been specific on this topic, given their nature.

It was felt amongst professionals that services would benefit from a multifaceted training that increases knowledge and understanding, legalities surrounding sex work, best practice engaging with women and men exposed to sexual exploitation and involved in sex work; safeguarding concerns, and a local understanding of the realities of the sex industry in Durham and Darlington.

## FUTURE AMBITIONS OF THE WOMEN INTERVIEWED

**Women were asked, towards the end of their interviews, “what makes you happy?” and “what would you like to do in the future?” GAP regards these questions as highly important in general service delivery. Explorative questions are important in order to understand women (and men) as individual, interesting and valid human beings, rather than as a list of needs or problems.**

The exploration of individual aspirations is important as sex workers are often written off by society, members of which whom may perceive that there are no realistic alternatives for these women. For services to be able to support sex workers to enrich their lives and to exit sex work if and when they see fit, it is to be expected that women (and men) are encouraged to explore their identity and aspirations.

When women were asked the question “what makes you happy”, children feature highly on the list. One woman notes, however, that the interaction between her identity as a mother and her addiction to drugs, makes her anxious. She loves to see the children but dislikes seeing them when ‘rattling’. She therefore struggles to navigate her dual identity as mother and drug dependant woman. A number of women report that drugs and, or alcohol are the things that make them happy, as they struggle to deal with their multiple and complex needs.

The transgender woman, who contributed to this report, stated that “looking good. Being accepted as a woman” makes her happy. It is relevant to note that the majority of transgender sex workers

identify as female.<sup>22</sup> This participant’s statement highlights that, for the transgender population, ‘passing’ is a top priority. This can be a stressful issue as many transgender people face humiliation if they are not deemed to physically blend with or meet the social expectations of their chosen sex. This particular woman was able to gain supported accommodation in an all-female service, for others it may not be so easy.

Over half of the women who answered this question, noted that it’s the “normal things” that make them happy, though one woman found it hard to remember what ‘normal’ is, or if she’s ever experienced it:

“

**Going out places, just going for a walk, going to the cinema... I sometimes... forget that I can do those things, because so many years I was trapped and I couldn’t do anything. I still forget that I can do things. I’m allowed to do things, you know?**

”

Ambitions for the future vary amongst the women who participated in this research. Six of the women explicitly acknowledge that they wish to exit sex work in the future, one of these, within a year’s period. This woman, although wishing to exit sex work, knows that this will be difficult for her and, or made difficult by her agency: “You’re putting your future in the hands of very dodgy people, let’s put it that way.”

A further four women have no intention, at present, to exit the sex industry:

“

**I love it all too much. I can't see a life outside of it because it's been a long time of my life and I couldn't see what else I was going to do, actually**

”

“

**Where else am I going to go and earn that money?**

”

Two women who are engaged in survival and opportunistic sex work and / or have been sexually exploited, wish to escort in the future.

Thinking long term, the majority of women wish to either re-enter education [seven women] and / or gain employment outside of the sex industry [nine women].

The women wish to gain employment in a range of sectors, from working on a cruise ship as a chef, to jobs in retail to joining the army. Seven of the women mention that they wish to work in support services in one way or another. These ambitions range from working in a care home, to peer mentoring and volunteering with GAP, to setting up a women's charity to provide safe spaces for vulnerable women and their families.

## CONCLUSION

**This study has utilised the successful, peer led methodology of Changing Lives' GAP project, to uncover truths about the lived experiences of sex workers in Durham and Darlington. It provides the means for women who are engaged in sexual exchanges to have a voice. This study has been written in such a way to let the voices of the women interviewed take precedence, as it is their stories we relay.**

Having identified and trained women to interview and gather data from their peers, GAP have analysed the data gathered, to show that there is, contrary to general perceptions, a sex market in this micro-region. As in other parts of the North East, this research has found that the lack of a visible on street sex market in the area, does not equate to the lack of the sex industry or that sexual exploitation does not feature.

Twenty women were interviewed in this study. Internet searches using popular adult sites showed over 200 people (male and female) advertising sexual services in County Durham and Darlington. This figure is still likely to be an underestimate of sex work in the area, due to the hidden nature of survival sex work. Women who engage in sexual exchanges in the Durham and Darlington can be broadly defined as either; survival sex workers; opportunistic sex workers; escorts or; those who have experienced CSE. It was noted that due to the complexities of these women's lives, categorisations which were given for the purpose of this study, are likely to change with the circumstances of individuals.

This study utilised peer led qualitative interviews to gather data on the lived experiences of the women who engage in sexual exchanges in the area. It was discovered that women who engage in survival sex work are likely to experience domestic abuse and violence, violence from purchasers and mental ill health, often attributable to trauma experienced as children or adults.

Escorts, who engage in more formalised sexual exchanges, were shown to be more likely to report feeling in control of their engagement in the sex industry than survival sex workers. Escorts also, however report high levels of social isolation and problems with escort agencies and are still at risk from violence and degrading requests from those who purchase sex from them.

Evidence of CSE was also demonstrated in interviews with younger women. These women often demonstrate low levels of understanding about what exploitation is and how they have been groomed as part of their exploitation.

This study also looked at the interactions between sex workers and the statutory and non-agencies they may come into contact with. Services that may come into contact with sex workers were identified and their staff interviewed. Women were also asked about their interactions with services and the level of support that they perceive that they have reviewed, surrounding their sex work or exploitation. Via these interviews, it was apparent that professionals feel that they could do more to support the specific needs of sex workers and that

several women would like greater support from a service that is tailored to their specific needs.

This study was written with intention to influence local service delivery, rather than act as an exhaustive academic study, as is demonstrated by the numbers of individuals interviewed and practical focus of recommendations. Through the findings of this research, it is apparent that there is a demand for a specialised service for sex workers and those vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Country Durham and Darlington.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**The data gathered in this study has been analysed in order to develop the following recommendations which are aimed at meeting the gaps in service provision:**

### SPECIALIST PROVISION

Establishment of a specialist sex worker and sexual exploitation service in County Durham and Darlington. There is a distinct need for a service which can reach and support sex workers and those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation in County Durham and Darlington. As one professional puts it “there is a missing piece” within service provision in the micro-region, as acknowledged also by the police who were interviewed for this research.

Several of the women interviewed remarked on their emotional and practical progress, since being involved with the GAP project. In order to establish the project to full potential, it is recommended that funding is made available, for one full time worker to develop a specialist service in the micro-region. Services should be based on successful models in the wider region and include; emotional and practical support via assertive outreach. Women will be able to access long term, one to one support with a designated key worker and via group drop in sessions. Outcomes of the project could include:

- Reduction in children, young people and adults exposed to sexual exploitation;
- Increase in women accessing statutory and non-statutory services to increase health and well-being. This could

include specific outcomes relating to sexual health, drugs and alcohol, universal access to services;

- Increased safety of women and men who sell sex;
- Increased disclosure and reporting of sexual exploitation, trafficking and violence against sex workers;
- Prevention, awareness raising and support surrounding consent, sexual violence, domestic violence and abuse and healthy relationships; and,
- Increased numbers exiting sex work

It is vital that professionals engaging women have a strong understanding of their needs and adopt a non-judgemental and open approach to these often stigmatised women. They must understand the multiple and complex needs of sex workers and adopt an open door policy to engagement with the project. Cases should remain open in times of non-engagement. Clients should have the opportunity to volunteer as peer mentors and support work volunteers as they provide effective ways to reach out to those who are otherwise hidden from universal access to services.

## UP-SKILLED WORKFORCE

Up-skilled workforce in relation to identifying and responding to the needs of individuals exposed to sexual exploitation and/or involved in sex work:

Statutory and non-statutory agencies to attend multi-agency specialist training on sex work and sexual exploitation. Services who should aim to attend these sessions include, but are not limited to, GPs, pharmacies, social services, accommodation services, police officers and women's services, due to low levels of disclosure.

Front line services to utilise available guidance on trauma informed practice, in order to better empathise with clients and understand their needs. One important feature of such practice is the recommendation to deeper discuss and understand the links between trauma, behaviour, mental health and substance use. Using available tools and training, services may be better equipped to identify trauma, adapt interactions and support strategies.

Local police forces to engage in best practice exchange sessions or develop best practice documents to be disseminated face to face, in training days. For example, positive results have shown in Northumbria Police, when police officers have engaged in GAP's "Sex work and sexual exploitation" training. Police in Durham Constabulary may benefit from specific in-house training on this topic and therefore should look to collaborate with GAP on the development of such a programme. Positive relationships with police can be improved in the area by the establishment of Designated Liaison

Officers (DLOs), named police officers to whom the GAP project and sex workers have a direct link. This tool has been utilised in the Northumbria constabulary.

The development of specialist sexual health services for sex workers, in Durham and Darlington. These services could be modelled on GAP's work with sexual health services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This successful model includes trained specialist nurses to which GAP staff have a direct phone number and outreach sexual health clinics. Interaction with sexual health nurses should include refreshers on how and why to use condoms, in discussions surrounding contraception.

Setting up of a multi-agency operational steering group surrounding sex work and sexual exploitation. These meetings would be chaired by statutory agencies and held on a regular basis. The purpose of the meetings would be to share information, create strategies on working together to support sex workers and those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation through clear referral routes, consider how to reduce risk and exploitation in Durham and Darlington. Designated workers from services would attend these meetings in order to promote cross service learning. Links should be developed with other such groups in the North East in order to meet these needs.

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# CHANGING LIVES

Changing Lives is the operating name of The Cyrenians, registered charity number 500 640,  
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