

**'Violence can mean a lot of things can't it?' An  
exploration of responses to harm associated with  
indoor sex work in Scotland**

**Emma Jane Smith**

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Department of Applied Social Science  
University of Stirling  
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## **Abstract**

The association of violence with sex work has been widely documented within research and policy. This thesis provides a critique and development of such perspectives. Framed from a qualitative approach, it extends current research which has offered limited insight into the realities of how violence is experienced and responded to by sex workers and agencies involved in the provision of support to sex workers. In this way, the research develops beyond a presumption and narrow understanding of violence/harm in sex work to consider how sex workers and service providers experience, define, and thus construct their responses to harm. Findings from the data indicate variation amongst participants in their responses to harm associated with sex work, with experiences of violence or supporting violence and relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers being important factors in how these responses are constructed. Both sex workers and service providers, however, recognised and understood associations of sex work with violence and victimisation, and related attempts to encourage individuals to cease or limit involvement in sex work, although this may not apply or be appropriate to all experiences of sex work and sex workers. The thesis contends that in order to gain an informed understanding of, and develop responses to, harm associated with sex work, it is important to consider the diversity of existing experiences of sex work. This should include alternative understandings and experiences of harm that are not limited to, or focused on, violence within sex work, as informed by the experiences of different sex workers. In doing so, there is the potential to better understand and accommodate a range of sex workers' experiences, needs and interests in ways that do not impact on sex workers' safety, or contribute to continued stigmatisation or exclusion, where some sex workers do not identify with a view of their work as harmful, or wish to exit sex work. Consequently this could aid the provision and development of services that respect and offer support where required, for different experiences of sex work amongst sex workers.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### **Introduction**

This study is centrally concerned with responses to harm associated with sex work, based on the experiences of sex workers and service providers living and working in Scotland. It will focus on how participants experience, define and respond to harm as it occurs in or relates to sex work. Within this chapter, the focus of existing sex work literature is briefly outlined, before proceeding to the research aim and purpose of the research. The rationale for conducting the current study and the need for further research into the topic area are discussed. Following this, a discussion of the theoretical and methodological approaches underpinning this research is presented, as a means of further situating and accounting for the contribution made by the study. Finally, the structure of the thesis is highlighted by drawing out the main order and content of chapters. In addressing these points, I aim to contextualise the study, providing a clear indication of the role, purpose and processes involved in undertaking the research.

### **Current research on violence and sex work**

#### *Terminology*

Sex work refers to the exchange of sexual services for money or other goods (Overs, 2002; Sagar et al. 2015; Vandepitte et al. 2006), although as is later highlighted, the term is highly contested as a form of work or as violence and exploitation. For the purpose of this thesis, the focus is on sex work as it relates to the exchange of sex for money in an indoor working context (for example, transactions conducted from flats or hotels). Sex work is the preferred terminology throughout this thesis, based on an understanding that the sale/exchange of sex can be consensual and a form of labour or 'income-generating activity' (Kempadoo, 1998: 3) which entitles workers to rights and protections (Scot-Pep, n.d. c). I acknowledge and refer however to different terms and understandings of sex work, as used by

participants, including prostitution. This is done based on a belief that research should ideally seek to enable participants involved in sex work, rather than outsiders, to identify themselves and their behaviours and that some terms may in fact reproduce stigma for individuals (Ditmore, 2006). It is noted, for example that 'sex work' is a preferred term amongst individuals who sell sex rather than 'prostitute' due to the latter term's historical condemnation and stigmatisation (Jeffreys, 2015; Kinnell, 2008; Nyembe et al. 2014; Sanders et al.2009).

Similarly, in the case of service providers who form part of the sample population, it is recognised that terms other than 'sex work' and 'sex worker' can be used to conceptualise and understand the experiences of working with individuals who sell sex. As such, service providers, as with sex workers in this study, are free to use terms, which they use, identify with and understand, in relation to the experience of harm associated with sex work. In other related research, the use of and meanings associated with the term sex work continues to divide opinion. This is briefly commented on here, and covered in greater detail in Chapter Two. This is intended to outline the extent and focus of current sex work research. It will examine how such research relates to this study, any omissions within the literature and how this study can contribute to existing gaps within sex work research.

### *The harms of sex work*

Sex work has routinely been posited as a form of harm to women. This argument has been debated however and viewed as a consequence of the main elements involved in sex work, due to aspects of the 'social environment in which it is performed' (Shrage, 2004). There are those who conceptualise selling sex as a form of oppression and subordination of women that cannot be compared to other labour, as it is perceived to involve not only the sale of one's body but also one's identity (MacKinnon, 1982; Millet, 1975; Pateman, 1988). Other proponents of this approach have highlighted frequent and extreme incidences of violence (for a critique, see Weitzer, 2007a, 2009) linked to, or inherent in the sale of sex itself. Dworkin (1993) for example defines prostitution as violence against women, while S

Jeffreys (2009) discusses trafficking for the purposes of prostitution, to support the view that sex work involves or constitutes a form of violence against women.

As others have argued, however, the harms associated with sex work are more a result of social attitudes and environment than of the work itself. Nussbaum (1998) suggests that sex work shares many of the limitations of other forms of labour, notably in conditions, opportunities and stigmatisation, which can account for the harms associated with sex work, rather than being inherent in the work involved. There is a wide body of literature that highlights the existence of, and harms created by, stigmatisation of sex work and sex workers (Bullough and Bullough, 1987; Gira-Grant, 2014a; Hubbard, 1997, 2004; Pheterson, 1993). Stereotypes and stigmatising attitudes and practices are seen to create challenges for sex workers in being able to work under favourable conditions and locations, potentially exposing them to greater risks in their work, with limited access to support. In the absence of such practices, harms to sex workers may be reduced, as some commentaries have suggested. These indicate a view that sex work is not always a source of harm and oppression, and can offer a degree of autonomy, choice and fulfilment for some individuals (Marcus et al. 2014; Morgan-Thomas, 2009; Pitcher, 2014).

#### *Omissions and limitations in sex work research*

There is a wealth of existing sex work research, particularly health-based studies, which have indicated the physical, sexual and psychological risks to health related to involvement in sex work (for example, Vanwesenbeeck, 2001 discusses the plethora of HIV/sexual health and sex work research). Often such studies have concentrated on the victimisation that may incur from sex work for female and/or outdoor sex workers, with fewer research outputs, focused on other sex worker populations. Further, much sex work research has predominantly focused on either sex work as a site of, or linked to victimisation, or as a form of freely chosen employment, with limited consideration of the differences in experiences between sex workers.

While analyses of violence or harms linked to sex work are useful to the extent that they indicate dominant constructions of sex work that can underpin responses to harm associated with sex work, I hope to develop this with the current study. It is beneficial to build on these analyses, by considering the range of experiences and understandings that are involved in responses to harm associated with sex work. This can indicate a greater diversity of views that are not limited to only female or outdoor sex workers by considering the perspectives of indoor sex workers and service providers.

### **Research aim**

In view of the existing gaps in sex work research, the aim of the current study, as discussed more fully below, is designed to elicit greater detail and understanding of the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland. There will be a critique of the views advanced within some research that unequivocally suggest the presence of, or association of harm with sex work. An important aspect of the research is thus to examine individuals' often varied, lived experiences of, and responses to harm, as applied to sex work. This is intended to move beyond a view that violence is necessarily always experienced in, or in certain forms within, sex work, that there are common definitions and understandings of harm, and that harm is managed in particular ways. Individuals' responses to harm will be explored to indicate whether and how individuals actually encounter, manage, understand and thus respond to harm associated with sex work. The main research aim/ question is:

- How do sex workers and service providers in Scotland respond to harm associated with sex work?

In order to address the central research aim the following areas will be explored. These pertain to an examination of experiences and management of harm, definitions and understandings of violence/harm, experiences of either receiving or providing support (sex workers and service providers' experiences of their relationships and interactions with one another in



receiving or providing support), and factors which feature in and influence responses to harm associated with sex work:

- How do sex workers and service providers experience and manage harm?
- How is harm understood and defined by sex workers and service providers?
- How do sex workers and service providers experience the process of receiving or providing support for violence/harm?
- What factors underpin and affect responses to violence against sex workers?

The research aim and questions developed out of an extensive review of existing studies on 'sex work', 'prostitution' and 'violence', amongst other related topics (see Chapter Two), some of which were limited in their consideration of different experiences and understandings of violence and sex work. It was observed that research has concentrated on the presence of violence in or associated with sex work, often in the area of health, where physical, sexual and mental/emotional risks and harms, posed by involvement in, or prior to entering sex work have been emphasised (Bindel et al. 2012; Church et al. 2001; Farley and Kelly, 2000; Hoigard and Finstad, 1992; Shannon et al. 2008a). Female sex workers have also frequently been a subject of focus, as indicated by some feminist and violence against women literature. This has linked women's participation in prostitution to unequal gender relations, representing women's oppression, objectification and subordination to the needs and interests of men (Barry, 1981; Farley, 2013; MacKinnon, 1993). Female outdoor sex workers, meanwhile, have routinely been depicted as victims who are likely recipients of frequent and varied forms of violence from clients, pimps or others, including authority figures and partners (Barnard, 2005; December17, n.d.; Giobbe, 1993; Kinnell, 2008; NSW, 2012). Indoor sex work however has also been reported to include violence, although levels and forms of violence

encountered have been noted to differ from violence incurred in outdoor sex work settings (Barnard, 2005; Church et al. 2001; Phipps, 2013; Sanders and Campbell, 2007).

By contrast there is less research that explores the diversity of sex working experiences, other than those of female and outdoor sex workers that may or may not include violence, positive experiences of sex work, or similar frequency and forms of violence to outdoor sex work. Similarly, there is limited research, which explores the role, experiences and interactions of service providers in supporting sex workers, particularly where support is offered to non-outdoor sex workers, or sex workers who do not perceive the need for, or readily engage with service provision. These gaps will be explored in the current study, which involves research with a diverse group of participants. These include some male sex workers, indoor sex workers, and service providers with varying degrees of experience and understandings of harm, and in accessing or providing support for violence.

Scottish-based studies were also notably absent within the literature, which has important implications in being able to fully understand the experiences of individuals in this particular geographical context. There have been ongoing developments in Scotland (and in sex work law and policy elsewhere) pertaining to the regulation of prostitution, through attempts to criminalise sex work, sauna raids and the dissolution of prostitution tolerance policies and more recently, by way of a consultation that aims for the decriminalisation of sex work and reform of sex work laws in Scotland. This suggests the increasing significance of responses to sex work, related to eliminating or reducing the harms of prostitution, and protecting those victimised or vulnerable as a result. This has not, however, been accompanied by research which explores these law and policy developments, as they have featured in, influenced and impacted on the experiences of service provision for sex workers in Scotland. The current study aims to address this in exploring more fully some of the factors that underpin and influence the uptake and scope of service provision offered,

including the effects of particular sex work law and policy on available service provision for sex workers.

In addition, in attempting to further an understanding of different experiences and understandings, this study is motivated by a need to address current constructions of sex work and harm, and how these can impact on the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work. This achieves the key aim of this research, based on developing an understanding of how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work, and how this can be influenced positively or negatively by factors including attitudes towards sex work and violence. This is in line with some feminist research, a theoretical approach aligned with this study, which highlights the need to understand the experiences of different women, and how these can be impacted by structural elements; for example, attitudes towards appropriate gender roles and behaviours.

### **Research approach and methods**

This study uses feminist and social constructionist approaches to develop an understanding of responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland. A feminist approach has been selected as a means of understanding the positions and lived experiences of female participants, taking into account the main tenets of feminist theorisation on sex work and how these correspond with, or are challenged by participants, particularly sex workers' experiences. Similarly, social constructionism offers a means of addressing current constructions of sex work and harm and how these can determine how sex workers and service providers define, experience, and respond to harm. It has been considered that both approaches, by focusing on the lived experiences of participants, can reveal more about the realities of responding to harm associated with sex work, and the various definitions, experiences, challenges and misconceptions this can involve. Further, it is deemed important to use approaches that prioritise participants' viewpoints, and enable them to contribute towards knowledge production that can aid social change, based upon finding appropriate ways of responding to, and supporting, sex workers.

From a sex worker perspective, this is viewed as a way in which sex workers can feature more in this transformative process, potentially deconstructing dominant assumptions of violence/harm and sex work, to enable a greater understanding of the realities and diversity of experiences amongst sex workers. Similarly, these approaches are considered a way of facilitating awareness of how service providers can be influenced by and respond to harm associated with sex work according to dominant ideologies surrounding violence and sex work, again, also highlighting the realities of how service providers respond to the issue.

In order to achieve this depth of information on participants' experiences, a qualitative research design is employed. Fieldwork for the research comprises twenty-four qualitative, semi-structured interviews, including one focus group, with sex workers and service providers from statutory and voluntary sectors. The analytical process is also in-depth, involving regular access to, and comparison of data, to ensure familiarity with and accuracy in the interpretation of participants' accounts.

### **Thesis structure**

Following this chapter, an extensive review and analysis of existing research is undertaken. This addresses a range of multi-disciplinary theoretical and empirical literature, in order to account for how sex work and violence and harm has been explained, researched and responded to, both currently and historically. Relevant literature is discussed, indicating key issues, limitations and omissions, relationship to the current study, and scope for further or developments in research. In Chapter Three, the methodological approach of this study is presented and key aspects of the design, sampling, recruitment, data collection and analytical processes are outlined. The analysis of this study is documented across Chapters Four to Six. Chapter Four comprises a secondary data chapter. Similar to Chapter Two, relevant literature is drawn upon within Chapter Four to chart recent sex work law and policy developments in Scotland. This chapter has a greater policy focus as a means of contextualising the current study. The role, scope and implications of sex work policy responses are discussed, and it is

considered whether these or other approaches are appropriate in the regulation of sex work. Chapters Five and Six discuss experiencing and supporting violence/harm within sex work and relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers, as key emergent themes from the data. The concluding chapter (Chapter Seven) provides a discussion of, and reflections on, the thesis as a whole. The aim of the research is re-examined as it is considered how this has developed throughout the research. Research findings are discussed in addition to the research contribution and impact. The study's contribution to theoretical and empirical knowledge and its strengths and limitations are outlined, and recommendations for future related research are made.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

This chapter draws attention to existing knowledge on violence/harm and sex work, exploring the extent of research output, how violence/harm in sex work has been understood in terms of its prevalence and nature, but also omitted or overlooked areas related to harm associated with sex work. To this end, this research will complement and add to the existing body of interest, knowledge and understanding of violence/harm and sex work. It develops the literature by addressing existing limitations, notably around conflicting understandings of risk and violence, as they are experienced in sex work and related responses. This considers the range of meanings that are attributed to violence and sex work, including the existing focuses of some sex work research on the health risks posed by sex work, and sex work as a form of violence against women. These meanings extend beyond the presumption of sex work as a site of violence, risk and oppression for all sex workers. Applying the body of *symbolic power* and *violence* literature, there is discussion of how, for the sex workers interviewed for this study, violence and risk is not always necessarily associated with their experiences of sex work. Harm is constructed in different and often less visible ways; for example through stigma linked to involvement in sex work, to which greater attention will be drawn, in order to understand how sex workers (as with service providers) experience and frame their responses to harm. Further, this research focuses on an under-researched aspect and sample population of the topic, by examining responses to harm associated with sex work in a Scottish context, amongst predominantly indoor sex workers and service providers.

The literature reviewed represents work encompassing various disciplines, countries and time periods up to the present day. Due to their limited availability, it has not been possible to provide many Scottish research

examples; however, other relevant studies drawn from the UK, Europe and internationally have been consulted. Initial search strategies were topic-based, and the literature was searched according to such terms as risk, violence and sex work, using a range of bibliographic resources and library catalogues. Later, the literature search was narrowed as relevant references and citations from sources already consulted were followed up. Throughout the literature review process, I also updated my knowledge of and searched for existing literature related to my topic, through conference attendance, membership of academic social media sites and journal and publishing mailing lists.

The chapter is categorised and sub-categorised according to the following themes: *risk, victimology, social constructionism and state responses to sex work*. Relevant studies relating to these themes are provided and discussed in terms of their significance to the aim of this research. This highlights main issues of focus and limitations of existing research, the contribution of this research to the topic area, and scope for development in future research in order to develop the body of knowledge on responses to harm associated with sex work. The chapter ends by summarising the studies consulted and again draws attention to how they have been used to inform and develop this research.

### **Risk**

In understanding the possible associations between violence and sex work, it is prudent to consider the wider framework of risk in which violence can be located. Risk has been a regular feature of sex work research, and yet, remains underdeveloped (see Leaker and Dunk-West, 2011 and Sanders 2004a). This is attributed to an analysis of risk being mainly, or solely understood in terms of individual risk behaviours. Female sex workers in particular have been represented as both risk-takers and at risk (of violence amongst other risks), as a result of individualised behaviours and activities, for example, drug use.

It has been suggested that sex workers are 'risk-takers' (Farley and Kelly, 2000: 9) - the contention being that sex workers are in some way responsible for the violence and harassment directed at them. Based on this argument, it is implied that sex workers possess certain personality traits that, ultimately result in their victimisation. For Rosiello (1993) this is directly linked to an inherent masochistic nature, while De Schampheleire (1990) identifies a range of emotional issues as precursors for addiction and later, prostitution. It is such beliefs that may contribute towards the unfounded claim that rape does not happen to or affect sex workers, from the perspective that sex workers regularly interact with multiple men for the purposes of sex, unlike other women (Farley and Kelly, 2000, Kinnell, 2008). Instead rape can be viewed as punishment for failing to provide instant sexual gratification or satisfaction for customers (Kinnell, 2008), a form of theft or 'breach of contract, an expected element of the job, or that, sex workers somehow deserve, or are 'asking for it' (Farley and Kelly, 2000:17).

This has been linked to failure amongst female sex workers (compared to other women), to adopt 'appropriate' risk aversion strategies and in turn, to protect themselves against possible danger, largely framed in the context of avoiding victimisation by men (Chan and Rigakos, 2002). This indicates the gendered dimension of risk, implying the need for women (not only sex workers), to regulate their behaviour and act accordingly, in order to avoid risks. This also applies where women become victims of crime, so that they are recognised as receiving protection from the law, although it has been acknowledged that secondary processes of victimisation, or 'victim blaming' (Clark and Lewis, 1977, cited in Downes and Rock, 2003) can occur, where female victims' actions or behaviours are brought into question (Campbell and Raja, 1999; Kelly et al. 2006; Lees, 1997; Phipps, 2009; Radford, 1987), thus, undermining their sense of perceived protection and support from the law. This can disproportionately affect sex workers, who may find their rights ignored, waived or unprotected compared to other female victims. Brooks-Gordon (2006) attributes this to a lack of acceptance of women's choice to be involved in sex work, resulting in a view of sex workers' accounts of their experiences as 'unreliable' (Ibid: 206) and their



continued stigma and harassment.

It has been argued however that in order to achieve a full understanding of risk behaviour, it is necessary to look beyond the experiences of the individual to the wider social and cultural context, which few studies have appeared to address. Lupton (1999) highlights this point, in contending that individualised risk behaviours and conceptualisations of risk are developed as a result of socio-cultural relations and structures. Similar analyses are provided elsewhere for example, Douglas (1992), emphasising the importance of the social and cultural environment in shaping and giving meaning to individuals' risk behaviours. This would suggest the need for a greater consideration of the social factors or circumstances, rather than individualised risk behaviours, that may underpin and produce the contexts in which violence/harm within sex work occurs. In this research, I also aim to account for wider social/cultural factors, which impact upon harm experienced within sex work and related responses. This is done by considering the existence of factors, other than sex workers' individual behaviours, that can contribute to violence against sex workers, or influence the ways in which sex workers (and service providers) respond to harm experienced in sex work; for example, sex workers choosing to manage experiences of violence individually (through a variety of risk management strategies) rather than seeking to engage with support services. These socially produced factors include stigma associated with involvement in sex work. Aspects of language and social structures can also impact, serving to legitimise particular views of sex work, for example, that constitute sex work as violence, while excluding or misrepresenting the views of sex workers. I later explore these areas in accounting for non-physical forms of violence that can be experienced by sex workers, influencing how they manage and respond to risks encountered through sex work.

### *Drug use and addiction*

As suggested by the literature, risk and associated risk-taking behaviours are a key aspect and characteristic of sex work. Drug use, as one example, has been consistently linked to sex work, in terms of facilitating entry into,

and as a motivating factor for continued involvement in sex work. High drug use has been found to occur in both indoor and outdoor settings (Cusick, 1998), but predominantly so in relation to outdoor sex working. A study by Jeal and Salisbury (2004) into the health of outdoor sex workers found that all participants had prior experience of using drugs and alcohol, with over half of the participants becoming involved in sex work in order to fund a drug habit. This is consistent with findings by Hester and Westmarland (2004) and McKeganey (2006) who similarly found links between sex working and the need to finance a drug habit. Rates of injecting drug use have been found to be particularly high amongst outdoor sex workers, prior to, and during their involvement, in sex work. McKeganey and Barnard (1996) note in their study conducted over two years, that up to 75% of Glasgow outdoor sex workers injected drugs, with this being linked to more persistent drug-taking behaviours, while Potterat et al. (1998) found that 75% of their sample population had injected drugs before becoming involved in sex work, with 94% currently involved in injecting drugs.

### *Sexual health*

Concerns relating to drug use amongst sex workers extend to sexual health. Links have been identified between drug using behaviours amongst sex workers and poor sexual health. Shannon et al.'s (2008a) study indicated heightened risks for sex workers in sharing drugs with clients, sexual harms, including unprotected sex, linked to STI transmission, as well as the potential for increased violence from clients. Surratt et al. (2004) meanwhile draw attention to sex workers' potential for contracting HIV or other STIs, linking this to the wider subculture of violence, a cycle of routine or normalised violence and abuse, as experienced by sex workers in the study, including drug use, homelessness and violence from clients. Romero-Daza et al. (2003) similarly recognised multiple sources and implications of violence for outdoor sex workers - finding a relationship between violence, drug use, prostitution and the risk of contracting HIV.

The links between sex work and HIV transmission in particular have been stressed, and have been the subject of much research (Vanwesenbeeck,

2001). Barnard (1993) and Church et al. (2001) note for example, the focus on the spread of HIV and the associated health risks of sex working (to the general population), compared to other risks that sex workers may face in the course of their work. Within this context, sex workers have been seen as both vulnerable to and implicated in the spread of HIV (Wolffers and Beelen, 2003). In relation to this, HIV (and other STIs) transmission may be linked to (or external to) drug use, as discussed, but also to a range of other factors. These include displacement of sex working zones and reduced risk management procedures (Shannon et al. 2008b), challenges in accessing support services following displacement of working areas (Shannon et al. 2008c), migration, trafficking, or criminalisation of sex work (World Health Organization, 2005), and violence experienced in and out with sex working contexts (Farr et al. 1996; Ford and Koetswang, 1991; Ward et al. 1999; World Health Organization, 2005). Other factors contributing to HIV/STI transmission relating to specific sexual practices include high numbers of clients (Harcourt and Donovan, 2005), and inconsistent condom use and unsafe sex (potentially also involving violence) with intimate partners (Pyett and Warr, 1999, Ward and Day, 1997).

By comparison, there are fewer studies that recognise or address the problems of associating or over-estimating the relationship between HIV (and other STIs) transmission and sex work; some exceptions being Boynton and Cusick (2006); Cusick and Berney (2005); Day and Ward (2004) and McKeganey et al. (1992), who have questioned the concept of sex workers as vectors of sexual disease drawing on amongst other factors, evidence of sex workers' high condom use, and low rates of HIV infection amongst sex workers. This research also attempts to expand an analysis of the risks of sex work beyond sexual health. Research questions have been framed around sex workers' broad experiences of their work, what risks they encounter and how they manage these risks. In this way, there is the potential to develop knowledge of possible risks or harms within sex work, beyond sexual health. Sex workers are able to reflect on this, but also several other issues; for example, physical violence or stigma that can impact on how safe they feel within and out with their working environment.

This will serve to broaden an understanding of how sex workers respond to harm associated with sex work, in terms of the actual or potential risks they experience and manage. This thesis will also indicate the implications of existing state responses to harm associated with sex work that focus on or link specific harms, such as sexual health, with sex work, and in particular how such responses can divert focus and support away from areas of concern to sex workers.

### *Mental and emotional health*

Poor mental and emotional health has additionally been identified as both a precursor of entry to sex work and a result of sex working. Silbert and Pines (1981), highlight the vulnerability of women involved in sex work, situating emotional alongside physical and sexual abuse in a wider continuum of violence and victimisation that can begin in a domestic or other context and extend to, and prevail, within sex work. Bindel et al. (2012) produces similar findings. Their study reported that 72% of sex workers had experienced childhood physical, verbal, emotional or sexual abuse, enhancing individuals' sense of worthlessness. A result of such experiences may be dissociation or distancing oneself during sex working, noted in Brewis and Linstead's (2000) analysis into female sex workers' construction and management of self during sex working transactions. This may extend to experiencing symptoms associated with *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* such as flashbacks, depression and anxiety (Farley et al. 1998, cited in Farley and Kelly, 2000). Such associations can be considered problematic however given that they do not appear to take account of the diversity of sex workers and experiences within sex work. Scambler (1997) highlights this, noting that not all sex workers consider themselves, or are negatively affected through involvement in sex work. These are popular myths and stereotypes of sex work, based often on experiences of a limited number of outdoor sex workers. Weitzer (2005, 2010) adds to these arguments, highlighting the potential harms of radical feminist perspectives in particular, for positing sex workers as victims of their work. In contrast, sex workers' experiences, and decisions to be involved in sex work, need not always be victimising, influenced by or linked to psychological or socio-

economic factors - especially when it is considered that sex work can represent both resistance and submission to patriarchal forces (Scambler, 1997). This relates to this research study, which similarly stresses the importance of acknowledging variations in experience, in attempting to understand sex workers and service providers' responses to harm associated with sex work.

*Violence: Conceptualising violence against women*

Violence features as a key topic within the current research. In order to enhance understanding of the nature of violence experienced by predominantly female sex workers, it is relevant to consider a range of theories pertaining to male violence against women. This serves to provide theoretical definitions and explanations of the violence that can affect women, including sex workers, and accounts for the underpinning attitudes and beliefs that can contribute to and perpetuate violence within sex work. These understandings of violence are later examined in an applied context, by exploring the literature on the extent and types of violence experienced by sex workers.

Gender norms and related attitudes to violence, are a main means of explaining male violence against women. Violence against women is now recognised as a major social problem (Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Edwards, 1987; García-Moreno and Stöckl, 2013; Renzetti and Kennedy Bergen, 2005), impacting on, amongst other factors, women's physical and emotional health (Campbell, 2002; García-Moreno et al. 2014; Greenan, 2004; World Health Organization, 2013), economics (Day et al, 2005, Walby, 2004), and their human rights (Amnesty International, 2013; Henderson, 2015; Qureshi, 2013). Women have been positioned as more likely to be a victim of violence (Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Mirrlees-Black, 1999; Walby and Allen, 2004; Women's Aid, 2006), and exhibit more fear of becoming a victim of crime including violence (Cops and Pleysier, 2011; Hirtenlehner and Farrall, 2014; Kury and Ferdinand, 1998; Mawby and Gill, 1987; Pain, 1995; Stanko, 2009; Zedner, 2002), with men viewed predominantly as the main perpetrators of violence (Dobash and Dobash,

2004; Hester, 2009; Hester et al. 2006). There have been challenges to this view however, notably in relation to domestic violence. Writers on *Family violence*<sup>1</sup> for example have highlighted that women are equally capable of, and are likely to commit violence towards an intimate partner (Dobash and Dobash, 2004, Straus, 2005). This has been supported by the findings of support organisations (Mankind, 2015, Men's Advice Line, n.d.) and media perspectives (Campbell, 2010, Graham-Kevan, 2011), which have similarly drawn attention to the potential for, and increase in, the numbers of male victims of violence by a female partner. This view, as Dobash and Dobash (2004) highlight however, fails to consider the contextual elements of women's violence, including motivations and intentions. Bograd (1999) also identifies the importance of context to family therapy theory and practice on domestic violence. Her analyses indicates the need for, and benefits to, considering gendered dimensions, as well as other factors such as race and sexuality, in discussions of domestic violence, in order to understand its complexities and how it may occur according to and under different social or cultural settings. Where such factors are considered, it is found that women's violence towards a male partner differs from that of men in its nature and outcomes. In several cases, women will act out of self-defence, often in response to men's violence towards them. Further, it is indicated that men are affected differently by women's violence towards them, and they are less likely to feel, for example, that their safety is impacted, or motivated to seek professional help. It has been, therefore, suggested that women and men's violence towards intimate partners are different, and that largely, women are the main victims, rather than perpetrators of intimate partner/domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> Family violence theory highlights the potential for violence and abuse within a variety of family contexts and amongst different family members, not only adult male partners. Barnett et al. (2011) cite numerous examples of this, including child, sibling and elder abuse, which contradict the notion of family/home as a source of care and affection. Similarly, social learning theory suggests that violence is a learned activity, witnessed and replicated through exposure to sources including TV and other media, and family (Felson, 1996; Hoffman et al. 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe et al. 1997; Kurz, 1989).

In the case of domestic violence, this has been explained as men believing that violence constitutes an acceptable way of controlling their female partners (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Hautzinger, 2007; Johnson, 2007). Often, this need to assert control stems from a culturally ingrained belief that women deserve to be disciplined by means of physical force (Flood and Pease, 2009), although this may be otherwise perceived as an excessive or inappropriate solution. In such cases, perpetrators may exhibit women or victim-blaming behaviour that, for example, undermines, deflects, or refuses to take responsibility for their actions. This can question or undermine victims' perceptions and experiences (Pain, 2012), or suggest that violence was provoked, as a result of a female partners' subversion of normative social or domestic roles (Hearn, 1996). Relating to this Hearn (1998) argues that men's perceptions and explanations of violence are situated in the context of male, patriarchal power, and reflect wider power imbalances between men and women, based upon ideas including male and female sexual roles and ideals, and sexism. McCarry (2007) also discusses such issues in her examination of the links between violence and gender roles and behaviours, as with Morgan's (1987) analyses which draws connections between the concepts of masculinity and violence, linked by constructions of masculinity. These constructions are based upon the sexual division of labour, and more widely, notions of the public and private spheres, nature and culture (and men and women's roles and relationships to these). Morgan's (1987) interests also lie with the various processes of violence, or 'violences' (Morgan, 1987: 181), including the recognition and definition of violence, and ways in which violence can be rendered acceptable in some circumstances. These are all processes, which involve men and the notion of masculinity (such ideas, including patriarchal power, are examined later within this chapter, where they are discussed as they relate to feminist perspectives on violence and sex work).

The latter point is based on an assumption of specific and appropriate gender roles and behaviours, referring to ideal normative female behaviour, in how women adhere to and perform in a domestic and sexual context. Where these roles and behaviours are challenged, violence may be

considered a normal or appropriate response to reassert the gender balance and male entitlement, as Bourgois (1996) found in his study of Puerto Rican drug dealers' use of violence towards women. Similarly, Gondolf (2002) has identified male entitlement as a common feature of violent perpetrators' personalities, in addition to narcissism and anti-social behaviour. Connell (1995) meanwhile applies the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* to account for men's violence and other activities. It is argued that men adhere to, and act according to, dominant social ideals of masculinity, in order to sustain the patriarchal system, for example, through particular cultural practices and violence. Men's conformity to these ideals can result in the oppression and domination of women and subordination of other men who do not identify or conform to dominant interpretations and expectations of masculinity, for example, through homosexuality (Connell, 1995, Kahn, 2009).

Giddens (1992) develops these points further to suggest that male sexual violence is representative of more than the continued influence of patriarchy. He points to the growing dissolution of the separate social roles of men and women, including increased public inclusion for women in social and work spheres, and the resultant sense of role or identity inadequacy and uncertainty that this may bring for some men, potentially provoking their violence towards women. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) in a reformulation of their earlier work, similarly address the need to recognise changes in women's practices, as well as the historical context of femininities and masculinities, and the resulting gender dynamics. This could account for 'the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups' (Ibid: 848), and help to enhance an understanding of the significance of gender dynamics towards various social problems including violence.

Related to Giddens (1992) discussion of role inadequacy, social structural theory explains violence as a result of unequal access to material goods (Hoffman et al. 1994, Anderson, 1997), and unclear or inconsistent social status (Lenski, 1954). This can be linked to experiences from a perpetrator's childhood, or other events, which act as a means of determining the future



abusive nature of the perpetrator. Similarly, social learning theory links and emphasises the significance of events in a man's childhood to his propensity to violence later in life. According to this theory, where boys have witnessed the abuse of their mother by their father, or were abused themselves by parents, there is a greater likelihood that they will replicate such behaviour in their later relationships with female intimate partners (Hines and Malley-Morrison, 2005, cited in DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2011, Dutton, 2001). The theory has been criticised however, in that some children grow up in violent environments yet do not exercise violence towards their future partners or children, while some people with limited experience of violence in childhood go on to commit acts of violence (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2011). Children will not however necessarily replicate violence where they are aware of its negative impact and regard it as such. This would then discredit the link made between behaviours observed or learned in childhood and later involvement in violence (Ibid).

Other explanations of violence against women have been based on psychological perspectives for example Umberson et al. (2003) explored the impact of stress and its relationship with violence. Gleason (1997) identifies a larger number of more serious psychological and social problems amongst men who are violent towards women, including anti-social behavioural tendencies or anti-social personality disorder (see also Norwood et al. 2004 who has found a relationship between domestic violence committed by men and other deviant behaviours), criminality, poor educational attainment, depression, and frequently, alcohol use. Holtzworth-Munroe et al. (1997) also attributed a range of psychological or social problems to men who were violent towards their wives. Amongst other issues, these men were more likely than non-violent men to have personality disorders, problems relating to attachment and dependency in childhood, greater psychological distress, poor social skills and issues with anger and alcohol use. In addition, violent men tended to possess and account for particular attitudes towards women and violence that positioned them as more likely to resort to physical violence against women (Ibid). Both Gleason (1997) and Holtzworth-Munroe et al. (1997) also highlighted the potential, but less frequently studied,

influence of biological, genetic and physical factors on men's violence towards women for example, chemical imbalances including high testosterone levels (Gleason, 1997, Holtzworth-Munroe et al. 1997) and head injuries (Holtzworth-Munroe et al. 1997).

Alcohol or substance abuse leading to loss of inhibitions and proclivity towards violence has been widely linked to violence against women. The *Economic and Social Research Council* (2002, cited in Scottish Government, n.d. a) reported that alcohol is involved in a quarter of cases in which women have suffered facial injuries. Finney (2004) noted a relationship between alcohol use and domestic violence, finding that perpetrators were often drinking at the time of the event, or had 'alcohol problems' (Ibid: 5), which facilitated disputes with partners turning into violence. Further, El-Bassel et al. (2005) has found links between drug-use and domestic violence, where female participants and in some cases, their partners were involved in drug use. Varying factors and effects related to drug use (largely crack and marijuana) including impaired cognitive abilities, women's socio-economic status and associations between domestic violence and a violent drug subculture, were considered as contributors to domestic violence, while experiences of domestic violence were also found to correlate with regular crack or marijuana use (Ibid).

Symbolic power and violence are now considered as alternative lens through which to understand violence against women. This is applied more specifically to understanding the different experiences and responses to harm amongst sex workers, in line with the aim of this research. It is intended that this will broaden an understanding of the forms and nature of violence that can affect sex workers (in or associated with sex work), focusing on how sex workers and service providers subjectively construct their experiences of harm associated with sex work.

#### *Symbolic power and violence*

The literature pertaining to the reasons for violence against women has influenced the current research to some degree. It has indicated how such

violence is conceptualised in terms of its definitions, nature and under what settings it can occur. This has facilitated a wider understanding of responses to violence against women, based on social structural factors. There are limits however, to existing theorisation on violence against women and violence as it relates to sex work, particularly when it is considered that sex workers' experiences are frequently excluded or undeveloped. Greater reflection on sex workers' current exclusion from research, which this study aims to rectify, can illuminate how harm, including violence, is experienced from the perspective of sex workers. This can relate to the extent and nature of violence, and whether and how experiences of harm are managed, individually, through peer support or seeking support through service provision.

Additionally, much of the literature has focused on violence as it is experienced in physical, psychological or other contexts. McKie (2006) indicates that the effects of physical violence in particular, have dominated the literature on violence. This can be attributed to the easier identification of and response to this form of violence, which can 'achieve a greater social and legal sanction' (McKie, 2006), over less visible violence, including harassment. She argues however that a focus on physical violence overshadows the damaging impact and consequences of these other forms of harm. Lombard and McMillan (2013) also reflect on this matter, noting that despite increased exposure of issues relating to violence against women, the experiences of some groups of women remain invisible or overlooked, including sex workers (Phipps, 2013). McKie (2006) thus suggests a re-conceptualisation of the term violence to include a broader understanding of violence, encompassing actual or perceived violations related to 'structures, actions, events and experiences' for example, police or state surveillance.

Similar observations have been made in relation to this research. The limited focus within the literature on how less visible forms of violence or actions not perceived as harmful can feature in and impact negatively on sex workers' lives has been noted. This can pertain to, for example,

structured agencies speaking for sex workers, or based on their experiences of working with sex workers, with similar experiences - including outdoor sex work and a willingness to use support services for the purposes of exiting sex work. This example emphasises the lack of legitimacy that is given to the voices of sex workers, and the extent to which only some sex workers' voices are represented. This highlights a lack of recognition by agencies in some cases as to the diversity of sex workers and their experiences of sex work. A consequence of this is that an understanding of the various and complex ways sex workers define and experience harm is obscured. This serves to marginalise and exclude the views of sex workers on a topic that can directly impact on them, and potentially prevent state responses that are relevant to their needs and interests. My research aims to overcome this limitation by considering all experiences that are deemed violent or harmful by sex workers (and of service providers who support sex workers), in order to better understand sex workers' experiences of harm, and tailor responses that appropriately address their experiences. Further, in addressing the experiences of indoor sex workers, I account for an under-researched sample population in Scotland. As indoor sex workers do not necessarily seek support for violence/harm associated with sex work, there is the potential for their experiences to be overlooked, or for a lack of understanding about experiences that indoor sex workers do consider harmful. This would include processes, not involving physical violence but that still create harm, through actions that symbolically serve to undermine, stigmatise or exclude individuals; for example, sex workers being encouraged to exit sex work due to its perceived harms (without consideration of their experiences), or through the approach and negative interactions of support services.

In applying the concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992), an understanding of violence beyond physical violence is obtained. A key focus of Bourdieu's work (1977,1984, cited in Parker and Aggleton, 2003) has been on the relationship between culture and power. His analyses explore the existence and activities of social systems based on hierarchy and power. Parker and Aggleton (2003) explain Bourdieu's work as such:

All cultural meanings and practices embody interests and function to enhance social distinctions among individuals, groups and institutions. Power therefore stands at the heart of social life and is used to legitimize inequalities of status within the social structure. Cultural socialization thereby places individuals as well as groups in positions of competition for status and valued resources, and helps to explain how social actors struggle and pursue strategies aimed at achieving their specific interests (Parker and Aggleton, 2003: 18).

Bourdieu (1992) draws upon these relations between culture and power in his discussion of symbolic power and violence. This is explained as subtle but effective power forms, represented by symbols such as images, cultural practices or words that are embedded in and maintained through social relations and structures:

Bourdieu uses the term 'symbolic power' to refer not so much to a specific type of power, but rather to an aspect of most forms of power as they are routinely deployed in social life. For in the routine flow of day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of *legitimacy* that it would not otherwise have. Bourdieu expresses this point by saying that symbolic power is an 'invisible' power which is 'misrecognized' as such and thereby 'recognized' as legitimate (Thompson, 1992, cited in Bourdieu, 1992:23).

These serve to largely uphold and legitimise both the position and needs of dominant groups and the hierarchies of power between them and dominated groups to the extent that the latter come to accept, normalise and thereby, reproduce existing power relations (Bourdieu, 1992).

The non-visible nature of these forms of violence mean that they are also often dismissed or not recognised (Morgan and Björkert, 2006, see also previous discussion by McKie, 2006 on the implications of this). This misrecognition can lead to the legitimisation (amongst the dominating and dominated groups, the latter of whom, may to some degree consent to their position) and strengthening of the power, underpinning symbolic violence (Morgan and Björkert, 2006). In turn, this can mask the power relations that enable a process of imposed meanings over certain groups and individuals

(Jenkins, 1992, cited in Morgan and Björkert, 2006). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) illustrate how this process operates and its power in maintaining differences and hierarchies between individuals as applied to language. They assert, that contrary to an assumption of language as equal, not all forms of language are acceptable, nor can all social actors claim competence and legitimacy in language, as exemplified by everyday interactions in politics, employment, education or other settings. The authors further highlight the power that resides in words, in being able to give and effect orders. This is dependent on a process, as discussed previously, whereby legitimacy is given to certain words, both by the individual who speaks, and those individuals affected by these words:

It [symbolic power] is defined in and by a definite relation that creates belief in the legitimacy of the words and of the person who utters them, and it operates only inasmuch as those who undergo it recognizes those who wield it (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 148).

Parker and Aggleton (2003) emphasise the importance of these processes of misrecognition, compliance with and legitimisation of, power, using them to develop an understanding of HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination that is based upon 'competition for power and the legitimization of social hierarchy and inequality' (Parker and Aggleton, 2003: 18). Stigma then can be understood in terms of its relationship to and purpose of sustaining existing inequalities (including race and sexuality). This can involve some actors normalising and accepting stigma that is embedded in and legitimised by a system of more dominant actors with the ability to define and maintain inequalities of power.

In the context of sex work research, studies have highlighted the existence and impact of symbolic violence on the lives of sex workers. Orchard (2014) echoes the views of Morgan and Björkert (2006), in highlighting the processes of consent, complicity and misrecognition that feature in, and inform, sex workers' experiences of violence. It was found that sex workers often normalised violence, having had varying (sexual, physical, gendered) experiences of violence throughout their lives, related to their socio-economic position. Stigma was also a key aspect of how violence against sex workers in Orchard's (2014) study was normalised. Violence was justified according to the stigmatised position of sex work and sex workers (and others associated with the sex industry) in society, who are perceived as threatening to the social order. In addition to normalised experiences of violence, sex workers were found to blame themselves or others for occurrences of violence, as a form of 'gentle' violence (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Orchard, 2014), i.e. violence that obscures individuals' exploitation of one another, and 'the linkages between systemic inequalities and social suffering among marginalized groups' (Orchard, 2014:24). Sex workers, did however exercise resistance on occasion to the violence they experienced, through strategies including retaliation and reporting violent clients (Ibid).

Symbolic violence is also addressed in a study by Simić and Rhodes (2009), which explores female and transvestite sex workers' experiences of HIV risk in Serbia. Their findings have illustrated that sex workers encounter various forms of violence, symbolically and structurally, including police violations (physical violence and humiliation amongst other acts) and disputes with clients over available services and parts of the body. These experiences of violence were found to reflect, maintain, operate and alter boundaries between the private and public that are used to maintain dignity; for example, police interventions and their exposure of sex work serves the purpose of reinforcing the purity of the public, but can negatively impact on sex workers, who can transgress bodily or other boundaries in attempting to avoid physical violence from clients or police. Simić and Rhodes (2009) found that sex workers both resist and contribute to the cycle of symbolic violence. They do so by seeking ways to preserve their dignity; for example,

through various individual strategies that offer protection and dignity from work-related violence. At the same time, sex workers draw upon dominant ideas relating to sex workers, notably, emphasising the responsibilities they take towards their health and hygiene standards, contrary to portrayals of sex workers as risk-taking and diseased (often compared to others who are less risk-averse).

The current study aims to develop this understanding of violence, as it can exist and impact through social relations and structures. The research aim is positioned around themes that aim to elicit participants' definitions and experiences of encountering, managing or supporting harm, in building an understanding of how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work. By enabling participants to speak broadly about these experiences and views, there is the potential that they will discuss the various ways in which they understand and experience harm. This can indicate diversities and complexities in understandings and definitions of harm, based on participants' experiences, which could extend beyond popularised understandings of violence, including physical violence. As a result a broader understanding of the diverse ways both sex workers and service providers experience, interpret and respond to harm associated with sex work can be obtained.

The following analysis of literature pertains more specifically to violence as it is experienced in or associated with sex work and sex workers, focusing on the theme of, and sub-themes related to, the concept of risk. Several of the interview questions within this thesis link to this. Questions focus on how sex workers experience violence or other harms, what risks are posed in sex work and how these risks are managed. Similarly questions take account of service providers' perspectives, relating to their experiences of supporting sex workers, and how they subsequently conceptualise how risks including violence are experienced and managed by sex workers. This would indicate the relevance and similarities of the following literature to the aim of this research, and also identify where there are differences or new knowledge to be gained through this research in understanding how



violence or other risks within sex work is experienced.

### *Sex workers' experiences of violence and harm*

The risks discussed thus far may result in or indicate the potential for violence within sex work. Violence is commonplace for many sex workers in the UK, Europe and internationally, occurring in both indoor and outdoor sex working environments. This can take several forms including verbal abuse, physical assault, rape, and potentially, murder (Campbell and Kinnell, 2001; Phipps, 2013; van Beelen and Rakhmetova, 2010), and also extend to factors that precipitate violence towards sex workers. These can relate to non-payment or disputes over payments, which can lead to robberies and sexual or physical violence by individuals who may not be clients, or who initially act as clients and later refuse payment (see Kinnell, 2008). Even where payment has been made, there is still potential for sex workers' safety to be compromised. Clients for example may attempt to engage in previously non-negotiated sexual activities, or remove a condom, negotiate a lower price or request extra time with a sex worker without paying more (see Day, 1994, cited in Sanders and Campbell, 2007).

In a three city comparative study, covering Glasgow, Edinburgh and Leeds, Barnard (2005) found high levels of violence towards sex workers over their lifetime, with 63% of violence initiated by clients. Of this figure, Barnard (2005) made an important distinction between the type of location where women were selling sex and the likelihood of violence being inflicted, noting that outdoor sex workers were more likely than indoor sex workers to suffer a greater degree of violence both in frequency and type of injury sustained (see also Church et al. 2001 on violence within indoor sex work environments). Outdoor sex workers were also more likely to be subjected to other types of crime - for example, robbery by clients and to suffer longer lasting violence that was unlikely to be interrupted by the presence of others. This study similarly addresses violence, as it is experienced and responded to by indoor sex workers in a Scottish context. My research is based on how sex workers define, encounter and respond to their experiences of harm. This will enable a greater understanding of the extent

to which, if any, sex workers experience or have experienced violence in their work, consider their work violent or exploitative and the nature of this violence. This can extend to understandings beyond physical violence, or violence within sex work. Based on this, the current study will develop understandings of harm within or associated with sex work, taking account of variations in experiences and understandings of harm between different sex workers, and how these may differ from or develop current understandings of harm, as examined in existing studies of violence and sex work.

An earlier Birmingham based study revealed similar patterns, with outdoor sex workers found to experience a higher proportion of violence than indoor sex workers (83% and 53% respectively), and all forms of violence, not confined to client inflicted violence (Kinnell, 1993, cited in Kinnell, 2006). Connell and Hart (2003) move beyond analyses based largely on the experiences of female sex workers, to consider the position of male sex workers in Glasgow and Edinburgh. It was found that male sex workers experienced various forms of physical, verbal and sexual violence in the context of sex work. This came from a variety of individuals including clients, members of the public and other sex workers. Similar to female sex workers, male sex workers in this study also exhibited safety concerns and generally employed a range of precautions in response to these, although there was the potential for their safety to be compromised where drug and alcohol use was involved. Several men were unable to remember clients they had been with due to using drugs and substances, while their use by some clients led to the physical and verbal abuse of male sex workers. The attitudes and poor interactions with police were also recognised as problematic for the safety of male sex workers, leading sex workers in one geographical area of the study not to report any incidents of violence experienced in sex work (Ibid).

Non-UK research has similarly focused on the prevalence and nature of violence, as it applies to and transcends sex-working contexts (Ribeiro and Sacramento, 2005 note the extension of violence to other contexts and

situations, beyond sex workers' immediate working environments). Delacoste and Alexander's (1988) examination of female sex workers' experiences indicated a diversity of experiences within sex work, including several qualitative accounts from 'survivors' testifying to the violence and other harms experienced during their time in sex work.

Crago et al. (2010) meanwhile reported high rates of physical and sexual violence amongst sex workers, in exploring police-perpetrated violence against sex workers in eleven countries throughout Europe and Central Asia. Higher levels of physical and sexual police violence were experienced by transgender sex workers than non-transgender sex workers, while male sex workers experienced higher rates of physical police violence than female sex workers, highlighting the added discrimination for male and transgender sex workers, in addition to their already stigmatised position as sex workers. An American study by Sloss and Harper (2010) similarly produced results that indicated a range of potential harms by police towards female sex workers. Consistent with other studies (for example, Nixon et al. 2002) Sloss and Harper's (2010) study also demonstrated sex workers' high exposure to violence from clients and strangers, as well as family and partners.

The potential for violence within sex work has been further emphasised in, and extended to, the context of human trafficking. This can be seen to relate to Kelly's (1998) discussion of a continuum of violence, referring to different forms of violence that share the commonality of being used by men as a means of dominating women, by threat and abuse, amongst other factors (Kelly, 1998, cited in Turner, 2012). In the same way, traffickers can use a similar process and procedures to assert control over their victims, resulting in a variety of harms to victims (Turner, 2012), as the following studies demonstrate.

In reference to her Chicago-based study of domestic sex trafficking, Raphael (2012) notes that the recruitment of young women into sex work may not be initially violent and exploitative, but that violence can later result

'once women have been emotionally manipulated' (Raphael, 2012: 61); post-recruitment, 76% of women had experienced slapping, punching (51%) and rape (52%).

In other studies, the violence or other harms associated with, and as a result of, trafficking, are more apparent. Jackson et al. (2010) suggest that while trafficked women (estimated at 2,600 out of 17,000 migrant women) do not necessarily experience violence directly, the threat of violence exists for them in the form of threats to their families, while debt-bonding means they are further controlled and are considered highly vulnerable. A further 9,600 women in the study were considered vulnerable in their potential inability to exit or seek appropriate support for exiting the sex industry. In a multiple-country study, Zimmerman et al. (2003) has similarly illustrated the potential harms associated with trafficking, finding that a range of physical, sexual and emotional health factors, as well as practical issues, affected trafficked women; for example, all women were reported to have experienced coercive, sexual acts and abuse including gang rape and forced unprotected sex.

According to some analyses, however, there are problems in situating sex work within trafficking and anti-trafficking discourses. This is framed from the perspective that too often sex work, or migration for the purposes of sex work, is conflated with trafficking, a lack of choice, and is associated with or linked to the violence abuse, and victimisation that may occur within trafficking (Hudgins, 2007, NSWSP, 2012). In the process, this can undermine or dismiss other (non-sexual) trafficking forms (Sanghera, 2011), or impact negatively on some sex workers, including migrant sex workers who may find themselves faced with restricted movement or deportation, or sex workers who are impacted by financial cuts to harm reduction (rather than zero tolerance approach), support projects (Garofalo, 2010).

Pickering and Ham (2014), drawing on observations and interviews with airport immigration staff in Australia, noted the use of border crossings as an important indicator of trafficking. The border was found not to be an effective

means of identifying trafficking cases; nonetheless it served a purpose in allowing staff to sift through and profile women, for example sex workers who were found to have the relevant visa to work in Australia but were still subject to suspicion and monitoring, often on gender and racial grounds, with little consideration of trafficking out with the context of sex work. This, the authors suggest indicates and enables 'various intersections of intelligence-led profiling and everyday stereotyping of women, sex work and vulnerability (to) play out' (Pickering and Ham, 2014: 17). Some similar themes are developed in this research. I explore the interactions between sex workers and service providers including experiences and views of accessing or providing support for violence. I consider that where negative attitudes and experiences are involved in interactions between sex workers and service providers, this can result in sex workers being less willing to engage with service providers, and relatedly, create the potential for increased stigma, exclusion and compromised safety for sex workers.

For Schreter et al. (2007), such findings deny the diversity of and agency on the part of sex workers, silence workers' voices and potentially exacerbate harms to sex workers, by criminalising and stigmatising them. Chapkis (2003) adds to these points, recognising failings in the American law to both empower migrant sex workers by protecting their labour rights, and support those sex workers who wish to exit the sex industry as a result of violence and exploitation. Further, as Kempadoo (2005) suggests, it can be processes of stigma, lack of empowerment and criminalisation that necessitate 'travel into, and work in, an informal or underground sector' (Kempadoo, 2005:37, cited in Lee, 2011: 28) and contribute towards the harms of trafficking (and violence within sex work more generally), rather than the assumed violence of sex work itself.

Beyond the context of trafficking, research has shown that violence is not always involved in, or associated, with sex work. Monto and Hotaling (2001) found that rape myth acceptance rates were low amongst a sample of men arrested for attempting to hire San Francisco-based street sex workers. 30% of these participants did not attain positive scores for any individual category

included in the rape myth acceptance scale. The authors suggest that not all clients of sex workers are violent and are no more likely to support rape myths than other men in the population. They acknowledge however, that other clients in different locations and contexts could produce opposing findings, or that answers could have been altered to be more socially desirable. This finding is replicated by Busch et al. (2002), who found low rates of men reporting or supporting violence, and behaving violently towards sex workers; despite some men showing potential support for attitudes that could be associated with, or lead to such behaviours; for example, preferences for violent sexual practices, linked to factors including experience of physical or sexual harm as a child, or having sexually conservative views.

Brents and Hausbeck (2005) similarly suggest that sex work is not necessarily always linked to or invites violence from clients and others. Their view is based on an examination of brothel workers' experiences within Nevada, a state that enjoys a legalised status in relation to sex work. The authors highlight the strategies employed by sex workers and brothel managers, including regular STI testing, installation of surveillance technology to monitor clients and training and support amongst sex workers as evidence that sex work need not always be equated with violence. This view can be challenged, however, given that arguments are based only on the experiences of indoor sex workers; other sex work environments do not seem to be accounted for or considered as much in discussions of how sex workers' safety can be improved.

### *Stigma, exclusion and discrimination*

As discussed thus far, violence, particularly physical violence has been viewed by some as emblematic of the harms within and associated with sex work. This has been supported by some studies, which point to the prevalence and varied nature of violence, encompassing several forms and affecting both indoor and outdoor workers, within sex work. Less focus however, has been directed towards the non-physical or forms of harm that do not necessarily occur within, but are linked to sex work, including the

social stigma of sex work and the related exclusion and discrimination of sex workers. This relates to a key aspect of this research which explores how sex workers define and understand harm, which may not be understood in physical terms, and extend to other meanings and experiences, that are similarly perceived as damaging by sex workers.

Commentators occupying this position have suggested that the real harm in sex work derives, not from the work itself, but from working under, or experiencing negative conditions of or responses to sex work, notably stigma (Gira-Grant, 2014a; Kong, 2006; Vanwesenbeeck, 2005), which can affect a wide range of sex workers (Koken, 2012). This also involves law and policy responses that are limited in their understanding of the nature and diversity of sex work and sex workers, their needs, and how these may best be accommodated, and can conversely 'do more harm than help' (van der Meulen, 2010: 235), by impacting on sex workers' work and personal lives (van der Meulen, 2010).

Lowman (2000) addresses criminalisation, as one particularly problematic response where in attempts to criminalise sex work and workers, there seems to be a tendency towards blaming sex workers for any negative experiences including violence that they may encounter.<sup>2</sup> A result of this is displacement for sex workers based on a view that sex workers constitute annoyance and irritation to society and need to be removed (Ibid). Pitcher et al. (2006) adds to the commentary on displacement of sex workers. Their study examining communities living and working in areas of street sex work, found that while there were some concerns raised relating to the visibility of sex work and its associations with drugs and crime, not all communities wished to enforce the displacement of sex workers. It was identified that this was potentially more harmful, than not. Displacement could result in sex

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<sup>2</sup> See also Edwards (1987), for a discussion of the repressive nature of prostitution legislation, which penalises and limits women from receiving full protection of the law where they experience violence, and Almodovar (2010) who critiques the benefit of current 'rescue' attempts of sex workers through arbitrary law enforcement, arguing that this does not provide justice so much as it focuses on punishing individuals for their involvement in sex work.

workers being placed in potentially unsafe working areas, while also discouraging access to, and engagement, with support services (Ibid).

On this point, the stigma attached to sex work that can prevent sex workers from accessing services can also result in specific needs not being met or dealt with appropriately. Relating to health, Whitaker et al. (2011) found this to be the case. The findings drawn from thirty-five interviews, involving drug users with experience of sex working, indicated that service users were stigmatised on several grounds, due to their drug use, sex working and having contracted HIV or HCV (hepatitis C virus), and attempted to hide their drug use, thus potentially creating further health issues. The language and attitudes to conveying news of HIV and HCV positive status, and to subsequent care and treatment employed by health professionals were recognised as an aspect and contributing source of this stigma leading the authors to highlight the need for change in health professionals' language, as a way of alleviating stigma, respecting clients, improving and maintaining uptake of services and reducing mortality levels.

More widely, the literature has suggested the extensive experience and impact of stigma on sex workers' lives. The pervasiveness of what Pheterson (1993) defines as 'whore stigma', attached to a perceived lack of virtue, is such that all women, whether involved in sex work or not, can potentially be subject to this stigma. An Australian focus group based study (Begum et al. 2013) with fourteen indoor sex workers shared similarities with the other studies discussed thus far despite some differences relating to the setting and nature of the work. Participants thus relayed experiences of stigma related to the immediate context of sex working, and in leaving the sex industry for other employment opportunities. This may have accounted for the sex workers contending that they lived a double life, with one work and one non-work based life, because of the stigmatised status of their work (Ibid). Similar findings are found in Blissbomb's (2010) personal account of her experiences as a middle-class sex worker, where she notes that, despite the relative stability and positive experiences associated with her work, 'the whore stigma is still the major cause of our oppression,



regardless of social capital' (Blissbomb, 2010: 308). This also applies to Ham and Gerard's (2014) work. Within this study, sex workers identified stigma as one of the most harmful aspects of sex work that could be exacerbated, rather than reduced in engaging with the state's (Melbourne) regulatory framework, thus, necessitating their approach of remaining invisible to, and within, healthcare and licensing systems (Ham and Gerard, 2014).

Some writers, as with sex workers themselves, have identified the harms of stigmatising sex work, linking this to the wider discrimination, exclusion of sex workers and denial of human rights, particularly where sex workers work voluntarily, or have not been a victim of trafficking (Doezema, 1998). Campbell and Kinnell (2001) discuss some of these matters in the context of criminal justice responses, where sex workers can be discriminated against in engaging with the criminal justice system or excluded where they choose not to engage. They note a tendency amongst sex workers to not report violence, due to presumed attitudinal prejudice from police, courts and the public. This is based on beliefs that their case will not be taken seriously by police and courts, that they will be arrested, face reprisals from perpetrators, and that their sex working will be publicly known should the case go to court. This, as O'Neill (2011) suggests can consequently heighten sex workers' marginalisation and exposure to sexual violence.

Gira-Grant (2014a) adds to these discussions, speaking more specifically about the dangers of policing and how it can create a cycle of fear for and discrimination against sex workers. Drawing on the example of US prostitution stings, where police pose as clients before arresting sex workers (video-taped and potentially made public), it is argued that this form of policing, based on profiling of sex workers, serves the purpose of limiting the choices of, disciplining and, punishing women who choose to be involved in sex work. This is built on the premise that while prostitution is denounced as a form of violence, violence is also deemed 'useful to keep people from it' (Gira-Grant, 2014a: 8). Hubbard (1997, 2004) meanwhile points to the more subtle ways that stigma can affect sex workers, through spacial exclusion;

linking the zoning of outdoor sex work (Hubbard, 1997), and 'zero tolerance' policies over sex working spaces (Hubbard, 2004) to continued stigmatisation and marginalisation of sex workers.

The stigma discussed so far can be compounded further for some sex workers by issues of discrimination and exclusion linked to one's homosexual or transgender status. Whowell (2010) observes this in the case of male sex workers, who she notes are either dismissed completely, or inappropriately considered within policy debates. This is consistent with the Home Office's (2006) prostitution strategy in which reference to male sex work and their needs is limited in scope. As this applies to knowledge and understanding of sexual violence against male sex workers by clients, Jamel (2011) has offered some explanations for such exclusion, including a desire amongst clients involved in heterosexual relationships to not provoke attention towards their extra-marital sexual activities, and the perceived higher vulnerability of, and incidences of, sexual violence towards female sex workers. For transgender individuals, discrimination can be widely experienced in the contexts of gaining employment, accessing healthcare and family and community relations, amongst other factors. This can be exacerbated by involvement in sex work, and influence a lack of engagement with support services (UKNSWP, 2008a).

#### *Other indicators of risk*

Although much discussion of risk in the context of sex work applies to the sexual, emotional and physical health of sex workers, there are additional risk factors that can be considered, related to social and economic circumstances. These suggest that the risks associated with sex work are situated in, and influenced by, social structural factors, including homelessness (see Davis, 2004), sexual exploitation within childhood (see Phoenix, 2012), and other deprivations or abuse during childhood, continued into adulthood, particularly where women were drug-users (Faugier and Cranfield, 1995). Hoigard and Finstad's (1992) analyses suggest that early experience of particular socio-economic factors can facilitate later recruitment into sex work. In their study of female sex workers

in Oslo, it was found that participants had dysfunctional home lives, in addition to problems adjusting to school and work. Of their twenty-six participants, twenty-three had some experience of the care system, with fifteen having spent time on one or more occasions in institutions prior to entering the sex industry. Shannon et al.'s (2009) study similarly reports a degree of instability in sex workers' lives, relating to social structural factors, which was linked to the risk of experiencing sexual and physical violence in sex working. The following factors, amongst others, were associated with actual violence, including rape and physical violence experienced by participants, of which 57% of participants had had experience at least once over the 18-month follow-up time. 87% of participants had been homeless and living on the street on at least one occasion during their lives, while one fifth of the sample claimed difficulties in being able to access drug treatment.

Some academics, including Bernstein (2007) and Sanders (2007) meanwhile, have explored differences in social backgrounds (for example, educational access and opportunity) as well as sex work environments (between indoor and outdoor sex work), showing how these can account for a lack of vulnerability and exclusion, and relative social and economic stability for some sex workers. This is applied mainly to middle class and indoor sex workers, for whom the decision to be involved in sex work, and under what circumstances, may be based on an active rather than constrained choice.

### **Victimology**

The plethora of literature relating to the risks within or associated with sex work suggests a conflation between sex work and victimisation overriding any concept of agency that can be exercised by some individuals involved in sex work. This supports a growing body of evidence which charts a development in how sex workers have been categorised, previously as 'deviants' to more recently as 'victims' perceived to be harmed by the circumstances leading to or involved in their participation in sex work and in need of state protection and support to exit sex work (Agustín, 2007, Wahab, 2002). More widely, this reflects an increased focus on victims

within criminology studies who were previously dismissed, undermined or under-represented, in favour of more salient aspects of study, including the psyche of criminals and mass political crimes and violations over smaller crimes affecting the individual (Rock, 2011). Crucial to this hierarchy, which afforded limited priority to victims was the assumption and use of 'negative imagery that connotes their status with that of the weak underdog' (Goodey, 2005: 11). This has been replaced with a view to incorporating the perspectives of victims to a greater extent, which can be attributed to factors including an increased fear of crime and focus on the vulnerability and mistreatment of victims within the criminal justice system (Ibid).

#### *Understanding the term 'victim'*

Victimology can be understood as 'the study of victims of crime, including such aspects as patterns of offence, place of incident, characteristics of and relationship between victim and offender' (Marshall, 1998: 693). There are challenges presented however in the application of victimology theories given the ambiguity and definitional issues around who constitutes a victim, and crimes that involve or do not involve or create victims, known as 'victimless' crimes (Carrabine et al. 2009). In response, there have been some suggestions advanced as to which individuals are more at risk of victimisation. These portrayals have often included women (Christie, 1986, cited in van Wijk, 2013, Davies, 2011) and children, based on reinforcing or linking their perceived vulnerability and innocence to victimhood (McAlinden, 2014), thus contributing to a view of or hierarchy (Carrabine et al. 2009) of the ideal or deserving victim. Under this model, the ideal victim is posited as one who is innocent and who has not precipitated their victimisation. This involves an individual's recognition of their victimisation and acceptance of the 'victim' label and status (Walklate, 2007). Conversely, individuals who are deemed to be engaged in risky behaviours and lifestyles, including individuals involved in sex work, can be blamed or viewed to have contributed in some way to their becoming a victim (Kinnell, 2008; Matthews, 2015; McCracken, 2013; Miethe, 1985), thus potentially impacting on their needs being met (Goodey, 2005).

Where victimisation of sex workers is recognised however, there are further challenges related to whether and how individuals respond to the harms they have experienced. Green (2011) reiterating Christie's (1986) concept of the ideal victim, suggests that victims are restricted by cultural norms that dictate how they should feel or behave, or how others perceive them in their role as a victim, reflective of the socially constructed nature of victimhood (see also Richardson and May, 1999; Spalek, 2006; van Dijk, 2009; Walklate, 2007). Where an individual does not adhere to an expected victim role and behaviour, there is the potential that their experiences will be questioned, dismissed or subjected to less sympathetic treatment (Miers, 1989, cited in Green, 2011). This can also create problems around the identification and addressing of different victims' needs. As Dunn (2011) highlights, experiences of victimisation do not equate to an individual requiring or wishing to receive support, which services should consider further in their planning and practices. Similarly, there is need for greater consideration and integration of the needs and expectations of some victims in service provision, particularly those whose experiences of victimisation are dismissed, and who find themselves excluded or dissuaded in ways from accessing support (Dunn, 2011, see also Rock, 2006).

As other literature indicates, however, victims can, and do, transgress culturally prescribed notions of victimhood in their lack of passivity and more active political involvement that increasingly recognises the place and need for victims' rights (Choi et al. 2010; Frazier and Falmagne, 2014; Kearon and Godfrey, 2011; Walklate, 2003). This supports evidence discussed earlier, which suggests that sex workers do not necessarily consider themselves to be victims, although they can be positioned as such due to the prevailing stigma, exclusion and criminalisation attached to sex work. In addition, the literature on sex workers' risk management indicates that sex workers utilise various safety strategies to counteract any potential experiences of harm and victimisation, thereby challenging the notion of sex workers as victims.

### *Risk management*

It has been suggested that sex work is a potentially dangerous activity or source of work, as with other occupations, for example policing, where there is the potential for violence (Sanders, 2005b). This can be attributed to sexual encounters involved in sex work occurring largely between strangers, thus carrying a degree of 'unpredictability' (Barnard, 1993:700). As Phoenix (2000) suggests, sex workers tend to make associations between men and the concepts of violence and danger, so that all men can be considered potentially untrustworthy and constitute a risk. This points to a degree of awareness and acknowledgement as to the risk of violence and potential victimisation associated with sex work amongst sex workers. The literature suggests, however, that exposure to risks can differ amongst sex workers and can depend, amongst other factors, on age and experience (Pyett and Warr, 1999), and crucially, establishing and maintaining self-protection strategies. Many sex workers employ various strategies; for example, adopting an assertive attitude with clients, establishing a group of regular customers, and working in a well-lit environment (Whittaker and Hart, 1996), to avoid both potentially physically violent situations and to alleviate any mental anguish that may arise from sex work (Browne and Minichiello, 1995, Sanders, 2005a). Furthermore, it is important to recognise that sex workers associate a range of meanings with having sex that are not necessarily linked to risk, or confined to sex work, including work, money and love (Browne and Minichiello, 1995).

This demonstrates the need to look beyond the label of victim, recognising the range of sex workers' experiences, which can include effective management of work-related risks. Sanders (2001) draws attention to this point, highlighting the use of protection strategies by outdoor sex workers as both a form of agency and resistance to violence and survival, in light of the potential for violence within, and limited social and economic opportunities and barriers out with sex work. Dalla (2000) similarly recognises this dichotomy between survivor and victim, labelling the former 'the Pretty Woman myth' (Ibid: 344), where women are temporarily involved in sex work, successfully exit, and are otherwise unaffected by their period of sex

working. Although her analyses tend towards the latter position that sex workers are victimised, Dalla's (2000) points remind us of the need to diversify and consider sex workers' experiences accordingly.

Amongst other strategies, sex workers have been found to use surveillance technology, 'bad-date' reports, and increasingly support from staff and police, in indoor sex work environments (Krüsi et al. 2012). On the other side of this, as Ham and Gerard (2014) have shown, sex workers can employ a form of 'strategic invisibility' (Ibid: 298). Their findings, based on Australian indoor sex workers, indicated that sex workers deliberately made themselves hidden or unknown to the state, contrary to the state's focus on the visibility of sex workers in healthcare and licensing settings. This in turn is seen to enhance sex workers' sense of agency, and reduce the vulnerability in terms of stigma that can result from engaging with healthcare professionals.

In outdoor sex working contexts, similar as well as more informal procedures may be followed, including establishing rules as to what is/is not permissible sexual conduct. These can relate to condom use, the use of intuition to screen out potentially dangerous clients (Williamson and Folaron, 2003), informing a friend of the location and time of an appointment and the client's details (Baskin, 2010). Sex workers can also use strategies to create emotional or physical distance between themselves and clients, including humour (Sanders, 2004b)<sup>3</sup>, numbing through emotional detachment or drug use, or prayer, and using physical violence against clients (Oselin and Blasyak, 2013).

### **Social constructionism**

As highlighted by some of the victimology literature, there are grounds for considering the term 'victim' and how this can be constructed in particular ways, resulting in various individual, social and political understandings of, and responses, to victimisation. This can be applied to the current research

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<sup>3</sup> See also Hochschild (1979) on the exchange and management of various emotions, used by airline staff to cope with particular professional demands.

where, in addressing the main research aim of how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work, there has been the opportunity to gain awareness of what knowledge and interaction processes shape these responses. This has the potential to develop an understanding of the various social meanings and conceptualisations attributed to sex work and violence amongst sex workers and service providers. Greater insight can thus be gained of how and why particular meanings are embedded in individual and professional responses to violence against sex workers, and how constructions of sex work and violence can impact in determining how different social actors respond to harm associated with sex work, in either seeking or providing support for violence.

Social constructionism highlights the need to challenge ‘taken for granted’ knowledge if it is considered that knowledge of the social world is based on meanings. Following from this, an understanding of the world cannot be considered natural or determined in any way. Rather, social processes, and the ways in which people (across different time periods and cultural contexts) interact, determine how knowledge, and, ultimately, truth is constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; De Lamater and Hyde, 1998). Applied to this research, social constructionism is relevant given its focus on how ‘people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live’ (Gergen, 1985: 266). This is allied with the main research aim of understanding how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work, and the various experiences and meanings that are involved in, or underpin, these responses.

#### *The social constructions of sex work*

Examining variations in responses to harm associated with sex work offers the potential for problematizing dominant assumptions surrounding sex work and violence. This can occur when it is considered that there are various claims to knowledge and truth that present and reflect a multitude of experiences and meanings linked to sex work and harm, between and within sex worker and service provider populations. Based on this, it is significant



to examine how sex work has been historically and currently socially constructed, as a means of understanding the basis of responses to harm associated with sex work and sex work more generally. This includes examining how some constructions of sex work and appropriate responses to it have been advanced in the process excluding other forms of knowledge and experience. This is considered now in different ideological and policy contexts, exploring how these have featured in and may continue to influence views of and responses to sex work.

### *Sexuality*

In many historical and contemporary discussions of sexuality, there has been a focus on how men and women are biologically distinct, according to different sexual roles and expectations. These ideals relating to femininity and female sexuality have been contrasted with prostitution, posited as a form of sexual deviance that transgresses dominant female sexual norms, and is damaging to individuals, families and communities, necessitating condemnation and regulation of prostitution. This supports Seidman's (2010) observation that societies will routinely 'support and privilege normal and good forms of sexuality and punish those defined as abnormal and bad through law, violence, ridicule or stigma' (Ibid: 24).

Alternative theorisation however, has highlighted the social foundations of sexuality beyond a biological understanding of sexual roles and behaviours to consider the variations in and meanings attached to non-culturally dominant sexualities. Applied to prostitution, this indicates the socially constructed nature of prostitution, based on ideas that it represents deviant and transgressive sexual behaviour although this may not reflect the experiences and views of individuals involved. For the purposes of this thesis it is relevant to consider the role and significance of ideas relating to sexuality, which have or continue to underpin and determine responses towards harm associated with sex work, manifested through attempts to regulate or curtail prostitution and individuals' involvement within it. This will be developed by the current study in order to uncover the prevailing influence and impact of ideas relating to sexuality and/or other factors that

are considered a means of potentially developing responses to harm associated with sex work.

*Natural vs. social explanations of sexuality*

Sexuality has been understood as a natural aspect of human behaviour and more recently, as a form of behaviour that is culturally determined and shaped by specific social norms and behaviours. The former view, understood, as *essentialism* has been particularly dominant, suggesting that sexuality is a natural, biological, fixed form of behaviour (Rubin, 1984; Vance, 1989; Weeks, 1986), particularly in the context of heterosexual, male sexuality (see Hawkes, 1996; Jackson and Scott, 1996; Rich, 1980). Women by comparison, have been generally deemed sexually inferior according to an essentialist perspective, with their sexuality used by, and secondary, to that of men as Irigaray (1985) suggests. Women have been characterised as passive, inactive, and less interested in sexual behaviour than men (Jackson, 1996), while at the same time, possessing biological urges that are 'awaiting arousal by a man' (Rahman and Jackson, 2010:17).

This differentiation of men and women according to different sexual roles and expectations has been used in early explanations of prostitution and its demand. Davis (1937) understood prostitution as functional to society and reflective of natural male biological urges. McIntosh (1978) meanwhile queried the demand for the purchase of sexual services, locating this demand in the context of male sexuality. In contemporary radical feminist analyses, commercial sex has been explained as being driven primarily by men to accommodate their sexual needs and interests, for example, in prostitution (Jeffreys, 2009a), and in sexual relationships more generally (Jeffreys, 1990).

Perhaps more significantly, separate gender and sex roles have been used to emphasise normative sexuality, and highlight deviations from this, particularly 'dangerous' female sexuality, exemplified by prostitution (Littlewood and Mahood, 1991, Mort, 2000). As Mottier (2008) contends,

female sexuality has historically been the focus of much 'scientific and moral scrutiny' (Ibid: 49). This was particularly apparent in the Victorian era, where female sexuality was largely dismissed or undermined compared to male sexual needs (Oakley, 1972), but was also a subject of focus, due to its apparent link to both sexual modesty and high sexual drive (Poovey, 1989). Prostitution, which had long been linked to moral degeneration and poverty, challenged this, as it represented a departure from the cultural ideal of monogamous sex and made the seemingly private subject of sex more public (Nye, 1999). Increasingly during this period it also began to take on medicalised meanings, represented by the introduction of the *Contagious Diseases Act* in the 1860s, which imposed a form of state regulation over prostitution in order to curb the spread of venereal disease. The most extreme of these constructions viewed prostitution as a 'pathological condition' (Nead, 1988: 131). The mental state of prostitutes was frequently questioned, often being defined as possessing hysteria linked to their sexual indulgences (Matlock, 1994). The meanings that emerged of prostitution at this time were symbolically significant as signified by the use of terminology such as 'social disease' and 'social evil' (Weeks, 1981:85), suggesting that much of society feared or loathed the social consequences of prostitution. This growing intolerance for prostitution could be seen through increased attempts towards greater state regulation, through for example, medical surveillance and moral, feminist campaigns, which Walkowitz (1980) has linked to middle-class concerns over working class female sexuality (see also Littlewood and Mahood, 1991).

This symbolism attached to prostitution was to ensure that the double standard idea became even more apparent. Women were clearly associated with the spread of venereal disease and poor health amongst the military, in turn posing a large threat to the ideal of strong and healthy armed forces. By contrast, male clients were not perceived as a health threat to prostitutes, with no action taken against them (Mottier, 2008). This resulted in several negative outcomes for women involved in prostitution, including forced internal examinations conducted at a central public location, acknowledgment by the women and their communities of their prostitute

status, and stricter redefinitions established in relation to acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, ultimately, facilitating the social isolation of prostitutes (Weeks, 1981; Walkowitz, 1980). By the 1880s, the acts were subject to repeal. This however, did not completely end the social control that had been established over women's lives. New agencies were formed, in place of the *Contagious Diseases Act*, and a wave of social purity legislation followed, subjecting prostitutes and increasingly, their children to greater surveillance by the police and authorities (Weeks, 1981).

Victorian representations of prostitution thus largely stigmatised, and sought to criminalise prostitutes rather than clients, failing to take into account the health implications as well as other dangers prostitutes may have faced in the course of their work. An examination of current responses by clients towards the violence inflicted on sex workers reveals similar patterns. Kinnell (2006) found that the responses of individuals convicted for the murder of sex workers, followed a typical narrative; all justified their actions on a belief that they were ridding or 'cleansing' society of something undesirable-prostitution (Kinnell, 2006: 141). Subsequent theories have since challenged essentialism, including Kinsey (1948,1953), whose work revealed the variations in human sexual activities, including a focus on the previously misconceived scope and nature of women's sexuality and suggested that what might ordinarily be considered abnormal human sexuality is in fact common, and cannot be classified as deviant (Jackson and Scott, 2010).

Later, Gagnon and Simon (1974) (see also Jackson, 1996; Plummer, 1975; Simon 1996; Weeks, 1986) emphasised the influence of social, rather than biological factors, in shaping sexuality, desire and the sexual self. They argued that a focus on a (presumed) biologically determined sex drive and the sexual organs dominated or overshadowed the underlying social meanings of sex and sexuality including how physical sexuality is learned, is part of and representative of wider social roles, and plays out in sexual behaviours. Foucault (1978) developed some of these ideas relating to the unchallenged assumption of sexuality as innate, pre-determined, and

influenced by repressive sources. He recognised sexuality as a source of potential power as well as repression, noting the increased discourse around sex from the eighteenth century onwards (not confined to heterosexual, monogamous relations), leading to a view of sex as a form of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1978).

### *Sexuality and deviance*

Despite the assumed functionality and normalcy of prostitution, whereby it exists to fulfil 'natural' male sexual appetite prostitution has also been considered a form of unnatural sexuality, particularly in criminology and deviancy studies. Lemert (1951) and Rosenblum (1975) have argued that prostitution embodies and represents a deviant female sex role, as exemplified by the promiscuous lifestyle of women involved, which can be contrasted with the ideals of femininity and female sexuality, i.e. domesticity, passivity, and sexual relations only within the confines of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship for the purposes of procreation, and fulfilment of male sexual needs (Mottier, 2008; McNair, 1996; Weeks, 1981).

This can involve what Bryan (1965) has termed, an initiation or 'apprenticeship' period, in which women are introduced to and trained in the skills and values required, notably in how to build a clientele, for a 'deviant career' (Bryan, 1965: 288). In a broader analysis of deviance, Matza (2010) addresses similar ideas when he discusses the process of how individuals become deviant. This involves *affinity* where individuals are drawn to deviance, *affiliation* where individuals become integrated in the new social context and the meanings embedded in this, and *signification* when individuals become aware of their deviant status and adapt accordingly, either rejecting or submitting to the label applied to them (Ibid).

Becker's (1963) work, although not focused on prostitution, is also useful in developing an understanding of how sex workers, as with other non-conformist individuals and groups, have been, or may continue to be, socially perceived, based on their sexual or other attitudes and behaviours. Becker (1963) notes that deviance is or has been linked often to a

pathological, medicalised (associated with mental illness) view of an individual or group; where they are considered diseased for seemingly not working healthily or normally, or questioned as to their functionality and sense of stability. Early criminologists Lombroso and Ferrero (1895) adopted this position in relation to the criminality of women. It was argued that women tended to have a lower proclivity towards crime due to their nature being more passive than men. In the case of females defined as deviant, including prostitutes, they concluded that they were abnormal, in biological terms. Female deviants were accordingly portrayed as, and discussed as, 'savage women' or lesser males, with reference made to their specific physical features, for example, the cranium and bone structure, as a means of differentiating them from other women (Lombroso and Ferrero, 1895). Deviance, however, can also be understood as a form of opposition or rejection of societal norms (Becker, 1963). In addressing the various responses to deviance, Becker (1963) reminds us of the subjectivity and conflict involved; an act considered deviant appears to depend on how others react to it, while individuals/groups labelled as 'deviant', need not always accept or agree with their deviant status.

Some writers have expanded on these points, in explaining the reasons for violence against sex workers, moving beyond a focus on the psychological makeup and assumed deviancy of sex workers. Monto's (2004) analysis, for example, centres on clients, the prevailing influence of male privilege and the role this plays in violence against sex workers. Based on this, client violence is explained by men's need to punish women who refuse to accept their social status (by claiming power through the money-exchange process of the sexual encounter) or, to reinforce their sense of masculinity. It can also be attributed to the beliefs of some men that deem sexual violence against women, violent forms of sexuality and the need to judge others' sexual practices as acceptable. This is consistent with Burt's (1980) measure of rape myth acceptance, i.e., the 'prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists' (Ibid: 217) that may underpin men's sexual violence towards women.

Related to this view of male privilege is the assertion amongst some clients that males have a natural entitlement to sex or power over women, which has been used to justify their behaviour, including violence towards sex workers (Monto, 2004). More extreme interpretations have been advanced, suggesting sex workers' responsibility for the violence they may experience, due to providing an inadequate service to clients (Gemme, 1993). Flood and Pease (2009) build on this, identifying a link between certain sets of attitudes, related to specific gender and sex roles, (held by men but also women) and the tendency for sexual aggression towards women by men.

These views would suggest the development of sexuality as a concept. It has transformed from being viewed as a largely innate and biologically determined force to being subject to critical analysis on the grounds that sexuality and sexual behaviours must be considered not only in a biological but also a social context. Related to this O'Neill (2001) suggests the importance of examining the micro and macro aspects of prostitution, in particular the relationships between sex workers' individualised lives, and the social and cultural place of prostitution in wider society, in order to obtain a more informed understanding of prostitution.

### *Sexuality and Feminism*

In addressing the theme of sexuality, feminist perspectives, relating to the nature and implications of sex work have emerged as important. This research explores how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work, and on what factors these responses are based. These include various understandings and experiences participants have in relation to sex work and violence, for example, relating to sex work as linked to a deviant and exploitative form of sexuality, or as a legitimate occupational choice, offering economic gain and in some cases, a powerful and positive expression of sexuality (Paglia, 1992, Sprinkle, n.d.). This draws on a debate central to feminist discussion. Further, feminist perspectives on sexuality and sex work can offer an alternative understanding of the relationship between sex work and ideas on sexuality, and how this can influence responses to harm associated with sex work.

These perspectives contrast with essentialist and early criminological explanations of sex work, which have viewed prostitution as an outlet for natural male sexual desires, and women involved in prostitution as physically or psychologically degenerate. Instead, greater focus is directed towards the social and economic factors that drive prostitution, with discussion divided between prostitution as emblematic of agency and empowerment and victimisation and lack of choice.

In rejecting the assumed naturalness of sexuality, feminist analyses highlight a much wider spectrum in which to locate and explain sex work. Specifically, structural (social and economic factors) rather than biological elements are emphasised as the shaping forces of prostitution (see O'Connell Davidson, 1998, O'Neill, 2001). It is within this framework that oppression can occur - a topic on which feminists are most divided, typically, according to a radical feminist or radical pro-sex perspective. Scoular (2004) and Wahab et al. (2012) identify these divisions in their discussions of radical feminist, sex radical and postmodern perspectives on sex work, and the influence of radical feminism within social work literature and research on sex work, respectively.

The dangers of sex work have been widely debated amongst feminists, (O'Connell-Davidson, 2002), with analyses divided by the level of assumed victimisation linked to sex work. This division has in fact raised questions about the applicability of feminism to the issue of prostitution. Kesler (2002) highlights this, noting the challenges for feminists, both in recognising prostitution as an aspect and implication of patriarchy (leading to a dissociation from and lack of support for prostitution), and, at the same time, feeling unable to exclude and marginalise women involved in prostitution (Ibid). Shrage (1989) similarly attends to this issue, observing that:

Many feminists want to abolish discriminatory criminal statutes that are mostly used to harass and penalize prostitutes, and rarely to punish johns and pimps...On the other hand, most feminists find the prostitute's work morally and politically objectionable (Shrage, 1989: 347).



Shrage (1989) situates the existence and continuity of prostitution in a patriarchal system, involving oppressive attitudes towards women. To address this, she neither suggests a reform or abolition of prostitution, but instead, advocates challenging culturally ingrained attitudes and beliefs that maintain the existence of prostitution. As Shrage (1989) contends, through this practice of challenging the legitimacy of existing attitudes, 'it [prostitution] will be remedied as feminists make progress in altering patterns of belief and practice that oppress women in all aspects of their lives' (Ibid: 360-361).

O'Connell Davidson (2002) also reflects on this challenge, being sympathetic to aspects of both sides of the debate on prostitution. She agrees that some sex workers willingly enter the sex industry for economic reasons and that they should be supported and protected in their decision to be involved in sex work. O'Connell Davidson's (2002) research however, exposing the inequalities of a commodified sex industry, leads her to lend support to feminist abolitionism<sup>4</sup>. Her argument is that existing feminist theory limits the possibility that individuals can both support and denounce aspects of prostitution (as with her own position); notably, sex workers' rights and the social and political inequalities underpinning the commercial sex industry (O'Connell Davidson, 2002). Gangoli (2000) develops these views meanwhile, in highlighting the various and, at times, contradictory feminist approaches to prostitution in India. She notes that while prostitution is identified as a form of hurt and violence that can involve state intervention, it is also a subject of silence and increasingly, to some extent a

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<sup>4</sup> This is linked to a belief that the demand for prostitution should be criminalised with a wider aim of reducing or even eliminating prostitution (Mackay, 2013). Abolitionism, related to prostitution has been based upon a view of prostitution as associated with the abuse, exploitation and inequality (Schulze et al. 2014) experienced by women. Increasingly, this has been focused on the issue of trafficking, for example, Alexander (1997) asserts that under an abolitionist approach, all prostitution or migration involving prostitution is considered as trafficking, whilst all trafficking is thought to be linked to or involve prostitution. An abolitionist approach opposes the suggestion that women can actively choose to be involved in selling sex (Kingston, 2014).

site of agency and empowerment, as with other topics in India including lesbianism, that do not fall within the dominant, socially accepted category of marital monogamy. Further, Gangoli (2000) argues that feminist activism has tended to generalise about women's experiences, often based on experiences of married or middle class women, thus, excluding and marginalising women with alternative experiences. This observation is made elsewhere, relating to the challenges for feminism in uncovering and representing the diversity of women's experiences (De Vault and Gross, 2012; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Reay, 2012).

It has been argued that prostitution is akin to exploitation and reflective of the unequal power differential between largely male clients and female sex workers, based on sexual relations. MacKinnon (1982) asserts that 'Sexuality is to feminism, what work is to Marxism; that which is most one's own and yet that which is most taken away' (Ibid: 515), highlighting the centrality of sexuality (as with work) in social life and how it is both strongly linked to one's identity and the potential for exploitation. Others advance these points, in discussing prostitution as it relates to labour exchanges. For Pateman (1988), sexual exchanges between men and women are posited as a form of sexual contract, which are unlike other labour exchanges between employers and employees, Pateman (1988) notes that the nature of the contract in prostitution is specifically sexual and reflective of the wider patriarchal force men have established over women. Overall (1992) compares prostitution to other forms of work, notably, domestic work, highlighting the commodification of prostitution as the main difference between the two. While domestic work - for example, childcare, or nursing could continue to exist in the absence of pay, she argues that prostitution could not, thus, it is 'defined by the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy (which) epitomises men's dominance' (Ibid: 724). Implicit in these arguments are the association of self or identity with sex, and the reduction of women's identities to their sexuality. In selling sex, conflated with humanity as Millet (1975) suggests; 'you're obliged not to sell sex only, but your humanity' (Ibid: 35). It is suggested that women sell themselves, not only sexual services (thus discounting prostitution as a form of legitimate

work), thereby, affecting their sense of identity and potentially exposing them to exploitation and harm, on which radical feminism in particular has concentrated its focus.

Central to the view that prostitution constitutes exploitation is that women can only be victimised, de-humanised and harmed through prostitution (Dworkin, 1993). This is linked to the violence (Jeffreys, 1997) and ultimately, murder, according to Hunter (1993), that it is argued, forms a key component of prostitution. In this sense, some feminists understand prostitution as constituting violence against women (Barry, 1995). Within this approach, linking prostitution to violence, it is maintained that women are harmed by involvement in prostitution, as they are likely to suffer more physical abuse than other non-prostitutes by men who wish to carry out violent sexual fantasies or vent frustrations towards women. In response, sex workers can adopt survival strategies as a means of blocking out and denying the violence. It has also been suggested that increased sexual liberalism focused on the choice individuals have over their sexual behaviours, means that it is significantly harder for women to recognise abuse against them and so, few speak out against the violence they experience (Jeffreys, 1997). Coy et al. (2011) have recognised this in the context of the increased 'normalisation of commercial sex' (Ibid: 447), in which commercial sex is posited as a form of both marketing or entertainment and empowerment for women. This is queried however, by the authors, who suggest that the cultural popularisation of sex work justifies, overlooks undermines, and misconceives the violence and harms within sex work, in turn, making many current representations of sex work a form of symbolic violence (Ibid).

In contrast to the above position, some have argued that sex work constitutes a form of legitimate work that can ascribe agency and power to sex workers (Bell, 1994, Chapkis, 1997). Doezema (2001) contends that in focusing on the victimisation of sex workers, a key aspect to radical feminist work, there is little 'possibility of political confrontation with sex workers who claim a different experience' (Ibid: 28, cited in Scoular, 2004). This suggests

the diversity of existent sex worker experiences, of which not all may be exploitative or otherwise negative in nature. Pheterson (1993) develops this view, showing how experiences of sex work need not be defined by victimisation and a lack of power, and can differ for individual sex workers: 'The assumption that whores go to bed with anyone is, in practice, not true for all whores...' (Ibid: 40). Pheterson (1993) does however acknowledge the harms and potential victimisation of sex workers resulting from laws and attitudes that fail to take account of different experiences of sex working, and in turn, 'rob whores of dignity and social participation... [and] tolerate hypocrisy in customers and anticipate violence from pimps' (Ibid: 60).

Phoenix (1999) similarly identifies the agency that sex workers can associate with their work. Her analyses suggest, as one example, that sex workers did not necessarily define their experiences as violent or exploitative, and thus, did not consider themselves to be victimised. Phoenix (1999) recognises the complexities of sex workers' experiences, in that sex workers can be both survivors and victims, and may or may not be fully complicit in the decision to be involved in sex work (with other social or material factors playing a role). On this basis, Phoenix (1999) highlights the variety of ways in which sex workers normalise, classify, understand and accept their experiences of sex working. Recognising and communicating this diversity is subsequently emphasised as a point of focus for social or political organisations hoping to engage with and facilitate change for sex workers (Ibid).

### **State responses to sex work**

Sex work, and its potential harms, as indicated by the polarisation of feminist perspectives, is a contested and active area of interest. This is evidenced by the range of law and policy responses that have been advanced, that focus on addressing sex work and the harms it can create for individuals and communities; more recently necessitating the greater and combined input of various statutory and non-statutory agencies in order to regulate sex work, particularly in outdoor sex work settings. In relation to this study, an examination of current and historical responses to sex work in the

UK is relevant as it enables a greater understanding of the extent to which and how sex work has been, or continues to be, conceptualised and managed through state responses and the factors underpinning these responses. UK responses to sex work are the primary area of focus, given that these incorporate or best reflect the position of Scotland, with regards to the regulation of sex work, although other European and international examples are considered. Based on this, the current study can develop the existing knowledge base surrounding responses to sex work by considering more the place of harm within current responses to sex work, and situating these in a Scottish context, which has featured less as a point of focus within analyses of responses to sex work. This research also aims to expand on the existing literature and understanding of responses to harm associated with sex work, by considering these as they apply, not only in a legal and policy context, but also to the individual perspectives and lived experiences of service providers and indoor sex workers. This can develop an understanding of how responses to harm associated with sex work are conceptualised at law and policy level, and actually experienced and perceived, in or outwith the context of service provision for sex workers affected by violence.

#### *Historical context of UK prostitution policy*

To understand the background and influences on the development of UK prostitution policy, it is useful to consider its historical context. This provides an insight into the definitions and actions that have underpinned state responses to prostitution since the late-eighteenth century, as prostitution began to emerge as a 'social problem' that impacted morally, medically and economically on individuals and communities. Arguably, these earlier policy debates on prostitution can be seen to continue through current policy, where increasingly prostitution is viewed as harmful, particularly for the individuals involved, and warrants some form of state intervention, for example, to target human sex trafficking (Lerum, 2009), similar to attempts to rescue women involved in prostitution by middle-class philanthropists during the eighteenth-twentieth centuries (Agustín, 2005, 2007). Charting Victorian-era to present day focuses and developments in UK prostitution

policy also enables an understanding of state responses to prostitution. This is conducive for the purposes of this research, in understanding the background and meanings embedded in some responses to prostitution; notably, those featuring in policy and service provision activities. Later, these are considered alongside individual perspectives to understand the range and nature of different responses to harm associated with sex work.

The first indication of policy development surrounding prostitution can be traced to the nineteenth-century. Beginning in 1824, a series of laws followed which clearly implicated, and condemned the seemingly amoral and criminal nature of prostitutes' activities. *The Vagrancy Act (1824)* imposed a fine or the prospect of imprisonment for any woman (deemed a 'common prostitute') who appeared to be acting in an unruly, or inappropriate manner in a public space. Later, *The Metropolitan Police Act (1839)* imposed similar penalties for soliciting or frequenting an area for the purpose of prostitution, and in turn causing annoyance to the lives of local residents or passers-by; immediate arrest and a fine if convicted which would increase in the case of further convictions. A similar law was subsequently applied to cover the rest of England through *The Towns Police Clauses Act of 1847* (Laite, 2006).

A focus on prostitution within policy debates was evident and continued into the latter part of the nineteenth-century. The main tenets of such debates however, were arguably more far-reaching and punitive in framing the health, and social, moral and economic impacts of prostitution than earlier perceptions of prostitution as a form of public nuisance. In 1885, *The Criminal Law Amendment Act* was passed resulting in an increase of the age of consent (from 13 to 16 years old) and simultaneously, laws that protected young people from entry to prostitution and women from being detained against their will by others in order to maintain prostitution. Under this law, provisions were also made to penalise owners, managers, or assistants of premises used as a brothel by means of a fine or imprisonment. An amendment in 1898 to *The Vagrancy Act*, condemning those who profited from the earnings of a prostitute (a pimp), further

highlighted the negative social and moral implications, and associated criminalisation attached to prostitution (Laite, 2006).

### *Policing sex work*

By the twentieth century, there were still signs that prostitution was considered a social 'problem', characterised by the introduction of Vice Squads in the 1970s and 1980s (Benson and Matthews, 1995, Matthews, 2008). These were designed to more effectively regulate predominantly outdoor sex work, involving multiple strategies around police surveillance and criminalisation of sex workers, including arrests, often to satisfy public demands, or in some cases police working with sex workers, in order to develop knowledge of other criminal activity, which could avoid the potential of arrest for a sex worker (Benson and Matthews, 1995). This approach could thus be potentially informal in nature, relating to a view of policing prostitution in the UK that has traditionally under-prioritised or undermined vice work as not worthy of much police time or effort (Matthews, 2005, 2008). Further, police involvement in prostitution has tended to be linked to intermittent public demands, or legal moves (Matthews, 2005); for example, during the 1950s, *The Sexual Offences Act (1956)*, urged by the *Wolfenden Committee*, and in the 1980s, with *The Sexual Offences Act (1985)*, both of which forced more police focus on the issue of prostitution (Weeks, 1981). This has been coupled with police enforcement challenges related to the ambiguous nature of prostitution; many of the activities associated with providing sex for monetary gain require some degree of legal intervention (Matthews, 2005) - for example, the rental of premises for, and living off the earnings, from prostitution (Sanders, 2005c) - although the actual act of exchanging sex for money is not illegal (Hubbard, 2006, Sanders et al. 2009).

With a recognition, however, of the limited effectiveness of policing approaches to prostitution (Matthews, 2005), as well as an increased focus on the harms prostitution can create for communities (see O'Neill, 2009; O'Neill and Pitcher, 2010; Scoular et al. 2007, 2009), and to some extent, the influence of campaigns amongst researchers and law reformers

(Sanders et al. 2009), there have been moves towards a more multi-agency approach towards prostitution. This has widened responsibility beyond the police for the regulation of prostitution, predominantly as it applies to prostitution in outdoor settings. Under this approach, there has been a focus on the use of alternative options for the control of prostitution. Measures include the use of *Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)* designed to tackle consistent anti-social behaviour without criminal sanctions, but which have provoked debate over their severity in case of breach of an order (imprisonment), and alleged ability to rehabilitate outdoor sex workers who may be displaced or excluded as a result (Jones and Sagar, 2001). There has also been the establishment of tolerance zones, and in some areas, the less formal negative zoning procedures; where informal sex working zones are re-created and situated within non-residential areas, serving both police needs and those of support services who are able to more easily access sex workers in this way (Matthews, 1992, cited in Matthews, 2005). As with ASBOs, the negative aspects of tolerance zones, particularly where dissolved, have been highlighted. Results have included the displacement, financial security and safety of workers, and subsequent disruption to communities, as sex workers and clients conduct transactions in new locations (Holmes, 2005).

#### *A new welfarist approach to sex work policy?*

The current UK position on prostitution can thus be characterised by multi-agency, welfare-based responses that can be attributed to new ways of governance (Matthews, 2005, Scoular and O'Neill, 2007). This has been accompanied by an increasing view of prostitution as commercial sexual exploitation, violence or violence against women, which is currently the favoured approach within, and shared by, the Scottish and UK governments (O'Neill and Pitcher, 2010). This reflects what has been termed 'the rise of the social' (Agustín, 2005, 2007), occurring from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Involving increased focus on and activity around 'helping' and 'saving' working-class women involved in prostitution throughout Europe, this was led by middle-class women, whose gender and class positioned them as ideal 'helpers'. It was during this time,



that Agustín (2007) claims the role of the prostitute was constructed. Initially, women selling sex were seen as a threat to health and morality, and latterly, as victims, a status which came to predominate and continues today, through the identification of female migrant sex workers as most in need of support and social intervention (Agustín, 2005, 2007, see also Wahab 2002 who discusses the prevailing influence of discourses around victims, protection and social control in social work practice with sex workers).

Existing policy documentation reflects this increasing conceptualisation of sex work as sexual exploitation or gender violence. *Paying the Price* (Home Office, 2004) and *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* (Home Office, 2006) are two examples indicative of the intended direction of policy-making related to prostitution currently, and in the future, i.e., curtailing entry to prostitution (particularly amongst young people), supporting and facilitating individuals to exit prostitution, protecting communities from the nuisance associated with prostitution, and penalising individuals involved in the exploitation or abuse of women through prostitution. The Scottish policy document *Being Outside: Constructing a response to Street Prostitution* (Scottish Executive, 2004a) shares some similar aims and objectives, but appears to have been subject to less debate and critique than *Paying the Price* (Home Office, 2004) and *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* (Home Office, 2006).

Such responses have been criticised, however, on several grounds. In relation to *Paying the Price* (Home Office, 2004), it has been noted that questions raised throughout regarding the management of indoor sex venues dismiss the realities of, and diversity within, the commercial sex industry. It is highlighted that sexual activities in indoor sex work often take place in the context of a consensual agreement between adults and are not necessarily characterised by exploitation and abuse. On this basis, it is claimed that there is little, if any, consideration of the view that prostitution constitutes a form of sex 'work', thereby, limiting the agency of sex workers and presenting only one side of the multi-faceted, theoretical debate on prostitution (Sanders, 2009). Soothill and Sanders (2004) similarly address

the policy's shortcomings in terms of its reinforcement of 'myths' relating to prostitution. The authors note that the policy initially acknowledges the diversity within sex work, but subsequently adopts a position that categorises all experiences of sex work as damaging. This is seen to dismiss evidence that indicates the realities of sex work, which may not be necessarily violent or exploitative, or a form of survival behaviour, as the policy suggests (Soothill and Sanders, 2004). Moreover, it is recognised that the policy's 'solutions' to sex work are inappropriate, and contrary to the aim of making sex work safer - for example, through displacing sex workers - instead representing, increased support for state regulation over aspects of sex work that may not be required. Rather, it is suggested that the protection of minors in sex work feature as a main area of focus (Ibid).

Cusick and Berney (2005) have also directed criticism towards *Paying the Price* (Home Office, 2004), focusing on the issues it presents, in terms of undermining the safety and wellbeing of sex workers (see also Brooks-Gordon, 2006, for a discussion of the potential risks posed by the policy, including disruption of outdoor sex workers' safety strategies, and to indoor sex work, and lack of support for safety zones<sup>5</sup>). They highlight that the policy is limited in its understanding of sexual health risks, both posed by, and to, sex workers. This is exemplified by a proposal to introduce sexual health testing, despite evidence suggesting low levels of HIV/STD rates amongst sex workers, and a lack of clarity as to how such policy would be operated on a wide-scale basis. In addition, the authors argue that the policy supports a view that existing sexual health service provision is adequate for all sex workers, with little discussion of how this could be improved, despite sex workers' continued need for access to and treatment from sexual health services. Further, it is argued that sex workers' safety is compromised and under-prioritised by some of the proposed moves of the policy - for example, ASBOs and increased policing of sex workers - which, in seeking to serve the interests of communities, may inadvertently displace, exclude and expose sex workers to danger (Cusick and Berney, 2005).

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<sup>5</sup> Areas, also known as tolerance or managed zones, in which outdoor sex workers can work safely (Brooks-Gordon, 2006).

As yet, however, the UK law has not chosen to abolish or otherwise criminalise prostitution, nor has the law adopted the position to regulate and legalise prostitution (Phoenix, 1999, Scottish Executive, 2004a), or to completely decriminalise sex work, although there have been recent moves in Scotland, England and Wales, and Northern Ireland towards criminalising the purchase of sex<sup>6</sup>. Phoenix (2007) has noted the UK approach as being one of 'partial criminalization' (Phoenix, 2007:77), reflective of its position over the past two centuries in not criminalising the sale of sex itself, but many associated activities, that are thought to create public nuisance (Phoenix, 2007). Similarly, in the case of two Australian states (New South Wales and Victoria), although both have demonstrated support for decriminalisation or legalisation of sex work, the extent to which this has been achieved or developed has been hindered by a lack of legal recognition of sex work as work, in the case of Victoria, sex work being assigned a 'special category' of work (Crofts et al. 2012).

This contrasts with other countries that have taken more definitive approaches, based on the abolition, semi-criminalisation, legalisation or decriminalisation of sex work. These include Sweden, Norway and Iceland, which have adopted an abolitionary approach in criminalising individuals who buy sex (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2013; Casey and Topping, 2014; Kilvington et al. 2001; Levy, 2011), also, recently, applied to Canada, where it is now illegal to both buy and advertise to sell sex (Casey and Topping, 2014, Yuen, 2015), (see also the case of Northern Ireland, discussed more in Chapter Four). France has retained soliciting as an offence, rejecting a plan to impose penalties on clients of sex workers (BBC, 2015). The US state of Nevada by comparison operates a more lenient system of regulation through legal brothels. Similarly, more tolerant approaches to sex work can be found in New Zealand, which has fully

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<sup>6</sup> Following an earlier proposal by Trish Godman (MSP), in 2012, Rhoda Grant (MSP) introduced a consultation process, wherein it was proposed that the purchase of sex be criminalised. For more information see: Scottish Parliament (2012a) and Scot-Pep (n.d. a).

decriminalised sex work (Open Society Foundations, 2012). This also applies to the Netherlands where sex work is legally recognised as work (when voluntary in nature) and subject to similar employment regulations as other forms of work (see Outshoorn, 2001, 2004).

*New directions in UK sex work policy*

Kantola and Squires (2004) expand upon some of these arguments to suggest that change is needed in relation to the current terminology and conceptualisations within UK prostitution policy. Comparing the Netherlands with the UK policy agenda, the authors argue that the UK typically adopts an approach where prostitution as an occupational choice is largely dismissed, or undermined. Instead prostitution is more widely depicted as a form of public nuisance as it applies in the context of the dominant discourse of kerb-crawling, and to some extent, as an issue of moral order, where human trafficking is now concerned. In failing to engage with a sex work discourse, the authors highlight the potential limits and negative repercussions, particularly for sex workers that could emerge from current UK prostitution policies, notably - limited discussion and actions relating to the regulation of positive working conditions for sex workers, and increased policing, surveillance and containment of sex work (Ibid).

Sanders and Campbell (2007) echo similar views. Suggesting that violence should feature highly on the UK prostitution policy agenda, they point to using procedures that provide a degree of protection within indoor sex work in order to improve conditions for outdoor sex work. This could be accompanied by cultural attitudinal changes which acknowledge sex workers as citizens entitled to full protection of the law and establishing sex work as a profession complete with rights and working conditions (Sanders and Campbell, 2007), similarly advocated by Morgan-Thomas (2009) who draws attention to sex workers' rights in making decisions related to their own lives. The importance of these and other themes are demonstrated in the following chapter, in which sex workers frequently reflect upon the wide-ranging impact of law and policy on their working lives. This includes conditions of work, perceived fairness and safety as a result of established

laws and policies surrounding sex work and relationships with statutory agencies that work according to these laws and policies.

It has also been suggested that future research concerning violence towards sex workers should consider the impact of policing and legislative measures that are designed to redress the problem of sex worker violence. As Campbell and Stoops (2010) show, there is evidence to suggest that the current climate surrounding responses to violence towards sex workers is changing. This is perhaps most aptly evidenced by the case of multi-agency working in Liverpool, where increasingly violence towards sex workers is being treated as a form of hate crime, resulting in the successful reporting and conviction of a number of individuals who have attacked sex workers. This has largely been aided by employing the 'Ugly Mugs' scheme, where sex workers complete details related to incident, perpetrator appearance and car description, enabling other sex workers to become aware of potentially dangerous clients as well as assisting with police investigations and production of evidence.

Such schemes, however, are limited to specific regions of the UK (Scotland not currently included), thus many sex workers do not have such support and remain at risk from client violence with a view that their experiences do not count as a hate crime or hate incident. This can be due to the definitional and conceptual difficulties in classifying hate crime, which remains an ambiguous and contested term, despite the existence of hate crime terminology since the 1980s, and a longer interest in hate as a motivating factor for crime in the USA (Ellis and Hall, 2010). Jacobs and Potter (1998) for example, highlight that prejudice, as with hate crime, is itself multi-faceted with a variety of meanings. Perpetrators may be unaware, deny, or differ in whether or how readily they admit to holding prejudices. Further, individual prejudices and, therefore, incitement to engage in hate speech or crimes may be justified on account that it generates security for an individual, develops one's self-esteem, an individual has grown up used to prejudice or provides an explanation for particular social or economic problems (Ibid).

Boeckmann and Turpin-Petrosino (2002) meanwhile reinforce the notion that defining and understanding hate crime is open to a variety of interpretations. Their argument is based on differences in culture, politics and social norms, which subsequently vary the way, hate crime, and crimes in general, are defined and understood. Perry (2003) reiterates these views, noting the differences that exist between US states in jurisdictions, in terms of: definitions of bias, categories of victims subject to protection and, level of bias as a motivating factor required to categorise hate crime leading Perry (2003) to contend that the concept of crime, including hate crime, is neither a universal nor static term; rather it is dependent on the particular cultural context and is subject to change over time. Bell (1997) similarly illustrates the extent of conceptual difficulties within the context of policing US hate crime where, although police have a degree of discretionary power affording them the choice of whether or not to enforce the law, this decision can simultaneously be constrained by factors including the difficulty of defining whether an incident constitutes a hate crime and a tendency amongst victims not to prosecute, which would limit the use of hate crime legislation. This corresponds to some degree with UK-based research which highlights challenges related to expectations of policing (not specific to hate crime); this can often be compromised by issues including a lack of evidence which make identification of a perpetrator problematic, or perceptions on the part of police officers as to the likelihood of securing a successful prosecution (Cretney and Davis, 1995). Related to this point, Iganski (1999) has outlined problems in the process of defining who counts as a victim and who is subsequently offered protection in the form of hate crime legislation. By excluding some groups, Iganski (1999) argues that this can indicate that crimes against these groups are more legitimate than those committed against groups favoured by the legislation; suggestive that some groups are less entitled to protection than others.

Continuous development in legislation and multi-agency engagement has suggested the growing prioritisation of hate crime as a significant social issue. In the Scottish context, the implementation of recent initiatives has

overseen the expansion of rights for victims, thus, facilitating to some extent, enhanced support for the victims of hate crime. These have included the establishment of victim statement schemes (Ministry of Justice, 2013) and the Victim Information and Advice (VIA) service (see Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, n.d.). This has been supported by the introduction of the *Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Act* (2009) which has expanded the scope of hate crime categorisation, previously only applicable to crimes aggravated by racial or religious prejudice, under the *Crime and Disorder Act* (1998) and the *Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act* (2003) (Scottish Executive, 2004b). This is consistent with the approach adopted elsewhere in the UK where responses have been arguably quicker; for example by 2003, under *The Criminal Justice Act* (2003) there were provisions in place to expand sentencing for hate crimes based on disability or sexual orientation in England and Wales (Scottish Executive, 2004b).

Based on perceived practical barriers however, it remains that gender violence is not currently defined or treated as a hate crime. This relates largely to perceptions that hatred based on gender is often difficult to prove; there are varying and complex forms of violence against women and it may be difficult to tackle them all and it may be too problematic to establish that a victim was targeted purely because of their association with a certain group, rather than some other factor. Moreover, in the case of Scotland, it has been argued that existing legal provisions are enough to accommodate hate crime, and that this is sufficient rather than introducing new legislation (Burman et al. 2009). Further, it has been argued that to try and define and establish gender aggravation in the context of hate crime where it may be considered a motive for a crime committed is not necessarily beneficial for the victim. For gender aggravation to be proven, it generally has to be shown that a woman was abused on account of her being female. By doing this, however, aspects of a women's life may be subject to scrutiny (for example, behaviour, lifestyle and appearance), to establish whether gender, or some other factor, was the motive for the attack, leading potentially to increased stigma and victimisation (Burman et al. 2009, Campbell and Raja, 1999).

Outwith the context of hate crime, it has been argued that the state generally often under-prioritises the importance of gender in relation to violence. With regard to domestic violence, findings have shown that state service responses are often largely shaped by specific gender assumptions. Such assumptions relate mainly to the concept of the family unit, women's place within the family, violence and women's link to this, and the expected roles and responsibilities of women. Responses in turn have often reflected these assumptions. There have been attempts amongst social workers, police and other state representatives to, for example reconcile women with their abusive partners, often by means of persuading women to modify her behaviour, threaten to remove children if women decide to leave their situation and to try to find a peaceful solution rather than arrest an abusive partner. As a result, rather than seeking to tackle the issue, emphasis is placed on stereotyped notions of the family, and a woman's role within it, male and female responsibilities, and, in particular, how women should behave within a domestic domain (Wykes and Welsh, 2008).

Hate crime was not the sole focus of the current study; although it was considered as an aspect of responses to harm associated with sex work that could emerge from discussions with sex workers and service providers. Discussions with sex workers focused on themes including their definitions of harm, whether and how they had experienced violence, risk at work and risk management strategies and their interactions with service providers. In questioning participants around these themes, there was the potential to better understand the extent to which harm experienced in sex work was recognised in law and service provision responses, some of the challenges faced by sex workers in disclosing their experiences of harm and how protected and supported sex workers felt as a result. This corresponds with some of the issues discussed thus far in relation to hate crime which makes the process of reporting, being supported for and receiving justice for a hate crime, challenging or unobtainable. This would highlight the relevance of the concept of hate crime to violence against sex workers, and potentially, the



need to recognise or re-categorise sex worker violence as such, in order to adequately support and protect sex workers from violence where needed.

It is also the case that some sex workers are deterred from reporting violent incidents to the police, as will be later explored. This can be attributed to, amongst other factors, fear of or perception of laws and policies as particularly restrictive (Edwards, 1987; NSWP, 2012; Penfold et al. 2004), a perception that their experiences would be viewed as non-serious or overlooked by police (Boff, 2012), concern about being identified as a sex worker (Kinnell, 2008), or that there will be reprisals from attackers (Kinnell, 2008, Wijers, 1998) which ultimately, place sex workers in further danger.

#### *Seeking support for violence: service provision*

The current study's aim of understanding how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work necessitates an examination of the role of service provision for sex workers. This includes broadening an understanding of to what extent and how service provision features as a response to harm associated with sex work, whether ideological or other factors underpin the availability and type of support offered and sex workers and service providers' experiences of service provision, from either a service user or staff perspective. Existing literature, as is later demonstrated, has highlighted some limitations in, and recommendations for, service provision. There continues however, to be an absence of research on both sex worker and service provider views on the experience of receiving or providing support for violence or other issues. As highlighted by Oselin and Weitzer (2013) there is particularly limited research relating to service providers, the services they offer and how these can link to particular theoretical or political positions on sex work and be reflected in their practices. In this way, the current study aims to add to, and develop, the literature on service provision by exploring service provision as a response to harm associated with sex work, and how this applies to both sex workers and service providers. In the process, there is potential to uncover the factors that are present in and shape, service provision, and indicate the wider impact of existing service responses (in terms of being

appropriate, contrary to or requiring development) as a means of addressing harm associated with sex work and supporting sex workers' needs as required.

### *Extent and scope of service provision*

Service provision for sex workers, similar to sex work research (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001) has often been targeted towards, and offered in the context of sexual health and HIV prevention (Graça and Gonçalves, 2014, Pitcher, 2006). More recently it has been recognised that sex workers may have a range of different and complex needs requiring support for a variety of issues (UKNSWP, 2011) for example emotional stress within and out with sex work (Jackson et al. 2007). In addition, it has been recognised that there can be limitations in or involving service provision, leading to significant gaps in in meeting the varying needs of sex workers<sup>7</sup> (Tampep, 2009), which may be compounded by the particular challenges facing sex workers when engaging with services; for example, perceived stigma and being judged for disclosing details of involvement in sex work (Clark, 2009; Fick, 2005; Gill et al. 2013; Gorry et al. 2010), sex workers' existing social exclusion and marginalisation (Scambler and Scambler, 1995), inflexible service provision (Drugscope/AVA, 2013), and increased criminalisation curtailing access to services (Morgan-Thomas, 2009, Scot-Pep, 2012). As a result it has been suggested that agencies offering support services to sex workers aim to include and develop a more holistic approach (Europap/Tampep, 1998; Hester and Westmarland, 2004; PEER, 2013; Tampep, 2009), in order to engage with and address the wide range of needs that different sex workers may have.

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<sup>7</sup> A study by Tampep (*European Network for HIV/STI Prevention and Health Promotion among Migrant Sex Workers*)(2009), incorporating twenty-five European countries found a range of gaps across service provision, including insufficient partnership working between service providers, and limited support for ethnic minority sex workers, resulting in increased 'vulnerabilities' for sex workers (Tampep, 2009: 58).

### *Impact of current practices on sex workers' engagement with services*

Linked to the development of appropriate service provision for sex workers, it would appear that there is a need to recognise and adapt to sex worker diversity in their experiences, needs and interests. Existing literature has addressed this to some degree, by acknowledging the range of sex workers' experiences and needs. This has uncovered challenges, for example, related to sex workers' various and complex support needs which may not be fully met through generic service provision (Holly and Lousely, 2014). Recommendations have been advanced, including (as previously discussed) the need for more holistic and multi-agency services to accommodate the heterogeneity of sex workers and the various needs they may have (Aspinall, 2014, Spice, 2007); tailored services according to specific client needs and expectations, for example, flexibility, and staff's knowledge, attitudes and treatment (Mellor and Lovell, 2011; Mosedale et al. 2009; Saldanha and Parenteau, 2013), and decriminalisation of sex work in order to encourage uptake of services by sex workers (Carr et al. 1996, Scambler and Scambler, 1995).

As suggested by other literature however, an increased emphasis on the harms of sex work in law, policy and service provision, may overshadow differences in sex workers' experiences, potentially creating a barrier to and limiting some sex workers from seeking the support they may require. This highlights the need to examine more the role of current sex work law and policy and related service provider responses, in how they understand and subsequently offer support to sex workers. The current study adds to this, in examining how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work, taking into account their responses, which can include seeking or providing support for violence, and any challenges, barriers or limitations this may involve. This develops the limited scope of existing literature on service providers and their responses in supporting sex workers, indicating the factors that may feature in and affect these responses and how these responses can encourage or dissuade some sex workers from accessing support.

Within the available literature, it has been suggested that existing service provision may be limited in its understanding of, and ability to, address different sex workers' needs and experiences. This is based on an overarching focus by services on the harms of and victimisation caused to individuals involved in sex work, resulting in measures designed to facilitate individuals to exit sex work. Accompanying this, there can be a prevailing perception that sex work constitutes criminal as well as immoral and harmful behaviour. This system of reinforcing 'core beliefs of immorality and illegality' (McCracken, 2010: 212) as McCracken (2010) has argued, limits sex workers in being able to identify their needs or seek support. Sex workers may believe that their actions, positioned as, and possibly understood themselves as illegal and immoral, preclude them from receiving or deserving help (McCracken, 2010).

Where this is not the focus of service provision and if sex work is not defined according to an assumption that it is a form of gendered violence or sexual exploitation, there is the potential that some services can be denied funding (Agustín, 2007), reflecting a wider concern over supporting projects that are seen to legitimise sex work and its associated harms (Mak, 1997). In the long term, the implications of restricted funding for services including the extent of and types of support offered, may be such that not all sex workers' needs are met and they are subject to increased exclusion and stigmatisation where they do not fit a model that denounces sex work. Ditmore and Allman (2013) have explored these issues in relation to the US anti-prostitution pledge<sup>8</sup> and its impact on available HIV and AIDS service provision for sex workers. Their findings demonstrated that there was a lack of clarity amongst services as to what they could or could not provide and to whom, how they could share best practice information and develop services with the available funding, resulting in some cases, in the reduction or elimination of vital services for sex workers.

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<sup>8</sup> A pledge, which necessitates that recipients of HIV and AIDs funding in the USA adhere to 'an organizational policy opposing prostitution' (Ditmore and Allman, 2013:1).

Cusick et al. (2010) has highlighted such limitations as they can affect sex workers in the context of English and Irish drug services. It was found that the links between dominant political agendas on sex work and available service provision may be detrimental to some sex workers, requiring that they engage with a model that commits them to exit sex work in order to receive necessary treatment. This can, in turn, create problems in facilitating effective harm reduction for sex workers; excluding and denying support to those who do not readily identify as a victim in line with dominant political agendas on sex work (Cusick et al. 2010). Similarly, Shaver et al. (2011) identified that the limited focus on exiting within some projects for sex workers was non-conducive and may not necessarily reflect an interest in wanting to exit sex work, with sex workers often only involved in such projects to avoid criminal sanctioning.

### **Chapter summary**

Within this chapter several studies have been considered and summarised, highlighting the various ways in which violence and sex work have been addressed. Much of the literature focuses on risk within sex work, with particular emphasis on the health risks applied to sex work and sex workers, including substance misuse, transmission of sexual infections, and violence from clients. More specifically, the literature reflects an emphasis on violence, as it may be experienced in or associated with sex work, but is limited in considering how these experiences of violence, if encountered at all, are managed by sex workers or service providers, and what factors feature in these responses. This research develops these areas to consider the wider, symbolic power and harms beyond immediate health risks, as informed by the views of participants. This includes an examination of harms discussed by sex workers that are not necessarily associated with sex work or considered harmful by others; for example, current restrictions in law and policies determining how and where sex workers work. Similarly, the research aims to develop the literature that suggests a relationship between sex work and violence by considering how violence within sex work, where it occurs, is actually experienced and managed, focusing on the lived experiences and insights of sex workers and service providers.

Violence in sex work has featured largely within the literature consulted, indicative of the prevalence and significance of the issue, although this has often been framed in very particular ways i.e. that sex work constitutes violence against women, or is linked to human trafficking. Some studies presented have contested these analyses, although it appears that there are generally fewer studies which focus on the perspectives of sex workers themselves in defining violent, risky or harmful experiences. These accounts differ from the largely abolitionist views that sex work in itself is violence, violence features in, is associated with, or results from sex work, or that violence experienced in sex working is the only context in which sex workers can experience violence (omitting potentially significant social and economic factors). The current study develops this by prioritising sex workers and service providers' views in how they speak about violence within the context of sex work, enabling participants to freely express how harm for them is defined, experienced and managed. This is not confined to the experiences of outdoor sex workers, to which much of the literature consulted has referred or focused on (particularly cases of exploitation and abuse which have been found within, and associated with, outdoor sex work, as discussed), and for whom experiences may differ somewhat from those of indoor sex workers.

Similarly, sampling bias within some studies made it difficult to assess their validity. Sample sizes in some of the studies consulted, for example, were small, or relied only on the views of some sex worker populations, notably, outdoor sex workers who substance misuse and female sex workers. Without a wider consideration of the experiences and needs of different sex worker populations, it is thus problematic to draw suitable conclusions about how sex workers experience, perceive and respond to violence or other harms encountered in sex work. The next chapter focuses on the methodological principles and practices applied to this study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed and reflexive overview and justification of the methods and methodology used within this study. All aspects of the research design and process are documented, encompassing theoretical and methodological approaches, sampling framework, access to and recruitment of participants, data collection methods and procedures and data analysis. In view of the sensitive subject matter of the current research, a large proportion of this chapter is also focused on the many ethical and practical dimensions posed by the research, including the potential for participant and researcher harm, in addition to the challenges specific to conducting research into sex work. Taking account of these factors, a discussion is presented, covering methodological solutions to the varying ethical and practical challenges identified. The chapter is finalised by summarising the methodological approach and decisions taken throughout the research, and offers some reflections on the research process as a whole.

#### **Theoretical positions**

##### *Feminism*

A range of theoretical perspectives has influenced the development of this research study including feminism. In view of the participant range, type of questions, and selection of methods it has been deemed conducive to consider feminism in some detail, particularly for the purposes of situating its influence in, and given its applicability to, the methodological practices of the current study. A feminist approach is likely to apply mainly to the methodological practices undertaken when interviewing sex workers in this study, which is a largely female sample population, and one which would arguably, benefit from an approach which prioritises, rather than undermines, misconceives, or demonises the views of participants, such is

the body of much social science literature purporting to represent the realities of prostitution (Koken, 2010). It is recognised however that values of feminist interviewing, including non-hierarchical power dynamics in interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2014, UK Data Service, n.d. a) and establishing rapport with participants (UK Data Service, n.d. a) are equally compatible with and relevant to the approach followed in interviewing all participants within this research.

Feminist research can be considered a form of knowledge production and development, which takes account of women's place throughout history, and questions, challenges, and seeks to overturn existing gender inequalities. According to O'Neill (1996) this knowledge formation process is a relationship between women's everyday lived experiences, political power, academic knowledge and social action. Underpinning this is a view that women should be as active as possible in the research process, helping to facilitate the social construction of knowledge, and promote the concepts of empowerment and social change (Ibid).

In relation to this research, it became apparent that a feminist standpoint epistemology would be particularly conducive to better understanding the position of the women being interviewed as part of this research, enabling their full involvement in producing knowledge and facilitating social change. Researcher objectivity, while a desirable aspect of the research process, is not always feasible. Instead, a researcher can find that they are more subjectively involved in the process than intended (Harding, 1991). In researching sex work, in particular, positionality - related to divisions in views and assumptions about the meaning of prostitution and sex work - can impact upon the research (Koken, 2010). From this perspective, feminist standpoint theory can be viewed as a more appropriate positioning. Based on the view that there are many assumptions relating to the social world, and 'who can be a knower and what can be known' (Hesse-Biber, 2012:5), feminist standpoint theory recognises the benefits of a subjective approach to research. Specifically, the adoption of a feminist standpoint theory serves to highlight and centralise the position of women within



research. Such an approach, it is argued, is required owing to the absence of female perspectives in research (Smith, 1988), and the need to provide a voice to women. The latter, now a central focus of feminist standpoint theory (Bui, 2007), suggests the importance of women's lived experiences (Evans et al. 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2014; Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2015), and provides an alternative lens through which to understand and transform the social world. This particular point was considered throughout the research process, with the researcher aiming to prioritise participants' voices and experiences.

### *Social constructionism*

Aligned with feminism to some degree, offering a means of problematizing dominant social identities (Fiaccadori, 2006,) and social constructs being a feature of feminist understandings of gender and sex (Marshall, 2008), social constructionism has also influenced the current study, theoretically and epistemologically. Social constructionist approaches query the presumption of a fixed and measurable social reality (Crotty, 1998, Jacobs and Manzi, 2000), that does not consider the influence of 'culture, history and ideology' (Gergen, 1998: 147). Instead, these approaches suggest that meaning or truth related to the social world exists and develops out of how people come to know and attach meaning to social phenomena. Dominant knowledge claims, based on positivist science which suggests that an objective and observable truth or knowledge of the social world can be obtained (Crotty, 1998; Hollis, 2000; Kolakowski, 1993), are discredited as a main means of understanding the social world within a social constructionist perspective. This relates to the current study, in which it is similarly important to address the differing and contested meanings and knowledge participants attach to their experiences, without assuming one dominant social reality, with regards to responses to harm associated with sex work.

Within this study, where a central focus is how different actors (sex workers and service providers) construct responses to harm associated with sex work, social constructionism and the study of social problems provides a way of understanding how some issues, notably sex work and its

associations with violence and harm, become 'problems', necessitating particular responses. A social constructionist perspective rejects a view of social problems as objectively determined, instead being based upon individuals' or collective definitions of behaviours or conditions that are deemed concerning (Blumer, 1971; Collin, 1997; Kitsuse and Spector, 1973; Schneider, 1985):

Sociologists have erred in locating social problems in objective conditions. Instead, social problems have their being in a process of collective definition. This process determines whether social problems will arise, whether they become legitimated, how they are shaped in discussion, how they come to be addressed in official policy, and how they are reconstituted in putting planned action into effect (Blumer (1971: 298).

Drawing on Blumer's (1971) claims, the importance of definition in the formation of social problems is emphasised within a social constructionist approach. Kitsuse and Spector (1973) advance this position in their discussion of deviance, in which they note the centrality of definitional and claims-making processes in the recognition of, and responses to, particular social conditions. They advocate the study of such claims-making processes and the actors involved as a means of understanding how social problems are defined, responded to and legitimised (Ibid). Earlier analyses of social problems by labelling and value-conflict theorists similarly attended to the subjective nature of social problems, drawing focus to the value-judgements involved in the identification of social problems (Becker, 1966, cited in Kitsuse and Spector, 1973; Fuller and Myers, 1941; Lemert, 1951; Waller, 1936), but according to Kitsuse and Spector (1973) they devoted less attention to the conditions or definitional processes through which judgements are formed, in some cases, striving for a 'balanced approach' that considered both the subjective and objective elements of social conditions (Ibid). Specifically, Kitsuse and Spector's analyses (cited in Ibarra, 2008) differed from other theorists of social problems, in their main emphasis being on claims-making and definitional activities rather than social conditions (Ibarra, 2008), taking into account, the position of the

sociologist in the construction of social problems (Ibarra, 2008, Kitsuse and Spector, 1973).

In the formation of social problems, Spector and Kitsuse (1973) focus on the process of definitional activities, involving 'groups making assertions of grievances and claims to organizations, agencies, and institutions about some putative conditions' (Ibid: 146). As part of this four-stage process, a definition of a condition as a problem is initially made. This may or may not involve the actors who are deemed to be the victims of that condition, and instead can entail the involvement of an organisation or individuals external to the condition, potentially with more financial or other powers to exercise the claim. Stage two involves formal activity or response relating to the control, limitation or change in the claim, leading to legitimisation of the problem. Stage three is where complaints and conflict can arise related to an organisation's ability to eliminate or change conditions. The final stage of the process is marked by the activities of groups, no longer related to the system, but instead involving alternative solutions to their 'problems', that 'challenge the legitimacy of established institutions and the procedures they organize for the processing of claims' (Ibid: 156).

This approach, centred on the place and importance of definitional and claims-making processes, relates to and develops the main aim of this research in seeking to understand how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex work. Applying this approach, a more nuanced understanding is gained of the multiple processes and actors involved in the construction and reproduction of sex work as a social problem, in turn, effecting different responses to sex work. Kitsuse and Spector's analyses (1973) enable us to see further than the subjective nature of social conditions, to the ways in which individuals construct social problems and accordingly their responses to these problems, through various definitions and claims. Their approach also highlights power differences, leading to the predominance and legitimisation of some definitions and claims relating to social problems and the exclusion or misinterpretation of other actors in the claims-making process, which can

lead to conflict and some actors seeking to find alternative solutions to their problems. Similarly, Leon-Guerrero (2005) writes that identifying the subjective nature of social problems enables us to comprehend how a social condition may be categorised and acted upon as a problem by some individuals, whilst not being recognised as a social problem by others. This argument can be applied to this research to understand the variations between sex workers and service providers in how they respond to harm associated with sex work. It enables an insight into whether and why these actors do or do not define or claim aspects of sex work as a social problem, and how this affects their responses. Further, a social constructionist perspective enhances an understanding of how some responses dominate - in particular, law and policy constructions of sex work or those advanced by otherwise influential institutions or individuals, for example the media and religious leaders (Leon-Guerrero, 2005, which are not always representative of or feature the voices of a diverse sex worker population. This highlights issues of claims-making and legitimacy with regards to responses to harm associated with sex work (as a social problem), issues which are explored in later chapters to:

- Illustrate competing definitions and claims made with regards to sex work, in particular its associations with violence and harm
- Discuss implications of claims-making: whether this contributes to or rejects the notion of sex work as a social problem, and what responses does this create
- Uncover the voices of sex workers, whose experiences can be unheard or undermined

While advancing an understanding of how social conditions, in the case of this research - harm associated with sex work - can be defined and acted upon as social problems, there are limitations to consider in using a social constructionist approach. Bacci (1999) has indicated that constructionist perspectives on social problems can be limiting, serving mainly to describe rather than deconstruct and enact political change around these 'problems',

although in some cases, minority groups have demonstrated a reclaiming of social problems for the purposes of advancing positive political change. Jenness (1990) writes how sex workers have sought to challenge and redefine conceptions of sex work to legitimise their work. Kitsuse (1980) draws on examples including paraplegics and sadomasochists, amongst other groups defined as 'deviant', but who are now redefining, challenging and demanding rights and protections based on their conditions, transforming the view of their conditions as problematic to 'society as the problem' (Ibid: 10). It is suggested furthermore by Bacci (1999) that there is a need to question and move beyond the construction of public claims-making around social problems. Bacci (1999) suggests that more focus could be directed towards who is able to make claims, and who is silenced or undermined within or compared to other social problems claims. Similarly, the representations of social problems and their implications could be considered in greater depth. Some of these issues are attended to in this study, through a consideration of the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work. This takes account of how some responses are linked to views of sex work as problematic, whether and how experiences of sex workers and service providers are considered in responses, and factors determining whether particular claims are responded to.

## **Methodological approach**

### *Research aim*

The methodological approach selected was based on the main research aim of the current study, i.e. how do sex workers and service providers in Scotland respond to harm associated with sex work? This aim was intended to develop an understanding of sex workers and service providers' responses: what these responses consist of, how harm is experienced, managed and defined by sex workers and service providers offering support to sex workers, experiences of support service delivery (as one response to harm associated with sex work), and the nature and implications of responses. The interview schedule was designed around these areas (see Appendix B for examples of interview questions), and included questions, exploring such issues as:

- Sex workers' safety; for example, what strategies sex workers have for managing risk at work
- Sex workers' views on support services; for example, have sex workers had any experience of using support services? What are sex workers' expectations of engaging with a service?
- Service providers' experiences of supporting sex workers; for example, what support do service providers offer to sex workers? What are service providers' understandings of violence/harm associated with sex work, and how does this shape their services? What are service providers' experiences of partnership working in order to support their clients?
- Barriers encountered by service providers in engaging with sex workers; for example, how do service providers maintain relationships with sex workers affected by violence?

As suggested by the research aim, based on sex worker and service providers' experiences, the research required an approach that offered sufficient flexibility and scope to uncover participants' voices and capture the subjective realities of their lives. For this reason a qualitative methodology, using individual and focus group interviews, was selected. Oakley (1998) has suggested the integration of quantitative methods with existing favoured feminist research methods as a means of developing feminism as an emancipatory social science. While this option was considered for use in the current study, potentially by surveying sex workers and service providers on the extent to which they accessed or provided services for support for violence/harm experienced in sex work, and their views on this, a quantitative or mixed method approach was not adopted. A quantitative approach, in particular was deemed non-conducive to meeting the research aim. Specifically, it was considered that using a quantitative methodological and analytical approach would not adequately reflect the subjective range and complexities of participants' experiences. An insight into the type of responses sex workers and service providers have may be gained, for example, in terms of whether and how frequently sex workers access

support services as a response to experiences of harm within sex work, but this provides limited detail on the reasons for and the nature and implications of this response. Rather, this may be better gained through qualitative methods, which would enable a more thorough exploration and description of participants' experiences and understandings (Guest et al. 2013, Ritchie, 2003), and how this may feature in and influence their responses to harm associated with sex work.

Further, with regards to researching the experiences of sex workers, quantification can be inappropriate. Brooks-Gordon (2006) argues that this applies when attempting to quantify violence; particularly as sex workers constitute a hidden population, creating challenges in terms of achieving representative data. Similar challenges are associated with this research, resulting in a small sample of both sex workers and service providers. For this reason, it has been difficult to achieve representative data or to generalise from the sample population. In-depth interviews, however, have provided some insight into the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland, which could also be developed for the purposes of future research.

In addition, in adhering to a feminist methodological approach, it has been recognised that quantitative methods, as a traditional means of social science inquiry, would be inappropriate given their contrasting values to feminism. It has been argued that much social research, including some forms of feminist research, deemed essentialist in nature (Butler, 1990), are generally incompatible, irrelevant or insufficient in capturing women's experiences (see Oakley, 1981, Sarantakos, 2005). Feminists have thus tended to promote and utilise methodological approaches and strategies, notably, qualitative, in nature, which are emphasised as a means of refocusing research based on male accounts and highlighting the significance of women as researchers in women-focused research (Sarantakos, 2005, Smith, 1992). In relation to this study, a similar approach has been taken with interviews selected as the main method of inquiry. This methodological choice reflects a commitment to feminist research values,

and is consistent with Reinharz's view (1992) that feminist-based interviewing can develop our understanding of the social world. Amongst other factors, qualitative feminist interviewing has the potential to break the silence of women's voices within research (Lykes and Hershberg, 2012), introduce unique views of conceptualising the social world (May, 2001), and empower or emancipate participants (Harding, 1991). A feminist interviewing approach can also limit researcher influence through reflexive research practice (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2012) and develop interview practices to include more research collaboration with, and feedback opportunities for participants (De Vault and Gross, 2012). Other researchers working currently on related areas of research have adopted methods, or taken methodological decisions of a similar nature. Sanders (2001, 2005b) successfully employed observation techniques alongside semi-structured interviews, whilst Wahab (2003) conducted focus groups with sex workers, enabling her to create a flexible, collaborative research experience that was strengthened by the extent of participation by sex workers. This supports the researcher's assertion that they have adopted the most appropriate methodology and methods, conducive to achieving the scope and depth required for gaining a more informed understanding of the area of research focus, as is detailed below.

#### *Methods of data collection, design and procedures*

The main data collection method was semi-structured interviews, conducted with sex workers and representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies closely involved in working with sex workers (in a health, practical, emotional support, or other capacity), with one focus group interview, comprised of workers from one agency. Semi-structured interviews were deemed one of the most appropriate methods for this type of research, based on the aim the research seeks to address, and level of depth and detail desired from participant responses, designed to reflect the realities of participants' lives. It was deemed important to engage with an interviewing style that was sufficient in exploring and producing detailed insight into participants' views and experiences, associated with qualitative interviewing (Byrne, 2004), while at the same time, allowing some structure through the



use of pre-designed questions (UK Data Service, n.d. b). This allows for the possibility of amendment and development of interview questions and topics (Denscombe, 2003) by probing for more information or expanding on new directions for the research. This negated the use of structured interviewing, which it was decided could limit the extent and scope of participants' responses, impacting on a full and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences (Bryman, 2008). Unstructured interviewing was considered as a means of obtaining perhaps fuller and richer accounts of participants' experiences. Constraints of this method however, including time and the possibility of participants moving vastly off-topic during interviews, prompted a decision to use a semi-structured interviewing format instead (issues also encountered by Lister, 2012).

It was acknowledged however that semi-structured interviewing could present some challenges. These include whether participants are completely honest in their responses, whereby participants provide responses in line with, or opposite to their expectations of what the researcher wants to hear (Newton, 2010). Interviewer effects, relating to an interviewer's characteristics and behaviours on participants' responses were also considered (Fielding and Thomas, 2001), as were ethical issues, including confidentiality and emotional impact on participant and researcher. In response to these and other issues, measures were taken to ensure that data gathered on participants was credible, and that the interview process was conducted in such a way so as not to limit or impact negatively upon participants' responses. A more detailed examination of these challenges and solutions can be found later in this chapter.

In addition to individual and focus group interviews, secondary data analysis was used as a method for this thesis. Relevant UK and Scottish policy and related documentation were consulted and analysed for the purposes of understanding and contextualising the extent and focus of existing Scottish sex work policy, and how such policy informs the responses of sex workers and service providers. This method was beneficial, in locating the significance of policy in responses to harm associated with sex work, and

how policy responses can impact upon the practices and perspectives of sex workers and service providers. Further, secondary data analysis has been credited for its use in research of a sensitive nature, or where access to participants can prove challenging (Fielding, 2004, cited in Long-Sutehall et al. 2010, Heaton, 1998), as with this study. In researching Scottish sex work policy, the focus of policy-making was explored including represented and under-represented or excluded individuals and interests. In relation to this, by combining a method of policy analysis with qualitative interviewing, a more informed understanding of policy practice and implications was developed, with priority given to participants' experiences and voices, which is not always fully recognised or understood in policy-making.

### **Sampling**

Based on existing limitations, identified from the wider body of literature, this study aimed to interview both sex workers and service providers based in Scotland, in order to further an understanding of how they respond to harm associated with sex work. There were no prerequisites regarding participation, in terms of the form of sex work individuals were involved in, the type of agencies that could be interviewed, or demographics including gender, age or social background. The only specification for the research was that participants should have some experience of working as sex workers or in a service provision role, or otherwise seeking or providing support for violence/harms linked to sex work in Scotland, to account for the gaps in knowledge surrounding responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland. This was considered a suitable approach for the purpose of highlighting the diversity of experiences that may exist in participants' responses to harm. Further, this was seen as conducive to developing the main research aim, in understanding the nature of responses to harm linked to sex work; in particular, the experiences which may prompt the type of response, or the decision to seek or provide support for violence/harm related to involvement in sex work.

As a result, various recruitment possibilities were considered and undertaken, including approaching different statutory and voluntary

agencies to negotiate research access, with staff and sex workers, and placing requests for participants via online forums. Final recruitment of participants was drawn from nine agencies, working with or for sex workers in various capacities, for example, health. This enabled me to interview staff and sex workers with varying levels of experience in engaging with or offering service provision, as discussed in more detail below.

### **Recruitment and access**

It was anticipated that there could be problems with obtaining and securing access to participants. Notably, problems of attempting to contact and gain access to sex workers due to the relatively hidden status of sex work were recognised. With no prior experience of sex work environments, there was some consideration that I could be viewed with suspicion, as an outsider, thus limiting the ability to be accepted, to network, and subsequently obtain a thorough knowledge and understanding of my topic area. Similarly, I considered the possibility of difficulties in securing access to key agencies. This could be due to lack of knowledge and trust in researchers, in terms of their credibility, purpose, and intentions for the research. Access arrangements may also be limited by practical constraints including the time and finances required for a researcher's integration within an agency.

#### *Initial recruitment procedures*

Taking account of the above challenges, the recruitment process was initiated as early as possible, following institutional ethical approval<sup>9</sup> with an estimated completion time of ten months, in which to recruit and interview participants. Doing so ensured that fieldwork details were finalised as soon as possible. This process of beginning recruitment at an early stage was also to prove beneficial later, when having encountered access issues, alternative arrangements for selecting participants and methods could be made.

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<sup>9</sup> Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the School of Applied Social Science, University of Stirling.

To access sex workers and service providers, it was deemed conducive to approach agencies in the first instance, and where possible, spend some time working alongside agencies to facilitate the research process. This was considered good practice for several reasons. It would provide a main source of contacting service providers and enable me to build trust with participants prior to undertaking interviews. By accessing agencies, it would also circumvent some of the anticipated issues around recruiting sex workers for the study; for example, for reasons of safety and lack of familiarity with sex work environments (discussed later in more detail). In relation to the latter, it was recognised that contact and good relations built with statutory and voluntary agencies could potentially facilitate research access to some sex workers who engage with service provision.<sup>10</sup> Agencies with experience in working with or for sex workers could enable a point of access to a sample population that could otherwise be difficult to reach, or who are reluctant to participate in research, unless it is within the context of service provision and via trusted staff, where the position and reputation of an external researcher has been established. It remains, however, that particular challenges related to sex work research can still hinder the successful recruitment of sex workers for research, in addition to impacting upon a researcher's reputation and research progress, as is now discussed.

### *The challenges of conducting sex work research*

Gaining access to a desired sample population can pose a challenge for all researchers, and is perhaps most apparent, when attempting to research certain topics, notably, within crime and deviancy studies. Studying sex work can be perceived as particularly challenging, with sex workers deemed a group that is difficult to reach (E. Sanders, 2006). Further, studying the sex industry, has, as some observe, the potential to stigmatise researchers. A form of 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman, 1990) may be attributed to researchers working in this field. The 'guilt by association' (Matza, 2010), whereby

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<sup>10</sup> It is recognised that gaining research access to sex workers in this way provides only a partial representation of the Scottish sex worker population, through the voices of sex workers who engage with service provision, and readily discuss this or other experiences of sex work.

individuals tread close to the moral boundaries in relation to deviance, means that by associating with certain groups or individuals, researchers, while they may not be classified as true 'deviants', find themselves otherwise differentiated and marginalised for studying what they do, as with Israel's (2002) research on female strippers. A researcher's motives and legitimacy for their work can be challenged (Irvine, 2014, Sanders, 2006b); they could be labelled as similarly deviant to the groups or individuals they study (Hammond and Kingston, 2014, Stark, 2012 cited in Irvine, 2012); or researchers may find themselves drawn into potentially both uncomfortable and stigmatising situations (Attwood and Hunter, 2009, Grenz, 2005). This has the potential to taint both the professional, and in some cases, personal reputations of the researchers involved, and that of their academic institutions, who may not wish to be associated with particular research agendas and findings (Kirby and Corzine, 1981). This research was widely discussed with both participants and family and friends, perhaps spanning from their interest or curiosity, as to the reasons for selecting the topic and the study itself. This required a degree of adaptation, in explaining why and how I was engaged with the research, to a range of individuals, some with direct or no experience or knowledge of the research area. I considered this to be a positive rather than negative response, in raising awareness of the significance and need for the research, and indicating personal academic interest in the area.

As with research into perceived criminal or deviant groups, or largely hidden groups, there is similarly a degree of adaptation or familiarisation required. Specifically, a researcher will have to adapt to and accept the activities of the group they are researching (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). This did not entail, as some other sex work researchers have done, becoming involved in the sex industry, as a means of experiencing first hand, and better understanding the realities of sex work. Based on the sensitivity of, and risks associated with this particular subject matter, it was considered inappropriate to have this type of personal engagement with the research area.

Rather, it was envisaged that I would, in other ways, seek to familiarise and become involved in the cultures of the groups being studied. The development of the research however meant that there were challenges in contacting and interviewing a large number of sex workers. In addition, the selected sampling approach - snowball sampling - chosen as a potential means of widening access to and recruiting participants, may have limited the extent to which it was possible to become fully familiar with the experiences of different sex workers. This approach, based on making contact with an initial set of participants who in turn can facilitate referral to other potential participants, however, has been credited with enabling access to hidden populations and often stigmatised groups including sex workers (Atkinson and Flint, 2001), and was similarly beneficial for this study. This was particularly useful as there was no pre-existing means of being able to recruit sex workers. Securing contact with and subsequently interviewing sex workers, through agencies, via liaisons with a gatekeeper from one support service, and through a sex workers' rights/advocacy organisation, was an invaluable opportunity. This enabled me to become known to sex workers, build relationships and relevant contacts, and, eventually, arrange and undertake interviews. In addition, given the time scale for this research as well as its qualitative nature, this technique was to prove advantageous for yielding rich participant-focused data within a short period. It is recognised however, that in relying on this technique, there was some potential for sampling bias to occur, particularly as the initial participant can put the researcher into contact with other participants, who do not differ greatly from themselves, thereby producing a lack of sample population diversity (Lee, 1993).

The use of a snowballing approach can present some challenges. Notably, reliance on an initial participant can result in the researcher only being able to access a particular range of participants, as was the case with this research. Sex workers in this study indicated that they were largely involved in indoor work, some having had limited use of or need for support services. They were also mainly female, educated, had actively chosen to be involved in sex work, and were politically aware, or active in relation to issues

surrounding sex work. In addition, the majority of sex workers interviewed, although recruited via initial contact from an agency (not a current service provider, but one which supports sex workers through campaigning and lobbying for sex worker rights), did not appear to be currently actively involved in using support services, or were interviewed via an agency gatekeeper. Some sex workers did, however, have previous experiences of accessing or using support services for health or other issues, but at the point of interview, were not seeking such forms of support, or were engaged with an agency for support from other sex workers, or for campaigning/lobbying purposes.

From this perspective, there appeared to be limited diversity amongst the sex workers interviewed. Sex workers' accounts, for example, did not generally reflect experiences that suggested that they felt victimised by their involvement in sex work, frequently required the support of services, or were unaware of the issues affecting them, or debates relating to sex work. Their experiences also tended not to correspond with the experiences of outdoor sex workers, whose needs, according to the literature, may be quite markedly different. It is maintained, however, that this study contributes to a better understanding of the experiences and responses of indoor sex workers in Scotland, in relation to harm associated with sex work. As a relatively under-researched area of sex work research (Sanders, 2005b, Weitzer, 2009), indoor sex work/sex workers are gradually gaining more recognition, becoming one focus of, and integrated within, recent UK and Scottish sex work policy, centred on the harms created by or linked to sex work. Due to this, it is important to focus on the experiences and views of more indoor sex workers, to gain insight into a population who are directly affected by such policy developments, but whose voices are often not addressed. I acknowledge however the potential to develop this research in future, through an expanded participant range that includes more outdoor, as well as more male and transgender sex workers, in turn, gaining a more representative view of sex workers' responses to harm associated with sex work.

Where possible, time was spent communicating with the majority of sex workers prior to conducting interviews. This was done primarily by e-mail, and in some cases, by telephone, so as to build rapport and familiarity with the participants, and gain an awareness of any concerns or points to address or develop later in interviews. The above was dependent on securing and maintaining access to the group being investigated. Initial access however, does not guarantee a smooth research process thereafter, as has been already demonstrated, and is further exemplified by the history of sex work research, an area traditionally fraught with challenges. McKeganey and Barnard's (1996) work illuminates this particularly well. Having secured access, they still encountered several challenges throughout the research process, mainly related to the negotiation of relationships with sex workers including participants being inconsistent in how much information they divulged, participants resisting involvement in the research, deciding whether to ask certain questions due to their sensitive nature, and participants seeking material goods or other services from the researchers (Ibid), some of which also emerged as challenges within the current research.

Related to these points, Berk and Adams (1970) have identified the ongoing challenge of attempting to build rapport with deviant groups, often largely distrustful of outsiders, including researchers, who are perceived as coming from very different (often economically or educationally elevated) backgrounds, and assuming value judgements of deviant lifestyles. Agustín (2004) expands this point, highlighting that deviant, or victim groups, may as above, be initially suspicious of outsiders; conversely, individuals considered to fall into deviant or victim categories, may open up to outsiders, but tell them only what they believe they want to hear, indicating the risk of deception for researchers conducting studies into areas of crime and deviance.<sup>11</sup> In the case of sex workers, this mainly relates to them referring

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<sup>11</sup> Conversely, see McPhee, (2012) who notes the benefits of being an insider in the field of addiction studies, in terms of being able to identify and avoid particular topics of discussion, that other researchers may have limited insider knowledge and understanding of.



to a tragic life event or background which accounts for their current circumstances, often deemed to be, their willingness to engage in, and remain within the sex industry. Sex workers can also discuss their experiences, using these as a basis for serving their own interests; support from certain projects often being dependent on an individual's adoption of a victim status (Agústin, 2004). In view of this, it was important to remain aware of these risks, taking particular care not to assume a victim status of sex workers, maintaining a non-judgemental stance and enabling sex workers to speak on their own terms.

### *Negotiations with service providers*

The issues previously discussed, associated with conducting research into sex work and sex workers, were not associated with the process of accessing and interviewing service providers for this study. There were still challenges however in becoming familiar with, and adapting to the cultures and practices of service provision, in order to gain research access to service providers. In the early recruitment stages of this study, several agencies were contacted, with a view to arranging an interview with themselves or their service users. It was intended that interviews would follow an initial period of observation or time spent working alongside or meeting agencies to develop and sustain relationships, before negotiating research access. Following a comprehensive search of relevant agencies with experience in working with, or for, sex workers,<sup>12</sup> agencies were contacted directly, initially by e-mail or telephone, and later, by letter, to follow up earlier communication or as a more formal means of applying for research access. The latter approach was to prove beneficial in terms of yielding a greater response rate and as a result, several interviews with staff were arranged. Subsequently, some of these service providers were able to provide details of other relevant agencies and individuals to contact, which

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<sup>12</sup> Various sources were consulted and used as contextual background and for the potential recruitment of statutory and voluntary service providers. These included online directories and websites of agencies involved in violence against women work, or with specific expertise in working with or for sex workers, and relevant literature; for example, agency reports.

facilitated the production of a wider list of potential participants to contact and begin access procedures with. Where work commitments meant that it was not possible to interview the original participant, there was the opportunity to interview other staff with relevant experience in working with sex workers. I also received referrals to other staff, with the possibility for potential interviews.

Similar to the sex worker sample, there were challenges incurred in achieving a large and representative sample of service providers within this study. Some agencies contacted did not reply to the research request, which could be attributed to staff changes or disbandment of a service. Further, where I was able to communicate with service providers, who expressed an interest in the study, this did not necessarily result in continuing communications with them or an interview opportunity. Amongst other factors, funding cuts impacting on available staff who could be interviewed, how and when interviews could be conducted, workloads and the involvement of projects with other researchers within a service, were cited as reasons for a service being unable to participate, or progress further with the study. In the case of some services, meanwhile, formal access procedures that could have extended beyond the time limits of this study meant that it was not feasible to continue to pursue research access for example, with police. As a result, the number of service providers that were interviewed and the way in which they were interviewed differed from original expectations. There were fewer service providers interviewed and more individual interviews conducted than focus group interviews and limited representation from statutory service providers. There was also not the opportunity to work much with service providers as a means of building and developing research relationships, prior to interviews. It was possible however to conduct some pre-interview meetings, as well as have e-mail or telephone communication with service providers, relating to, for example, requests for lists of possible topic areas and questions and to explain more about the research. This was to prove conducive to participants and myself becoming acquainted from an early stage and facilitated later discussions; supporting Shaver's (2005) view of the importance for a researcher to

dedicate adequate time and effort to introduce themselves to potential participants.

In the case of pre-interview communications with service providers, this was particularly useful for building knowledge of institutional terminology or norms that might facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the culture of the group being studied. This is not without its limitations however, as Sharpe (1998) has observed. Her study into women's motivations for entering prostitution, involving input from the police, revealed the complexities of trying to adapt to a form of institutional culture, in Sharpe's (1998) case, the masculine police culture emerging as a particular barrier. This was less applicable to the current study, however, the research still necessitated that I became familiar with and complied with the service's practices to some degree, to progress with the research. This entailed, in some cases the use of gatekeepers, who spoke on behalf of an agency, or provided the main means by which I was able to interview other staff, or gain access to sex workers.

#### *The use of gatekeepers*

For the purposes of this research, the use of agency gatekeepers provided a useful means of gaining perspective on a particular service's role and activities or widening the involvement of other participants, who I may not have otherwise been able to access. There are however limits to this approach; if an agency adheres to a specific agenda, or works only with, and in certain ways, with particular clients, this means that a researcher may be compromised in terms of how and who they can access and interview. Thus it was important to consider that I may have only had access to sex workers who actively sought support from a service provider, or who have particular health or other support needs. This does not take account of sex workers who may work within indoor sex venues, as with the participants in this study, or who choose not to seek support from agencies, thus limiting the extent to which this study can adequately represent diversity within the sex worker population. In one case, a gatekeeper was necessary for conducting interviews with sex workers, who had or were currently using the

services of that agency. This may have been due to a perception that service users had been over-researched and that there was a need to safeguard the interests of service users. Interviews with sex workers were thus conducted on my behalf by one agency, with a list of possible topic areas and questions and a condensed participant information sheet sent prior to interviews, with a request that details of the research findings on participants were provided prior to publication. While it would have been advantageous to speak to sex workers directly, so as to verify information and pick up on or expand on points of further interest that could develop the research, it is recognised that this was a significant way of accessing an otherwise potentially unobtainable sample.

In another case, in seeking to gain access to a sex workers' rights/advocacy agency, it was necessary to liaise on a continuous basis. This entailed telephone and follow-up e-mail communications to discuss the research. Intended interview format and question types, and use of the data, amongst other issues were initially discussed, and I later received some feedback related to my questions (from a largely sex worker-based perspective), before my research request was forwarded to members of the agency and sex workers. This was taken into account, and questions were re-worded or altered accordingly, so that negotiating access to participants could begin. While this may be considered to detract somewhat from the original questions or focus of the research, this was considered important for the purposes of advancing the research. The benefit of this ongoing communication with an agency was that I was able to develop good relations, later leading to an interview with an agency representative (reflecting the agency's perspective as a whole) and with sex workers, as well as receive feedback that enabled me to continuously address and reflect on the purpose, uses and appropriateness of my research, particularly for sex workers. Further, aiming for flexibility and a participant-focused approach, in this case potentially facilitated me in gaining research access to an otherwise difficult to reach sample population, and increasing my credibility as a researcher, by ensuring that the research process was professional, safe and met the interests of both participants and researcher.

## **Interview process**

The fieldwork process began in October 2013 and was completed by July 2014. During this time twenty-four participants, comprising ten sex workers and fourteen service providers were interviewed. Of these participants, twenty-one participants were female and three participants were male (Ryan, Scott and Steve).

Service providers interviewed, from both statutory and voluntary sectors, were varied by type of agency and the forms of support they offered to sex workers (see Table 1). They worked in a range of service provision roles, from support worker to service manager. Not all service providers worked exclusively with sex workers; instead working with a range of women who accessed their services for different reasons, including support for drug use or experience of sexual assault. Service provision in the form of police or community-based support services (for example, sex worker led online forums) were not included in the sample, owing to challenges in accessing and recruiting participants from these services. Similarly, there was limited opportunity to interview sex worker led organisations, or agencies representing a sex worker rights/activist perspective; only one such agency was interviewed.

Both front and back line agency workers (who are referred to throughout as service providers) were included in the sample. This was to obtain a rounded insight into responses to harm associated with sex work, from the perspective of workers with experience in supporting sex workers directly, or the strategic planning and implementation of service delivery. Of the service providers with experience of supporting sex workers, many were involved in the support of outdoor sex workers. This was not intended, but in approaching agencies that could participate in the research, it emerged that a majority had experience of working with outdoor sex workers who tended to access and use their services more. Fewer agencies had experience of working with indoor sex workers, although this could be attributed to different needs between outdoor and indoor sex workers (Pitcher, 2006) and

the relatively 'hidden' nature of indoor sex work (Jenkins, 2010) that makes it less likely for support services to come into and maintain contact with indoor sex workers (Indoors Project, 2010). The potential issue of this was that service providers could account only for the experiences of outdoor sex workers. The knowledge and experiences of service providers was deemed wide ranging enough however, in that they were able to comment and reflect on sex workers' experiences of harm within sex work in general, thus, justifying their participation in the research. Further, in interviewing a range of service providers who worked with outdoor and indoor sex workers, there was an opportunity to gain insight into sex workers' experiences as a difficult to access group (Sanders et al. 2009).

The majority of sex workers who chose to participate in the research disclosed experiences of indoor, independent sex work. No outdoor sex workers or sex workers identifying as outdoor sex workers were interviewed, although they were not excluded from participation in this study. Discussions of several service providers' experiences, however, offered a degree of insight into the experiences of outdoor sex workers. Sex workers within this study represented a range of ethnicities; of the sex workers interviewed, four were UK and six were non-UK nationals. All had lived and worked within Scotland (and elsewhere); most were resident in Scotland during the fieldwork process. The research was not specific to the experiences of migrant sex workers; it transpired however that several sex workers had experience of temporary/permanent involvement in indoor sex work in Scotland, but had been born/lived elsewhere.

This corresponds with existing evidence, which suggests that indoor sex workers are predominantly migrants, for example, 52% of indoor sex workers are estimated to be migrants (TAMPEP, 2007), with London-based projects having contact with a particularly high number of indoor migrant sex workers. Scotland, like other areas of the UK, has increasingly seen a move towards more indoor sex work and the inclusion of more migrant workers within the industry (Leask, 2014, Lebov, 2009); an estimate of Glasgow indoor sex work, reported that around 50% of workers came from non-UK

countries (Lebov, 2009).<sup>13</sup> Comparatively there are fewer migrant sex workers involved in outdoor sex work due to concerns over visibility and policing (Ibid). Although, it has been demonstrated by some research that migrant sex workers do not largely feel that they are forced into selling sex (Mai, 2009), other evidence indicates that migrant sex workers constitute a group particularly susceptible to marginalisation and harm. This has been attributed to factors including the conflation of sex work with trafficking, resulting in 'sensationalist claims of a massive legal and moral crisis' (Brooks-Gordon, 2006: 60). This can exclude the voices and represent a lack of concern for the rights of migrant sex workers (Sanders et al. 2009), particularly where they do not constitute 'worthy migrants' (Agustín, 2006:134), i.e. a victim of trafficking or refugee. The negative effects of anti-trafficking interventions for migrant sex workers can be seen through limitations on migration, including deportation and restricted movement (Garofalo, 2010).

In addition, practical issues related to service provision and uptake, mean that many migrant sex workers do not contact and engage with support services, and thus, may be subject to further exclusion, marginalisation and lack of support. Services may have limited contact or experience working with migrant sex workers, provide support only in certain locations or environments (for example, large cities), or do not speak languages that would enable them to engage with a range of migrant sex workers (Agustín, 2006). Where migrant sex workers do access support from a service, there are various issues and barriers that have to be considered and addressed, in order to provide the appropriate type and level of support, for example, confidentiality and building trust, language and cultural differences (UKNSWP, 2008b). In relation to this research, provisions (as later detailed) were made to ensure that interviews and the research process limited the possibility of contributing to or furthering harm for participants. It was also

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<sup>13</sup> Observations of changes to the sex industry, including increased involvement of migrant sex workers in Scotland, based on police scoping exercises and recordings of numbers of service users in contact with support services.

very important, in view of the differences in experiences amongst participants, that there were opportunities to empower and give voice to participants. This was achieved through a participant focused approach, which enabled inclusion and priority of the voices and experiences of all participants involved in the research.

The tables below provide information on the range of participants involved in the research. Table 1 includes information on service providers such as individual job roles and the statutory or voluntary nature of each service provider. Details of sex workers interviewed are provided in Table 2. For reasons of anonymity, participants' real names are not included. In addition, to protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants, the following information is also omitted: the names and locations of service providers, specific types of sex work in which sex workers are involved, participants' age ranges, specific nationalities and the locations in which participants were interviewed.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1: Service providers**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Type of agency</b>	<b>Work areas/type of support offered</b>
Amanda	Criminal Justice worker	Voluntary	Justice; working with women involved in sex work  Support offered for a range of areas including housing and exiting sex work
Anna	Service leader	Voluntary	Varied; includes work around sexual

<sup>14</sup> It was discussed with service providers, of whom many were involved in multi-agency working that there was the possibility that other service providers interviewed could identify them, through discussions of their work activities, principles etc. Participants were assured however that their real names, service names and locations would not be disclosed to protect their confidentiality and privacy as far as possible.



			<p>exploitation and domestic abuse</p> <p>Services include street outreach for sex workers</p>
Corinne	Service manager	Statutory	<p>Sexual health/medical services and support</p> <p>Services include counselling for sexual assault and rape</p>
Eilidh/Fiona/Georgia/Lesley/Rachael (focus group)  Marie	All Drugs workers (Georgia: senior practitioner)	Voluntary	<p>Provides services for all female sex workers; working in indoor and outdoor environments</p> <p>Services include counselling and outreach for indoor sex workers (e.g. safety advice and provision of condoms)</p>
Eva	Board member	Voluntary	<p>Campaigning and lobbying</p> <p>Main activities involve campaigning on issues including sex workers' rights and safety</p>
Kirsty	Training and Development manager	Statutory	<p>Violence against women</p> <p>Services include practical and emotional support</p>
Sarah	Women's worker	Voluntary	Domestic abuse and related issues, including

			substance misuse  Services include outreach and refuge
Scott	Development worker	Voluntary	Supports individuals with experience of abuse, including trafficking  Services include emotional support
Shona	Development officer	Voluntary	Violence against women; commercial sexual exploitation  Information provision/referrals

**Table 2: Sex workers**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Amy	Sex worker (indoor)
Beth	Sex worker (indoor)
Carrie	Sex worker (indoor)
Claire	Sex worker (indoor)
Danni	Sex worker (indoor)
Jenna	Sex worker (indoor)
Lauren	Sex worker (indoor)
Ryan	Sex worker (indoor)
Steve	Sex worker (indoor)
Tara	Sex worker (indoor)

Data collection was undertaken in a variety of locations in order to elicit the desired scope and depth from the research, establish the range of, if any,

similarities or differences in responses to harm associated with sex work across Scotland, and to ensure that responses were as representative as possible. Research data were drawn from five Scottish cities - Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Inverness and Dundee. This was largely for reasons of convenience, because of the working locations of service providers, and the locations in which sex workers also worked and were able to meet. Comparatively, no rural locations emerged as possible interviewing sites.

Where possible, interviews were conducted face-to-face. This was the case for the majority of interviews, with some exceptions in the form of e-mail based interviews with one service provider and two sex workers, and three interviews with sex workers conducted by a service provider. Most interviews conducted were individual, according to participants' preferences and availability with the exception of one focus group with five service providers. Research with service providers, however, was initially expected to take the form of focus group interviews. These were deemed advantageous in enabling service providers to discuss shared work-related attitudes and experiences (Kitzinger, 1995), that may be easier and uncover nuanced information due to participants' familiarity with one another (Finch and Lewis, 2003; Liamputtong, 2011; Morgan, 2002). Group interviewing is also compatible with the feminist angle of this research or other forms of research that seek to limit power imbalances between researcher and participants, enabling a greater focus on a range of participant voices (Liamputtong, 2011).

It was considered, however, that focus groups could be problematic for several reasons. There is the potential for the production of trivial answers. These can be undeveloped, ambiguous or unclear in form, as a result of the focus group setting, if time is restricted, if there are too many participants, or if particular members dominate the discussion, in which case the researcher must seek to divert the flow of discussion or include others (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Where these issues did occur, on occasion, appropriate solutions were devised to counteract them; for example, following up on

points raised during the focus group that required more detail or clarification by further e-mail communication.

Both focus group and individual interviews typically lasted around an hour, with some variations, for example, interview times ranging from thirty to seventy-five minutes. Following interviews, participants were thanked for giving up their time, invited to make further contact should they have any questions or comments, and in some cases, asked whether it would be possible to contact them on any further occasion to follow up on certain points raised in interviews.

Interviews were largely conducted in safe, public and discreet locations where possible. The one exception was where a participant (sex worker) had requested an interview at their home, due to concerns over discussing interview content publicly. The decision to conduct this particular interview was based on having met the participant previously, and specific arrangements so that my interview time and location was known. I was contactable by mobile phone and could leave if necessary, a practice which was applied to all interviews. Interview locations included individual offices, or conference rooms within service provider headquarters, and in coffee shops or bars with sex workers. Bookings were made for some locations in advance, if necessary, or quieter areas and times to conduct interviews were selected to ensure adequate space and privacy for interviewing participants. Interviews also followed a similar structure in terms of ethical guidelines and practice, as detailed below.

## **Ethical considerations**

### *Overview*

An awareness of ethical issues and guidelines was of paramount importance within this research. As noted, this research presented several ethical issues and challenges, due to its sensitive subject matter, which had the potential to impact on participants and the researcher (McCosker et al. 2001). Some of these issues applied to all participants, in particular the need to make clear to participants their role in the research (Watts, 2008),

how their confidentiality and privacy would be protected (Graham et al. 2007, Kaiser, 2009), and the use and storage of their data (Fink, 2000, Flick, 2009), in order to minimise any subsequent harm caused to participants. Of these issues, some were potentially specific or of greater importance to sex workers; for example, disclosure of information that could result in criminalisation of or other harms to sex workers. Based on this, it was imperative to employ steps that would reassure participants and seek to minimise harm wherever possible, and in turn, develop the progress and professional approach of the research.

## **Participant harm**

### *Distress during interviews*

Participant harm was considered as the largest potential ethical challenge and barrier to developing the research. Richards and Schwartz (2002) indicate the varying risks that can arise within qualitative research, including exploitation, anxiety and misrepresentation of participants. In the case of this research, similar issues were anticipated, affecting sex workers in particular who could have been involved in disclosing personal experiences of harm or other sensitive or personal information (as later detailed).

It was considered, however, that all participants could be impacted by their involvement in the research. This could have related to participants becoming distressed during interviews in recalling either their own experiences of harm, or that of others, as encountered in the context of supporting sex workers affected by violence, or in knowing other sex workers who have experienced violence. Where this occurred, interviews would have had to be temporarily stopped, rescheduled or dismissed altogether, should the interview content have caused any degree of upset, anger, embarrassment, or other distress for participants. This was not the case with any interviews in the current study, which were only stopped on occasion for practical reasons for example, due to a noisy research environment. Interviews were designed to be as flexible, indirect and informal as possible, and also, usually involved a degree of friendly 'small-talk' prior to interviewing. In following this approach, a sense of rapport was

built between participants and myself, enabling participants to gain trust, familiarity and ease in talking to me about themselves, and leading to participants feeling comfortable enough to disclose a greater degree of or more sensitive information later in the interview process.

In the case of participants experiencing any degree of distress during the course of interviewing, questions would be reworded and initiated again at another point in the interview, or if necessary, discarded where participants seemed unresponsive, or repeatedly diverted from questions when reintroduced. Participants generally did not seem to overtly express any distress during interviews, and so questions were only re-worded, prompted or re-directed, where participants appeared to forget the question, were vague in their answers and moved onto or expanded on an unrelated point. Participants were also reminded throughout the research process of their right to refrain from answering some or all questions during interviews, or to withdraw completely from the project, should they wish to do so. Additionally, throughout interviews, it was monitored whether particular questions appeared to upset or otherwise distress participants, or whether they appeared to be uncomfortable for other reasons, for example; - by the use of audio recording equipment - in which case, I would stop questioning, or switch off recording equipment. In only one interview, a tape recorder was not used for this reason (a further three sex workers, interviewed via an agency gatekeeper also did not consent to their interviews being recorded). Although it was not applicable to participants in the study, I sought to consider the ongoing support of participants prior to, during and following interviews: allowing the participant time and space to cry, or vent other emotions; exhibiting supportive body language towards the participant (pauses or silence for example); offering the participant a refreshment, and providing a list of support services that the participant could refer to for further support.

### *Confidentiality and privacy*

Similarly, I considered that participants could have had concerns relating to matters of confidentiality and privacy. Notably, participants could express concern about the information they provided; the purpose and intended uses of information they provided, how, how long for, and where it would be stored, and who would have access to information about them, and may fear the consequences of the details they provide being publicly disclosed. Such concerns, if unaccounted for, could have had the result of participants being selective in the information they provided and information offered may be partially true, exaggerated, or omit important details, thus, presenting problems of claiming research accuracy.

With regards to protecting their confidentiality and privacy, participants were provided with an information sheet prior to any data collection commencing. In providing this sheet (see Appendix C) all relevant information pertaining to the use of data and research rights was outlined, and the value of participants' input was emphasised. Participants were provided with the opportunity to communicate any concerns about the research at an early stage, thus, avoiding the potential for ethical issues, based on an infringement of confidentiality and privacy, to arise. This was supplemented with a consent form (see Appendix A) requiring a signature with some exceptions (see below), prior to interviewing. Similarly, this was intended to provide an opportunity to express concerns, if any, about the research, at a preliminary stage. To further alleviate any concerns regarding confidentiality and privacy, participants were reminded throughout the research process as to the importance of communicating any opinions or concerns that they may have had. Participants were contacted post-interview to thank them for their participation and to remind them that they could express any concerns or raise any further questions, if necessary, related to the research. This was intended to reassure participants, and potentially, circumvent any further ethical issues arising.

### *Disclosure*

For sex workers interviewed, issues of confidentiality and privacy were particularly important. Related to this, prior to interviewing, it was considered that there could be critical ethical implications should information relating to a previous crime or a future source of harm have emerged that could potentially harm the individual participant or another individual. It was possible that, in the course of interviewing, participants could have disclosed particular violent experiences that were not previously brought to the attention of police or other authorities. Although this was not the case with any interviews, I was aware of the possibility of having to report such incidents, in line with legal requirements, should participants have revealed a past, undisclosed crime. Upon further reflection however, the difficulties of the above approach were identified, particularly when questioning participants about their experiences of violence (many of which may be unreported), and soliciting (which by itself could result in criminalisation), where participants could unwittingly disclose information that would either result in their criminalisation, place participants in a situation where they felt compelled to confront details of previous unreported crime (for example, a sexual assault incident) or leave participants confused or apprehensive as to the extent and scope of information they disclosed.

To accommodate these concerns, it was necessary to be as clear about the boundaries of confidentiality as possible, for participants. This involved ensuring that participants were aware of, and understood that the only scenario where external parties could be involved, thus raising the potential for breaking participant confidentiality, or criminalisation of the participant or others, would be where it was deemed that there was the potential for a very serious, or imminent source of danger to affect either the participant or another person (for example, the death of a participant or another person). On this basis, participants were free to divulge any, or as much, information as they deemed appropriate within interviews (which could include details of past involvement with a crime, including a participant's role as victim in a crime), with the knowledge that any information they did disclose would adhere closely to the principles of privacy and confidentiality. On the latter



point, I fully considered the role of researcher, notably that it is not the place of the researcher to decide whether a crime, particularly where it has involved the participant as a victim, should be reported. Participants may have several reasons for not reporting particular incidences of victimisation, or indeed, may not even identify as a victim and are thus not aware that their experiences might warrant police intervention, for the purposes of prosecuting an offender and ensuring justice. For these reasons, a degree of caution was exercised when considering whether or not to report certain information, relating to participants' involvement in, or associations with crime. To further accommodate the above concerns, and to alleviate any incidences of participant harm, where necessary time was spent with participants prior to interviewing to explain the research in more detail, afford them the opportunity to ask and have any questions or concerns about the research answered, and to enable participants to thoroughly read and ensure that they understood, or clarify, where required, the information provided to them in the information sheet and consent form.

Participants were informed, by the provision of an information sheet, of my need to take action, where details of past, undisclosed crimes, or a future involvement in criminal, or otherwise harmful activity involving themselves or another person were revealed (likely to involve consultation or liaison with relevant authorities including the police). The information sheet stresses that although every reasonable effort is taken to ensure that no harm is caused for participants, there may be particular scenarios where this is compromised, for example, should information pertaining to involvement in a previous crime be revealed, in which case, participants should be made aware that the information they provide 'would be excluded from confidentiality and anonymity' (Orb et al. 2001). Further, it explains what the consequences might be, for the participant themselves, or others, in such a case, i.e. the researcher would have to share information relating to a previous criminal offence committed with the police, or other relevant authorities. A consent form similarly informed participants of potential limitations to their confidentiality and anonymity and allowed them to progress with their involvement in the research on this basis.

## **Informed consent**

Informed consent can be understood as the procedure of, or responsibility, for making participants aware of issues including the purpose and use of the research, their rights, potential risks, and how and to what extent their confidentiality will be protected (see Corti et al. 2000; Social Policy Association, 2009; Social Research Association, 2003). This is seen as a key component underpinning good ethical practice (Richards and Schwartz, 2002, Wiles et al. 2007); although informed consent may often be challenged by factors, including the involvement of 'vulnerable' participants (see Morrow and Richards, 1996, University of Stirling, n.d. and certain research situations where it is neither practical nor methodologically sound to obtain the informed consent of individuals (Spicker, 2007). The issue of informed consent did not prove to be initially problematic from the perspective that the participants recruited were deemed to have sufficient capacity (in terms of awareness and understanding about the research and its potential risks and the ability to willingly consent to involvement in the research) to take part in the research; a point emphasised by the *Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)* (2012) as particularly pertinent when seeking valid consent from participants.

Informed consent still continued, however, to feature as an important ethical aspect of the research. Specifically, informed consent was a requirement asked of all participants, in order to proceed with any individual interview or focus group. In some cases, this was a lengthy and complex process, particularly when attempting to secure research access through agencies. This involved ongoing communication with agencies as earlier discussed. Several requests were made from agencies for my research questions and further clarification had to be provided in places, as to the intended questions to be asked of potential participants, before the advertisement for participants was circulated, or participant recruitment could begin.

Different forms of informed consent were used according to participant type. In the case of sex workers, verbal rather than written consent was obtained.

This was considered a more appropriate form of obtaining consent, on the basis that sex workers could have been uncomfortable with providing written confirmation of their real name. As already noted, this was the case where several sex workers questioned procedures for the use and representation of their names within this research, or provided specific false names that they requested be used within the research.

As verbal confirmation may be a less reliable way of securing informed consent however, I sought to ensure that informed consent was verbally agreed at all stages of the research process; before, during, and after interviews. Where sex workers provided written consent, it was useful to follow Cwikel and Hoban's (2005) recommendation of allowing sex workers to sign consent forms using their pseudonyms. Further measures that can be and were used to enhance the credibility of consent procedures for sex workers, include: provision of information relating to the purpose and use of the research, and who may have access to it and providing contact details of researchers, or other useful sources of information (Cwikel and Hoban, 2005). It should be noted however, that any initial concerns (amongst either participants or myself), pertaining to consent, and the subsequent use of data, was generally alleviated by providing participants with an information sheet, pre-interview, detailing all relevant information about the research, including, the purpose and intended use of the research, participant rights, and providing participants with an early opportunity to highlight any concerns or questions that they may have had in relation to the research, and any of its associated risks.

Informed consent, as expected, was less problematic with service providers. Similar information was detailed to participants, relating to the use of information for research purposes only: information being provided conforming to *Data Protection Act (1998)* regulations; the voluntary nature of the research; the possibility of tape-recording interviews if permitted; and participants' rights to withdraw from the process at any point. This process of obtaining participant consent, again, highlights the need for a participant's agreement at all stages, in order for the research to proceed. Service

providers, however, were asked to provide written, rather than verbal confirmation of their agreement to participate in the research.

### **Managing power relations**

*The British Sociological Association (BSA)*'s Statement of Ethical Practice Article (2002), Points 14-16 emphasises that relations between a researcher and those being researched should be based ideally on equality, trust and integrity, despite any differentials that can exist between parties in terms of power or status. This was a position considered within the current research. Although there did not appear to be any overarching factors affecting the relationships between participants and myself, it was important to adopt a reflexive and open approach to the research. This enabled some reflection on how particular factors, for example, age or educational background, as well as values and interests<sup>15</sup>, could impact upon the research, in terms of the scope and quality of participant responses. Further, self-disclosure to some degree may have facilitated the interview process, and ensured that relationships between participants and researcher were non-hierarchical. Participants, specifically sex workers, rarely asked about my position on sex work, but where they did, often indirectly, as a result of inquiring about my general interest in the subject of sex work and violence, this helped in creating a more fluid and reciprocal discussion and may have as Illingworth (2001) notes of her own research, altered the power relations of the interview. As Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) has observed, self-disclosure may feature to some degree in all research interviews, but that there may be more scope for, or greater and more intense levels of this in research on sensitive topics. As with some researchers in Dickson-Swift et al.'s (2007) study, I had not initially planned to largely self-disclose during interviews, seeing this as an opportunity for a focus on participants' experiences

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<sup>15</sup> See discussions by Becker (1967, also cited in Jamrozik and Nocella, 1998) and Gouldner (1975, cited in Jamrozik and Nocella, 1998) who have contested whether sociologists must necessarily adopt 'sides' in researching social problems; Becker (1967) arguing that sides are inevitably taken in social research, while Gouldner (1975, cited in Jamrozik and Nocella, 1998) suggested the possibility of a more objective role for sociologists, who need not take sides in their research.

instead. It subsequently transpired, however, that there were times when this occurred or was necessary. Abell et al. (2006) found this within their research, noting the importance of transparency in both the participant and researcher's identity for a successful interview experience. Similarly, with this research, some self-disclosure on my part usually relating to my research interests and background was considered appropriate as a means of establishing rapport with and respecting participants. In addition, by employing the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviewing, the problem of power relations may have been diffused. Specifically, there is greater potential with this type of methodology and interviewing format, for flexibility in what and how much information participants divulge, thus, allowing the interview process to be more participant-led or informed, rather than focused primarily on the researcher's interests.

### **Role of the researcher**

In addition to the above issue of managing power relations, I envisaged some potential difficulties in how participants perceived me, and how this could be managed. Specifically, there was the possibility that my role in the research could be misinterpreted. I could have been seen to represent or be perceived to represent a professional source of emotional support, for example, a counsellor, by participants. This contradicts the actual role of the researcher, for it is neither the role of, nor appropriate for the researcher to counsel participants (see Corbin and Morse, 2003), although there may be some therapeutic benefits for participants gained through the qualitative interview encounter (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2006). With this in mind, participants were reminded of, both, their own and my role throughout the research process, in order to manage and respond appropriately to participants' expectations of the research. This entailed informing participants of my role from the outset, through the provision of an information sheet and accompanying consent form, and answering any questions about my role in the research during interviews. Although no participants requested or appeared to be in need of further support post-interview, I had a prepared list of services, in the case that participants required counselling or other professional support.

### **Conducting internet-based research**

Another potential ethical challenge emerged in the form of conducting internet-based research for this study. It was not initially intended that the research would involve the use of the internet for recruiting and interviewing participants. In-person interviews were the intended choice of method, over e-mail based interviews which can pose a number of challenges including the potential for deception (Orton-Johnson, 2010) and the inability to monitor body language and verbal cues (Illingworth, 2001), which could be used for the purposes of probing more on particular issues. As access was to prove problematic it became necessary however to use this means. In aiming to recruit more sex workers for the study, a research advertisement, detailing relevant information relating to researcher background, project details and the purpose and use of the research, was designed and posted on some forum threads.

The internet however poses particular challenges if used, as outlined in the *British Society of Criminology (BSC) guidelines*, Point 4 (v) (2006) as a main means of data collection. This includes the internet being generally unrepresentative of the study population under investigation, impacting on users' privacy (for example, e-mails, or forum inputs used as sources of research data may be monitored), and subsequent behaviour online (including distorted or vague responses), and causing problems related to data storage (Binik et al. 1999). A greater challenge was how the research advertisement was received. Amongst some respondents on the sites used, there was a view that I was adopting a particular moralistic stance of their activities, or that they had been 'over-researched', while others questioned my motives for studying the topic. To minimise any further harm, the decision was taken not to respond to any posts that appeared negative or aggressive in tone, or to pursue the recruitment of participants any further, via this means.

Where the internet was used for interviewing participants, in the case of two sex workers, for whom distance meant it was not practical to conduct an

interview in-person, and for following up points made in interviews, the following actions were taken, where possible or necessary, to safeguard the interests of participants and researcher. These included password-protecting information created and stored online (Cwikel and Hoban, 2005). Other techniques employed, as advocated by Binik et al. (1999) were:

- Using encryption techniques
- Informing participants about who will be granted access to their data, and how their data could be used (a violation of participant privacy and confidentiality occurring only in the case that illegal, or otherwise harmful information was disclosed to the researcher)
- Transferring electronic files containing raw data to separate and deleting original files
- Taking extra time and effort to ensure that participants' online identities are authentic
- Not using unsolicited e-mail to contact participants
- Suitably debriefing participants after interviews for example, referring participants to appropriate support services, where necessary

### **Risks to researcher's coping mechanisms**

The previous sections have outlined some of the potential and actual ethical challenges encountered within the current study, often from the perspective of how these challenges could impact on participants. Beyond this however, it has been important to recognise that similar to participants, the research process could negatively impact on the researcher. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) suggest this in their identification of four main ways in which a researcher may be exposed to danger: physical, emotional, ethical and professional. Similarly, with the current study, there was the possibility of encountering a variety of unsafe or distressing experiences, some of which are culturally unfamiliar (the research environment for example), or emotionally draining or uncomfortable. A researcher for instance may feel guilty and emotionally drained from asking and listening to participants revealing distressing experiences (Arksey and Knight, 1999), or experience

stigmatisation from colleagues for studying certain kinds of topics (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). The research may also have potentially compromised my security and personal safety. Researchers can be exposed to illegal activities, or other potentially harmful situations, whereby there may be an expectation that a researcher becomes involved, for example, in notifying relevant authorities of breaches of work related health and safety policy, or promoting certain health practices such as condom use (Cwikel and Hoban, 2005). It was thus imperative to employ strategies, based on risk assessment and avoidance of potentially risky situations (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994) that would enhance the safety and wellbeing of the researcher, as well as participants, in turn, ensuring that the research process posed minimal risk for all involved. Within the current research, I was not the subject of or exposed to any particularly harmful situations. As noted there was the potential for risk in conducting a home interview with one participant, but sufficient precautions were taken to minimise risk in this situation.

In undertaking fieldwork, particularly with sex workers affected by violence in the course of their work, there was the potential to be emotionally impacted. In view of this, it was ensured that adequate support opportunities and networks were in place, to deal with the extent and nature of information that could be disclosed. An external network consisting of friends, family, and colleagues, was a useful source of support, as was my familiarity and training in identifying, responding to and coping with challenging emotional situations, through voluntary work with victims of crime. Further, I developed an understanding of how peers working in similar research environments, have been subject to, and dealt with emotionally draining, or otherwise compromising fieldwork situations (for example, Boynton, 2002; Sanders, 2006b; Shaver, 2005; Wahab, 2003). Thus, I had some familiarity with, and was prepared for the prospect of emotional and practical challenges that could occur in the course of conducting research on violence and harm within the sex industry. In order to facilitate additional support, contact was made with others working on similar research projects (academics and newly qualified PhD candidates), to share research experiences, and obtain



advice on handling difficult aspects of the fieldwork process. This was supplemented by joining online PhD support groups, and attendance at related conferences and events, which has helped to establish how others in a similar position have addressed and overcome issues related to the ethics of fieldwork. In addition, a research diary was used, so as to debrief, comment and reflect on any particularly distressing (or rewarding) elements of the research process; how such experiences were handled, what challenges emerged, what could have been done differently, and what could be learned from these experiences for future reference.

## **Practical considerations**

### *Research environment*

Throughout interviews practical as well as ethical challenges were presented. Research environment was one such challenge. Amongst other issues, some locations were noisy and disruptive, while others were very quiet, presenting difficulties in listening and adequately capturing participants' discussions, while in the latter case, a quiet location proved problematic for reasons of privacy. Some participants were concerned about others nearby overhearing discussions, some of which involved sensitive or private matters. In view of these factors, notes were also taken throughout interviews, and some participants were asked whether they would be willing to be contacted after interviews, for the purpose of following up on, or clarifying information, missed or misinterpreted during interviews.

## **Post-interview reflections and process**

### *Validity and reliability*

During and after interviews, it was important to consider the validity and reliability of the data. These concepts are widely applied in quantitative research, as a means of demonstrating the replicability (reliability) and accuracy (validity) of research, but they are also used in qualitative research, although the concepts may be understood differently. As some have argued, validity and reliability may be less relevant to qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, cited in Porter, 2007, Shenton, 2004), and that instead qualitative researchers should strive for rigour in other

ways; for example, demonstrating the trustworthiness of research (Cho and Trent, 2006; Elo et al. 2014; Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004) and the extent to which research findings are made clear, consistent and accessible as part of an 'audit trail' (Rolfe, 2006:309).

Applied to this research, I was confident that the interview data presented a true and accurate depiction of individuals' experiences. It was a relatively small sample making it difficult to assess the wider generalisability of findings. The data obtained from participants however provided a clear insight into some sex workers and service providers' responses to harm associated with sex work. Participants generally spoke very candidly and at length on their experiences, and were also willing to be contacted again following an interview to confirm or provide further information. In addition, once analysed, rich data emerged from the interviews that addressed and developed the aim of the research, confirming my belief in the quality and accuracy of the information provided.

There was the possibility however that as much as participants appeared to provide truthful accounts of their experiences, their discussions were self-censored (Yanos and Hopper, 2008). Regarding this, participants may have chosen to monitor or repress what information they provided, particularly where incidents of a more distressing nature were concerned. More generally participants may have spoken in particular ways and on certain topics, in an attempt to present themselves favourably; for example, as empowered in relation to their involvement in sex work, and thus provided the stories that they want to tell (Trahar, 2009). In this way, Holstein and Gubrium's (2004) analyses of the active interview is relevant, showing how participants' answers should not be taken as reality, but rather considered as ways of constructing and giving meaning to their experiences or realities in the context of the interview process. Further research could extend to a wider range of individuals' experiences on the topic. This could indicate the extent to which participants' experiences are representative of other sex workers and service providers, or whether there are alternative perspectives

that should be considered in developing an understanding of sex workers and service providers' responses to harm associated with sex work.

#### *Storage and use of data*

Following each interview, recordings were transferred from a digital recorder onto a personal, password-protected computer, and audio files uploaded. This enabled the safe storage of data, which were then transcribed, and revisited by myself. The regular process of accessing and comparing recordings and transcripts helped to ensure more accuracy and developed familiarity with the data.

#### *Data analysis procedures and approach*

Data analysis formed an important part of the research and adhered to the following factors, as recommended by Silverman (2006): making clear one's analytic approach, demonstrating how the data relates to relevant theory and opting to undertake a detailed form of data analysis. The research data were transcribed using a coding system; particular names, events, and words were categorised under different code names. These code names were then closely examined, and regularly compared, for their similarities and differences as well as new emergent ideas or themes. Thereafter, the main themes to have emerged from the data were identified, in addition to their fit (or lack of) within the existing body of literature on the subject: highlighting the similarities and differences in responses between participants; identifying any omissions or sources of undeveloped data; and accounting for why particular information was limited in scope or missing. This process enriched the research findings: providing a detailed description of findings; how these linked with particular social norms and structures (as outlined in other existing literature sources); and what implications emerged, in order to better understand and account for responses to harm associated with sex work.

#### **Chapter summary**

This chapter has detailed the methodological decision-making involved in the research process, taking into account theoretical and methodological

positioning; the selection of particular methods and approaches; participant access and recruitment; data collection procedures; ethical and practical challenges and solutions related to the research; and implications arising from the research process. Although there were several potential challenges associated with the research, including issues of safety in the field, these were largely circumvented by preparation and adhering to necessary safety procedures during and after fieldwork. This did not however completely remove challenges from the research process; challenges being a component of most research, but especially so in research involving sensitive matters, or contact with difficult to reach individuals and groups, as discussed.

Access was a particular challenge within this research, but this was also accompanied by other specific and more general research challenges including the suitability of research environments and participant resistance. On reflection, planning for and conducting fieldwork was a thoroughly insightful and informative, yet challenging process. It revealed the complexities associated with researching this particular topic area and the subsequent need for preparation, planning and professionalism throughout in order to achieve both research and ethical aims. Gaining insight into these complexities, particularly the access and resistance issues associated with researching sex work and sex workers, also indicated the need for a participant-led or focused approach wherein sex workers were provided with opportunities to define how and where they were interviewed (for example, not using real names and being consulted on the wording of research questions), and to speak on their own terms of issues of concern to them (for example, not on violence as it occurs in sex work, but rather, the wider ways in which they may experience harm). This similarly applied to interviewing service providers, where it was important to persevere in attempting to secure interviews and to recognise their experiences of providing support to sex workers, and key issues in providing this support; for example, funding. With regards to interviews, it would have been advantageous to speak to more participants, particularly sex workers, who are often under or misrepresented in research, and statutory service

providers, of whom there were notably fewer than voluntary sector service providers within this research. This could have expanded the scope of understanding of variations in responses to sex worker violence. In consideration of access and related time constraints however, the final range of participants was deemed appropriate, in being able to elicit the necessary extent and depth of data on responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland. Having considered the means by which data was collected and analysed within this chapter, the following chapters develop this in discussing findings from the research process.

## Chapter Four

### Sex work policy in Scotland

#### Introduction

This chapter provides secondary data, in addition to the study's research findings, which addresses the main research aim of this study, i.e. how do sex workers and service providers in Scotland respond to harm associated with sex work? In order to achieve this, the chapter outlines the role, extent and impact of sex work policy<sup>16</sup> as a means of contextualising and understanding individual and professional responses to violence against sex workers, explored in the later research findings chapters. Scottish sex work policy is the main focus of the chapter and explores the ways in which Scotland shares some similarities to the rest of the UK, but also differs to some extent in its policy agenda surrounding sex work. This considers the extent and nature of legislative developments, regional differences in understandings and approaches and the focus of policy-making. The chapter takes account of the most recent key legislative and policy developments, the issues and interests these represent, and their implications, including the influence of policy in shaping responses to harm associated with sex work or the need for alternative interventions for the regulation of sex work in Scotland.

#### *Overview: UK prostitution policy approach*

Scottish sex work policy shares some similarities with the wider UK approach to sex work, notably in terms of challenges incurred in attempting to define and accordingly regulate activities involved in sex work. The UK policy position has traditionally been ambiguous in nature. This relates to the fact that prostitution, or the exchange of sex for money, while not in itself illegal, can involve activities that are subject to criminalisation, including

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<sup>16</sup> Although 'sex work' is the preferred terminology used within this chapter and throughout this thesis, this does not reflect current UK and Scottish policy terminology, which commonly defines sex work as 'prostitution.'

soliciting and operating a brothel. This is the case for both England and Wales and Scotland, where there are sanctions in place to deal with individuals and activities, viewed to incite or abuse through prostitution (Bindel and Kelly, 2004).

Historically, there was a heavily policed, enforcement approach towards sanctioning prostitution. This has since developed to incorporate more of a welfarist, multi-agency focus, which is not specifically tied to the criminalisation of individuals who sell sex (discussed in more detail in the Chapter Two). There have, however, been increased moves towards criminalising those who purchase sex and protecting individuals who sell sex and are deemed vulnerable as a result of their involvement in prostitution. This is reflected in some of the main UK and Scottish policy documentation relating to prostitution, including *Paying the Price* (Home Office, 2004), *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* (Home Office, 2006), and *Being Outside: Constructing a response to Street Prostitution* (Scottish Executive, 2004a), which discuss and share some common issues and areas of focus, including the prevention of entry to prostitution and the promotion and provision of options for exiting prostitution (see Chapter Two for a more thorough discussion).

This has been attributed partly to the increased influence of the 'Nordic' or 'Swedish' model<sup>17</sup> in England and Wales (Scoular and Carline, 2014). Recently there were plans to amend the *Draft Modern Slavery Bill* (2014) that would oversee the criminalisation of clients in England and Wales, although these were subsequently withdrawn (see Adams, 2014). Various academics criticised this planned amendment, which has similarities in places with the Swedish approach to regulating prostitution, citing relevant research, which has exposed the challenges and negative repercussions

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<sup>17</sup> Sweden passed legislation on 1 January 1999 that criminalised the purchase of sex (see Swedish Institute, 2010). Since then, several other Scandinavian countries have developed and passed similar legislation, notably Iceland and Norway (Skilbrei and Holmström, 2011, cited in Sanders and Campbell, 2014, Ekberg, 2013).

(for sex workers) of implementing the Swedish law (see Prostitutes Collective, 2014). Similarly, a clause has recently been passed in Northern Ireland, which will also criminalise the purchase of sex<sup>18</sup>, and has also been the subject of debate, concerning its proposed benefits (see Jacobs, 2014a). Scotland, by comparison, in 2013, decided against the adoption of this approach (Levy and Jakobsson, 2014), following a contested proposal to criminalise the purchase of sex (see following discussion of *The Criminalisation of the Purchase of Sex Bill*). Most recently, there have been moves in Scotland towards an alternative approach to criminalisation. Jean Urquhart (MSP) has proposed the decriminalisation and law reform of prostitution in Scotland, which would amongst other changes, enable sex workers to work together in groups of up to four (Grant, 2015) and share finances with families or others (Smith, 2015, Weldon, 2015); currently areas which are criminalised. If the proposals are passed, this will potentially herald greater safety and rights for sex workers (Grant, 2015; Smith, 2015; Weldon, 2015), in line with models of decriminalisation elsewhere, notably New Zealand which decriminalised sex work under the *Prostitution Reform Act 2003* (Bellamy, 2012).

As with English and Welsh laws, there is also numerous and wide-ranging legislation which makes provisions for different aspects of, and activities related to, prostitution in Scotland. These include the *Civic Government (Scotland) Act* (1982) pertaining to the regulation of street prostitution, and *Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act* (1995) which makes it an offence for any male to live (in whole, or partially) off the earnings of prostitution, or consistently solicit, or be seen to be occupying a property, as a resident or visitor for the purposes of inciting prostitution (Quay Services, n.d.). While previously Scotland differed from England and Wales, in the absence of legislation that dealt with clients (Bindel and Kelly, 2004), this

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<sup>18</sup> Clause 6 of the *Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill* has proposed a ban on the purchase of sex, as part of attempts to amend Northern Ireland's trafficking and prostitution legislation (see The Guardian, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/oct/21/northern-ireland-ban-on-paying-for-sex-is-approved-by-stormont-assembly>) for more information.



changed with the introduction of the *Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act* in 2007, which made soliciting or loitering for the purposes of purchasing sex an offence. This was followed by the *Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act* (2009), which expanded the scope of criminalisation for pimps and clients; enabling the prosecution of individuals that are found to have incited, or coerced another individual into sexual activity without their consent (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009). This increasing view in the UK towards criminalising clients and other parties, such as traffickers (and subsequently protecting, rather than punishing sex workers)<sup>19</sup> represents, as some academics suggest, a new focus on the concept of vulnerability (Munro and Scoular, 2012). This can similarly be applied to the position of Scotland, which has in recent times sought to criminalise the purchase of sex amongst other policy and legislative developments that have focused on the perceived vulnerability of, and need to, protect individuals involved in prostitution. As Munro and Scoular (2012) point out, the adoption of this approach, raises critical questions about the meaning of vulnerability, whose interests are served and the implications of defining and attempting to protect vulnerable individuals, including increased state control over, and further exclusion of sex workers. Some of these points are considered later as they apply to Scotland's recent policy and legislative developments.

*Scottish prostitution policy approaches: the case of Glasgow and Edinburgh*  
Despite some similarities between Scotland and the rest of the UK, in their approach to prostitution, they differ to some degree. Scotland's position on prostitution for example, is not uniform with some distinct differences in approach according to region. Prostitution in Glasgow and Edinburgh, in particular has been noted to differ considerably. This relates to both the extent and nature of prostitution in each city and how the cities have framed their response to regulating prostitution as it is bought and sold. Within Glasgow, there has traditionally been a predominant street prostitution

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<sup>19</sup> In December 2014, in Scotland, a Bill designed to target human trafficking and exploitation was introduced, which includes a single human trafficking offence and an increase in the maximum penalty for offenders of life imprisonment (Scottish Government, 2014a).

scene, with high rates of intravenous drug use and associations with cases of violence and murder, leading prostitution to be viewed as an issue of social welfare (Mackay and Schaap, 2000). This is reflected through Glasgow City Council's aims and objectives surrounding and underpinning its approach to prostitution, where it is possible to determine the council's main areas of focus, i.e. around protecting and safeguarding the 'victims' of prostitution (the women involved and the wider community), reducing demand for prostitution and encouraging exiting and preventative options through an integrated, multi-agency approach (see Matthews and Easton, 2010). The Council's recognition of 'street prostitution as a significant social problem in Glasgow, which affects women, families and communities and... that prostitution is one form of commercial sexual exploitation' (Glasgow City Council, n.d.) appears to correspond with the objectives of the wider Scottish Executive's (now Scottish Government) view of and approach to tackling prostitution. In this, a similar, welfarist response, centred on vulnerable individuals' involvement in prostitution and addressing the demand for prostitution (Matthews and Easton, 2010) can be observed. Related to these concerns, Glasgow has adopted a zero tolerance approach to prostitution, involving more 'interventionist' policing (Mackay and Schaap, 2000), although there is some informality surrounding this, as Glasgow is reported to have a form of tolerance zone in one part of the city, where outdoor sex workers can work relatively safely and mainly without the intervention of police (Glasgow City Council, 2003). Indoor sex work in Glasgow is also reported to generally not be subject to much or the same level of police intervention as street prostitution, which is more widely associated with violence and public nuisance (Mackay and Schaap, 2000).

Tolerance zones for prostitution in Glasgow have not however been widely accepted. This has also been the case for other areas of Scotland. In 2003 there was an attempt to legislate on the issue of tolerance zones in Scotland. This was intended to enable local authorities to establish zones in which sex workers could not be criminalised for 'soliciting, loitering or importuning' (SPICE, n.d.: 1), The Bill however was eventually withdrawn in November, 2005. Glasgow City Council cited issues, including cost and

lack of benefits in terms of public health and safety for sex workers and clients, as their reasons for not supporting the Bill (Glasgow City Council, 2003). Edinburgh meanwhile had already ceased its practice of operating a tolerance zone (as is later discussed) by 2001. Aberdeen (by 2007) followed Edinburgh's approach of ending prostitution tolerance zones, after the implementation of the *Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act (2007)* (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009).

While the latter approach, regarding tolerance zones and the non-criminalisation of sex workers, tends to currently predominate in some aspects of Scottish prostitution policy, as with policies in the rest of the UK and Europe, previous approaches in Scotland have reflected different views and ways of regulating prostitution. At the time of the *Wolfenden Committee on Prostitution and Homosexual Offences* (from 1954 to 1957), while there were some concerns about prostitution, it was generally considered that prostitution in Scotland was not a large matter of public nuisance, and that street offences and the operation of brothels constituted a larger problem in London. Scotland by comparison was considered to have a fairer and more effective system (involving cautioning) for women who solicited for the purposes of engaging in prostitution, which did not require legislative review or change (Davidson and Davis, 2004).

More recently, Edinburgh followed a relatively tolerant approach with regards to regulating prostitution. The majority of prostitution in Edinburgh is estimated to occur indoors where until recently, the licensing policy for saunas in the city allowed for a fairly liberal approach to regulating indoor sex work premises by agencies including the police and the health board (Mackay and Schaap, 2000). Amidst increasing concerns as to the harm reduction and risk management aspects of such premises (saunas and massage parlours), including associations with organised crime, and 'activity beyond the scope of the licensed activity' (Edinburgh City Council, 2014: 5), a consultation was initiated, where it was subsequently recommended that saunas and massage parlours should no longer be licensed (Ibid).

There is also thought to be less intravenous drug use amongst sex workers in Edinburgh (Mackay and Schaap, 2000), thus, contrasting with the nature of prostitution in Glasgow. Street prostitution, does however, exist in Edinburgh, and was until 2001, subject to some form of regulation, through the operation of a tolerance zone, or 'Non-Harassment Zone' (Edinburgh City Council, 2003). This was largely a pragmatic response to the issue of street prostitution. Borne out of an earlier model, the focus was on harm reduction, and involved partnership working in order to effectively tackle issues that were linked to prostitution and drug misuse (Edinburgh City Council, 2003). Within the zone, sex workers were not subject to police intervention, where they were considered to be working in a way that did not 'attract complaints from members of the public or otherwise cause offence' (Ibid), but pimps, drugs or evidence of other criminality were not similarly tolerated. Following several socio-economic changes in the area, the zone was withdrawn, but several challenges and issues arising from the resulting displacement of sex workers have since been identified, including public nuisance, access issues for service providers trying to engage with sex workers and increased violence for sex workers (Ibid).

*Scottish prostitution law and policy: Criminalisation of the purchase of sex*

In terms of legislative and policy development, Scotland has also had its own distinct legislation and an active sense of policy development, centred most recently on criminalising the purchase of sex, regulating street prostitution, and sauna licensing. With regards to criminalising the purchase of sex, in 2012, Rhoda Grant (MSP) began a consultation process (as part of the introduction of a Members' Bill) with the aim being 'to criminalise the purchase of sex...something that would criminalise the purchaser, rather than the seller' (Scottish Parliament, 2012b: 1534), as it applied to individuals purchasing sexual services from both outdoor and indoor sex workers (Grant, 2012).

The consultation, involving a wide set of responses that included sex workers, service providers, and academics amongst other individuals and organisations, was welcomed, particularly by advocates of a 'zero tolerance'

approach to prostitution, such as that of the council's position in Glasgow, which is cited as favouring the 'Swedish' model (see *The Scotsman*, 2008). Amongst other comments, supporters of the proposal (including religious organisations, and violence against women partnerships and groups) claimed that the Bill would facilitate a reduction in the demand for and incidence of prostitution (where accompanied by changes in attitudes towards purchasing sex), protect sex workers from experiencing violence, and promote the concept of gender equality in Scotland (Scottish Parliament, n.d.).

Such commentary seems to support and may be aligned in places with the Scottish Government's (2009, 2014b) current stance on gender violence, specifically violence against women, which covers prostitution, amongst other activities and behaviours that occur within public or domestic settings, including pornography, rape and child sexual abuse. Within *Safer Lives Changed Lives* (Scottish Government, 2009) and the more recent *Equally Safe* (Scottish Government, 2014b) documentation, prostitution is positioned as 'commercial sexual exploitation', and thus recognised as a form of violence against women: 'It becomes commercial sexual exploitation when another person, or group of people, achieves financial gain or advancement through the activity' (Scottish Government, 2009:8). This suggests some overlap between existing government positioning on prostitution and related drives towards implementing laws and policies that reflect this view; where prostitution is considered a form of exploitation and violence against women that necessitates further state intervention, in order to address the assumed damages associated with prostitution, to individuals (sex workers) and the wider community, potentially at the expense of some individuals and groups' interests.

On this point, the *Criminalisation of the Purchase of Sex Scotland Bill* (Scottish Parliament, 2012a) was subject to criticism, predominantly by sex workers and advocates of sex workers' rights. It was argued that the introduction of a law around criminalising clients would be both unpractical, with the *English Collective of Prostitutes* noting that 'criminalising clients will

not stop prostitution, nor will it stop the criminalisation of women who work as prostitutes' (Scottish Parliament, n.d.: 15), and could be potentially detrimental to the needs and interests of both sex workers and clients. Some of these issues related to sex workers' right to choose to engage in sex work being denied; type of and numbers of clients reduced or affected by deterring good clients from buying sexual services; while riskier clients continued to purchase sex (impacting on income and safety), and sex workers being further stigmatised, excluded and marginalised from necessary sources of support (Ibid). Despite a large majority of consultation responses supporting the proposal - seventy out of eighty-eight organisations (Ibid) - limited cross-party support meant that the Bill was eventually dropped.

#### *Regulation of outdoor prostitution*

In a similar vein, the earlier *Prostitution (Public Places) Scotland Bill* (passed as law in 2007), attracted criticism as to its intended benefits in regulating prostitution. Under this legislation, an offence occurs where 'A person...for the purpose of obtaining the services of a person engaged in prostitution, solicits in a relevant place... or, 'A person... loiters in a relevant place, so that...it may be inferred that [they] was doing so for the purpose of obtaining the services of a person engaged in prostitution' applicable whether an individual was in or on public transport or in a motor vehicle (*Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007*). While the legislation by its very nature, suggested a move away from the criminalisation of, and increased protection for, outdoor sex workers, and instead focused on purchasers, commentators, including academics and organisations working with or for sex workers, suggested that the actual effects could differ, and be negative particularly for sex workers. Definitional issues, around the meanings of 'public nuisance', 'alarm' and 'offence', as well as the name of the Bill was raised by *The UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UKNSWP)* (2006). They argued that these terms were both extremely subjective and stigmatising to sex workers and that there was a related need to establish how and to whom particular behaviours, in the context of street prostitution, caused alarm or constituted a nuisance.

This narrow focus on public nuisance whereby the public could have considerable discretion and control in defining and relocating street prostitution, was viewed to potentially create both safety and policing challenges as street prostitution could become more widely dispersed (Barnard, 2006). The longer-term effects of all of this, as several commentators suggested could impact more negatively on sex workers. Offences would be prostitution related, making it more difficult for sex workers to move on and obtain other employment in future, as the *Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS)* (2006) highlighted. The exclusion of the legislation to individuals in motor vehicles was additionally noted as ignorant to the fact that most purchasers use a vehicle for this purpose, and thus, only those most visible would be liable to be criminalised, i.e. sex workers (Scot-Pep, 2006). Where sex workers were at risk of criminalisation, some commentators noted that existing and planned provisions in arresting and fining sex workers were inadequate. Fines can often not be paid, and could lead to detainment or imprisonment (Scot-Pep, 2006, Sanders, 2006a), which instead could be replaced by a system of court diversion options, providing necessary support where needed for sex workers (Sanders, 2006a).

### *Sauna raids*

Recent (2013) raids on Edinburgh's saunas have further added to a climate, in which arguably, legislative and policy commitment to the issue of prostitution has increased, but often to the detriment of sex workers' needs and interests. This is not confined to Edinburgh. Similar events have occurred in Soho, London, where in 2013, several lap dancing venues, sex shops and brothels were targeted and arrests made as part of a larger, 18-month, organised crime operation (Tomlinson, 2013).

Edinburgh, as discussed, previously had a tolerant approach to prostitution, operating a Non-Harassment or tolerance zone for prostitution until 2001 (Edinburgh City Council, 2003), with saunas subject to minimal intervention. This was to change with the formation of a single Scottish police force in 2013 (Police Scotland), reported to have integrated more of a zero-tolerance

approach (in line with policing in the Strathclyde region) following the amalgamation (Fogg, 2013). Pressures have accompanied this new approach, with Edinburgh City Council urged to review or update their licensing system as it relates to saunas. More recently, police advised the council that they should only license establishments where there is a 'ban on items of a sexual nature', to which sex workers' rights organisations have objected, criticising the move for its messages about morality and the potential health implications for sex workers and clients (Withnall, 2013). Aside from these issues, testimonies by sex workers working during the raids provide some insight into the immediate effects and aftermath of events, reported to include humiliation, confusion and lack of positive interactions with or information from police (Scot-Pep, n.d. b). Police meanwhile have emphasised the harm reduction focus, underpinning their recent recommendations to Edinburgh City Council (Licensing Sub-Committee) regarding the licensing of saunas (Police Scotland, 2013).

### *Policy in practice*

The impact of various attempts to eliminate or reduce the harms of prostitution is reflected through existing Scottish support service provision. Currently, there are over 100 organisations across Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government's *Violence Against Women and Girls Fund* (Voluntary Action Fund, n.d.). Funding is provided on the basis that services adhere to, and deliver, according to a 'gender based analysis of violence against women' (Voluntary Action Fund/Scottish Government, n.d.). This definition of violence against women would include the category of prostitution, alongside pornography and trafficking as a form of commercial sexual exploitation (Scottish Government, n.d. b). In relation to violence against women, the Scottish Government has outlined the role and importance of equalities and addressing violence against women in their approach (Scottish Government, 2010). This has involved specific training and guidance to facilitate the improvement of services in tackling violence against women, which recognises the benefits of multi-agency working in particular as one strategy (Scottish Government, 2010, Scottish Government/COSLA, 2009).



In the case of prostitution, the Scottish Government has in recent years started to more closely address the topic of commercial sexual exploitation, including outdoor prostitution. As a result, commercial sexual exploitation has increasingly been recognised as gender-based violence, with services beginning to consider integrating the topic within their work (Scottish Government/COSLA, 2009). This influence can be observed in the activities of various services, based upon preventing entry to prostitution and promoting exiting solutions for individuals already involved, or in some cases, harm reduction, advocacy and rights-based models, that aim to support sex workers who remain involved in sex work in keeping safe. Provision of services may be based on outreach, appointments or drop-in facilities for sex workers, or a combination of all of these, accommodating a range of needs which include sexual health, housing and alternative employment options. In line with moves towards greater integration and collaboration between services, many agencies operate as part of a multi-agency partnership, or include some degree of multi-agency working in their approach. Several agencies tend also to be wide-ranging in the scope of their work; working on different forms of, and issues related to, violence against women, including, but not necessarily specific, to prostitution.<sup>20</sup> This proliferation of services working to tackle prostitution or other issues defined as violence against women would suggest the growing influence and role of policy within service provision. In Chapter Two, the process of implementing and integrating policy into service delivery is considered in greater detail. This takes account of the challenges and barriers that may underpin this process, specifically in relation to services for sex workers. The current extent and nature of service provision (not specific to Scottish service provision), limitations in service provision, including lack of choice for sex workers who do not identify with the service's aims and practices, and the resultant impact on sex workers, is highlighted.

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<sup>20</sup> Specific examples of Scottish support services and the different work they are involved in are omitted here. I chose not to provide the names or locations of individual services (in addition to participant names), in case this potentially identified staff members.

## **Chapter summary**

Scotland's approach to prostitution is not greatly unlike that of the rest of the UK. While distinct in its own legislation and policies, including some key regional differences, Scotland can be seen to have followed the UK approach towards the regulation of prostitution. This pertains to an increased focus on the control of prostitution, particularly as it relates to criminalising clients and protecting those perceived to be vulnerable (sex workers), echoing other European policy and legislative approaches (for example, Sweden). Similarly, Scotland appears to share the wider UK sense of ambiguity relating to prostitution. While not illegal, many activities associated with prostitution are subject to sanctioning, thus, requiring some degree of policy input as to their regulation. Regulation however may not always be uniformly enforced, according to regional or other factors.

Recent legislative and policy developments would suggest both the growing policy interest in prostitution in Scotland (as in other geographical contexts), and the scope and focus of related policy-making. The main Scottish prostitution policy developments can be understood primarily in terms of the purported harm associated with, or created by, prostitution; which are increasingly aimed at highlighting the detrimental impact of sex work upon sex workers. These developments are reflected through:

- Attempts to criminalise the purchase of sex, shifting the focus and penalisation from sex worker to client
- Increased interest in the regulation of outdoor sex work and to the disruption of this type of sex work market, again involving penalties for the client rather than sex worker
- The wider disruption of sex work with a focus on harm reduction and the protection of vulnerable individuals, through sauna raids, growing dissolution of prostitution tolerance policies, and targeted attempts by support services to encourage exiting options amongst sex workers

Based on these developments, it appears that there is a range of perspectives underpinning Scottish prostitution policy. Arguably, policy has reflected, represented and responded to the needs, expectations and interests of only some in the contested arena of prostitution policy. These have included views as to the perceived victimisation caused to sex workers, by their involvement in sex work, and the associated harms and nuisance of prostitution for communities, which have influenced policy-making in the direction of eliminating or reducing prostitution where possible. Notably, there are fewer voices in policy and the media that represent and address the diversity of Scottish sex workers (some exceptions including the consultation for the proposed *Criminalisation of the Purchase of Sex Scotland Bill*), which could be counterproductive to aims of protecting the safety of individuals involved in sex work. This does not consider variations in experiences of sex working - some positive and some negative - beyond those represented in the subject of current prostitution policy initiatives, that could benefit from the input of individuals with direct experience of sex work, and who could be affected by changes to sex work laws and policies. Consequently, this suggests the need for greater consultation with a wider range of sex workers, alongside the views of practitioners, policymakers and communities. Insights informed by sex workers can be useful for indicating the particular conditions and structures that facilitate or limit the safety of sex workers, including the consequences of sex work laws limiting where and how they work.

It is thus apparent from the varied responses to recent policy and legislative moves as to the continuing contested nature of prostitution and how it should be regulated, with a range of ideologies and experiences underpinning responses to this issue. In reflecting on the Scottish prostitution policy landscape; for example, there is potentially much difference to be observed between sex workers, as intended recipients or individuals that could directly be affected by laws and policies that are implemented, and service providers who may be responsible for overseeing implementation and trying to engage with sex workers as part of this process.

In relation to addressing the main aim of this thesis, on understanding responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland, these commentaries were useful for consolidating an understanding about how policy responses are constructed and have developed in Scotland; what issues and whose interests are covered; what ideologies and experiences these responses are built on; what the range and nature of responses can tell us about responses to prostitution in Scotland; and whether these differ or correspond in any way. Overall, this has facilitated a more informed understanding of the importance, extent, use and implications of policy in shaping current responses to harm associated with sex work, amongst both sex workers and service providers. Based on this, it seems that policy-making surrounding prostitution in both Scotland, and in other countries, continues to divide opinion between policy-makers, sex workers and communities as to its need and proposed benefits. With Scotland recently subject, to a series of policy and legislative developments, proposed for the purpose of reducing or eliminating some of the harms associated with prostitution, and at the same time, discredited for their moralistic and punitive underpinnings and implications, it remains that policy-making on prostitution requires an approach which adequately understands and responds to the experiences of all who can be potentially affected, including sex workers and service providers.

## **Chapter Five**

### **'Women experience violence from clients and partners in the main' (Rachael, service provider):**

#### **Experiencing and supporting violence within sex work**

##### **Introduction**

Existing research has suggested the widespread experience of different forms of violence in or associated with sex work, affecting both indoor and outdoor sex workers (Kinnell, Jeal, and Day's responses to Church et al.'s, 2001 study; see also Abel et al. 2007; Indoors project, 2010; Sex Workers' Project at the Urban Justice Centre, 2005). This has often portrayed involvement in sex work as a form of risk-taking behaviour (see Barnard, 1993; Phoenix, 2000; Sanders, 2005b). Weitzer (2009) has also highlighted the tendency to generalise experiences of sex work, particularly with negative experiences that suggest the widespread violence, abuse and exploitation of sex workers. Weitzer (2009) extends his criticism to the fact that much sex work research has focused on the experiences of outdoor sex workers, with comparatively limited attention given to the experiences of indoor, male and transgender sex workers, as well as managers and clients. In addition, there appears to be limited research pertaining to the experiences of agencies working with or for sex workers; where and how they are positioned and operate within the wider sex work as exploitation or occupation debate (Oselin and Weitzer, 2013). Kinnell (2008) argues that, as with sex workers, individuals and agencies working with sex workers are often marginalised and their views discredited or omitted within debates on prostitution, particularly those pertaining to the safety and violence experienced by sex workers.

This would indicate the need for a broader understanding of experiences of harm in sex work. This relates to the main aim of this study, which explores how sex workers and service providers respond to harm associated with sex

work, and takes account of the varying experiences of participants in encountering or offering support to sex workers affected by violence. In doing so, it is anticipated that a greater understanding of the range and complexities of experiences will be gained, based around varying definitions of harm, and direct and in-direct experiences of violence, provided by sex workers and service providers. This chapter draws on data, which relates to the research aim, exploring key themes including the *experience of risk*. Specifically, discussion of the data is focused on what harm means to participants, and how they respond to it. This considers how harm is defined and indeed whether particular experiences are defined as violence. It also examines participants' understandings of risk, safety and protective strategies. Further, lived experiences of harm (physical and non-physical) are considered to understand how these underpin sex workers and service providers' personal and professional responses to harm associated with sex work. The chapter concludes with a considered discussion of the data presented, and suggests implications drawn for future related research.

**'I don't think of my job as risky' (Jenna, sex worker): The experience of risk**

A key aspect of discussions of sex workers' experiences of violence related to the concept of risk and was discussed by both sex workers and service providers. For one experienced sex worker, Claire, it appeared that the participant was aware of and sought to mitigate risk, in the context of sexual health, in her discussion of having regular sexual health testing (as with other sex workers interviewed). Claire subsequently offers a perspective that seems to suggest that risk is rarely a concern within her current job. She goes on to comment that amongst colleagues, there is a perception that sex work is no more risky than any other form of employment:

I've been particularly lucky in that regard. I do know a lot of sex workers who em, you know, would say that they don't find the job any more dangerous than any other job. That said I'm aware that the experiences of on street sex workers might be entirely different (Claire, sex worker).

It is acknowledged by Claire, however, that she had been lucky in this sense, suggesting her awareness of the potential risks associated with sex work - a view which is more widely discussed by other sex workers regarding potential risks they take or face in the course of their work, and protective strategies they adopt as a result.

Claire's comments, relating to her experience of sex work and that of other sex workers, also highlights important differences in exposure to potential or actual risk of violence between indoor and outdoor sex working practices. Raphael and Shapiro (2004) have drawn on these differences in their study of sex workers, examining the existence of violence in indoor and outdoor sex work settings. Violence was found to be more commonplace amongst outdoor-based sex workers, although rates of violence experienced by indoor sex workers were posited as potentially higher, more frequent and severe in nature compared to the experiences of outdoor sex workers. As highlighted by the earlier comments of Claire (sex worker), there was some conceptualisation that outdoor sex workers have very different experiences of encountering and managing violence or other risks, indicating that there are differentiations made amongst sex workers as to how they and other sex workers experience their work. Beyond this, the sex workers in this study, none of whom appeared to be involved in, or indicated previous experience of outdoor sex work, tended to focus on their own experiences of sex working, and spoke little, if any, of sex work in an outdoor context. This may highlight a lack of knowledge about different sex working practices, and possible polarisation between sex workers, operating in either indoor or outdoor environments.

Whether directly affected by it or not, physical as well as mental and emotional violence was acknowledged widely as a key risk associated with, but not specific to sex work, as one sex worker, Amy pointed out, in discussing how experiences of violence can occur out with sex work:

There's not, there's no distinction as to the fact that like in any job, you can experience violence, and it would be good to have just a

support and to be able to access justice if you did, no matter what you're doing (Amy, sex worker).

There were some differences however, in terms of how this violence was presented, defined and experienced. This was particularly evident between sex workers and service providers. Some sex workers did speak of actual or potentially violent experiences, encountered during the course of their work, as demonstrated, relating to physical and non-physical forms of violence:

I felt very uncomfortable...again trying to resist his attempts to get between my thighs... He didn't try it again afterwards (Tara, sex worker).

Burst condoms, forcible guys, men stalking...physical threats are all worrying (Danni, sex worker).

Violence of financial type... is upsetting but all I can do is learn from it and forget it as quickly as possible (Jenna, sex worker).

Sex workers within the current study all, to some degree, acknowledged the potential for risk within their work (Armstrong, 2014). It is apparent from the data, however, that some diversity exists between all sex workers in their experience of risk, which may or may not feature violence, and how risk is subsequently perceived (Ibid). Some discussed risk directly by reference to actual incidents they had experienced, or in terms of perceived harm. For other sex workers, and as more frequently discussed, it is evident that risk has been less applicable to them in their work, perhaps as a result of adopting specific safety precautions. As such, sex workers spoke about the risk of encountering violence in their work much more indirectly. They did not directly talk about violence, but rather, recounted incidences of a negative nature, including occurrences of physical violence. Where violence was not considered to have been involved, other language was used to give meaning to a negative experience, or where other risks or factors were highlighted as more important. In this context, sex workers' lack of discussion about violence can be understood as reluctance to acknowledge their experiences of, or the potential for harm and exploitation in their work. It is also possible, however, that in a sex worker not discussing violence, this is simply not an aspect of their experience of sex working, or that other



matters are of more importance, in terms of presenting a risk to sex workers, perhaps reflective of the varying definitions and understandings embedded in the term 'violence'. On this point, both sex workers and service providers offered various definitions of violence - which will be discussed later in this chapter - which would highlight the multi-faceted nature of the term, and in turn, the difficulties that may arise in attempting to provide appropriate responses to sex workers' experiences of 'violence'. Further, while the idea that indoor sex work may be safer or present different, more manageable risks to that of outdoor sex work, was not discussed directly, some participants mentioned aspects, particular to indoor sex work - for example, working in pairs from a flat - that suggested that this could be the case, thus, accounting for their lack of experience of, or familiarity with violence within their work.

From a service provider perspective, it appears to be largely the case that some degree of exposure to risk, particularly violence, is assumed on the part of sex workers, whether indoor or outdoor. This is reflected in several discussions with service providers. Notably, these accounts appear to vary somewhat in their focus on, and understandings, of risk, from the meanings attached to risk by sex workers. Sarah's (service provider) comments below, highlight a main risk for, and barrier to, sex workers seeking support from a service, in terms of child protection which could impact both on themselves and their families; a view also shared by several other service providers who had experience of this issue affecting sex workers:

Child protection... If someone's got a child and they're working as a sex worker, you know, it's the same as substance misuse if they approach a service...When I first started... it was completely anonymous, but now because of GIRFEC<sup>21</sup> ... we've got a duty to report any concerns and if someone's, em, bringing back punters to their house or whatever, then that's a concern obviously. So that's a

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<sup>21</sup> GIRFEC or 'Getting it right for every child' has been identified as 'a consistent way for people to work with all children and young people... (an) approach which helps practitioners focus on what makes a positive difference for children and young people- and how they can act to deliver these improvements' (Scottish Government, 2012: 6).

barrier. A fear of their children being removed (Sarah, service provider).

Similar concerns were raised by Amy (sex worker) in discussing the laws around the criminalisation of third parties. This indicates some similarity between sex workers and service providers in how they identified particular risks linked to sex work, although Amy did not discuss this risk in the context of being a barrier to accessing services, but more widely in terms of the risks presented to her and her family by restrictions in laws surrounding sex work:

Laws that can actually target your family, so people can actually, in your family be criminalised for living on your earnings, so for example, I pay the mortgage on my house, and maybe some of that money actually does come from my sex work... [family members] could actually be done for living on the earnings of prostitution, so these kind of laws that are around third parties, the ones around clients that they are trying to bring in, I think these are actually very, very harmful to sex workers, cos people don't see them as directly criminalising sex workers, but they work in slightly implicit ways to, to... encourage you to have to take risks in your work, and to make you not feel protected by the law (Amy, sex worker).

Other than this example, the data shows that sex workers and service providers differ somewhat in their understandings of risk. Service providers, for example, in several cases, seem to adopt the position that sex work in itself constitutes a form of violence and thus, carries a degree of risk, as is discussed later in this chapter. However it was recognised, as one service provider discussed, that there can be varying experiences of, and responses, to violence/harm, despite the predominance of coming into contact with particular service users, often individuals with experience of outdoor sex working:

Each person is individual, and even if the exact same things happened to the exact, to two people, em, the way that it, it affects those people can be very different (Scott, service provider).

The potential consequence of this is that certain forms of support are offered, or promoted, to sex workers affected by violence - for example,

support around exiting the sex industry - and may only be available to sex workers who are willing to engage with available support models. Kirsty (service provider) discussed one such model; the current Scottish Government definition of violence against women (which includes sex work under the category of commercial sexual exploitation), and the approach adopted by her organisation:

We've gone for the violence against women approach which is about saying actually, this isn't about sexual behaviour, this isn't about work, this is about survival, and that's very much the, the kind of basis of how the agencies have signed up to, to tackling the issues... which is about kind of saying you know, we don't believe that women involved should be criminalised, but we do believe that actually the men who are paying for sex should be criminalised... And we would say that the women involved are, are vulnerable and that they're being exploited by people who are paying for them to have to sex with them basically (Kirsty, service provider).

Thus, discussions by several service providers seemed to centre on the presumed exploitative and dangerous nature of sex work. Based on their experiences of providing outreach and other forms of support work, for example, participants recounted cases of young girls and women entering the sex industry, who were subject to exploitation and abuse due to their age, as well as the nature of the work involved in selling sexual services. Related to this, another common theme that emerged was the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1988). This is an ongoing cycle of violence that may be a part of, but is not necessarily specific to, individuals' involvement in sex work, that is experienced by some sex workers in and out with their association with sex work. Anna's (service provider) account echoed several other service providers' experiences, in regularly encountering sex workers with issues around:

Drug misuse, alcohol misuse, mental health concerns, severe trauma, severe domestic abuse, a storm...I mean some of the women, you know, you hear stories all the time (Anna, service provider).

As indicated, sex workers were depicted as having various experiences of violence and abuse. These included domestic violence, child sexual abuse and addiction issues throughout their lives, which were separate from, but also part of their involvement in the sex industry. Implicit in this and other accounts is the suggestion of sex work as a form and contributor to risk, risk-taking and potentially exploitative behaviours and activities, for example, substance addiction and domestic abuse. In Chapter Two, this association between risk and sex work is discussed, drawing on some of the main ways in which risk within, or linked to sex work, has been conceptualised. This is developed, however, by other accounts, including those informed by sex worker perspectives that indicate alternative sources of risk and harm for sex workers. This is not necessarily linked to involvement in sex work, but to wider processes of stigma and exclusion that are experienced by sex workers, and can lead to heightened risks to sex workers' safety including increased exposure to violence.

Service providers generally discussed these issues as they related to the experiences of outdoor sex workers, who were the main client group that service providers had direct contact with or knowledge of the issues they faced. As some service providers noted, however, there were emerging challenges in the form of new ways of conducting sex work transactions, via phone or online, resulting in fewer women arranging and providing sexual services outdoors, thereby, reducing service providers' access to and knowledge in dealing with violence or other issues faced by outdoor sex workers. This was highlighted by Kirsty (service provider), as an area for concern from the perspective that indoor sex workers were seen as a more hidden group than outdoor sex workers, and less likely to access and receive support from services. These issues are expanded on later, as another service provider, Marie reflects on the general challenges of engaging with indoor sex workers; for example, their lack of engagement with services can be linked to a desire to hide their involvement in sex work. Based on this, there appeared to be some acknowledgement by service providers as to the limits of their current knowledge and understanding of a variety of sex workers' experiences of violence and harm, and how this may

have to be adapted and reprioritised in view of increased off-street sex working and shifts in sex workers' needs.

While many service providers seemed to identify the risks associated with sex work itself -including violence - sex workers discussed and understood risk in somewhat different terms. Risk was acknowledged and to some degree accepted in terms of risks that had previously been or were currently encountered, or could occur in the course of sex workers' working lives, either to themselves or other sex workers. These actual or potential risks to sex workers' safety were not necessarily however linked to having or considering oneself the victim of a violent experience. Thus whilst sex workers normalised or to some degree accounted and prepared for the risk aspects of their job, taking preventative measures to avoid or alleviate experiences of violence, this did not always result in sex workers conceptualising themselves as victims or potential victims. This indicates the socially constructed nature of the term 'victim' and how individuals respond to experiences of harm (Green, 2011). Relating this to sex workers, evidence indicates that sex workers do not classify themselves or their work experiences and activities as victimising (International Union of Sex Workers, 2008; Magnanti, 2012; Sagar and Jones, 2014; Schaffauser, 2010). Despite this, their victimisation is routinely emphasised through, for example, attempts to end individuals' involvement in sex work (Schaffauser, 2010), in some cases, leading to preferential treatment by service providers, where sex workers are perceived as victims (Wahab, 2006).

Instead sex workers appeared to acknowledge the importance of responsibility with regards to their work, and thus conveyed experiences, which suggested that they took steps to avoid becoming a victim of violence where possible. This correlates with other work such as Harris et al. (2011) and Parent et al. (2013) which suggests an awareness of vulnerability and sense of responsibility amongst sex workers, seen through their attempts to modify their behaviour and avoid risks posed by their work, for example, sexual health testing. As suggested by other analyses, however, sex workers' responsibility in avoiding risks can be undermined by working in

environments that do not permit safe working practices (under a system of non-regulation), and which ultimately, heighten the potential for victimisation and exploitation (Sanders and Campbell, 2007).

Differences between sex workers and service providers in how violence was experienced indicates the socially constructed nature of responses to harm associated with sex work, as a variety of perspectives are involved, often focused on the view of sex work as a 'social problem'. Laing and Cook, (2014) focus for example, on the construction of sex work as problematic geographically, requiring solutions so that the 'public nuisance' associated with sex work is diverted away from particular urban spaces. Scoular et al. (2009) also draws on visible forms of sex work, arguing that there has been a particular focus on outdoor sex work as a 'problem' that warrants intervention, due to the threat it poses in terms of social order and control. As documented here and discussed elsewhere in the findings chapters, there is polarisation between some sex workers and service providers in how sex work is perceived with a predominant focus on the harms of sex work for individuals involved, although this does not reflect all sex workers' experiences of sex work. Where this dominant construction of sex work as violent and exploitative is not accepted by sex workers, there are implications relating to increased social control and sanctions in restricted work conditions or environments, and lack of support from services who do not engage with sex workers who are not planning an exit from sex work. This indicates the significance of some perspectives on sex work, particularly those that make claims as to, and propose and enact actions, around the perceived harms of sex work. Such measures however, are not necessarily relevant to, or are indeed damaging to the experiences, needs and interests of the sex workers they target.

Returning to the earlier point of how sex workers seek to take responsibility for their safety in their working environment, this highlights the significance of debates that posit sex work as a legitimate occupation, in so much as it demonstrates the degree to which some sex workers consider sex work as 'work' and envisage or aim for similar conditions and rights to other types of

employment.<sup>22</sup> Sex workers conceptualised and focused on risk as it applied, not to the work itself, but to responses towards sex work. They were attuned to the potential for or actual violence within their work as discussed, and thus, employed several protective strategies in response, to counteract any individual risks posed by their work, as is discussed later in this chapter.

Outwith their immediate work context, however, sex workers also commented on the circumstances that accentuated actual or potential risks within their work. This indicates the presence of violence in sex workers' lives outwith and not confined to, violence within sex work. These related to wider social relations and processes including stigma and restrictive legislation. Stigma was widely recognised by sex workers as a particular challenge of, or risk associated with, their work, in some cases rather than the work itself. More specifically, in keeping with a focus of this study on sex workers' experiences of accessing support services, sex workers discussed stigma as it existed or could be perpetuated through support service provision, potentially deterring sex workers from accessing relevant support if required (discussed in more detail in the following chapter).

Sex workers, however, recognised stigma in other contexts, beyond service provider approaches and laws and policies; for example, treatment of sex workers and public and community attitudes. The latter was similarly discussed by several sex workers as problematic in terms of how negative or misconceived public attitudes impacted on their lives, and that of others, around them. Family members could be similarly subject to stigma and ostracised for their association, or end ties with a sex worker, prompting some sex workers in this study not to disclose their involvement in sex work. This could include not approaching support services, a process which could involve, or be perceived to involve, sex workers having to publicly make

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<sup>22</sup> Lopes and Webber's (2013) findings have likened and suggested the benefits of existing sex worker activism to trade unions, in terms of developing new ways of organising and representing, the needs and interests of marginalised workers.

others aware of their association with sex work. The potential stigma created by this, and other factors (for example, perceived treatment by service providers) indicate that in some cases, sex workers would rather, and do, find alternative means of support for violence or other harms encountered in their work, beyond approaching a formal organisation for support. This can be related to Goffman's (1990) work on stigma. As with the sex workers who discussed stigma in this study, he observed that stigmatised individuals have recognition of, and similar concerns and values to others, about their social identity and management of this identity. Individuals can thus be aware of their stigmatised position, how this may impact or potentially affect them, in terms of being identified, received and accepted by others and act conscientiously, defensively, or in ways that alleviate, or avoid judgement from others (Ibid), as some of the following comments suggest:

Stigma also makes it difficult for me to make friends outside my work environment. When you meet someone new, the question - what do you do for a living? - comes up very early in the conversation with people over twenty-five. Telling them I'm a hooker will most probably scare them off or produce unhealthy curiosity (Jenna, sex worker).

Sex workers should be able to go to the police and report a crime against them, and to have that treated with the upmost of confidentiality and respect...and also they should be able to do that knowing that the police won't put on their file that they are a known sex worker...this prohibits, in some cases, the women from exiting, because they can't get a job which requires any kind of background check (Claire, sex worker).

Such processes were perceived as harmful and seen to potentially compound or give root to further inequality and violence towards sex workers, notably, through attempts to regulate the sex industry (for example the criminalisation campaign and raids on saunas in Scotland), in addition to stigma and exclusion experienced in the wider society. The unintended consequence being that legislation and policy-making designed to protect sex workers, is actually associated with compounding or creating more risks for sex workers and thereby, potentially increasing the likelihood of experiencing violence. Where it is considered how sex work is



conceptualised, defined and advertised, particularly as harmful, victimising and exploitative, sex workers have suggested that this is harmful to them, as Jenna (sex worker) highlighted:

All organisations that describe my job as commercial sexual exploitation objectify me and exploit me to further their agenda and get more funds from the government. They promote physical and emotional violence against me by pages like this and this and this [referring to service providers' online or print advertisements of the perceived dangers associated with sex work, their role and services]... it's these pages that give ideas to the dangerous abusive people out there, and show me as a target... most people, looking at me wouldn't think that I am a problematic drug user, or that I suffer abuse at home, or that I started my job at 13. Yet, if they read these reports, this is the image of a prostitute they will have (Jenna, sex worker).

This is based on the premise that it reduces or undermines their sense of agency, rights and personal experiences that underpin their decision to be involved in sex work. Sex workers discussed how this creates further challenges and barriers in the way of criminalising them, their clients and families. The impact of this can be reduced income and increased stigma and exclusion. Sex workers can also engage in more risk-taking behaviour, in seeking to avoid criminalisation, in turn enhancing the potential for them to encounter violence and danger in their work.

Of these risks, focus has been directed towards limitations in the law that do not currently allow sex workers to work with other sex workers from a flat or other premises.<sup>23</sup> This is seen to compromise their sense of safety and reassurance that may come from sharing with other sex workers, or having the protection of minders or security staff, and may lead to greater risk-taking, as illustrated below:

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<sup>23</sup> Under section 11 (5) of the *Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act* (1995) it is an offence to operate, manage or assist in the management of a brothel, or willingly permit any premises to be used as a brothel. Two sex workers who work together from the same premises - as a safety measure - can be considered to be operating a brothel and are thus, liable to face charges of brothel keeping (Urquhart, 2015).

I used to share a flat with another girl but due to more or less recent incidents regarding raids of two girl flats and stuff, we are too worried to share anymore. The law forces us to work on our own and hence to take the risk of being in a very vulnerable situation (Tara, sex worker).

We always risk prosecution if we work together. Landlord and hotels are free to eject us if they discover we are doing sex work... The *Proceeds of Crime Act*<sup>24</sup> makes me know that I am more financially attractive to a police investigation than a violent client might be. I cannot engage a security worker because they would be at risk of prosecution (Lauren, sex worker).

In addition to sex work laws and policies, barriers were identified in relation to the restrictions of some service providers, particularly those that are aligned with current governmental positioning that views sex work as a form of commercial sexual exploitation and gender inequality and aims towards prevention and exiting from sex work. It was highlighted that unless sex workers are prepared to engage with a model adopted by the law and in the approaches of some support services i.e. one that recognises sex work as a form of sexual exploitation and the victimisation of sex workers, then they can find themselves marginalised and potentially more at risk. This can lead to disengagement and sex workers not accessing relevant support where needed. In the context of Swedish sex work, Levy (2014, cited in Levy and Jakobsson, 2014) similarly found that sex workers who wished to access support services were required to identify and engage with services as a victim. This is exemplified by the comments of a representative from a sex worker rights and advocacy group in this study:

If a sex worker doesn't actually engage with that model and they don't feel like a victim in their work, they enjoy their work, they just want to work with the protection of the law, and what they find is they actually can't engage with the policies and the laws that are there and they need to work outside of that, and for them that's even more excluding than the law directly criminalising them (Eva, service provider).

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<sup>24</sup> The *Proceeds of Crime Act* (2002) relates to the confiscation of the proceeds of crime. Part 3, sections 92-155 applies to Scotland.

For other service providers meanwhile, although risk was perhaps defined more in terms of sex work itself, it was still acknowledged that current approaches or developments in law and policy could have negative implications, including increased risks for sex workers relating to negotiating transactions with clients and the conditions of work:

The sauna raids raised the profile of the issue, but maybe weren't as supportive of the women, as they could have been, and that does make me slightly nervous... And I also think the reality is criminalising somebody, whilst it might keep her safe for a wee while because she's not, you know, prostituting herself, probably not going to...unless you team that with interventions... you're not going to change the kind of outcome that she's probably going to go back to it (Kirsty, service provider).

What it does mean is that they take much bigger risks em, not only in terms of where they're going or working individually, but also in terms of...they then stop taking the time to screen clients... Whenever they're under a persecution...it has to happen very quickly, so there's, there's less screening, they're just in the car with anybody, there's less punters around for them which means they'll take less money for em...worse acts (Scott, service provider).

Given the work and agendas of some support services, it is possible that specific interests drive recognition of the potentially negative implications of law and policy developments. Based on some service provider insights, it is argued that changes and developments in sex work law and policy, for example, the criminalisation of the purchase of sex are equally of interest to service providers as sex workers themselves, particularly if it results in sex workers disengaging and accessing services less as these participants commented:

So effectively decriminalising it, would it be outdoor, sauna workers...it'd just make it harder for them to do what, well what they feel that they need to do, em, and for us, it'll be harder for us to reach them...I don't know, but I don't think it'll help the situation (Anna, service provider).

It [criminalisation] could make it more hidden, so people won't access our services because they'll be scared of being criminalised around it...they won't say what they've being doing because they'll not want to get arrested or challenged...so, I think it'll just make things, for me

I think it would affect our service in that people would not access it as much, because they would be scared of being charged or criminalised (Corinne, service provider).

There was less recognition, however, of laws and policies, and relatedly, how these translate into the approaches adopted by service providers, as a main source of harm and negative experience for sex workers. Instead, service providers viewed violence as a possible result of law and policy developments (rather than being a direct cause of harm for sex workers) that could negatively impact on service providers' ability to easily access and engage with sex workers. This reflects how sex workers and service providers can differ in their interpretations and responses to harm, with some forms of harm more readily defined and acted upon, for example, physical violence thought to be associated with sex work. By comparison, unrecognised forms of harm to and as defined by sex workers, such as the existence and perpetuation of negative sex work laws and policies, can receive less attention. This is demonstrated by service providers' lack of discussion of such matters, or where discussed, service providers anticipate the effects of these forms of harm impacting more on their service delivery, rather than acknowledging how sex workers can be negatively affected by the input of law, policy and service provision.

**'I talk to the women in the sauna and we all look out for each other'  
(Beth, sex worker): Managing risk**

Related to the theme of risk, participants, both service providers and sex workers frequently discussed how risk was mitigated in the context of sex working. Based on the relevance of questions on risk within their work and having direct experiences, sex workers tended to discuss this matter more and in greater detail than service providers. Service providers however demonstrated some understanding of risk and how sex workers might seek to avoid risks particularly where they were involved in direct support roles. Within such roles, service providers had more opportunity to gain an awareness of the types of risks faced by some sex workers, and how they

dealt with such risks, either proactively or in a much less direct way, as these participants indicate:

They would kind of examine the car, work out what colour the car is, try and take note of the registration plate, that kind of thing... maybe not wear a scarf... a necklace, dangly earrings could be pulled, so clothing, you know, that kind of thing they will think of really carefully (Amanda, service provider).

I do safety planning with the women... so you think about where are you meeting them, tell someone where you're going, keep your phone handy, you know, record if possible (Sarah, service provider).

Assessing customers on the initial contact and going with their gut feeling. Carrying panic alarms with them and some women work with other women, again watching their backs. With indoor women it can be very much based on how clients/punters present themselves (Fiona, service provider).

Risk management thus emerged as a familiar aspect and point of focus within several sex worker and service providers' discussions. Many strategies employed by sex workers related to effective communication with clients that included requesting clients' contact details, as Steve discussed, and setting clear boundaries with clients as to available services, a tactic used by Claire. As other sex workers, for example Beth, discussed, communicating experiences with other sex workers and looking out for one another was a useful way of managing risks posed by their work. Other safety measures used by sex workers included checking exit routes in the work environment (Ryan) and relying on intuition when arranging and meeting clients (Tara). Generally, all sex workers' experiences within this study indicated a degree of planning with regard to setting up transactions, involving communication with clients, or others (fellow sex workers, or potentially service providers to seek safety advice) and risk avoidance strategies that ensured their safety throughout the course of their work. This can account for the low rates of violence disclosed by sex workers in this study, as a result of taking responsibility for how, where and when they worked. It is also possible, however, that sex workers did not wish to disclose particular incidences of violence or discuss situations where responsibility had not been exercised for ensuring their safety, during

interviews.

Setting boundaries around safety precautions was associated with managing risk, again discussed predominantly by sex workers, but also, in some cases by service providers. Whether and what safety precautions were adopted differed mainly due to experience. As discussed, sex workers had a range of experiences of physical and non-physical harm, including non-payment and exploitation<sup>25</sup> of sexual services, which was considered harmful by some sex workers, as it could potentially involve or lead to further violence or exploitation.

Risk management amongst sex workers was also found to differ according to their experience of sex working in either an indoor or outdoor context. It is again difficult to comment fully on this point, given that this study is focused on indoor sex workers, and thus, the experiences of risk management presented are particular to indoor sex working practices. There were, however, many similarities identified amongst the sex workers interviewed, in terms of the types of safety precautions they adopted as a means of avoiding risk in their work, although, this varied, depending on individual preferences and previous experiences of having encountered actual or potential violence, as indicated:

My main risk management is actually my intuition. The way people ask for an encounter and how you communicate with them via e-mail or phone gives a first impression of what the other person might be like. If I don't feel comfortable writing with this person, I am certainly not going to meet him (Tara, sex worker).

You can tend to tell whether somebody is genuine or whether they're just a time-waster, just by speaking to them, rather than through e-mail, or messages... I always make sure somebody knows where I am and what time I'm working at... make sure that...everything is in place in terms of protecting your own sexual health and theirs... Never working from their home... I would only ever work in a place

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<sup>25</sup> Exploitation referring to factors including clients who waste a sex worker's time, robbery, and request extra or different services that were not initially negotiated.

that I knew there was maybe other people around so in a hotel for example (Amy, sex worker).

When seeing new clients, I screen them based on their communication with me, willingness to provide a deposit or reference from another provider, or their real name if they are staying in a hotel. If I am going to a hotel, someone always knows where I am and what to do if I don't contact them at a prearranged time, or deliver a special code word which means I need assistance (Lauren, sex worker).

Where service providers discussed the risk management of indoor sex workers, it emerged, from some interviews, that service providers possibly found it difficult to obtain much insight on this matter, as indoor sex workers tended not to seek support as much, for a variety of reasons, as reflected on by Marie (service provider):

They did not feel they needed support. For some indoor workers there was a clear hierarchy between what they did and women who worked on the street... [they] would engage with in order to access support regarding sexual health, but did not feel that they required support in other areas. Indoor workers seemed to be less likely to be looking for support in regards to drug use and were also keen to remain anonymous... We have also found difficulty in accessing indoor workers who may work in clubs (Marie, service provider).

Such commentary is useful in that it serves to enhance an understanding of indoor sex workers' experiences of harm in particular. Although it was not clear from Marie's or other service providers' (with some experiences of engaging with indoor sex workers) comments, as to the extent and scope of indoor sex workers' experiences of violence<sup>26</sup>, this can illustrate, to an extent the differences between indoor and outdoor sex workers in seeking support for violence or other issues. Further, it suggests future areas for

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<sup>26</sup> Levy and Jakobsson (2014), amongst others (see Cusick et al. 2009, Kinnell, 2008) note the difficulties of estimating sex worker populations, resulting from the frequently stigmatised and marginalised status of sex work. This is particularly pronounced in the context of the Swedish criminalisation of the purchase of sex, where it has not been clearly established whether levels of sex work have changed, in terms of decreased levels of indoor/online sex work (Levy and Jakobsson, 2014). See also discussions on New Zealand's decriminalisation of sex work, under which it has been argued, there has been little change in rates of people entering the sex industry as predicted (Abel et al. 2009).

improvement in terms of extending types of available service provision and meeting the needs of indoor sex workers appropriately.

**Violence can mean a lot of sort of things can't it?' (Kirsty, service provider): Defining and understanding violence**

Returning to an earlier point, definitions and understandings of violence and harm was a significant theme within the data, occupying several areas of participants' discussions. Prior to interviewing, there was some consideration of the various meanings and definitions associated with sex work and how these could be problematic. These included terminology surrounding sex work and sex workers, and whether the latter was an appropriate term to use with participants who sold sex. In relation to this, participants were free to employ whatever terms, or language they deemed appropriate. As a result, throughout interviews, participants used a variety of terms including 'prostitute', 'hooker', 'whore', and 'sex worker'. Similarly, there was some prior reflection as to how service providers defined and spoke about sex work, and whether there could be some problems with this, given the preferred terminology of 'sex workers' throughout interviews. Service providers generally accepted and used this term in interviews but like the sex workers in this study, also referred to numerous other terms on occasion when discussing their own and sex workers' experiences, including 'victim', 'survivor' and 'prostitute'.

Violence as it applied to experiences within sex work was found to have several components and meanings for participants. This fits with one of the key research themes relating to how sex workers and service providers defined violence, designed to uncover the various terms and meanings participants attached to violence, and how this impacted on their response to harm associated with sex work. As discussed in the earlier methodology chapter, some understanding of sex workers' experiences, particularly outdoor workers who engage with a service, was obtained through interviewing service providers. Sex workers interviewed were also able to further an understanding of the experiences of sex workers in general, by



discussing both their own and their colleagues' experiences, or in comparing their own experiences as indoor workers to outdoor workers, for example:

If it does come in here [criminalisation of the purchase of sex], it would be hugely detrimental to the welfare of sex workers, em because it would drive the most needy further away from the support agencies that can help them. In particular street sex workers, they will have to work further away from the police (Claire, sex worker).

In this way, it was possible to gain some insight and give voice to other unrepresented sex workers, through the definitions and understandings provided by sex workers in this study. It is recognised however that this method is only partially representative of the sex worker population, and potentially prioritises particular sex worker voices; indoor sex workers in this study. This is a problem, which researchers can encounter in viewing and treating sex workers as a 'homogenous population' (Dewey and Zheng, 2013).

In beginning to explore both sex workers and service providers' experiences, it was useful to initially understand how participants defined violence and harm. Not all sex workers interviewed defined violence as such, but the understandings, terms and importance they attached to harm later became clearer, as they discussed their experiences. Service providers were able to more easily define violence against sex workers; perhaps as a result of their organisation having clear guidelines on the varying forms and nature of violence that can be experienced by sex workers. For some service providers, however, there was an acknowledgement of the possible limitations of defining violence, and the experiences of sex workers. Rachael (service provider) recognised for example, that service users did not always share the views she and her colleagues had on violence. The implications of this are that service provision may be delivered without due consideration of its impact on some service users who find that their needs are not met:

I kind of think that if that woman wasn't in that situation she probably would view it more similarly to ourselves, but I think women perhaps become a bit desensitised to those things...I just think its worth throwing in there that sometimes our perceptions of what is violence,

what is abuse and what is wrong isn't necessarily shared by the client group that we work with (Rachael, service provider).

Eva (service provider) discussed this in suggesting the problems of adhering to a particular approach or definition of violence against sex workers, notably, assuming rather than confirming and understanding how sex workers themselves define experiences of violence. Shona (service provider) meanwhile spoke about the challenges of coming up with a model that accommodated the needs of a range of sex workers, some of whom do not necessarily identify themselves as sex workers, and the need to listen and respond to different sex worker voices. This indicates an increasing recognition on the part of some service providers, as to the problems of defining and understanding sex workers' varying experiences of harm. It also highlights the need to move beyond a service view of, and approach to, dealing with violence, where possible, and listen to how individuals involved in sex work - beyond those that openly engage with services, or identify as a sex worker, experience and understand harm - in order to tailor service provision that meets different individuals' needs.

There was therefore variation between, and amongst, sex workers and service providers. This appeared to depend on the degree and nature of experience of violence participants had had, either having experienced violence directly, or non-directly, through knowledge of violence as it applied to other individuals, or having had some form of association in a work context with sex workers who had experienced violence (see the comments of service provider Lesley, compared to some sex workers' insights):

I think for me it would be...violence would be a form of abuse, its something that you...you know, that is done to you and it could be psychological abuse, sexual abuse, something that you don't have any control over and that ultimately you are the person who's harmed however it happens (Lesley, service provider).

The more kind of obvious one is violence, if you experience violence from somebody that was posing as a client in the context of your work...kind of state-endorsed violence where you feel like you kind of need to work in...a situation that could quite easily open up risks of

violence, and for me, that is actually the state endorsing violence against sex workers (Amy, sex worker).

Its mental and emotional violence that is really hard to cope with. Being threatened and stalked and afraid to report it is hard. Living in constant fear of being outed<sup>27</sup> is hard. Being bombarded daily with images of sex slaves and prostituted women is hard (Jenna, sex worker).

There was some acknowledgement that harm is more widely understood in physical terms. In the case of both sex workers and service providers, however, violence was understood to encompass more than physical force. This reflects their recognition of the wider damage of less overt forms of violence, including coercion and control, which is claimed to be the most harmful and prevalent type of abuse (Stark, 2013). For service providers, in particular, discussions of physical violence were often extended to include a discussion of service users' past experiences of both physical and non-physical violence. In this way, service providers spoke of, and understood, several service users' experiences as representative of a continuum of violence as previously discussed. This highlights how some service providers frame and have interests in addressing the wider, non-physical elements of violence, as experienced by some sex workers.

Further, the use and extent to which particular language was employed by some service providers - for example, "exploitation" and "violence against women" - was interesting, providing an indication of their responses to harm associated with sex work, based on an assumption of physical and other forms of violence linked to sex work. Such terminology often signified the approach service providers adopted in supporting sex workers affected by violence, involving a model of harm reduction or sex work exiting strategies, highlighting the socially constructed nature of sex work as problematic,

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<sup>27</sup> 'Outed' referring to the experience of being exposed as a sex worker and the potentially negative implications that can arise from this, for example, another sex worker, Claire discussed the difficulties that sex workers can face in applying for alternative employment, particularly in care work where an individual's previous involvement in sex work may be recorded on a disclosure form.

which predominantly focuses on and responds to the negative experiences associated with sex work (Weitzer, 2007b). This contrasted, however, with the views of sex workers in this study who, by comparison, did not speak of their experiences of sex work in these terms, referring only to terms such as “violence against women” to acknowledge their awareness of how sex work was perceived by some support services, and how this varied from their own experiences:

I know what their position is on sex work, and I know that they see sex work as inherently a form of violence, and for me, that takes away the idea that actually sex workers can experience violence independent from that, so if you see it as work you can experience work-related violence, whereas if you see every transaction in sex work as rape which they do and they publicly say that, then if you go there to say I was raped by someone posing as a client, then my automatic feeling would be that they, even if they don't say it, they're thinking every, every time that you work, that is rape (Amy, sex worker).

They [service provider] see it as exploitation and...em...I don't think its a place where, well first of all I don't really feel like I need the support services that they offer and secondly em...compared to like use a service that saw my work as a form of exploitation and violence because that's so far removed from what its like [laughs] for me (Steve, sex worker).

Some sex workers interviewed extended the most common definitions of violence to include a focus on state-endorsed violence<sup>28</sup>, which has been identified as a main contributor to the harm experienced by sex workers (see Berg's 2015 discussion of this in the context of sex trafficking policy). This makes it difficult for sex workers to work safely, but also impacts on other parties including clients and support services who may find their access to and engagement with sex workers reduced (Benoit et al. 2014). Amy (sex worker) often used the phrase 'state-endorsed violence' in her discussions, as highlighted earlier, while Lauren (sex worker), as below also drew frequently on the concept, highlighting the impact of particular sex

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<sup>28</sup> Violence sanctioned by and perpetuated by the state, for example through the creation of laws and policies that are not in the best interests of some sex workers and increase their potential of experiencing harm or disadvantage.

work law and policy responses, and the extent to which these are associated with the most harm to some sex workers. More generally, the harms of sex work laws and policies were recognised by other sex workers in this study as some of the most damaging or negative aspects of their involvement in sex work, although this was not always necessarily defined as, or linked to being, a form of state violence against sex workers:

I also believe that the state and media and other groups can enact violence. Criminalisation is a violent action since it endangers sex workers. Someone is emotionally violent to me if they without question believe for example that consensual sex work does not exist and the whole industry consists of rape and they persist in trying to tell me that my experiences are not true (Lauren, sex worker).

This could be related to the other definitions given for mental and emotional forms of violence, often hidden and unrecognised in nature, relating to Bourdieu's (1992) discussion of symbolic power. For the sex workers who discussed this, this was portrayed as a very specific form of harm, built into the structures of law and policy and some support service provision, and designed or promoted around the concepts of safety, protection and vulnerability; for example, attempts to criminalise clients, targeted exiting strategies, and laws forbidding sex workers to work together. Sex workers pointed out, however, that the opposite was often true, and that this type of violence was actually more harmful than physical or any other violence that might result from sex work. This is due to their feeling that often such moves reduced their sense of agency in wanting to work in the sex industry. Working schedules could be disrupted, penalise those involved, or could result in sex workers engaging in more risky behaviours in order to continue sex working. Steve (sex worker) raises some of these issues, notably in relation to laws on brothel-keeping:

Brothel keeping laws force me to work alone, em...ideally they also force me really to work from my home which is fine but em it's always, it would be nice to have like be able to separate work and home so in an ideal world, it would be great to rent a premises that I could share with a couple of friends or a friend, we could work

together from the place, but the current laws make that impossible (Steve, sex worker).

In this context, Bourdieu's (1992) concept of symbolic power provides a relevant framework for extending an understanding of how violence is enacted against sex workers. Based on the premise that violence can encompass more than physical harm for individuals, the concept of symbolic power enables recognition of the fact that non-visible and often legitimised forms of violence can harm individuals. Violence can thus exist in the form of social interactions and processes which while not necessarily physically harmful, can legitimise and exercise power over some individuals that is contrary to their interests. This is similar to how some sex workers in this study articulated the impact of measures designed to curtail or impede the ways and locations in which they worked or received support related to sex work. By comparison, service providers did not cover or appear to recognise this type of harm in their discussions. This can be attributed to differing perspectives based on power relations. Here Bourdieu's (1992) discussion of symbolic power is again significant, indicating how some actors can claim competency and dominate over other individuals in their speech and practices; in this case, in defining whether and what aspects of sex work are harmful. As Bourdieu (1992) indicates this need not occur through language. Rather individuals can be intimidated and subjugated by way of suggestion and the mere presence of another individual in a position of power:

The relation between two people may be such that one of them has only to appear in order to impose on the other, without even having to want to, let alone formulate any command, a definition of the situation and of himself (as intimated, for example) which is all the more absolute and undisputed for not having to be stated (Bourdieu, 1992:52).

Relating to this study, the concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992) can be applied to understand how sex workers can negatively perceive and be harmed by legal, policy and service provision approaches to sex work. This is the case where sex workers, as with participants in this study, do not associate or experience violence through sex work. Thus, state responses,

which presume, imply and define violence and victimisation through all experiences of sex work, can be equated with harm for some sex workers. This is due to an apparent disregard for sex workers' views and experiences of sex work, and interventions, for example, which seeks to limit how and where sex workers work, thereby, dismissing their choice to be involved in sex work and their ability to work safely.

Although service providers discussed the harms of laws, policies and support service delivery less, there was some recognition of where statutory and voluntary agencies could improve their services, in relation to defining harm associated with sex work. Kirsty (service provider) for example, as with Rachael's (service provider) earlier comments, spoke about the potentially negative use of language and how some service users may not necessarily term their involvement in sex work as such, and how service providers may thus, have to change or amend the ways they communicate terms to service users. The following quotation illustrates one service provider's definition of involvement in sex work. The participant's comments make clear that their organisation's definition is one of several definitions and meanings that can be attributed to the sale of sexual services. As with some other service providers' views, she acknowledges how her organisation's definition of, and approach to, prostitution as 'problematic' may contrast with the perspectives of individuals who sell sex. Individuals will not always deem their involvement in sex work as a problem nor will they necessarily name or view their experiences as violent (Kelly, 1988). As Javier Trevino (2015) highlights however, sex workers provide descriptions of themselves and their work that indicates their understanding of the complex and socially constructed nature of sex work (Javier Trevino, 2015). Kirsty's (service provider) comments demonstrate some of these issues:

We're saying 'prostitution' as our, that's what we've chosen locally as how we want to describe it, but... if I went up to that woman and said I'm really concerned about you, I think you're involved in prostitution, she'd be like what are you talking about? So there's something about the language we might use in strategy is not necessarily the language we should be using to people who we think are involved... we're talking about young women who might, you know, get a can of

beer...for having sex with somebody who wouldn't necessarily think that was a problem... is it a problem? Its that thing about what actually is normal teenage sexual behaviour and what isn't, when does it become you know, something else that you're being exploited (Kirsty, service provider).

In relation to symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1992), an understanding can be gained of how organisations can inadvertently perpetuate violence through the language and approach they adopt in relation to sex work. In considering that dominant actors or organisations exert influence and power, not only through their speech but also more subtly through their practices, as Bourdieu (1992) asserts - for example, the suggestion of selling sex as harmful - we learn that there are wider ways, other than physical violence, in which individuals can be harmed. This includes where individuals do not associate or name their behaviours as violent, or the conflation of particular sexual activities with prostitution. In this case symbolic violence (Ibid) offers one way of understanding how an organisation's approach can differ from, and impact negatively, on its service users. Specifically, the approaches of organisations that do not consider the varying experiences of individuals involved in selling sex, or use language that is misrepresentative or limits the agency of individuals (in choosing to sell sex and remain working in the sex industry), can be considered a form of symbolic violence (Ibid). This can be seen to harm sex workers by upholding and legitimising only one view of sex work as harmful and warranting interventions that eliminate or reduce sex work. In doing so, this fails to address and improve the working experiences and conditions of different sex workers.

Another crucial difference between sex workers and service providers was how they discussed victimisation. The language used by some service providers reflected a view of sex work as exploitation, fitting in some cases, with funding commitments and agendas, where sex workers are portrayed as victims. The term and concept of vulnerability, and subsequently, needing to 'save' or 'rescue' service users, was used. This relates to feminist approaches, which include the goals of highlighting women's



experiences, empowerment and the facilitation of social justice for women (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Dowling, 2011; Kralik and van Loon, 2008; Reinhartz, 1992). Similarly this research draws on feminist approaches, in aiming to focus on and give voice to the experiences of (largely) female participants, in particular to sex workers, who can be considered a stigmatised and often under-represented and misinterpreted group (Goodyear and Auger, 2013; Kinnell, 2008; McNeill, 2014; Wong et al. 2011) As Kesler (2002) notes, it is difficult for feminists to 'shun a group of women, particularly marginalized women' (Ibid: 219). This can be seen in increased and contested attempts to 'rescue' women involved in prostitution<sup>29</sup>, such is the focus of some feminist organisations and other institutions (Agustín, 2007; Crabapple, 2015; Gira-Grant, 2014b; O'Connell Davidson, 2010).

Several examples drew on negative terminology, imagery and implications associated with sex work, including drug dependency, fear and self-esteem issues, 'shutting off' and dissociation from sex work, and sex workers with histories and ongoing experiences of abuse. Although not clear in all cases, service providers generally spoke about these terms and experiences as they applied to the position of outdoor sex workers. Some service providers noted that indoor sex workers might equally face issues in the course of their work, although their needs and situations can differ to that of outdoor sex workers. Marie (service provider) noted a desire to remain anonymous amongst indoor sex workers, so as not to make friends and family aware of their involvement in sex work. Lesley (service provider), as with some other service providers, meanwhile discussed indoor sex workers' needs in predominantly practical, health related terms, as was her organisation's experience of interactions with indoor sex workers. These needs as Lesley (service provider) discusses are seen to be limited, or difficult to address more generally. These commentaries do not necessarily reflect the extent of indoor sex workers' needs, but rather, speak to their particular needs as

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<sup>29</sup> By sex worker rights activists who have opposed the abolitionist stance of some feminist organisations, as discussed by Doezema, 2006, see also Doezema, 1998; Doezema's interview with Overs, 1998; Kempadoo, 1998.

indoor, rather than outdoor workers, and the extent to which organisations can offer support that is appropriate to these needs:

Apart from that we have indoor workers who will contact our services, its mainly for condoms and lube and kind of practical things...that's an area that has been difficult for us to move into. It does happen but it's happening slowly (Lesley, service provider).

Given some of the identified barriers that prevent indoor sex workers from seeking support from statutory or voluntary organisations, for example, seeking to hide their involvement in sex work, service providers had less experience in supporting indoor sex workers, and thus could not fully comment on their experiences compared to outdoor sex workers. This lack of knowledge and understanding about the indoor sex work industry can be seen to extend to research more generally on the topic, as Weitzer (2007a) observes, in relation to the predominance of research into outdoor sex work.

As noted, the service providers interviewed generally worked with outdoor sex workers, and thus based their views of victimisation on these service users' experiences. The 'vulnerable' status of sex workers was emphasised, although as one service provider discussed, the language of victimisation can be potentially empowering, allowing the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' to be reclaimed, and serving as a positive indicator of progression from a negative experience. There are tensions, however, linked to categorising an individual as 'victim' or 'survivor'. Walklate (2007) demonstrates this in emphasising the polarisation between feminism and victimology, based on their differences in conceptualising women as either survivors or victims. Phoenix (1999, 2009), by contrast suggests an overlap in experiences that means sex workers can be both victims and survivors.

Further, from a feminist perspective, the notion of empowerment can be considered problematic in that it is not attainable for all women. Regarding this point, some analyses have indicated the limits of feminist research in being able to adequately reflect and empower the diversity of women, varied according to class, ethnicity or other factors (Bowes, 1996; Reay, 2012;

Sage, n.d.). Female sex workers, too, similarly constitute a group that has traditionally not been empowered (with exceptions through some sex work research that has sought to interrogate issues of ethics and politics) through research (Hubbard, 1999). This can change if sex workers adhere to a feminist abolitionist understanding of their involvement in sex work where they are 'accepted and supported' (Doezema, 2006: 6). Sex workers, however, can face opposition where they do not engage with these views or the support offered by some organisations (Ibid). In this sense, there are problems in assuming that sex workers can be empowered through engaging as a 'victim' with some support organisations particularly as not all sex workers, as shown by this research, will readily access or identify with organisations that classify and link their involvement in sex work to violence.

In considering how service providers and sex workers discussed and defined victimisation, a social constructionist approach is also relevant. This enables an understanding of how individuals bring different meanings to and construct their experiences of victimisation to the extent that individuals can reject or re-conceptualise notions of vulnerability, for example, through the mobilisation of social movements (Dunn, 2008). This contrasts with earlier discussions, which have indicated the symbolic violence and misrecognition of such violence (Bourdieu, 1992), manifested through language that can be experienced by individuals. Some sex workers in this study did this, not by reference to victim or survivor terminology, but in expressing their rejection of a victim status, based on their personal positive experiences of involvement in sex work:

It's obviously very, very financially rewarding, and it gives me the flexibility to work around my [family's] schedule, to plan my diary, em its also rewarding in its own right. I do a lot of work with disabled clients, which is quite challenging, em but very rewarding and I also do a lot of hardcore domination so that's fun, that's like, that's fantasy, role-play type thing, it doesn't really feel like work sometimes (Claire, sex worker).

The following extracts from Shona (service provider) and Sarah's (service provider) interviews represent some of the issues encountered by service

providers, leading them to associate a degree of vulnerability and victimisation with sex work, contrary to the views of several sex workers within this study:

It's somebody who can shut off, who can disassociate, who is able to split off in her head... every woman I've come across will all talk about that. About the need to shut off, the need to split off, go inside themselves... it's a coping mechanism because something bad is happening to them (Shona, service provider).

Substance misuse...mental health. A lot of the women you know have got no self-esteem, they've got personality disorders, they've got no confidence, they don't care, you know, what happens to them... if they're forced into doing it by their partner, they're scared not to, and if they don't make a certain amount of money, they're going to get beat up so they have to do everything they can.' (Sarah, service provider)

While sex workers were aware of the risks of their work, and whether or not they personally had experiences of violence, none termed themselves or seemed to identify as victims. In this way, a process of labelling (Becker, 1963, Fine, 1977), involving the definition, labelling of and response by the 'labelling' and individuals labelled to a particular behaviour or activity, seemed to be applied by others, but was not necessarily applied by sex workers themselves (Birch, 2015 examines this as it applies to sex work, showing how labelling amongst other responses, can result in sex work being driven underground due to criminalisation). In relation to this, the concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992) can be used to understand how individuals can be subject to harm, not through direct encounters with violence in this case, but through words, which misrepresent and dismiss sex workers' experiences, classifying them primarily as victims because of their involvement in sex work. The majority of sex workers in this study however, while aware of the victim status assigned to them by others, did not passively accept this status. This develops Bourdieu's (1992) discussion of misrecognition as it relates to symbolic violence. The exercise of symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu (1992) is dependent on complicity amongst dominated individuals towards the dominating actor or institution. Thus where the dominated deny and thereby misrecognise the power another

individual or institution has over them, symbolic violence can be easily exercised, although this can be challenged, as with this study, in sex workers' recognition of existing power processes that attempt to influence and impact on their level of involvement in sex work.

Conversely, several sex workers in this study were aware of, and commented on, speech and practices (forms of harm), rather than acts of physical violence they had experienced that they found to be harmful, often relating to sex work laws and policies and the related approaches of service providers. These were seen to assume the victimisation of all sex workers by concentrating only on particular experiences of sex work (predominantly outdoor-based sex work), and disrupt and reduce the choice and autonomy of sex workers, through attempts to eliminate or limit sex work. Further, rather than accepting these forms of harm, some sex workers indicated their rejection of such views and advocated ways in which laws, policies and service provision could better accommodate the views and experiences of a wider range of sex workers. In Claire's (sex worker) case this has involved campaigning work around sex workers' rights, to challenge dominant portrayals of sex work and sex workers' experiences:

As part of my campaigning work I went out to the parliament and stuff like that, and met with the women and spoke with them, and when I told them how they were being portrayed, they were like what? I was like yeah this is what she's [politician] saying, she's saying that you're, you're pimped and you're coerced and you're drug addicted...It was disgraceful, em, so I think and that's, as part of my campaigning work is to make people see that that's not the case for the vast majority of sex workers (Claire, sex worker).

This highlights the agency these participants had regarding their work, particularly in framing (Goffman, 1986) their experiences of sex work. Building on previous comments, it also emphasises differences between indoor and outdoor sex workers. In interviewing indoor sex workers, or sex workers who had little association with support services, there was a sense that participants spoke about, and from their own experiences, of victimisation, rather than through an organisation. Whether or not this can

be considered representative of most indoor sex workers, the experiences of sex workers in this study would generally suggest that they have different experiences to outdoor sex workers, experiences that do not seem to be named as or largely associated with being a victim, and conversely, are discussed using terms and in ways that suggest positive as well as negative aspects to being involved in sex work.

Where the victimisation of sex workers was not assumed, an equally harmful practice was identified, in the form of victim blaming. Some sex workers noted that, just as they could be perceived and defined as a victim, they could instead, or additionally, be blamed for violence or other risks they experienced, likened by some to the interrogation, or backlash, that non-sex workers can face. This can follow a rape or sexual assault, where a victim's clothing, demeanour or other factors are brought into focus, and can be attributed partially, or in whole, to the victim's experience. Ryan (sex worker) discusses that it would be helpful not to feel judged or be subject to inappropriate questioning by the police and other services, as with 'victims of rape'. Amy (sex worker) meanwhile reflects on and likens sex workers' and other (female) victims' possible reluctance to approach police, due to societal perceptions of individuals and groups who constitute the ideal or deserving victim (Christie, cited in van Wijk, 2013):

If you put yourself in a situation of risk, well you know, like you're even, even if a woman gets raped on a night out, its that whole argument of what she was wearing, or where she was, well why was she hanging about, down about that area, where it's a dark lane anyway, wearing a really short skirt, what does she expect to happen? Its that kind of idea (Amy, sex worker).

Lauren (sex worker) similarly noting the lack of justice for female victims of violence and rape, explained why she would not feel supported by the law if she were to experience violence:

Let alone all the problems detailed... the UK police and judiciary have a very poor record when it comes to securing convictions for violence and rape, particularly against women (Lauren, sex worker).

This reflects a process where sex workers have accepted or normalised and adapted to experiences of violence and abuse within their work (see Warden, 2013<sup>30</sup>). As a result sex workers may not name or identify their experiences as harmful. This can additionally be based on fear or apprehension of the legal and social consequences of disclosing their experiences of violence within sex work (see Ditmore, 2006, Warden, 2013). Some service providers have associated a normalisation process (Dodsworth, 2015; Phipps, 2013; Sanders, 2005b) with their service users. This refers to how sex workers can undermine, dismiss, or re-define their experiences that, to others, may be considered harmful or exploitative. More widely, it has been argued that violence against women is normalised. Occurring from an early age in schools (Lombard, 2014, McCarry, 2010), girls have been shown to be aware of, and experience forms of, violence such as pushing and being called sexual names, although this is not always named as violence and is often differentiated from 'real' violence, i.e. adult men's public involvement in violence which can have formal consequences including imprisonment (Lombard, 2014, 2015). In this way, girls come to normalise and minimise their experiences of violence, which can then also feature later in their lives, as part of men and women's interactions with one another (Lombard, 2014, 2015). As a result, as Corinne's (service provider) comments indicate, violence against sex workers can go undetected, as sex workers choose not to report incidents to police, or are unaware that their experiences can be defined and considered as violent and are thus potentially subject to intervention by police:

If they are sex workers we tend to see them if they've had a particularly bad attack, so they might not report what they would see as a normal, so which would mean it goes on quite frequently, but its just, its seen in their eyes as normal...I think they just think it just comes with the job, its just, that's what it is, you know, that's how it is...they expect it, they almost expect it, they expect to get so many in whatever time (Corinne, service provider).

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<sup>30</sup> Warden (2013) has linked the normalisation of violence, which aids and reproduces human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, to the everyday lived experience of violence in women's lives, as embedded in Guatemalan social structures.

Such risks were not necessarily accepted however, or were viewed, in several cases, as potential risks (see Armstrong, 2014), in view of sex workers' various strategies to manage and counteract violent or otherwise negative working experiences, often without the need to access service providers for support.

### **Chapter summary**

Based on the findings, it has emerged that there are varying experiences of harm for both sex workers and service providers, particularly in relation to how or if violence has been encountered for sex workers, and how their experiences of harm are conceptualised, or understood in the context of service providers supporting sex workers. Concepts of risk and the potential for violence within sex work, as with particular definitions of harm often relating to physical violence were acknowledged and understood by sex workers. This, however, did not necessarily equate to their own experiences of sex work, in which violence, at least in a physical sense was not often present. This was highlighted by some sex workers, who made a distinction between their own largely positive experiences, and the negative experiences of outdoor sex workers, who may have limited and constrained choices in how they work.

Instead, harm was more frequently linked to or experienced in a non-physical setting. Several sex workers discussed that they understood violence, as it applied to the wider impact of attempts to criminalise clients, restrictions on the locations and ways in which they worked and whether and how they could access support related to their involvement in sex work. Such measures were often perceived as more harmful than sex work, limiting sex workers' choices and potentially compromising their safety and well-being by forcing them to work alone, or take larger risks in terms of the clients, locations and conditions they worked under. Some sex workers also recognised harm in the context of service provider approaches, discussed in more detail in the following chapter. These approaches were perceived as harmful where it was assumed that all sex workers must have particular



experiences of sex work, notably, past or current experience of violence and exploitation, and a desire to exit sex work. As with current laws surrounding sex work, this was again seen to negatively impact on sex workers, denying their right and choice to work as a sex worker, and forcing them to look for alternative support for their needs, where they could not engage with a service provider for ideological reasons, i.e. because they did not identify as a victim, or wished to discuss their exit from sex work.

Many service providers by comparison adopted a view that assumed the presence of violence and other harms within sex work, often based upon their own experiences of supporting sex workers who had encountered violence and exploitation through sex work. Some service providers did, however, recognise that, in places, how they would define violence and harm could differ from sex workers, highlighting the socially constructed nature of responses to sex work, which within this study, has largely been divided between a view of sex work as harmful from the perspective of service providers, and rewarding, by sex workers who have described several positive experiences and financial gain through sex work. Their response to violence against sex workers was thus based on a conceptualisation of risk and victimisation within sex work, and also, to some extent, by external constraints, which shaped their overall view and approach to sex work, and responding to the needs of sex workers. Outwith the context of sex work, some service providers also recognised the harms of measures including criminalisation for sex workers and how this could result in negative experiences for sex workers, although this seemed to be framed from the view that such measures could impact on their ability to access and engage with sex workers, rather than as a potential source of harm for sex workers.

The implication of this, however, is that sex workers can be harmed. It has been demonstrated that sex workers are affected by a process of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992). This occurs where there are attempts to define and link all experiences of sex work with violence, as with the dominant violence against women model of sex work. It is thus suggestions and practices

around the purported harms of sex work that can be deemed more harmful by sex workers than physical acts of violence themselves. This is due to a lack of recognition and representation that is given to different experiences of sex work, of which not all are violent. Instead, sex workers are widely depicted as victims, and their choice to be involved in and work safely within the sex industry, is overlooked in attempts to eliminate or disrupt sex work markets.

There was some acknowledgement of the differences in experiences between indoor and outdoor sex workers, although largely, service providers' discussions referred to either directly supporting outdoor sex workers, or the perceived experiences and needs of outdoor sex workers, which to some degree, varied from the experiences of the sex worker sample within this study. Service providers however were able to comment to some extent on the experiences of indoor sex workers and any resulting needs that they may have. Some had prior experience of working with indoor sex workers and thus had some knowledge of their level and nature of engagement with a service, while others spoke of the increasing need to address the experiences of indoor sex workers, in view of more sex work transactions being arranged off-street and online or by phone. Some service providers queried the fact that their service was largely based on accommodating the needs of outdoor sex workers, recognising the need to expand in order to hear other sex worker voices and support them accordingly.

These findings illustrate the conflict in how experiences of harm are actually encountered and conceptualised. There were some commonalities amongst sex workers and service providers in how they recognised risks within sex work. There were more differences, however, in how harm was defined and experienced. Sex workers largely suggested that sex work and harm held different meanings for them than for service providers. For sex workers, violence was not always linked to or involved in sex work, with sex work often viewed as an expression of free choice. Harm, in several cases, was seen to result from a lack of recognition of positive choice, rights and

experiences in choosing sex work. This could involve the responses of laws, policies and service providers, that through adopting harmful measures, could potentially further exploit, stigmatise, exclude and marginalise sex workers. Service providers meanwhile often based their experiences and thus responses, to harm associated with sex work on directly supporting sex workers who had various negative experiences associated with their involvement in sex work, and a high need status, which does not always correspond with the experiences of other sex workers.

In the following chapter, participants' experiences of harm are built upon, to consider in particular the role of relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers. This examines the context of support service provision and delivery and how its engagement feeds into and influences responses to harm associated with sex work.

## Chapter Six

### **‘Its good to talk about sex work and I can do that here’ (Carrie, sex worker): Relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers**

#### **Introduction**

Within the previous chapter, participants’ experiences of harm were examined, taking into account how sex workers experienced and managed harm, service providers’ understandings of sex workers’ experiences of risk and harm, and how both sex workers and service providers defined and spoke about experiences of harm associated with sex work. Expanding on this, this chapter examines a specific aspect of participants’ experiences of harm, their *relationships* and *interactions*. This accommodates one of the main research themes of the study for both sex workers and service providers, addressing how both experience support service delivery from the perspective of either receiving or providing support for harm associated with sex work. Participants’ experiences in either receiving or providing support for harm linked to sex work are explored. This includes if, and why participants previously or currently accessed or provided any support services, their perceptions of the support they received or provided, and how this could impact on any future responses to harm associated with sex work.

The chapter begins by briefly reiterating the significance and use of different support services by sex workers - relating this to the study findings - before exploring key themes related to the relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers including *agency* and *barriers to supporting sex workers* that underpin and account for current responses to harm associated with sex work. This is divided into two sections; the first discussing factors that can affect the relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers. Secondly, there is a consideration of

responses to harm associated with sex work, focusing on the relationships sex workers have with other sex workers, and the relationships service providers form with other service providers in order to respond to and manage the challenges of supporting sex workers. The chapter concludes by summarising the role, nature and significance of the relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers, considering the implications arising from this, and discussing how these can facilitate or hinder the appropriate support of sex workers.

### **Service provision for sex workers**

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two), support service provision for sex work has traditionally been health orientated. More recently this has expanded, owing to a recognition of the varying needs different sex workers have, beyond sexual health and HIV prevention, coupled with limitations in service provision and challenges in engaging with sex workers. Consistent with the literature, similar issues were raised by sex workers in this study, regarding the extent, availability and quality of service provision, suggesting the importance of appropriate, tailored service provision in meeting the needs of sex workers. All sex workers interviewed discussed interaction or familiarity to some degree with one or more service providers. There were variations in the uptake of service provision, depending on what needs, knowledge and experiences sex workers have or have had previously. Predominantly however sex workers discussed the need for, and experience, of accessing health related services for, amongst other services, sexual health testing and obtaining condoms, offered by the NHS or specialist sex worker only health services. Other than this, there was little or no discussion of direct interactions with other statutory services such as police, amongst sex workers. This was attributed to sex workers having had no or limited experience of a severe violent incident necessitating the involvement of police. Sex workers also reported managing work-related risks themselves, or coping with violence or other harms through more informal means and networks, for example, seeking the support of other sex workers. Some sex workers meanwhile, with more experience of engaging with a service and support workers, reported that they would potentially

approach the police if they were to experience violence at work. This was based however on a known and trusted support worker liaising with, or supporting, them in reporting to the police, rather than them directly contacting the police, indicating the significance of developing and sustaining strong relationships, in order to adequately build trust with and support sex workers. For some non-statutory service providers this was viewed as a particularly important part of their role. These service providers discussed the importance of building trust and developing relationships with sex workers. In some cases, service providers indicated that they drew on this experience to act as a facilitator and to support sex workers in formally reporting a violent incident to the police.

Non-statutory, voluntary service providers were also recognised by sex workers as a potential source for accessing health as well as other services, for example, practical advice and support related to sex work. As already noted, sex workers were generally aware of the risks involved in, or associated, with their work and had experience of employing practical strategies in order to minimise or avoid, potential violence or harms, without necessarily consulting support services for advice on these matters. More widely, sex workers were often reluctant to access or engage with these service providers, where it was perceived that they held a particular ideological stance and approach to offering support; similar to some statutory organisational approaches and state laws and policies surrounding the perceived harms of sex work. This was related to a view that some service providers held a moralistic stance towards sex work; notably that sex work was wrong and harmful and exploitative to the individuals involved in selling sex, as well as the wider community. This was seen to compromise or deny support to some sex workers, and their ability to positively engage with a service, as the following sections illustrate.

**'I don't feel that I need to do anything that I don't want to' (Carrie, sex worker): Agency**

Findings from the data have indicated the centrality of agency fitting with a significant debate within feminist research on sex work as to the degree to

which sex work is a freely chosen occupation or exploitation (Ditmore, 2006; Sanders et al. 2009; Shah, 2004; Snyder-Hall, 2010). This debate has largely constrained an understanding of sex work and sex workers' experiences, confining them to a narrow definition of being either exploitative or empowering without factoring in the wider diversities and complexities that exist within sex workers' experiences (see Sanders et al. 2009). The current findings relating to agency expand on this, indicating the ways in which sex workers can have both negative and positive experiences in sex work, and by responses to their involvement, which may impact on their choices in whether and how they work.

The findings relate to the study's themes, which explore experiences of receiving or providing support for harm associated with sex work. This presents the opportunity to gain an understanding of the agency sex workers and service providers have or make in responding to harm, and how this varies according to their position as sex worker or service provider. On this point, sex workers and service providers shared a sense of familiarity in using the concept of agency in discussions. How both parties framed the concept was found to differ somewhat however, fitting with Goffman's (1986) frames theory. While frames are widely socially shared as a means of organising, understanding and giving meaning to experiences, these experiences can encompass different frames, and thus, provide different meanings for different individuals for a similar experience (Ibid). This is exemplified by the comments of some service providers in this study who linked a lack of choice and disadvantage to an individual's involvement in sex work, and which could result in or perpetuate violence or other harms, as suggested by Shona (service provider), in discussing a service user's understanding of the reasons for her entry into sex work: 'she absolutely understood by the end that it was a restricted choice.'

Shona, as with other service providers, particularly those working in a direct support role, often with outdoor sex workers, discussed choice in the context of limits and restrictions over an individual's power. This was often related to the issue of gender inequality, which was addressed as an aspect of

power that played into the lives of some sex workers. This was discussed by some service providers in the context of supporting or attempting to engage with sex workers who can be reluctant to access statutory or all support services in general. This may be due to prevailing gender stereotypes around the ideals of domesticity, chastity and passivity of women, and the expectation that this could bring negative judgement, or consequences for women involved in sex work, as one focus group interview with service providers revealed (exemplified by Georgia's discussion) much like the wider regulation of women's behaviour, where women may be attuned to and alter their activities and conduct accordingly, so as not to be accused of initiating violence (McKie, 2006).

Other service providers - see Sarah's (service provider) comments as one example - identified power structures in their discussions, in the form of women's personal relationships with their male partners or clients. Unequal power relations with men in or out with sex work could result in an often dangerous or chaotic lifestyle for such individuals and impact on their ability to fully engage with a support service. These findings, exemplified by Georgia and Sarah's (service providers) comments, relate to the theoretical positioning of this research, based upon feminist and social constructionist perspectives. They demonstrate in particular, dominant social constructions of gender and control of female sexuality (Kaplan, 1990), in which women are expected to adhere to a social role that involves marriage, care, motherhood and domesticity. Where women transgress the boundaries of expected femininity, based upon marriage and a passive female sexuality, they can find themselves subject to judgement, exclusion and stigmatisation (Ibid). This can be complicated by disclosure of involvement in sex work, where women have children, as it can reveal both a women's transgression in her involvement in sex work, and as a 'suitable' mother. Women who sell sex have recognised the negative effects associated with their involvement in sex work on their children, including risks to children through access to drugs and injecting equipment (McClelland and Newell, 2008), separation from children as a result of working and perceived stigma towards children



and mothers related to their mother's involvement in sex work (Sloss and Harper, 2004).

A feminist perspective, meanwhile, can be related to and explain Sarah's (service provider) observations, related to the difficulties in engaging with women involved in sex work. Patriarchy, defined as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (Walby, 1990:20), is seen here through some women's dependency on, and relations with, men that limit their abilities to leave sex work or report a violent partner. Implicit in this discussion are the inequalities of power that exist between men and women that posit men as the dominant sex (Brownmiller, 1976) and depend to some extent on women's shared view with men of their social position (Krais, 2006). It is these patriarchal social structures that result in the violence, oppression and subjugation of women (Walby, 1990), although, as shown by some research, sex workers do challenge patriarchy and dominant images and ideals of female sexuality through sex work (Saraswathi Seshu and Pai, 2014, see also Habiba, 2015):

I mean by the very fact they're female, there's still that kind of double whammy, I mean, women are still viewed as kind of wives, carers, mothers, so you know, I think women feel more judged and condemned because if they're, you know, using alcohol or drugs and sex working as well especially, they can feel that they don't get treated the same way as you or I would if we went in. And there's also the fear as well kind of like how much do they tell another professional, cause they might have children and it's kind of child protection issues are in their head, what will happen to my children, I'm using drugs and I'm street working? You know, so there's a fear as well of opening up to professions (Georgia, service provider).

There are some (sex workers) that are forced to do it by their partner, em, or pimp, whatever you want to call him, to feed their habit, so he'll send her out, she's got to make money, if she doesn't get enough money, she'll get beat up for it... if its domestic abuse, and, or they've been pimped out, they've been forced into doing it, there's also the fear of, if I say anything to the police, or if I speak to a worker and its gets reported to the police, then I'm going to get killed (Sarah, service provider).

An individual's choice to work within the sex industry was defined and understood by some service providers in ways that indicated sex workers had partial agency. Sex workers were seen to have constrained choice in their involvement in sex work, as entry to and harm through sex work can be forced upon some individuals. Further, it was recognised that individuals can be limited in their ability to exit and obtain employment and opportunities out with sex work, due to a variety of social structural constraints, for example, poverty and drug use (Benoit and Millar, 2001, Mayhew and Mossman, 2007). These comments indicate that an individual's element of choice in the decision to be involved in sex work is removed or significantly reduced. This relates to a key argument of radical feminist thought which explains and associates prostitution with men's violence against women. Through prostitution, as with other forms of commercial sexual exploitation, it is argued that women experience little or no agency in their involvement in sex work (Jeffreys, 2009a, MacKinnon, 2011). This view has been contested however by some who highlight the need to recognise other, positive experiences of sex work (Alexander, 1988; Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Leigh, 1988; McCracken, 2013; Ward and Day, 2004), as informed or led by sex workers themselves (Ditmore and Allman, 2011, Saraswathi Seshu and Pai, 2014).

Comparatively, in several interviews with sex workers, agency was discussed in different, mostly positive terms. To a lesser extent, some sex workers interviewed recognised a lack of power, as it could exist in sex work; for example, through exploitation by managers, or more generally, in the potential risk of encountering violent or exploitative situations where their control is reduced, although this did not necessarily apply to their own experiences of sex work. Predominantly however, agency was discussed positively, either mentioned directly, or suggested by the way participants spoke about the nature of their involvement in sex work; for example, the extent to which they were able to choose to work in sex work and under conditions preferable to them. Claire (sex worker) for example had read around the subject of escorting, before becoming involved as an escort herself: 'I did a lot of reading and research before I took the plunge', and

expressed that her work 'doesn't really feel like work sometimes', indicating some prior consideration of the risks as well as more rewarding aspects of the job that prompted an active decision to become involved in sex work. This links with other research that demonstrates the power sex workers exercise in their sexual encounters with clients through being able to set limits on what they offer, in turn enabling sex workers to be rewarded financially and in their understanding of male sexuality (Perkins, 1991). For other sex workers interviewed, it was evident that they had chosen to be involved in sex work, often a decision made to supplement or provide a flexible way of working around other employment, study or family commitments (Benoit et al. 2014): 'I make enough money doing that but I still do sex work on the side to make sure I can provide a little bit more' (Amy, sex worker). Involvement in sex work was also in some cases, linked to the job satisfaction derived from particular aspects of sex work. This was linked to gaining specialist skills, for example, working with disabled clients as one sex worker disclosed. Working alongside other sex workers and being able to work under positive, non-exploitative conditions that might not be present in other employment (Mai, 2009) were also cited as reasons why sex workers enjoyed their work.

As suggested by several sex workers, job satisfaction often entailed having the freedom in being able to work in ways as and when it suited them (see also Lucas, 2005). This can be seen as reflective of the autonomy associated with independent and indoor sex work (Hubbard and Prior, 2012, Pitcher, 2015), with which most sex workers in this study appeared to be engaged. In very few discussions was there an indication that the choice to enter sex work, and continue to be involved in sex work was forced, or associated with previous disadvantage, as some service providers also acknowledged:

I have seen women who have expressed that they feel working in the sex industry is a choice that they should be allowed to make. They have expressed that they feel it is a job, like any other, and it is their choice to decide how they make their living (Marie, service provider).

It is recognised, however, that sex workers will not necessarily use or identify with the term 'victim' (Sagar and Jones, 2014), thus limiting an understanding of the nature and degree to which sex workers participate in the decision-making process, in choosing to be involved in sex work. Similarly, as Dunn (2011) has suggested, although a process of victimisation may have occurred and been acknowledged, it is possible that not all individuals will consider that they need, or would like, support.

This highlights the variations between the actual needs and expectations of the needs of victims and the necessity to understand and take account of these to support individuals accordingly. Moreover, indoor sex workers have some similar needs and concerns to outdoor sex workers, particularly, where health is concerned, as this study has demonstrated. Some sex workers discussed concerns about and acknowledgement of the risks sex work could pose to their sexual health. This necessitated the need to take personal responsibility for their actions, both in how they negotiated safe sex practices with clients and in accessing health projects for sexual health testing or other services: 'the only service that I actually use is just the generic sexual health services like *Gay Men's Health*, which is... in my experience has only been positive' (Steve, sex worker). There are however particular characteristics of indoor sex work that may result in further victimisation or marginalisation, and which can present more barriers for sex workers in terms of addressing and meeting their needs. These include isolation, which can impact on a sex worker's ability to enforce their rights or seek wider support for any issues they may be facing (see *Indoors* project, 2010).

In the current study, some sex workers reflected on this issue, viewing isolation, enforced through restrictions in the law that do not permit sex workers to work together, as contrary to their needs or desires. This was seen to deny them the company and safety that collective working can offer, and potentially heighten their exposure to violence (see later discussion in this chapter on the importance of peer support for some sex workers). More frequently sex workers in this study associated a lack of, or limited choice

with, responses to sex work. Some sex work laws and policies and service provider approaches were viewed as damaging, particularly, if they assume violence, exploitation and victimisation of sex workers, question their motives for working, focus service provision around exiting strategies, or where laws and policies fail to take account of how developments might impact on sex workers' lives. Where this applies in the context of engaging with service providers, sex workers in this study largely suggested that this was problematic, by undermining or denying their choices to be involved in sex work, and preventing sex workers, other than those that identify negative experiences and wish to exit sex work, from receiving appropriate support. Based on this, sex workers perceive both reduced control for themselves, and increased control in terms of the power others have over them, in directing whether and how they are involved in, and can be supported for, working in the sex industry, relating to Bourdieu's (1992) discussion of symbolic power. Applying this concept enables an understanding of how sex workers can experience non-physical harms, through the exercise of power in law, policy and service provision, which imposes particular ways in which sex workers can work or receive support; for example, by limiting sex workers working together or requiring them to engage with attempts to help them exit sex work, although this can be detrimental to the interests of some sex workers who wish to be involved in sex work and in doing so, work in ways that ensure their safety.

This can also be related to Foucault's (1980) work on disciplinary power, particularly his commentary on how surveillance, rather than violent measures, can be used as an effective, constant means of discipline and instilling social order. Foucault's (1980) analyses indicate that it is more subtle power processes that can be used in the discipline and control of individuals, which assume and depend on their docility, for example through school discipline. Similarly, Bourdieu's (1992) discussion of symbolic violence enables an understanding of harm beyond physical force. His work highlights the potential of other unseen processes through words, images or cultural practices which can be used to exercise power, control and harm over individuals. Like Foucault's (1980) analyses, Bourdieu's (1992)

discussion indicates that the exercise of power over some individuals by a dominant group is dependent on their acceptance and misrecognition of the power held over them.

In this study, sex workers conveyed experiences that suggested the ways in which they felt constrained, not by their work, but by processes that sought to monitor, control and punish sex workers for whether and how they worked, reinforcing a view of sex work as harmful and morally wrong (see Bernstein, 1999, Mak, 2004). As earlier discussed, these largely related to assumptions made of sex workers that they experienced violence and harm through their participation in sex work, and related attempts to encourage their exit from sex work:

I don't want to have to deal with someone who might, you know try to explain to me how I should exit, you know, from the sex industry, and how what I do is like damaging to myself, and I'm like no I just want to talk about maybe a condom which broke (Ryan, sex worker).

Sex workers also cited laws and policies on sex work that they found harmful. Limiting indoor sex workers from being able to work together from a premises for example, was seen as a means of controlling and to some extent punishing sex workers, particularly those who chose not to exit sex work and wanted to continue working safely by way of working alongside other sex workers. Sex workers in this study additionally recognised that they could be punished in terms of being unable to access particular support services, where they did not identify or choose to engage with the position of some organisations on sex work. Ryan (sex worker) expressed this, in relation to approaching the police: 'In some ways this is a form of violence [being questioned on involvement in sex work] as well for me, cos I can't just see a state service, like a police service' (Ryan, sex worker). Jenna (sex worker) shared a similar view:

I and a lot of people I know wouldn't even dream of it [reporting theft, stalking or threats to police], for fear of being investigated ourselves, of letting the police know where we live and work, of being told, what did you expect, it's a dangerous job (Jenna, sex worker).

The negative consequences arising from these processes, including increased exclusion and stigma for sex workers were generally considered more harmful than the risk of violence posed by or associated with sex work.

The above commentary relating to sex workers' agency, or a lack of, indicates some of the ways in which current responses to harm associated with sex work are socially constructed. As Weitzer (2007b) highlights, in the context of human trafficking, particular assumptions and claim-making may surround aspects of social life, giving rise to them being defined and constructed as a social problem, although this 'may or may not reflect actual social arrangements' (Ibid: 448). Social construction and amplification of the harms of sex work, both to those involved and the wider society, have been such that sex workers have been continually subject to focus historically and currently. Sex workers have been perceived as individuals in need of social control and regulation, in view of their assumed immoral and deviant character (Wahab, 2002). This view of 'the fallen woman' (Agustín, 2007; Ditmore, 2006; Wahab, 2002) has continued with sex workers routinely cast as victims (Bruckert and Hannem, 2013; Cook, 2014; Red Umbrella Project, 2014) rather than criminalised with focus predominantly directed towards the most extreme and negative of experiences (Weitzer, 2007b) and limited recognition of alternative, non-victimising experiences of sex work.

In this study, sex workers have recognised and commented on these constructions of their work, noting how negative attitudes around sex workers' reduced power, control and victimhood, continue to be attributed to sex work and sex workers. Service providers were similarly aware of the violence and abuse that can exist in sex work, drawing upon their work with some sex workers with these experiences and in some cases by reference to law and policy responses which equated sex work with violence and exploitation. Sex workers, in particular, highlighted the implications of these constructions. Harms including reduced support from services, further stigma or control over whether and how they worked, could occur where sex workers did not accept constructions of themselves or their work as

victimising or as socially problematic. This could lead to the wider exclusion of sex workers, involving their rights or entitlement to support or protection not being fully considered or met: 'they were shaken up and they felt that their rights were exploited' [in reference to sex workers' views of recent Edinburgh sauna raids] (Anna, service provider).

Department of Health research (Balfour and Allen, 2014) suggests that sex workers experience multiple forms of vulnerability and social exclusion; for example, homelessness and family breakdown, which can create barriers preventing them from being fully included and integrated within society. Within this study, exclusion, where discussed,<sup>31</sup> was also related to a feeling amongst sex workers that they were often not adequately involved, and that their input was not encouraged or was misrepresented in sex work policy-making, requiring new solutions that were inclusive of their perspectives (see Doezema and Overs interview, 1998; Gothoskar and Kaiwar, 2014; O'Neill and Campbell, 2006).

This could be attributed to sex workers, as well as sex worker rights and advocacy organisations failing to classify sex work as violence against women, or not adhering to particular definitions, or policy agendas surrounding sex work. Where this is the case, this can result in a lack of opportunities for sex workers for involvement in or co-operation with service providers or lack of funding for sex worker rights organisations. As two examples of the impact of exclusion on sex workers, Eva's (service provider) discussions suggest some of the main challenges of this, in terms of sex workers' rights for her organisation, while Ryan (sex worker) observed that despite the interest of sex workers and specific sex worker led services, they are frequently excluded from consultations that directly concern their lives:

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<sup>31</sup> Exclusion was discussed mainly by sex workers, but also some service providers. In the latter case, it was recognised for example, that some sex workers were excluded, resulting in a lack of inclusion of their voices, experiences and perspectives in service provision.



We're kind of seen as the ones that are going to cause trouble which...so we should be causing trouble because we're not happy with the way that it is, and we are representing sex workers, so if we weren't causing trouble then we'd be doing something wrong, but it is also frustrating that you go into these meetings, and from the beginning that's how you're seen and a lot of the time you are silenced in the meetings and you're not seen as having a valuable perspective...we don't provide support anymore cause we don't get funding to provide the support and sometimes that can be...like you're pushing against a brick wall (Eva, service provider).

They [sex worker led service] are trying to join [male prostitution network]... were not allowed to be part of the network because...they don't agree with the definition that its like sexual exploitation... they were actually not interested to have actual male sex workers on the panel, on the network, on the little group where they decide you know...so that's like really frustrating (Ryan, sex worker).

Where sex worker experiences of violence were not recognised, this was seen to equate to a denial of labour rights for sex workers, and seems again, to reiterate the sense of reduced agency that some sex workers feel is associated with their work. One sex worker, for example, noted the rights that workers in other industries have, referring to female factory workers' rights in a developing country, and how this does not always apply to sex work. This is often because a moral perspective is applied that stigmatises and informs views towards sex work:

What they need is workers' rights, so why is it that the exact same argument can be applied for sex workers, but cos there's a moral obligation there, or moral kind of judgement there that people shouldn't be selling sexual services, that sex workers aren't entitled to those workers' rights, whereas, the other way around its, automatically, of course you give them rights, you... make sure that their rights are enforced, their workers' rights... I feel like in the law, you are seen as like a victim of violence, or structural violence, or poverty, or single parenthood (Amy, sex worker).

Some sex workers were aware of the Merseyside model of policing violence against sex workers<sup>32</sup>, and the acknowledgement of sex worker violence as

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<sup>32</sup> A model, which takes seriously sex workers' experiences of crime, and is designed to protect, encourage and enable sex workers to report violent

a hate crime, although this was not necessarily a main area of focus, in terms of comparing with or reflecting upon their own experiences of violence/harm and receiving support, and how these can be better accommodated under a model that recognised the severity and impact of their experiences. In discussing this form of policing, however, as with labour and human rights and awareness of the legal system, several sex workers demonstrated an advanced knowledge and integration of this knowledge, through their active politicisation in matters relating to sex work, violence and rights. This echoes Giddens's (1987) concept of the 'double hermeneutic' where social science and 'lay' concepts integrate with one another so that individuals may easily draw upon social scientific knowledge to enhance their understandings of and subsequent behaviour within the social world, in the same way that 'Sociological observers depend upon lay concepts to generate accurate descriptions of social processes' (Ibid: 30). More frequently, as discussed earlier, sex workers appeared to conceptualise their rights being undermined or dismissed, due to their assumed victimisation and subsequent treatment by service providers.

**'It would help if the sex worker clinic wasn't located in the drug addiction centre' (Jenna, sex worker): Sex workers' preferred service provision**

Building upon the previous section, the impact of particular service provider approaches is now considered. This takes into account how these affect sex workers' access to, and relationships, with service providers, and more widely, how this can impact on the safety and well-being of sex workers, who are dissuaded from accessing service providers for support. Amongst all sex workers interviewed, there was a commonality in expectations regarding treatment, with participants' positive experiences of accessing and interacting with support services linked to the treatment they receive (or had received). Most sex workers shared a view that a service should be fair, non-judgemental and acknowledge and respect an individual's choice to be

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attacks against them (see Jacobs, 2013 and Jacobs, 2014b: interviews with Shelly Stoops, former Independent Sexual Violence Advisor for sex workers in Liverpool and ACC Chris Armitt).

involved in sex work. In addition sex workers agreed that they would be more likely to consider approaching services that demonstrated openness, understanding and accommodated their needs. This finding reflects the wider literature, which suggests the need for respectful and non-judgemental behaviour in service provision aimed at sex workers (Jeal and Salisbury, 2013, Persist Health Project, 2014). Sex workers' individual choices, circumstances and needs should be considered and respected, whether that entails progression onto exiting from sex work, or continuing to work safely (Gaffney et al. 2008), as Jenna and Claire's (sex workers) comments indicate:

As for health organisations, it would help if the sex worker clinic wasn't located in the drug addiction centre... it just reinforces the myths for the general public. Secondly, I don't want to go there and look at sad anti-drug posters, always in dark colours, with sombre images (Jenna, sex worker).

Sex workers should be able to go to the police and report a crime against them, and to have that treated with the upmost of confidentiality and respect...and also they should be able to do that knowing that the police won't put on their file that they are a known sex worker...this prohibits, in some cases, the women from exiting, because they can't get a job which requires any kind of background check (Claire, sex worker).

Other comments by participants demonstrated various preferences and needs related to service provision. These included female-only services and a focus on harm reduction rather than solely encouraging sex workers to exit sex work. Sex workers also indicated that services could be improved where they were led or more informed by the views of sex workers themselves. Tailored service provision, which was adapted to individual service users and confidential services, were additional preferences discussed by sex workers that could improve current service provision. Discussion of these factors indicate some of the existing concerns or barriers influencing current service uptake by sex workers, or their disengagement with services, as with Tara's (sex worker) comments on the factors that would stop her or make her reluctant to engage with a service. Tara's views, relating to her needs and expectations from a service are

reflective of other sex workers' discussions, which similarly focused on the importance of confidentiality and lack of judgement from organisations offering support:

Definitely female workers. It would feel weird to speak with a guy about all that stuff...and even better a girl who has worked in the industry herself...that just makes it more authentic what the person says, if she has experienced it all herself than just studying it from a book...and certainly most important anonymity and confidentiality... it [a sex workers walk-in clinic] just feels less judgemental...and that's what's important to build trust to any kind of service (Tara, sex worker).

Service providers, in several cases, appeared to share similar views to sex workers. Participants working in a support role, in particular, exhibited some knowledge and understanding of the varying issues facing their service users. Related to this, in discussing their thoughts on how support services might be improved, service providers, similar to sex workers, envisaged that ideally a service's approach should be 'friendly and welcoming and not judgemental' (Corinne, service provider), where 'people were more open-minded...and actually listened to the women instead of pre-judging them, just based on what they do' (Sarah, service provider). Several service providers demonstrated an awareness of the implications of adopting particular attitudes based on their experiences of providing support to sex workers for violence or other issues. Eilidh, for example, discussed the challenge, as a service provider, of working with service users who disclosed distressing or otherwise negative experiences in terms of remaining non-judgemental, supportive and emotionally unaffected by the information they receive:

I'd like to think as [Rachael] says, I'd be able to deal with it, you know, and not put my own opinions onto her. I realise it would be very difficult though not to (Eilidh, service provider).

Service providers recognised how attitudes relate to their treatment of sex workers, and how this can determine the extent to which sex workers access and positively engage with services, particularly where it is perceived that service providers disapprove of, or are judgemental of, the

behaviours and choices of individuals involved in sex work. This extended to a consideration of how such behaviour can serve to further stigmatise sex workers, who already encounter multiple forms of stigma in their working and personal lives (Campbell and Gibbs, 2009). Related to this, some service providers discussed the stigma attached to sex work and the negative treatment sex workers receive as a result. This includes a lack of social concern for, and disposability attached to, sex workers in the wider society or, through current or previous interactions sex workers may have with some services where they do not feel that they are treated fairly or respectfully, described by Lowman (2000) as a 'discourse of disposal'<sup>33</sup>. Corinne's (service provider) reflections, shared by several other service providers with a similar working or wider knowledge of prevailing societal attitudes and stigma towards sex work and sex workers, emphasise the de-humanisation and sense of worthlessness that is often assigned to, or assumed of, sex workers:

Because they are sex workers...they think they can do whatever they like to them and they'll be ok, so...no-ones going to take it seriously if they go to the police, nobody's going to care if they're dead or alive...they're [sex workers] not kind of real in a way, they are de-humanised in that sense (Corinne, service provider).

This can be considered reflective of how service providers acknowledge, or understand, to some degree, the difficulties service users face in approaching an organisation for support, particularly concerns amongst sex workers that they will be negatively judged and stigmatised for their involvement in sex work. Rachael's (service provider) comments recognise that sex workers who experience violence - for example, a rape or sexual assault - should be entitled to the same level of rights, protection and treatment from the law, as any other victim of crime:

Its not about the sex work, it's about the fact that you are a female and that you have experienced a traumatic event and you should get

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<sup>33</sup> Lowman (2000) identified a 'discourse of disposal', focused around attempts to rid residential areas in British Columbia of street prostitution, which resulted in increased violence towards and murders of sex workers.

exactly the same service as any other woman, just because you're a sex worker, it makes no difference (Rachael, service provider).

In these and other comments expressed by service providers, there was a re-iteration in places of earlier points, particularly those relating to the concepts of agency and treatment by service providers. Based on this, if sex workers are to engage to any extent with a service, it is important for service providers to allow them the opportunity to engage with a service on their own terms, taking into account and responding to different sex workers' needs and expectations of service provision.

### **Barriers to supporting sex workers**

Service providers were reflective on the barriers preventing current and potential service users from engaging further, or seeking initial support, which shows a sense of realism and understanding about the challenges faced in engaging with, and supporting, sex workers. Many of these barriers related to practical issues - for example, inflexible service opening hours as Georgia (service provider) discussed - or aspects of risk-taking or abusive behaviour, such as drug addiction or domestic violence in intimate relationships, that made it problematic for some sex workers to commit to initial or ongoing support appointments, identified by Amanda (service provider). A sex worker's previous experience of abuse within the care system, involving in some cases the input of statutory services, also emerged as significant within some discussions. This reiterates previous comments on the perceived level and nature of violence and exploitation in sex workers' lives by some service providers. As Scott (service provider) and Rachael (service provider) expressed:

They were in care when they were younger and that's where they've been abused, social work is seen as the enemy, police are seen as the enemy and they won't involve themselves with anybody who they think may be connected to...the council, social work or the police... the biggest challenge is their fear and hatred of anything that's seen as being anything to do with the statutory services (Scott, service provider).

Sometimes their [sex workers] fears are actually quite real... maybe we have all seen where actually a woman discloses that she is sex working or she's been a victim of an assault or a violence and is also a sex worker and that's where that has happened, actually all of those attitudes and judgements and fears that she had about doing that are absolutely revealed in the professional that she's speaking to (Rachael, service provider).

Although the majority of service providers interviewed were non-statutory, service providers did comment on the extent to which views such as the one discussed above by Rachael could impact on the level of uptake and engagement with their service. This can be seen to be the case as some sex workers perceived certain negative treatment based on their previous experiences of involvement with statutory services. Service providers identified several situations where sex workers could disengage from the support offered by their services. Scott (service provider) linked this to sex workers not having a clear understanding of the role and position of the service, thus requiring that service providers identified themselves and the work they were involved in. It was discussed that sex workers had a fear of accessing services in case it involved the subsequent involvement of social work (Fiona, service provider).

Based on this, service provision itself, and statutory service provision in particular, as previous examples have indicated, can impede sex workers' engagement with services. This can be in addition to other external barriers where sex workers have had previous negative experiences with services in the form of judgement, stigma and institutionalised care. This leads to a distrust of, and reluctance to, engage with particular support services, as will be later discussed in the context of comparing experiences of statutory and non-statutory services. It is important to note that generally the comments relating to sex workers' previous negative experiences of care under statutory services, resulting in their lack of future access and engagement with services, did not correspond with the views of the sex workers in this study, and may be more applicable to the experiences of outdoor sex workers. There was some commonality in sex workers' reluctance to engage with statutory services, such as police, as well as non-statutory

services, to be later discussed. In the case of the current study however, this was not attributed to sex workers' previous experience of the care system, thus highlighting the variation between service providers and sex workers in how both conceptualise and experience access to and engagement with support services.

In discussing barriers to service provision the main difference between service providers and sex workers related to the expectations versus the realities of service provision. Thus, in some cases, while service providers might share similar expectations or visions of service delivery as sex workers, external constraints, agendas or other barriers can hamper what support can realistically be provided. This is a finding consistent with tackling violence against women more generally, through partnership working (Rummery, 2013). O'Neill (2011) highlights the problems that this can create, particularly where services have to amend or change service delivery in order to meet specific funding guidelines for example, around exiting measures, a result being the exclusion of and lack of support for sex workers who are unable, or do not, wish to exit sex work.<sup>34</sup> Of these, funding commitments were identified as one factor that could potentially shape the extent and nature of support offered. Some service providers noted issues relating to funding cuts, whereas for other service providers whose services received funding, they, in some cases referred to their funders, or the specific models they followed, as a result of receiving particular funding, for example, Scottish Government violence against women funding. Many service providers were thus aware of their relationship to funders and that this could potentially impact on their ability to provide certain services and meet the needs of service users.

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<sup>34</sup> See also Carline and Scoular (2015) who note the further social exclusion and marginalisation of sex workers resulting from their failure to conform to particular service models and exit sex work. At the same time little is done to change the conditions for and status of sex workers, meaning both exiting or continued involvement in sex work proves equally problematic for sex workers.



With some exceptions, as below with Corinne's (service provider) view, most participants did not expand on the matter of the relationships between funders and service providers. There was limited discussion in particular of the immediate and longer-term implications of these relationships for themselves as service providers and for sex workers. As later discussions suggest, however, it is possible that these or other factors can result in an increased sense of job dissatisfaction in terms of job pressure and frustration:

There have been lots of funding cuts to voluntary organisations or third sector organisations... money is cut so...that obviously takes away immediate service provision for people, so I would say that would be the main one, is to you know, fund projects that would work with women (Corinne, service provider).

In addition to some of the issues surrounding engagement with service users, and funding commitments, several participants spoke of wanting to do more in terms of service provision. It was clear from discussions, however, that this was not always feasible, due to amongst other factors, a service's charitable and voluntary status and available funding. Anna's (service provider) comments represent other discussions by service providers that suggest a sense of frustration resulting from the sometimes limited scope of their work:

I think its good but there's always more you can do, do you know what I mean? Like, I look at other agencies that are similar to us in other parts of the country that are often offering things that we'd like to offer, but we just, we don't have the money to do it. We're volunteers, we're not government, we're vol...we're a little charity... yeah, just keep what we're doing, keep adding on, making the public realise that this is a serious subject (Anna, service provider).

Although no service providers in this study spoke about challenges that have largely hindered their development, as with other services, for example, in the context of criminalisation and community support for the disbandment of particular types of service provision (see Pitcher, 2006), service providers did reflect on the more general challenges in providing

services for sex workers. These include being able to access and continue engagement with sex workers in order to provide the level and type of support required by different sex workers, and in the case of several service providers, issues related to funding. In relation to the latter, there was some indication that service providers opposed limits on funding or the relationship between funding and type of service offered, seeing this as being at odds with what they deemed the most appropriate type of service, or what they would like to personally offer service users, particularly where service providers had experience of working on a one-to-one basis with sex workers. It is important therefore to note that current constraints on service delivery cannot be considered reflective of the personal views of service providers and that underpinning their professional responses to supporting their service users are a multitude of views and emotions, for example, frustration and disappointment.

**‘I wouldn’t approach the police’ (Amy, sex worker): Statutory vs. voluntary service provision**

Some similarities were found amongst sex workers in terms of the likelihood of approaching an organisation for support. Of the sex workers interviewed, there was a mix in terms of the agencies or other sources of support, that participants would be most likely to approach. Several sex workers indicated that they would be unlikely to approach police or other statutory or formal organisations. Support would instead be sought from a range of other sources, including other sex workers, sex worker organisations, close friends, or support workers. Tara (sex worker) remarked that ‘if something really bad would happen I would rather talk to someone I know than to some other person from an organisation’. Steve’s (sex worker) discussions indicates some of the reasons why sex workers may be dissuaded from accessing particular support sources; in this case, because of perceived judgement and lack of support from the police:

Probably the first thing I would do is call others, a friend that’s also a sex worker, em...and then together talk with them about whether to go to the police or not. I wouldn’t automatically go to the police, I’d need to think about it, I think (Steve, sex worker).

Interviewer: Why would that be?

Em...I suppose just a perception, just like, well, perception of the police might not take it seriously and also, a perception that um, it might be quite a humiliating process to go through to deal with them about it to disclose that you're a sex worker, and you know, I've heard reports from other people that describe feeling kind of judged...by the police and not particularly like kind of supported so, if there was like a kind of sex work liaison person or something like that, that would make it, make a big difference because then there's somebody you can...you know, I think the thing with the police is you, you go in and report something, you phone up or you go into the police station, no idea who you're going to be talking to, it could be somebody who's very supportive and understanding but it could be somebody not so there's always that, its like that uncertainty over how you're going to be received (Steve, sex worker).

To some degree, service providers too recognised the difficulties associated with accessing formal, statutory services as highlighted by Lesley (service provider), during a focus group interview in which she and her colleagues spoke widely of the barriers for sex workers in accessing support. Other service providers similarly often addressed this issue as a difficulty for sex workers they were involved in supporting:

Because a lot of our women have a drug problem which is sometimes why they're out working on the streets, their fears of...if someone has a sexual attack for instance and we're saying to them would you like us to help you report it to the police and they say no, because their experience is I've been here before, I've been sexually assaulted, I went to the police and all they wanted to know was who I was buying my drugs from, so they've already had a negative experience, so for them, as Georgia was saying, they're not getting taken seriously about what they're here for now, it just makes it impossible for them to go back again (Lesley, service provider).

In some cases, there was ambiguity surrounding sex workers' perspectives, related to potentially approaching and receiving support from services. For instance, some sex workers said that they would be willing to engage with some services, particularly voluntary services that could have some crossover with, or work in conjunction with, statutory services. Sex workers were less inclined, however, towards engaging with the police or more formal organisations. They highlighted that they would find this process

difficult, but with little explanation as to why this would be the case. Where it subsequently emerged that a sex worker had a support worker, they then indicated that they would consider approaching other sources of support, for example the police. In another case, a sex worker, Lauren noted a previously positive experience of engaging with the police in obtaining advice for threatening behaviour at work, but indicated elsewhere, in reference to raids on saunas, that she associated risks and a lack of safety and protection (from prosecution) with the police. This indicates that in different contexts sex workers will consider accessing the services that they see as appropriate. In the case of sex workers who will consider contact with statutory services via a voluntary support service, meanwhile, it is shown that some degree of trust has to be established and developed in one support service context before formally accessing and engaging with another service.

Where sex workers were reluctant to approach the police or other statutory organisations, this was, in some cases, as before, linked to expected treatment by the organisation in question. In other cases, it appeared that sex workers had concerns relating to the possibility of criminalisation (not all sex workers interviewed appeared to have an understanding of laws and policies surrounding the sex industry, and thus, had little, if any commentary relating to the impact of criminalisation on them). This was linked to an expectation that in disclosing an experience of violence, their involvement in sex work, and potentially illegal activities, is exposed:

Interviewer: Do you feel that current laws and policies surrounding the sex industry protect you in your work?

No, no and no again. The law here criminalises prostitution and they force you to work on your own. The only protection we have is to work together and look after each other. But here if you get caught they press charges on you for brothel keeping. This makes absolutely no sense to me (Tara, sex worker).

Additionally, in the case of one male sex worker interviewed, a reluctance to access the police and other statutory organisations was based on

apprehension and fears over the potential threat of homophobia and discrimination:

I don't know how trained they are about like equality issues, whether there is like homophobia, and...I really don't want to be sitting in a police station with like homophobic police officers who like won't understand anything, you know (Ryan, sex worker).

In other cases, sex workers expressed that they would be reluctant to access support from non-statutory organisations, for reasons other than, or in addition to criminalisation. This largely related to a particular position on sex work advocated by some service providers, as previously discussed, notably, a view that defines and understands sex work as a form of commercial, sexual exploitation, which victimises individuals. As suggested by several participants' discussions, some sex workers perceive this in negative terms. It can be viewed as insulting, and contrary to their perceptions and experiences, taking little or no consideration of their choice to be involved in sex work, as Steve (sex worker) discussed:

It imposes that ideology onto a person's experiences even if their experiences are totally contradictory to that ideology you know, yet if you try and argue that sex work is intrinsically violent...basically what you're doing is you treat sex workers' consent as meaningless, you know... There's a real difference between like intentional acts of violence and harm and consensual sex work, in my view anyway, yeah (Steve, sex worker).

Further, as Claire (sex worker) expressed, in engaging with some service providers, sex workers are encouraged to discuss the possibility of exiting the sex industry, in line with the service's particular policy approach: 'it's like exit, exit, exit, let's talk about your exit strategy... they are very much in line of the zero tolerance policy.'

This and other participants' views suggested, however, that this does not always fit with the interests of sex workers who may not be in a position to, or want to, stop working. Discussing exiting options, or motives for sex

working may also be unexpected, or contrary to why sex workers are approaching the organisation, as one participant points out:

I don't want to have to deal with someone who might you know try to explain to me how I should exit you know from the sex industry, and how what I do is like damaging to myself... he [service worker] was really trying to find like the reason why you know...but I was like I'm not here to talk about it, I'm here to get like practical support... I was like, you guys are paid to like you know support us when, you know, not trying to find the reason why we're doing sex work (Ryan, sex worker).

In these situations, sex workers expressed anger at being routinely guided towards discussing certain topics. These related to the nature of their work, whether safe sex practices are adopted, whether they have considered exiting sex work, that to them, signified an association of their work with violence and harm. This often resulted in discussions being focused on the harms of sex workers' work, rather than supporting them for issues that may or may not be directly related to their involvement in sex work. For this reason, as discussed elsewhere, several sex workers reported a reluctance to make contact with various organisations (statutory and non-statutory). This was based on the view that accessing support services could entail unnecessary discussion of matters of little relevance, or that is inappropriate for them, for example, exiting sex work, and thus may not adequately meet their needs and interests. This can contribute to the symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992) used against sex workers where they are harmed not by physical violence encountered in sex work, but through processes such as those named, relating to misguided or inappropriate service provision. Through these processes, sex workers can be subject to unseen harms, disguised by attempts of support in the form of limiting or ending involvement in sex work, even though this can be contrary to their needs and interests and applicable only to some sex workers. Jackson et al. (2013) highlight the implications of such processes, in the context of public-police engagement, finding that where police authority is not based on fairness, people are less likely to trust and be willing to co-operate with the

police. This can similarly be applied to the reluctance of some sex workers to actively engage with, and feel supported by, service providers.

In contrast to some of these insights, other participants have indicated the positive aspects of being able to access and receive support from service providers; reflective of the variations in individual experiences of interactions with different support services. Thus, while many sex workers were wary of, and reluctant to approach statutory organisations such as the police, there were some exceptions. For these sex workers, a willingness to engage with the police (or other statutory organisations) was closely linked to having had a positive past experience with them:

In the past I have found the police very supportive...when you go to report like an attack, or you know that you feel threatened, or what not, I've never come across, kind of the police not giving a damn, just because of you know what you do for a living, they...do take it very seriously which is good (Claire, sex worker).

In the case of voluntary service providers, some participants noted the immediate and longer-term benefits of engaging with a service. This largely applied where a close relationship is built and maintained with a support worker, as some sex workers reflected: 'they are here for me when I need them. Always. Just approachable' (Carrie, sex worker), 'I always say that I have no issues with anything. I get the help I need here and more' (Beth, sex worker). Where this is the case, it appears that good relations developed with a support worker or a voluntary service more generally, could facilitate and ease the process of approaching more formal organisations such as police, as some sex workers commented. This corresponds with some of the comments made by service providers. Through discussions relating to job roles and responsibilities, it emerged that many were involved in support type positions. This entailed a focus on meeting needs, in the immediate and long-term, which some participants emphasised, and related to their ability to form and maintain good relations with sex workers using their service:

I mean everybody's different and you have to go at their pace, you know, and its kind of unique to that person and their needs and whatever's going on for them... its all about whatever the client needs, you know, whatever their needs are we will try and adapt our service to compliment that (Lesley, service provider).

So our support kind of varies what we do, its what the women want, you know, whatever she presents with and that could be something like even sitting down having a toastie and building up relationships, getting them into the drop-in and building up trust with them really (Georgia, service provider).

### **Relationships outwith service provision**

Beyond the initial focus of the relationships between service providers and sex workers, findings from the data revealed a greater diversity of and complexities within relationships. As one example, sex workers on several occasions referred to their relationships with other sex workers despite the often solitary and isolating nature of sex work (Dodsworth et al. 2014, Magnanti, 2014). This was largely in the context of receiving peer support. Sex workers recounted day-to-day experiences of working that included discussing experiences of clients and practical issues, as well as support in the aftermath of a negative experience at work, such as being threatened with violence.

Peer support was also discussed as it applied to sex workers working together. Current legal restrictions in the UK, pertaining to sharing a flat for the purposes of selling sex, were central to these discussions. Sex workers stressed the negative implications of these restrictions. In being unable to share a flat, or other premises for work purposes, sex workers noted the loss of working collectively and peer support, noted in other studies as favourable compared to working alone (see Sanders, 2005b). As sex work can carry a certain degree of risk and may involve much time spent working alone, several sex workers found this particular form of support invaluable, as exemplified by Tara (sex worker) and Amy's (sex worker) comments:

I really miss working with someone else...of course for safety but also for socialising...you are forced to work in isolation except from



the customers you see. It was so nice to chat or eat with someone in-between bookings (Tara, sex worker).

Like being able to work with somebody else, that's for me, that's a huge... weight off my mind that I'm not on my own with a client, like there's somebody else there... Being able just to work, even with a few people, or work with a receptionist, none of that's allowed here, but that...these are huge things that mitigate risk for me (Amy, sex worker).

Sex workers noted that having the support of other sex workers helped in many ways. Business could be increased (Lauren, sex worker) or working alongside others could provide informal, work 'banter' and laughter (Sanders, 2004b). Tara (sex worker) noted that through sex work she had formed friendships outside work, while at work these friendships had helped make the job less mundane or alienating, and provided support from others in a similar situation for the everyday aspects of sex working. Ryan (sex worker) meanwhile adds that the support of other sex workers can assist in the case of having a violent or other negative experience at work:

It's not the only way, you can work by yourself, but it's just more dangerous... it's so like isolating, having somebody that you can talk to, you know, really makes a big difference in the job, and like spending the whole day at home like waiting for clients is quite like you know, it can be quite scary (Ryan, sex worker).

This was seen as particularly beneficial where support from family, friends or authorities was unavailable or insufficient (where, for example, practical strategies about managing risks at work could be better or more easily provided by fellow sex workers), or where sex workers faced challenges in seeking support from these sources, and thus, may fail to have their needs for practical or emotional support, met. Crucially, where there was a lack of, or compromised peer support as a result of legal restrictions, sex workers envisaged greater danger and a need for them to engage in more risk-taking behaviours by working alone or with little assistance from others. It is interesting to note however, that peer support does not always feature as or is a positive aspect of sex working. Some service providers indicated this in discussions relating to competition for business and resulting violence that

can occur between sex workers. Marie, Georgia and Rachael, all from the same service noted assaults amongst outdoor sex workers themselves and by partners of other sex workers. As with other experiences recounted by service providers, however, this was not seen to be largely applicable to the sex workers interviewed in this study, but rather reflected more the experiences of outdoor sex workers.

This reiterates earlier points that suggest that, contrary to their intentions, law and policy developments often impact negatively on sex workers. Sex workers' discussions would indicate a perceived sense of enhanced risk. This risk is not related to the job itself, but to legal impositions that instead of ensuring safety, reduce it, by removing or disrupting informal support structures amongst and for sex workers. It is these very structures, of having the support of fellow sex workers that several of the sex workers interviewed seemed to value more. Sex workers for example, associated such support with feeling safer; more protected and supported at work, than perhaps, other external, formal sources of support.

Another notable relationship was observed in the form of partnerships between organisations providing support for sex workers. All service providers spoke to some degree about relationships they had built with other organisations. This was often portrayed as a necessary aspect of being a service provider. Noting developments and an expansion in focus on the area of violence against women, service providers highlighted how they had to adapt accordingly. Where organisations may have previously had specialisms in the service they provided, this had changed to incorporate a multi-specialist, inter-agency approach. This was necessary in light of increased service user numbers and referrals, requiring support for an array of practical, physical, emotional and social issues. Scott's (service provider) comments provide some background to the various changes, in terms of expansion of clientele and development of new related services that occurred within his organisation: 'they found quickly that the girls that were coming up, also had brothers that were being abused, or boyfriends that were needing support in some way.' In addition, commitments to funders,

applicable to several service providers interviewed, meant that the scope of their work was wide-ranging or had to develop in line with new priorities and agendas. Sarah (service provider) as noted earlier, discussed the increasing influence of the issue of child protection within her work, while Kirsty (service provider) situated her work role in the wider context of violence against women and gender inequality, as it involves topics including but not confined to sex work, such as honour-based violence.

Service providers were thus familiar and spoke around the issues of communicating with, signposting and referring sex workers to other appropriate organisations, where they could not personally provide the specialist support needed, particularly those service providers that they had an existing relationship with, or were known to have a good reputation, as Amanda (service provider) noted:

I think there's some agencies that particularly myself I work with, I have lots of trust in. I know that they'll do a good job... I think for me, if I'm making a referral for a woman I want to know that I believe in that service as well...if I've had a negative experience from somewhere, I'll think, actually this woman's very vulnerable, do I want to send her to somewhere that I don't have trust in? I will refer them to any service I feel that's going to do a good job, that's going to meet her needs and it's an appropriate referral (Amanda, service provider).

There was some recognition from participants that in seeking to provide and promote best practice, positive collaborations between organisations were important:

I think of recent times probably the last couple of years or so I think there has been a bit more of a recognition from agencies that actually we need to have a more collaborative approach, you know, kind of to try and improve women's opportunities for making change... I think there has been a little bit more of a recognition more recently that actually there isn't one answer that's going to help this person...there has to be more of a joined up approach (Rachael, service provider).

Perhaps driven by the need for best practice, or due to sharing similar values and agendas (for example, in following the Scottish Government's approach to violence against women), opinion amongst service providers

generally suggested that communicating or working directly with other organisations was a positive experience as Amanda indicates:

I find it really positive...its very multi-agency, sort of like a one stop shop, very holistic approach, which is best practice, that's what we should be offering women and I think that's a really positive way, and that's women only as well, so that kind of partnership working that we do I think is just brilliant (Amanda, service provider).

Some participants noted that their work activities included the collection, dissemination and sharing of information, via several means - online and in-person at meetings, conferences and other training events - as exemplified by Shona (service provider) and Kirsty's (service provider) discussions:

Getting the information in and putting it back out again...information in, information back out, and its about then turning that information into public education, awareness raising and then looking at how we build up the skills for people how to use that information (Shona, service provider).

We do quite a number of different training courses...a foundation course, which is understanding violence against women and gender inequality... we do one on commercial sexual exploitation which really is just about kind of looking at culture and looking at kind of like what kind of messages young people and adults are getting about these things (Kirsty, service provider).

Working together in such ways can then be viewed as a way of more appropriately responding to harm associated with sex work, in terms of better understanding the needs of, and ways to develop, support for sex workers. It can also be understood as a useful means of communicating and developing a common ground or purpose with others, working in a similar field, as the Scottish Government/COSLA (2009) have understood partnership working in the context of preventing violence against women. In this sense, the work activities of service providers seemed to be designed and developed around the formation of relationships, necessary to provide best practice and the most appropriate support for sex workers.

As discussed, similar agendas may be attributable to the positive relationships noted amongst service providers. In one interview, Shona

(service provider) draws on some of these commonalities in terms of a shared need for 'best quality services' that reduce harm for individuals involved in sex work, although there may be some conflict involved in the process of seeking to provide the best services for sex workers as is later considered. This was the case, particularly where engagement with sex workers was concerned. Although it was not always evident whether service providers discussed this issue with other organisations with whom they came into contact, the engagement of service users appeared to be a common work activity and goal amongst service providers. Organisations discussed the importance of raising awareness of the service they provided, encouraging service uptake and in turn, meeting the needs of sex workers. On the other side of this, service providers discussed the challenges of encouraging sex workers to access their services, such as making and maintaining contact after following up with sex workers after the initial meeting, or after certain needs had been met (for example, obtaining condoms). It is probable then that this is an area on which service providers relate to one another and form and strengthen a relationship on the basis of. Discussing these experiences is instrumental in how service providers understand, frame and develop their own and others' experiences of working in an arguably challenging and stressful field of work, and could be understood as a form of peer support.

In building relationships with, and receiving peer support from, other organisations, location of service provision emerged as important (this added to recognised issues of partnership working). These include conflicts of interest between partner organisations owing to different views, reaching a consensus, and encouraging input from other organisations. In relation to the latter, Sarah (service provider) highlighted an issue where some service providers are dismissive of, or concerned as to how to ask whether service users are involved in sex work. This again highlights some of the barriers that service providers can face in supporting sex workers. In this case this is related to understanding the nature of sex work and knowing how best to support individuals involved in sex work, which has important implications in

terms of meeting the needs and adequately supporting different sex workers:

They [service providers] don't know what's going on underneath and people just, I think they're scared to ask more, the same with domestic abuse, you know. I do a lot of awareness raising around substance misuse and I say, you know, do you ask, well no, why not? I don't know what to do if they say yes. And again, it's the same with sex work, so I think there's a lack of understanding from a lot of services (Sarah, service provider).

Some service providers spoke about their regional position, wherein their location meant or could potentially make it significantly more difficult to be able to meet easily with other organisations, attend conferences, and keep up to date with best practice and emergent trends. These issues may be compounded by the fact that an organisation is voluntary, as these service providers discussed:

I think if services started working better and started to realise that there is an issue up here... and its not this quiet, wee place where nothing happens, and people are actually willing to accept, yeah it [sex work] happens, and do train them in how to support the women because they're going to come into the services one way or another, whether its through A&E or sexual health, if something could be done that way, if services started engaging more with other agencies and signposting the women, instead of just fobbing them off or handing them a packet of condoms or whatever (Sarah, service provider).

I think being this far north has got its issues. A lot of kind of sort of female gender sex worker kind of training tends to happen kind of sort of in the central belt if, to be fair, it actually happens in Scotland at all, as I think actually in comparison to England there's probably a lot more you know, kind of sort of that goes on in England than there does in Scotland...Its difficult for us because obviously it's a voluntary organisation, we are limited with time and money, you know, so when external training opportunities do come up it can be quite limited and possibly maybe we don't have a presence there (Rachael, service provider).

The implications of this were twofold, not only for developing positive relations with other organisations but also for providing the most appropriate support for service users. This related to integrating work, and 'signposting'

to other organisations, where one service provider could not offer the necessary level or type of support.

Having considered service providers' insights, peer support and the formation of relationships emerges as important, particularly given the various challenges involved in service providers' work. Throughout interviews, service providers noted many challenges specific to working with marginalised, or hidden populations, and the emotional impact of hearing traumatic stories and dealing with service users' cases. These included distress, unpredictability, frustration and isolation, as Georgia (service provider), as one example, recounted in discussing supporting sex workers who have reported a violent incident and experienced the criminal justice process as a result:

We felt a wee bit demoralised by the justice system cause you knew he was guilty, and that could impact on you... it demoralises you as well because you know this woman could go through this system which is really traumatic, the questioning and everything, you know, reliving that and then for it to come out at the end where she's not believed except by us, and that does impact on you, you know, it does. You feel let down in a sense as well for them, you know, you feel that they're really let down (Georgia, service provider).

This resonates in some ways with the experiences of sex workers. A variety of feelings were expressed by participants in describing some of the more mentally challenging aspects of their work. This highlights the emotional labour (defined by Hochschild, cited in Wharton, 2009 as workers' management of feelings in order to fit with employer requirements) involved in the roles of both sex worker and service provider. The reason some service providers gave for coping with these challenges was related to having others in the workplace who understood the process and with whom they could debrief (informally or through training events) with day-to-day after a particularly negative situation. With these situations, as some service providers highlighted, the use of humour with other colleagues can be a useful way of de-stressing, in the immediate and informal sense, without having to seek, or receive a formal de-briefing session for any distress

caused by a particularly difficult case. Rachael's (service provider) comments exemplify this, in the context of communicating with a service user, indicating the positive, sometimes therapeutic relations that can exist between service provider and service user. She notes the benefits in talking to another woman through her work, indicating the similarities and unity that can exist between women, despite their separate positions (hooks, 1986), in this case, as service provider and service user:

You can also kind of be having a bit of a bad day and just sitting and having a laugh with someone even though they're a client, does it really matter, its still a woman talking to a woman...I find that aspect of it quite rewarding and I think times like that and experiences like that are also what helps you deal with the less rewarding, the less nice things to hear you know (Rachael, service provider).

By comparison, as previously discussed, some sex workers shared this view of the importance of working with others, for the purposes of informally debriefing, coping with the mundane, undesirable or stressful aspects of the job, or for providing some form of safety and protection at work. Current laws, however, mean that this is not possible which has an impact on the degree to which some sex workers feel safe and protected at work.

### **Chapter summary**

This chapter has reflected on the relationships and interactions underpinning responses to harm associated with sex work, amongst sex workers and service providers, drawing on the current study's findings. Fitting with the research areas of how sex workers and service providers experience receiving and providing support respectively, it has revealed how both experience relationships and interactions in supporting violence/harm associated with sex work, and the complexities this can involve. These include building formal and informal support relationships, and the challenges and barriers that are faced in doing so.

Primarily the chapter has focused on the relationships between sex workers and service providers. This has examined the extent, nature and perceptions of past and current relationships and interactions between sex



workers and service providers. It has also considered the positive and negative aspects of sex workers and service providers' relationships with one another. Additionally, there has been some focus on the factors in service provision that impact on the ability to engage and sustain relationships with sex workers and could be improved; for example, treatment of and choices made available to sex workers. Further there was consideration of the relationships that can exist outwith service provision. These include the relationships between sex workers, and relationships between service providers, that help broaden an understanding of other available networks and means by which sex workers and service providers respond to the issue of harm associated with sex work.

The findings presented emphasise the importance of relationships and interactions in relation to harm associated with sex work, whether these exist between sex workers and service providers or not. They indicate that there are various ways in which sex workers and service providers can and do respond to the issue, highlighting the importance of contact with and support from others in dealing with an incident of actual or potential violence. Where sex workers do access service provision for support, as was demonstrated by sex workers' reference to knowledge of, and in some cases use of services, some key factors emerged as important for ensuring initial and ongoing use of a service. Notably, most sex workers expressed the need, desire for and expectation of fair, non-judgemental support and relationships with services, which respected and were tailored around their choices. In the absence of these factors, sex workers can be dissuaded from seeking and using available support, thereby, impacting on the degree to which their needs are accommodated, and the need to seek informal support elsewhere. This can exist for example, in the form of peer support through working with other sex workers, which, as indicated by some sex workers' comments, was a preferred way of both working and receiving support.

Service providers articulated their role and the nature and aims of their work in similar terms recognising, for example, the importance of sex workers'

own choices and expectations of how their needs should be met, and their treatment of and approach in dealing with sex workers in order to ensure sex workers' continued use of a service. Service providers were also mindful however of the constraints under which they worked, for example funding agendas, and that this could impede the scope and nature of the service provision they could offer to sex workers, including their ability to build and maintain relationships with sex workers. In response, some service providers expressed the need to develop further their work with other support services, in order to develop a more holistic approach to better understand, accommodate and support the needs of sex workers. In meeting these needs, service providers often conveyed experiences of supporting outdoor sex workers. As the previous chapter discussed, however, there is a growing understanding amongst some service providers as to the differences between indoor and outdoor sex work markets. This is accompanied by knowledge of increased off-street sex working and the subsequent need to engage with, form relationships with and support the needs of more indoor sex workers. Based on this, in future, it is possible that service providers will need to develop new strategies in accessing and building relationships with indoor sex workers. This should be considered where aspects of current practice are inappropriate and could be developed to engage with sex workers that have some different or similar needs to outdoor sex workers.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapters have documented the process of planning, undertaking and analysing the data from this research study. This chapter brings this together, reflecting on, and concluding the thesis. The study's purpose and aim is firstly re-examined. It considers how the aim has related to, and developed, throughout the research process. Thereafter, there is a focus on the main research findings of this study. The final section of this chapter reflects on the contribution and impact of the research. This indicates where the research is positioned and how it develops the body of existing theoretical and empirical knowledge. The study's strengths and limitations are examined and recommendations made for future research into this area of study. It is hoped this will ultimately broaden knowledge of the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work.

#### **Why study 'responses to harm associated with sex work?'**

This research has developed out of an interest in current responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland. Despite academic interest in the topic of violence and harm within or associated with sex work, this interest has rarely been expanded on to include a consideration of these responses; how violence/harm, if it occurs, is experienced and managed by sex workers, or how service providers may or may not feature in responding to violence against sex workers, and their experiences, understandings and motivations in this process. Specifically, there appeared to be scope for further research in examining how harm is actually experienced, defined and dealt with by sex workers, and the varying agencies that can be involved in providing support to sex workers, in response to an experience of harm. This involved exploring and understanding the lived experiences underpinning responses to violence against sex workers, over the presumption of violence in sex

work and limited consideration of how harm is understood and managed by sex workers and service providers.

Consideration of these factors offered new insights and directions for further research and practice. These included understanding to what extent and how sex workers experience and manage harm through sex work, how this is supported by existing service providers, any barriers or challenges facing sex workers and service providers in their responses to harm, and developing relevant service provision to include more opportunities for services to access and support sex workers.

### **Research aim**

The overall aim of this research was to examine how sex workers and service providers in Scotland respond to harm associated with sex work. This was in view of current gaps in knowledge. These gaps relate to how sex workers in Scotland experience, manage and access support for harm, in addition to the role and experiences of service providers in responding to harm associated with sex work. Further, there is limited knowledge regarding the nature and implications of these responses; in particular, what and how experiences of harm and relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers underpin and influence responses to harm associated with sex work.

### *Experiences of harm*

Existing research has indicated some of the ways in which sex workers respond to experiences of harm at work, including risk management strategies that seek to avoid or minimise particular risks that can be encountered in sex work (Bates and Berg, 2014, Sanders, 2004a, 2004b) without the need to seek formal support. This accords with the findings of the current study, which has also reported sex workers' use of safety measures and informal support networks, as a means of managing violence/harm without the input of support services, for reasons including fear of criminalisation in engaging with authorities. Beyond this, however, in the Scottish context, there is less knowledge of how sex workers respond to

their experiences of harm as it applies to seeking and receiving formal support through statutory or voluntary service providers. This reflects the literature more generally, which has notably limited or no sex worker perspectives in research, law and policy, and which is instead represented by others, thus, offering a limited understanding of the different needs and interests of sex workers (Comte, 2014; Desyllas, 2013; McCracken, 2010; Weldon, 2010). Further, as indicated by this research, it was demonstrated that an understanding of sex workers' experiences of harm could be developed by the inclusion of service providers' views. Different service providers, across statutory and voluntary sectors, have some role and experience in responding to harm associated with sex work, in line with their own areas of focus and expertise, and in integrating the approaches outlined by current legislation and policies. The integration of service providers' perspectives in this matter was also considered important as it was not possible to cover a wide range of sex workers' views; therefore this provided insight into some sex workers' experiences of encountering harm and accessing a service for support, alongside service providers' experiences of offering support.

In addressing these limitations, it was significant to examine experiences of harm, from the perspective of either encountering violence/harm as a sex worker, or providing support as a service provider. This was a broad theme related to the main research aim, designed to explore and reflect the variations and complexities of experiences within and between the two sample groups of sex workers and service providers. Factors studied included the extent of violence experienced by sex workers and any strategies taken by sex workers to risk manage and ensure their safety. From the perspective of service providers, this included an examination of service providers' experiences in supporting sex workers, and any barriers they faced in accessing and supporting sex workers.

### *Relationships and interactions*

It was important to explore the role and significance of relationships and interactions, in order to understand the experiences of participants in how they respond to harm associated with sex work, in either receiving or providing support. This entailed examining sex workers and service providers' experiences of building support relationships in and outwith the context of service provision, including relationships between sex workers and service providers and amongst sex workers. By exploring the range, nature and quality of relationships that sex workers and service providers have, a more nuanced understanding was gained of the different ways in which relationships feature in, and influence, responses to harm associated with sex work. This explored for example, how relations affect sex workers' level of engagement with services or their decisions to manage their experiences by other means, or how service providers understand, manage and act in their role of supporting sex workers. Questions based around these areas of how participants responded to, and were supported for, violence/harm through their relationships and interactions, aimed to develop existing literature beyond sex workers' individual risk management by exploring the place of, and support offered by, sex workers' relationships (with service providers and other sex workers) in managing experiences of harm.

## **Findings**

### *Overview*

Building on related primary and secondary data, this study has found that there are various individual and professional state responses to harm associated with sex work, reflected in sex work laws and policies, how sex workers manage harm themselves and through service provision. The latter has been a particular area of focus in this research, with both sex workers and service providers interviewed on their responses to harm associated with sex work by either receiving or providing support for experiences of harm. These experiences have been examined in the context of increased focus and activity around the subjects of sex work and violence, through existing sex work legislation and policy.

It has emerged that how sex workers and service providers respond to violence against sex workers depends on various factors. These include personal experiences of violence, how harm is defined as a service provider or sex worker and experiences of receiving or providing support for harms linked to involvement in sex work. Crucially there appeared to be some conflict in perspective between the sex workers and service providers in this study, relating to particular responses to sex work and its association with violence, although there were some similarities noted between participants. Conflict of opinion between participants was most apparent where there appeared to be overarching focus within sex work laws, policies and related service provision on the harms of sex work. This was seen by sex workers to limit recognition of the choices and diversity of experiences amongst sex workers, particularly where efforts were focused mostly on encouraging individuals to exit sex work or change their working locations and conditions, which in turn could risk their safety. Underpinning this finding, experiences of harm, and relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers emerged as important for understanding how responses to harm associated with sex work are framed and implemented.

The findings of this study suggested some variations in and complexities relating to sex workers' experiences of harm. Where sex workers experienced harm, this was managed in a variety of ways that could include but did not always involve the input of support services. Sex workers avoided or minimised violence and harm through their own protective strategies. Support services were also not accessed where sex workers did not define an experience as violent, did not perceive that they required support or where they had previous negative interactions with a service that dissuaded them from seeking similar support in future. Sex workers did not suggest that they did not or would not consider accessing support services for a violent incident, or did not experience violence that warranted state support, but in several cases they avoided this, because of how they perceived or experienced the responses of some services. This often related to sex workers not perceiving services to be appropriate to meeting their needs and the ideological position of an agency. Where an agency

was seen to have a moralistic view of sex work as wrong or harmful in particular, sex workers were less inclined to seek support. Further, sex workers were reluctant to engage with service provision, where they did not want to or share the approach of some agencies regarding exiting sex work. Judgemental, previous experiences with a service also accounted for sex workers' limited access and interactions with agencies.

In some cases, therefore, sex workers suggested that experiences of violence/harm were better managed themselves or using the support of other sex workers. Sex workers did not deny the potential for violence in their work. They acknowledged the risks associated with sex work for themselves, as indoor sex workers, and in other sex working contexts. This often involved taking responsibility for avoiding the risks of violence and other harms where possible. Sex workers also however emphasised risks beyond those that they potentially faced in sex work; notably, harms that can result from particular responses to sex work, manifested through law and policy responses and through the responses of some service providers (Almodovar, 2010, van der Meulen, 2010). Related to this, there was some consensus amongst sex workers that where there were not such negative responses to sex work, including the assumption of violence within sex work, sex workers could work more safely. An improved approach for sex workers would be to recognise different sex workers' experiences of sex work, including positive experiences that do not include violence, and their choices to be involved in and work safely within the sex industry.

Violence and harm was thus seen in some cases as an aspect and by-product of particular responses to sex work, where violence was both assumed to be part of sex work, in laws and policies, and in several of the approaches of support services designed to help sex workers. Sex workers however viewed this approach, largely in a negative way. In particular, they saw the process of socially constructing an ideal victim - of the vulnerable sex worker - as harmful. This construction of the ideal victim of sex work was seen to drive sex workers into riskier working practices and environments, preventing or limiting them from working together,



criminalising their clients, distancing sex workers from service provision and thus, resulting in inappropriate or lack of support where needed. In response sex workers advocated approaches that recognised their choices in wanting to be involved in sex work. They welcomed approaches that involved their consultation, and did not assume their victimisation, or push exiting options on them. Further, sex workers called for more recognition of the harm of such approaches by service providers and in law and policy, indicating that these are an aspect of or potentially contribute to further violence and harm towards sex workers.

By comparison, service providers in several cases adopted an opposing view of sex workers' experiences of harm. Often, service providers modelled this on their experiences of working more with outdoor sex workers with different experiences, including more frequent exposure to violence and exploitation, in and outwith their involvement in sex work. In contrast, insights provided by the indoor sex workers interviewed for this study predominantly related to their familiarity, knowledge and experience of indoor sex work. They thus made fewer references to, or identified with, outdoor sex work and types of harm commonly associated with this, including prior and ongoing abuse and coercion to be involved in sex work. Violence and victimisation was often linked with sex work more generally by service providers and formed a basis for some services' response to violence against sex workers, which involved facilitating sex workers in reducing or curtailing their association with sex work. This and other factors, notably commitments to funders and funding criteria, underpinned many services' responses to violence against sex workers and would imply the need to develop more inclusive criteria in service provision that recognises and accommodates the diversity in sex workers' experiences, to support all sex workers affected by violence/harm. There was however recognition in places of the differences in experiences amongst sex workers and that approaches adopted by a service may not necessarily apply, and be relevant, to the experiences of all sex workers, particularly indoor sex workers who have reduced need for support or different support needs to those of outdoor sex workers.

In accounting for different responses to harm associated with sex work, relationships and interactions between sex workers and service providers emerged as an important factor. This was related to the role relationships and interactions can play in responses to harm associated with sex work, whether and how particular relationships are built and developed as a means of responding to, and adequately supporting, harm. Sex workers, as indicated by the research for this study seek out and develop relationships with service providers as a way of managing their experiences of harm. In other cases, sex workers self-manage work-related violence and harm, and/or rely on the support of other sex workers who can offer support and guidance, having had similar experiences and knowledge of the working environment. Whether sex workers did, or did not, currently use or require a service for support, relationships and interactions were acknowledged as an important factor in determining a future response to an experience of violence and harm, in terms of the decision to access and use a particular service for support purposes. On this point, it appeared that a sex worker's decision to approach and maintain contact with a service would be dependent on particular factors; for example, good relations with service providers, which were non-judgemental and respected their choices and needs.

Service providers conveyed similar views as to the importance of taking into account sex workers' needs and choices, and building strong relationships with sex workers where possible. In view of this, it was found that service providers' responses to harm associated with sex work could be based around and developed to some extent by the relationships formed with other service providers, although service providers recognised restrictions to this; notably precarious funding and thus the scope of support available. This could provide mutual support and guidance as a means of enhancing responses to harm associated with sex work by developing the scope and quality of service provision offered to sex workers.

## **Research contribution and impact**

### *Contribution to theoretical and empirical knowledge*

The current study has been situated in, and influenced by, a wide range of competing theories and perspectives, creating a broad theoretical framework. This has had an impact in terms of the methodological approach selected and locating and understanding the research findings as they apply to wider social science knowledge. Methodologically, feminism has been applicable in shaping the methods and approach used throughout the research. The adoption of a qualitative feminist approach has enabled a fuller consideration of participants' perspectives in how they frame their experiences on their own terms, allied with my own aims for the research in promoting inclusivity of voices that have not been widely acknowledged previously and facilitating participants to direct and shape the knowledge process. It has also signified the importance of researcher reflexivity, making clear one's own values, and how this is used to articulate and prioritise participants' experiences (see Armstrong, 2012). Concurrent with a key debate in feminist approaches to commercial sex, an emergent theme of this research related to choice in experiences of sex work, specifically; whether the choice to be involved in sex work was recognised by service providers or whether sex workers felt that this choice was undermined or dismissed. Feminist ideas were thus relevant to researching responses to harm associated with sex work in this study, given their similar focus on the polarisation of views on sex work (between sex workers and service providers), divided according to the assumption of choice or lack of choice involved in sex work.

To a greater extent, this research has integrated and developed the concept of symbolic power in understanding responses to harm associated with sex work. It has applied this concept to understand how participants, particularly sex workers, define their experiences of harm, how this can differ from how others conceptualise their experiences of involvement in sex work (often deemed as socially 'problematic') and how this subsequently impacts on their responses, in terms of seeking support for violence/harm experienced

in sex work. In several cases, sex workers discussed violence as it referred to wider, non-physical forms of harm. Sex workers felt constrained, for example, by laws and policies that did not enable them to work with other sex workers or sought to criminalise clients, thus, potentially impacting on them financially or in terms of safety, and by service provider approaches that did not recognise, undermined or provide support for these harms, or denied support for sex workers who wanted to continue working. Such responses were perceived as a form of harm that could negatively impact sex workers; for example, leading to conditions which heightened rather than reduced the potential for violence and exploitation to occur. By applying the concept of symbolic power, a broader understanding is obtained of how sex workers understand and experience harm, beyond a view that unequivocally associates violence with sex work *per se*, or that presumes that particular definitions and forms of harm are experienced and understood by all sex workers. This suggests how sex workers are negatively impacted by, and perceive responses and processes, which are ironically, designed to facilitate their safety. These are often considered harmful for dismissing sex workers' views and experiences as to what conditions and environments would respect their choice to be involved in sex work, thus limiting their safety and protection in a work setting.

Within this study, there was some conflict of interests in terms of the definitions and experiences accorded to sex work, and violence/harm within sex work. Sex workers generally did not share the view of some service providers that sex work is an inherently exploitative activity that victimises the individual involved, nor did all sex workers agree or share a common view, with each other or service providers, as to what harm constitutes in the context of sex work. There were thus various meanings relating to sex work: who was involved, their backgrounds, and how they were or could be affected by violence. These meanings reflected different experiences in encountering or providing support for violence/harm, and were important to consider as they underpinned and shaped how sex workers and service providers discussed and acted in response to harm associated with sex work.

In the context of this study sex workers' experiences of sex work have been largely socially constructed as violent, exploitative and victimising. In Chapter Four, events and changes in Scottish and wider UK law and policy responses to sex work were documented - including attempts to criminalise the purchase of sex - which demonstrated the increasing focus on and construction of sex work as harmful, particularly for sex workers. Chapters Five and Six further examined the above perception of sex work, and outlined how this has informed and been reflected through service provision, based on the insights of sex workers and service providers. Sex workers' perspectives often suggested an awareness of this in how they and their involvement in sex work was negatively perceived to involve violence and abuse. This was similarly evident in the approaches of some service providers, who drew on personal experiences, as well as the influence of wider law and policy narratives of victimisation associated with sex work. This reflects increasing movements towards a victimisation narrative of sex work and sex workers, away from previous state responses which have sought to criminalise or otherwise indicate the deviancy of individuals, particularly females in choosing to be involved in sex work (Agustín, 2007; Florin, 2012; Gurd and O'Brien, 2013; Skilbrei, 2012).

The above expands on existing arguments that suggest sex work, in itself, still continues to be considered and constructed as a victimising and exploitative activity (Comte, 2014), although this may not be or is understood to be the case, for some sex workers, who have alternative perspectives and experiences of sex work and harm in or associated with sex work (see Bernstein, 1999; Jenkins, 2009; Kontula, 2008; Shdaimah and Leon, 2014; Weitzer, 2005) as with participants in the current study. Important implications follow from this in terms of service provision; in particular, how support for harm is offered, and whether sex workers seek support, particularly if they do not identify with or accept a victim status that is assigned to them. More widely, where all sex workers are positioned as victims (in law policy and service provider approaches to sex work), or by assuming that harm is experienced in particular ways and by all sex

workers, there is the possibility that not all harms facing sex workers are recognised; notably, negative responses to sex work which remove or reduce sex workers' sense of agency and ability to choose how and where to work safely. Sex workers as a result can be further stigmatised, marginalised or face increased risk of violence (Bjønness, 2012; Hallgrimsdottir et al. 2006; McClintock, 1993). This can reproduce a view of sex work as a 'social problem', and, contrary to existing victimisation narratives of sex workers, serve to instil social control over and punish women who transgress social norms in being involved in sex work (Mathieu, 2012, Skilbrei, 2012,). Based on this, the current study adds to the body of existing theoretical and empirical knowledge by emphasising the need to problematize and deconstruct dominant assumptions of sex work and sex workers in order to expand an understanding of what underpins and influences responses to harm associated with sex work.

### **Strengths and limitations**

This study has developed an understanding of the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work in Scotland. It does so by developing existing research, which although focused on violence/harm, within, or linked to sex work, has rarely tended to consider associated responses to harm; how harm is experienced and managed, amongst various individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. Further, this study builds on and indicates the significance of sex work policy. Analysis of the Scottish and UK policy landscape, in addition to the interview findings, has demonstrated how responses to sex work and harm associated with sex work in Scotland have changed. In particular, there have been moves towards the regulation of sex workers in the context of criminalising the purchase of sex. There has also been a growing focus on the harms of sex work for those involved. This is evident in some policy-making and funded service delivery, which follows a 'violence against women' approach and emphasises the need to protect individuals from the purported harms of sex work, through encouraging their exit from sex work.

There are limitations to the current study, however, that could be overcome for future research purposes. Access was a problematic aspect of this research, limiting the number, range of and way participants could be interviewed. As a result fewer participants were involved in the research than anticipated, in terms of sex workers and service providers, and their availability to be interviewed in-person. This made it difficult to generalise the research findings, or suggest that the research is widely representative of other sex workers and service providers. In the former case, in particular, it would have been advantageous to interview more participants, given the lack of representation of sex workers' perspectives in research. In addition, the sample of sex workers interviewed tended to represent the views of predominantly indoor and female sex workers, who were often more politically aware of the impact of responses to and debates surrounding sex work. They also appeared to report some different needs compared to outdoor sex workers, suggesting the need for a more inclusive sample population which includes sex workers with varying experiences and perspectives on violence or other issues encountered in sex work, and in seeking support for harm. From a service provider perspective, it would have been beneficial to interview more agencies with experience of working with a wide range of sex workers, including indoor, male and transgender sex workers, sex workers from different socio-economic backgrounds, or who differed in their responses to harm. This could have enabled an understanding of how sex workers with varied experiences can respond to harm differently, have needs outwith support for violence, or how different service provision approaches work to encourage or dissuade access to, and uptake of, services. Potentially, this could be used to shape the direction of service provision, in order to support more sex workers affected by violence, and in meeting any other needs they have.

*Participatory Action Research (PAR)* presents one way of overcoming the previously discussed challenge of access. In using this approach in working with female sex workers, O'Neill (2001) defined PAR as being 'about working with women and which [has] empowering consequences for all those concerned' (Ibid: 49). PAR research moves from being research 'on',

or that claims to represent participants, to research which involves working together and speaking with participants; uncovering and prioritising the wide range of experiences that can exist amongst sex workers (E. Jeffreys, 2009; O'Neill, 2001; O'Neill, 2010; O'Neill and Campbell, 2006; van der Meulen, 2011). Applied to this research, it could have involved the increased input and focus on sex workers; perhaps using more creative and innovative research practices in how the research was planned, designed and implemented. This could have potentially minimised the problems of accessing and engaging with sex workers.

### **Recommendations**

The current study has highlighted the importance in understanding the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work particularly as different factors, including experiences of violence, involved in these responses can have an impact on the extent to which sex workers access and receive support, and to which service providers are able to provide support to sex workers. Taking account of these and other relevant factors can contribute to the development of current and future policies and support service provision for sex workers. Agencies, as a minimum, could provide and develop the safety of sex workers, based on ensuring non-judgemental contact and building relationships with sex workers. This could be supported by Scottish Government policy, through removing or reducing barriers that limit sex workers in being able to work safely for example, restrictions on the number of sex workers that can work together from a flat. This can enable an understanding of how particular factors, notably the treatment and approach taken in supporting sex workers, attitudes towards sex work and recognition of the differences in experience amongst sex workers, can encourage, rather than prevent, sex workers' access to and engagement with services. Future research could also extend an examination of responses to harm associated with sex work amongst a wider range of sex workers who may have experiences and perspectives similar to the participants interviewed for this study, potentially in different locations, as a comparative study, or using alternative methods and approaches as highlighted.



Researching the topic of responses to harm associated with sex work has been an extremely challenging yet insightful and rewarding process. While there have been difficulties in accessing participants, and in researching a sensitive topic area, there have also been valuable learning opportunities. Interactions with sex workers and service providers have extended my interest in and understanding of harm as it applies to sex work and how this culminates in different, often complex, ways of responding to harm associated with sex work that involve a range of conflicting views on the potential harms of sex work and how it may be regulated. Having obtained insight into the various social actors and meanings involved in responses to harm associated with sex work, I believe there is scope for developing this area. In particular other perspectives and experiences which feature in and influence responses to harm could be developed in order to further understand and adapt responses to harm associated with sex work.

Based on the findings of this study, I argue that there is a dominant discourse surrounding sex work; notably one in which sex work is constructed as and assumed to constitute or involve violence, as defined by sex work laws and policies and emphasised through some types of service provision. Through dominant social constructions and understandings of sex work, sex workers are regularly positioned as victims of their involvement in selling sex. Some opportunities exist for sex workers to resist these views; for example, in self-managing their work and interacting with other sex workers as identified by themselves and by service providers. Sex workers, however, can find that service provision, as with sex work laws and policies, often operates and imposes a dominant, moralistic discourse of sex work that is insensitive to, or dismisses, their experiences. This can be considered a form of symbolic power, whereby the voices of sex workers are often unheard or under-represented compared to support services, thus silencing their experiences of sex work and harm. Further, the contentious nature of sex work is apparent in the context of violence and harm, as demonstrated by the different meanings and definitions sex workers and service providers applied to their experiences of harm within or associated

with sex work, and how they responded to these experiences as a result. Despite the variations in participants' views and experiences of sex work, there was commonality in how sex work and violence/harm were understood. Specifically, there appeared to be a shared view that sex work is still negatively constructed, or understood to be associated with violence, risk and victimhood, in turn, sustaining the social stigma of sex workers as McClintock (1993) asserts:

Whore stigma and the constructed ignorance that enshrouds the public's understandings of sex work foster the misconception that prostitution involves no more than a woman selling her body to a man, for a certain period, to wantonly do with as he pleases (McClintock, 1993: 2).

This influences, and has been reflected in, responses to harm associated with sex work in this study, affecting whether and how sex workers seek support and how service providers provide support for harms linked to sex work. By moving beyond this analysis of sex work, however, and taking into account alternative views and experiences of sex work that do not correspond to a narrative of violence and victimisation, there is scope for transformation. This includes recognition of the varying needs and experiences of different sex workers, and amendment to, or change in, how support is provided for sex workers, with a wider view to prioritising and protecting the safety, choices and rights of all sex workers. It is within this context that the current study is situated and hopes to offer some contribution now and in future research and policy. It does so with the intent to enhance an understanding of the nature of responses to harm associated with sex work, such that more sex workers are adequately supported in relation to violence or other issues, in ways that are appropriate to and respect their needs, choices and experiences.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Research consent form

Appendix B: Interview schedule

Appendix C: Participant information sheet

## **Appendix A**

### **Research consent form**

In signing this consent form, you agree that you are aware of and understand the purpose and uses of this research, and provide your consent to participate.

#### **For your information**

- The research is voluntary in nature, and you have the right to withdraw at any point from the research process
- Please read and ask any questions related to the information sheet provided, before signing this consent form, to ensure that you understand your role in the research
- Interviews will be tape-recorded, dependent on your consent
- All data that is recorded will be stored securely by the researcher
- The researcher is solely responsible for the analysis of the data
- The researcher will primarily assume a research/interviewer role, not a counselling role
- Data Protection regulations will apply - you are thus, able to access any information about yourself held by the researcher, if required
- All information obtained will be used only for academic research purposes
- All reasonable measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants throughout the research process, and within the final research output
- Your name, and any other personal details will not be disclosed during the research process, unless information is revealed to the researcher, that relates to the harm of yourself, or another person
- Extracts of the interviews may be used within the final research output; as above, no details revealing your identity, or other personal information will be revealed



I agree to be interviewed (Please indicate your choice)

Yes

No

I also consent to the interview being tape-recorded (Please indicate your choice)

Yes

No

I have been provided with the opportunity to ask any questions relating to the research (Please indicate your choice)

Yes

No

I have read and understood the information sheet provided (Please indicate your choice)

Yes

No

Name: .....

Signed: .....

Date:

.....

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview schedule**

The following represents some of the questions asked during interviews with sex workers and service providers. These questions do not reflect all questions asked during interviews however, as there were frequently opportunities to discuss new areas of interest to the research or probe more on particular areas, based on participants' answers.

#### **Sex workers**

What safety issues, if any, have you faced in the course of your work?

Do you feel the need to take risks in your work? If so, why?

What strategies do you have for managing risk?

If you experienced violence who would you approach and why?

If you have had any previous experience/s can you tell me about that engagement with the service?

As a sex worker, what would you want, or look for in a service?

What would you particularly dislike when accessing services?

Do you feel that current laws and policies surrounding the sex industry protect you in your work?

Would you feel supported by the law if you experienced violence?

## **Service providers**

How would you define violence against sex workers? (Violence/harm as it applies to sex work)

Can you tell me more about the service users you work with?

What are your experiences of discussing risks and safety with sex workers?

What kinds of support are available for service users?

Can you tell me about your work with other agencies in supporting sex workers?

Do you see there being any particular challenges or barriers involved in providing support to sex workers affected by violence?

What are the most rewarding and difficult aspects of your work with service users?

What are your thoughts on the criminalisation of sex work in Scotland and its impact on sex workers?

## **Appendix C**

### **Participant information sheet**

#### **Researcher background**

I am Emma Smith, a PhD research student within the department of Applied Social Science at the University of Stirling. Prior to undertaking my position at the University of Stirling, I completed my sociology/social research methods training at various other institutions. I am now undertaking a research study, as part of my PhD thesis, that will explore responses, amongst sex workers and service providers in Scotland to violence associated with sex work.

#### **About the study**

My research aims to explore how sex workers and service providers in Scotland respond to violence associated with sex work. I am particularly interested in exploring the various experiences of responding to violence associated with sex work, the challenges that may be involved in this, and the possible social and political implications of current responses to violence associated with sex work.

#### **Your role**

With your permission, you will be invited to take part in an individual interview. Interviews will be held in a public location at a mutually convenient time. Where possible interviews will be tape recorded, in order to ensure a reliable, and accurate account of your experiences. Interviews are designed to be informal in nature, involving a discussion of the stated subject matter, between you as a participant, and myself as interviewer. You should be aware that the interview is voluntary in nature, and you are under no obligation to answer on any matter, should you feel uncomfortable. You also have the right to withdraw completely from the research process, should you deem it necessary.

### **Confidentiality and privacy**

Your confidentiality and privacy are of paramount importance. Your identity, and any other personal information about yourself, will be kept confidential at all times during, and after the research process. Quotations of information that you provide may be used within the final research report, but your name or any other relevant personal details will not feature in the final report. All information provided to me will be stored securely throughout the research process, on a password-protected computer. Myself, and potentially my supervisors, are the only parties who are likely to have access to the data.

It should be noted, that for the most part, any information that you provide will be kept private and confidential, and used primarily for academic purposes. Participants will be free to divulge any information that they wish within interviews, with the knowledge that any information they do disclose will adhere closely to the principles of privacy and confidentiality.

The only exception to this would be cases where there was deemed to be very serious or imminent danger to the participant and/or another person, in which case the researcher may have to involve external parties.

### **How will participant information be used**

The information that you provide will be used mainly in the production of a doctoral thesis. Other potential uses include, your information being used as a basis for conference presentations, journal articles, teaching materials, and future, related research surrounding the subjects of sex work and violence.

The information that you provide, aside from the uses listed above, has many potential benefits, including contributing towards social and political change. In participating in the research, participants can help ensure that the voices and needs of sex workers are heard more widely. This can contribute towards a greater understanding of the experiences of sex workers amongst the public; improve the scope and quality of service

provision offered by service providers working with sex workers, and influence policy-making on the issue of violence associated with sex work. This suggests that there is much potential for positive change, including, a reduction in stigma and discrimination towards sex workers, and in the social conditions which help to ensure the continuity of violence against sex workers. Crucially, in better understanding the conditions and challenges faced by sex workers, as informed by the perspectives of sex workers themselves, there may be opportunities to eliminate, or reduce the extent of harms experienced by sex workers.

### **How you can participate**

If you are interested in participating in the research, or have any questions/concerns relating to the research, please contact me using the contact details listed below. I will then contact you to arrange a convenient interview date and time.

I would like to thank you for your interest in this research study.

Miss Emma Smith  
PhD student (Sociology and Social Policy)  
Department of Applied Social Science  
Colin Bell building  
University of Stirling  
Stirling  
FK9 4LA  
E-mail: [emma.smith@stir.ac.uk](mailto:emma.smith@stir.ac.uk)

In the case that you wish to discuss the research with someone other than myself, please contact my supervisors, for whom, contact details are provided below.

Supervisors: Dr. Ian McIntosh, and Dr. Niall Hamilton-Smith, address as above

E-mail: [ian.mcintosh@stir.ac.uk](mailto:ian.mcintosh@stir.ac.uk) or [niall.hamilton-smith@stir.ac.uk](mailto:niall.hamilton-smith@stir.ac.uk)