

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Prostitution](#), HC 255

Wednesday 30 October 2019

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Sarah Champion; Angela Crawley.

Questions 1–80

Witnesses

[I](#): Kate Garbers, Director, Unseen, Professor Teela Sanders, Professor of Criminology, University of Leicester, and Lynette Woodrow, Lead on Modern Slavery and Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor, Crown Prosecution Service.

[II](#): Professor Marianne Hester OBE, Chair in Gender, Violence and International Policy, University of Bristol (via video link).

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Kate Garbers, Professor Teela Sanders, and Lynette Woodrow.

Chair: Can I welcome our witnesses, everyone in the Public Gallery and people watching online to this evidence session. This is the first session of our inquiry into prostitution and, unfortunately for this Committee, it will be the last session because when Parliament is dissolved, the Committee's work falls. We were very eager to hear from you—the academics and experts in this area—as a precursor, I hope, to future work that a successor Committee might undertake in this area, and for you to share with us all your knowledge about the prevalence of prostitution and its impact. Before I ask you to introduce yourself as witnesses, Sarah and I would like to declare our interests.

Sarah Champion: I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on prostitution and the global sex trade.

Chair: And I was one of three people commissioned by the former Prime Minister to do a review of the Modern Slavery Act, which reported earlier this year. Before we begin our questions, would you just say your name and organisation you come from?

Lynette Woodrow: Good morning, I am Lynette Woodrow. I am a deputy chief Crown prosecutor from the Crown Prosecution Service and I am based in London.

Professor Sanders: Good morning, my name is Professor Teela Sanders. I am a professor of criminology at the University of Leicester.

Kate Garbers: Good morning, my name is Kate Garbers. I am a director at the anti-slavery organisation Unseen. I am not an expert in prostitution, but am here to offer the modern slavery and human trafficking perspective.

Chair: That's great. Tonia will start our questioning.

Q1 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** What do we know about the people who are selling sex?

Professor Sanders: I have been working as a researcher in this area for 20 years. There have been considerable changes over the past 20 years. We can characterise the sex industry by direct and indirect markets, with indirect relating to webcamming and lots of new markets, whereas direct is more obvious. In terms of how the markets look at the moment, the majority are made up of people who work online as independent escorts—probably around 60% of the market. Far fewer are on the streets, with 10% or 20%, very much geographically dependent; some cities have none, some have much more. Around 30% is brothels—indoor markets.



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It is important to flag up issues around mobility, with people moving around towns and cities to work in the sex industry, and fluidity, which is people moving in and out of the sex industry, often having mainstream jobs or other jobs in the gig economy or formal economy, so having other ways of getting money, as well as working in the sex industry. We see lots of, if you like, precarious labour in that sense, with sex work coming into that.

It is really important to flag up the digitally facilitated nature of the sex industry these days, which is growing exponentially. I have just finished a large, three-year project called “Beyond the Gaze”, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, which was just on online sex work, so lots of information is coming out about that.

Q2 Chair: When you say it is growing exponentially, do you mean a growth in the trade, or that the involvement of the digital sector is growing?

Professor Sanders: Both. We see new markets developing all the time related to digital technologies. People can now work on their phones, can work instantly and can send phone messages and SMS. It is indirect, essentially. However—we do not have numbers about this, because it is very difficult to count—I think because it is so easy to set up profiles and so on, more people see this as a way of earning money irregularly. They set up profiles and may work one month but not another—student sex work, for example, which we know is increasing. Both the markets and the numbers of people becoming involved in this quick-cash economy are increasing.

The other point to highlight is migrant sex work. I estimate that nearly 50% of sex workers in the UK are now migrants. In the last couple, three or five years, we have seen migrant sex workers on the street for the first time, which is definitely a new phenomenon in the UK. That is certainly happening much more in London. Lots of lots sex workers indoors are also migrant sex workers.

Q3 Sarah Champion: On that 50% of migrant workers, is that 50:50 in both the direct and indirect markets, or is it disproportionate on one side or the other?

Professor Sanders: Probably across all markets. The other thing to point out, in terms of equalities, is that there is an over-representation of people of LGBTQ and non-binary identities involved in the sex industry. If we are talking about inequalities and experiences of discrimination, we know that those identities already experience discrimination, including in sex work and the stigma related to that. LGBTQ and people with multi-identities—intersectionality—are quite marginalised groups if we are thinking about who experiences worse discrimination and prejudice.

Q4 Tonia Antoniazzi: What do we know about those who are buying sex?

Professor Sanders: As part of the “Beyond the Gaze” project, we did the largest survey of customers in the UK, with more than 1,300 people responding. We know that people generally only buy sex a couple of times



a year. They are mostly middle-aged—40-plus or going that way. The majority of people do not buy sex prolifically. There is a new trend of older cohorts of men buying sex for the first time from the age of 60-plus; older men engaging for the first time in paid sex. That is very interesting, from a public health point of view.

Q5 **Sarah Champion:** Direct sex?

Professor Sanders: Yes. The survey found that that group are buying sex much more frequently—several times a month—and integrating it into their lifestyles more so. In terms of markets, we tend to find that people who go to the street are experimenters and may just be doing it for the first time; they do not do it often. If people are developing habits or integrating it more into their lifestyle, it is indoors, essentially, with escorts.

Q6 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** To Kate and Lynette, what do we know about the sex trade?

Kate Garbers: In terms of selling sex, there is a distinction to be made about someone who is trafficked—ie forced into the sale of sex—who may not reap any financial benefits from that. If I can refer to the National Crime Agency statistics and look at those who have been sexually exploited and identified by the UK authorities, the caveat is that this is a statistical piece that does not account for people who do not want to come forward and who do not want assistance. I will give you the numbers, but please use them with caution.

Last year in the UK, there were nearly 7,000 potential victims of modern slavery and trafficking identified. Of that number, just over 2,000 requested assistance and help, and went into the Government-run adult care contract. The main type of slavery and trafficking last year was forced labour, not sexual exploitation. The number of people that exploited for the purpose of sexual exploitation was 1,200; they were predominantly women, but there were about 100 men within that figure.

It is also important to point out that 28% of those who reported exploitation—whether that was forced labour, criminal exploitation, domestic servitude or sexual exploitation—were exploited overseas. The Modern Slavery Act allows us to care and support them in a UK context, but the exploitation occurred overseas. That isn't purely sexual exploitation. For me, there is a wider gamut in terms of what modern slavery covers; sexual exploitation is part of that but could potentially be different in some cases to the prostitution that is being discussed.

Q7 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Do you think there is enough information about who is selling sex to allow robust policy recommendations to be made?

Professor Sanders: Who is selling sex—probably no. My studies have been the only ones in recent times around who is selling sex. We have information from the national survey of sexual attitudes and lifestyles from 2014, which is more about STIs and health. They only asked, "Have you ever paid for sex in your lifetime?" which doesn't give us a detailed enough picture around patterns, trends, and who, how and why. There is



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definitely not enough information on sellers. We found more diversity around sellers—men buying sex from men, a small customer base who were female and trans—in the study that I did, but there has been very little since then.

Q8 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** What else needs to be done?

Professor Sanders: In terms of finding out who are sellers?

Tonia Antoniazzi: What are the gaps and problems?

Professor Sanders: There is very little research being commissioned in relation to the sex industry at all in the UK. We have a paucity of information.

Q9 **Chair:** Is that different from other countries?

Professor Sanders: Yes. I think there is an issue around research funding that is specific to this country. Other countries have much more availability of research funds, particularly around sexuality and that kind of work.

Q10 **Chair:** Why?

Professor Sanders: I think the UK research fund is a different topic. UK research funding, particularly around social sciences, is really tough. I can only think of one current study of a decent size in the whole of the UK—not small scale, like a PhD—that is being done at the moment.

Q11 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Do you have anything to add to that, Kate or Lynette?

Lynette Woodrow: No, nothing from me. My expertise relates to the legal framework and how it operates in practice.

Q12 **Sarah Champion:** Can we look at the direct selling of sex? Are there specific harms that you recognise with that that you could expand on? Teela, could I start with you?

Professor Sanders: A lot of my work has been around crimes, violence and safety. When we think about sex workers in relation to their crimes it is important to see that there have been trends and changes. I did some work on the homicide database for sex workers. Over a 20-year period we established, as we had assumed, that it was general street sex workers who were going to be most at harm. We have seen that up until the last three years, when that trend changed. It is now indoor migrant sex workers who are most of risk of homicide. When we look at the markets that is obviously because most sex work has moved indoors anyway, so it follows that the migrant sex worker is possibly more vulnerable. They are working on their own, they are not attached to support projects and people don't know about them. There is something there to think about.

When we looked over that 20-year period, only three murders were in brothels, so there is something there to look at in terms of which environments are safer. That is an age-old fact, established in the



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literature, that environment makes a big difference in terms of safeties and crimes.

For the “Beyond the Gaze” study, over 650 sex workers working online replied. We found some interesting facts about crimes. Although the majority of people had experienced a crime, we were surprised to find that only a quarter had experienced sexual or physical crime, or robbery in the last five years. There had been a change to more digitally facilitated crimes—nearly 70% said that they had experienced harassment and stalking, with unwanted contact online through social media.

Q13 Sarah Champion: Is that people they met through selling sex who then start stalking them online?

Professor Sanders: Yes, the communication is all online—that is how they meet their customers—and, whether people become a customer or not, there can be harassment. Their experiences of crime are of a different nature.

Q14 Sarah Champion: Sorry, it is election fever. Are you saying that this happens to people who are selling indirect sex—

Professor Sanders: No.

Sarah Champion: So people who have met their customers online. Got it—they are advertising online and that is how they meet them.

Professor Sanders: Exactly. Harassment, stalking and persistent unwanted contact were highly reported, but generally never to the police. The issues around the under-reporting of crime are really significant and high, and then we think about migrant sex workers who experience this—they would rarely get in contact with anyone about reporting crimes.

Q15 Sarah Champion: I was very interested in what you were saying about the shift in homicide: migrant women and the women more likely to be at risk would be working on their own generally.

Professor Sanders: Generally, yes. As we know—Lynette will be able to speak to this—the brothel-keeping laws put people in fear of working together. Ultimately, even if they are working collectively for safety, the brothel-keeping laws have been used.

Q16 Sarah Champion: Did you drill down? Do we know whether those deaths were caused by the customers, or an associate?

Professor Sanders: When we did the database, we facilitated for occupational homicide—so it was not domestic partners. Essentially, it was people who were killed in their work, that is by customers. We ruled domestic partners out of the database.

Q17 Sarah Champion: That is interesting. Kate, do you have anything to add from the people you know?

Kate Garbers: When you look at the numbers in the NRM, the people who have been identified as sexually exploited come from foreign countries.



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The top five countries are Albania, China, Vietnam, Romania and Nigeria. If you add children into the numbers, the UK also pops into the top five, again echoing the migrant piece—when we look at prostitution, that potentially overlaps with human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. There again, that overlaps with migration policy, and legislation needs to be considered.

- Q18 **Sarah Champion:** Lynette, from your perspective, are you prosecuting for crimes against people who sell sex? Because of that, are you aware of any particular crime that occurs against them?

Lynette Woodrow: What I can say with the experience of a prosecutor is that the changing trends that both Teela and Kate spoke about are evident. Looking at the increase of working digitally, there is diversification in the sex industry. That is certainly our experience as prosecutors. There are real challenges in that, with the international reach, and the complexity and volume of digital material, but there are real evidential opportunities as well.

There have been successful prosecutions using work provided from adult services websites. One recent conviction that did not have to rely on the people who were trafficked was because a raft of material was available from the flight companies—the bookings—and adult services websites, showing that one person or a handful of people were in control of different profiles, and those individuals were being moved around, so we could evidence the trafficking from this digital evidence—real opportunities for us as evidence gatherers. Our policies are keeping abreast of these changing trends.

- Q19 **Sarah Champion:** Teela, may I come back to you? You mentioned this in your introduction, but will you talk about the different experiences and inequalities about those selling sex? I was talking to a support service which said that people with disabilities can be particularly vulnerable and exploited. Are there particular groups that face inequalities when selling sex?

Professor Sanders: There are those who do not have direct access to services. We are at a time when specialist sex worker services are being culled, particularly in cities. Lots of services are going mainstream, particularly around sexual health or health-related services, and it is very difficult for sex workers to access those things.

Some of the successful support projects across the country have migrant outreach workers who generally speak Romanian or an eastern European language. They have direct access to the communities and cultures around sex work, and they are trying to bring people into services. Often, eastern European sex workers think that you have to pay for everything. You have to pay for all your services—you can't get a termination or access any kind of healthcare—so they really disengage. Those groups are not generally involved in our mainstream services.

For LGBTQ people and trans sex workers—trans workers are often involved in a stage of their journey of transition, and they use sex work to



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fund that. There are very few services for them. There are probably some in London and Manchester, but there is a general lack of services, and those groups have real trouble accessing support and health services.

Q20 Sarah Champion: Is any intersectionality at play around the inequalities that exist?

Professor Sanders: Definitely, especially if women of colour are intersecting with some of those identities. You tend to get strong outreach links that bring people in—a peer education model, if you like. That works successfully in some of the African countries, where sex work support projects use sex workers to bring other people in and build up that trust. We also see that happening in places where there are strong partnerships between the police and support projects, certainly where the hate crime model is in place.

The Merseyside model is leading there, and last year Cambridge, North Yorkshire and West Yorkshire also announced that model. It is about having a strong hate crime framework for sex workers who experience crimes, and communicating with the sex work community in the locality to say, “We will treat your crimes as crimes. We will not treat you disrespectfully.”

Q21 Chair: Is there any third-party reporting?

Professor Sanders: Yes, National Ugly Mugs runs an important scheme. It was originally funded by the Home Office, and now the police forces often fund it as well. National Ugly Mugs has a huge amount of data to express on vulnerabilities.

Q22 Sarah Champion: Kate, you said that you deal with trafficked people and those in modern slavery, but do you see any particular groups that are discriminated against in the work you do?

Kate Garbers: Unseen will predominately support a migrant population, and those who have been exploited for sex work will predominantly have been found in independent houses or brothels.

There has been some research into the fact that trafficked women have also been working on the streets, and from their perspective, the inequality is, as has been said, about access to services. If nobody knows they are here and they do not understand the language or what services are available to them, and they are being forced into the sale of non-consensual sex, they are in a sense trapped. Accessing those other services is a real problem, which creates that inequality.

Q23 Sarah Champion: We have received evidence that suggests a link between prostitution law and policy, and the impact on human trafficking in our country. Could you speak about that a little?

Kate Garbers: I can give you my current thoughts on that. You have had submissions from a lot of anti-slavery and anti-trafficking organisations, but we were not one of them. That is because we wanted to ensure that

we understood what we were going to say publicly before we said it—it is ironic that I am now sitting here.

We are very aware that there will be overlap between prostitution, slavery and trafficking sectors. We are also aware that it is potentially dangerous to over-conflate that overlap, because it might skew the figures that we are looking at. It might then skew legislation and policy and then the support that we are able to give.

Q24 Sarah Champion: In what way could you see it skewing the figures?

Kate Garbers: I might again revert to Teela on this one. My understanding is that some of the studies that have been done that try to link flows of human trafficking to prostitution have not necessary been done from the best database.

Q25 Sarah Champion: That is in other countries?

Kate Garbers: Yes, that we now may look towards to develop our own approach to this. For me, we need to ensure that the data we are using, and the other countries we are looking to, is coming from a really sound and robust base—that we are not conflating the issues, but we are also appreciating that there is overlap.

Those are some of the nuances that the trafficking sector also needs to grasp, so that we can then have a voice in this arena, should we choose to. Part of the work that we are now doing is working with UCL in the next couple of months to call the trafficking and slavery sector together to say, “This is what is going on around us. These are the decisions that the people in power are making. Do we as a sector want to have a voice in this, and what does that voice look like?”

Once we have brought that together, I would be more than willing to hand in any information we gain from that. We realise that, as a sector, it is something that we have probably stayed away from, because we appreciate the difference. But now there is an opportunity for us to come together and start some of the conversations to understand the nuances between the issues.

Q26 Chair: When might that work come to fruition?

Kate Garbers: We are hoping that we will be pulling that group together in December or January.

Q27 Chair: From that, you will then produce a document.

Kate Garbers: We hope to open the conversation and invite people who have opinions across the spectrum to understand where the sector may sit, to help the sector come to a position of understanding, as individual organisations and, ideally in a dream world, as a whole sector, to help the discussion that is going forward.

We are not sitting from a position but we are saying, if we get people in the room and talk about this, we may end up in a situation where policy and legislation change made in one arena directly affects people whom we



are currently supporting, and vice versa. We are just aware of that and want to explore some of those dynamics.

- Q28 **Sarah Champion:** Lynette, from your perspective, what are the links between prostitution, human trafficking and sexual exploitation?

Lynette Woodrow: The prosecutor's job is to select the right defendant and the right charge. You'll know that all our prosecution decisions are made in accordance with the code.

Prosecutors will always ask themselves, when looking at any case type, two questions. Is there sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction? If there is, is it in the public interest to prosecute? Their job is to make that assessment and pick the right charges that accurately reflect the full offending behaviour—ultimately, if there is a conviction and sentence, to give the court the appropriate and full sentencing powers available. That is the context.

When we are looking at certain facts and circumstances, the evidence may disclose trafficking and some more classic prostitution offences, such as controlling prostitution for gain. There can be indictments that include both of those. You have an individual who is responsible for the trafficking, which could be the movement, recruiting or receiving of an individual. It does not need to be international, but it can be.

They may also be responsible thereafter for controlling the prostitution for their own gain or someone else's gain. From that perspective, there could be a link, if that individual is responsible for that full spread of offending behaviour. From the prosecutor's perspective, that is certainly where we would see those connections.

- Q29 **Chair:** Lynette, turning to your side of this piece, what impact has there been on charging decisions and case outcomes from including prostitution within the CPS VAWG strategy?

Lynette Woodrow: The important thing about the VAWG strategy is that it groups together a number of offences that are predominantly, but not exclusively, committed by men against women; I should say that that is the predominance although it is absolutely not every case.

Prostitution is one of the offences under that header. The reason it does that is to recognise that very often it is in a context of abuse of power: there is a control dynamic and potential exploitation that may be present. We put them all together to assist prosecutors in understanding the dynamic that can be found in those offences when they are understanding the case and making their decisions. Prostitution offences are within that because it assists prosecutors to understand that. I think that is really important.

- Q30 **Chair:** Has there been any impact on charging decisions and case outcomes as a result of that change?

Lynette Woodrow: The policy in terms of the prosecutor's approach to prostitution is that we will focus on exploiters and those who abuse and



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harm prostitutes. It is clear that prostitutes should not be routinely prosecuted as offenders; we have really clear policy guidance on that.

We released some statistics in the VAWG report earlier this year about prostitution, which we can share with the Committee afterwards if that is helpful. Certainly, the context in which those decisions are made is one in which the prosecutor has to follow our publicly available policy, which recognises the abuse of power and targets offenders and exploiters.

- Q31 **Chair:** Some of the evidence we have received suggests that the laws on prostitution can make people who sell sex feel less safe—for example, the law on brothel keeping potentially catches women who work together for their own protection, as we talked about earlier, as well as the exploitative brothel owners. How effective do we feel the existing law is at recognising those sorts of nuances?

Lynette Woodrow: The first thing to recognise is that a big proportion of the prostitution offences are summary only. Brothel keeping is one of them. That means that the police retain the discretion to record or arrest or not. They retain the discretion to give and out-of-court disposal or not. They also retain the discretion to make the charging decision without coming to a prosecutor.

Once there is a charge, that is when the prosecution services will receive that case. That work has gone on by the police before coming to us. Once it comes to us, the prosecutor makes the decision in accordance with the code and the underpinning guidance that I explained. There is a set of models in the brothel-keeping guidance that assist prosecutors to focus on those who take a management approach, controlling and harming other prostitutes, rather than those who are joining together for their own safety as equal partners.

- Q32 **Chair:** You are saying, Lynette, that the flexibility of the system works well.

Lynette Woodrow: Certainly, the guidance we have allows prosecutors to make those judgments and exercise discretion, but the key thing is that it is absolutely clear that prostitutes should not be routinely prosecuted, and the targets should be on those who are exploited.

- Q33 **Chair:** Teela, do you agree?

Professor Sanders: Less so, just from what practitioners tell me—I run a national practitioner forum. Obviously, I am in touch with sex workers, and if you speak to activists they will say that is not their experience. There have been several cases where these laws have been targeted at sex workers working together without distress.

- Q34 **Chair:** Is that because of the way the police are using the laws, rather than the way Lynette's team are using them?

Professor Sanders: Yes, that is what I think the distinction is. Having helped to write the NPCC sex work policing guidance with that group of



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people, the picture of policing in this country could not be more disparagable.

Q35 **Chair:** What do you mean by that?

Professor Sanders: It is very different in every force. Sex workers move and talk, and there is a very strong online community of sex workers. Something may be happening in one force but in the neighbouring force in the next street, it may be totally different. I am currently doing a piece of work in the west midlands and it is very clear: brothels have been tolerated for 20 years, working closely in partnership with the police to have effective, well-managed establishments. In the next street, however, brothel closures and premises closures are coming down on people every other month.

Q36 **Chair:** So you are saying that inconsistency is—

Professor Sanders: It is major. Because of the issues around policing—there is not enough police capacity out there to do neighbourhood policing, and it is very much led by complaints or issues that have been brought to the police, rather than being intelligence-led. Ultimately, lots of the sex work community would say that the laws are just not applied in any sense.

Q37 **Chair:** But that is an inconsistency in the way it affects those selling sex.

Professor Sanders: Yes.

Q38 **Chair:** Kate, we know there is a variable understanding of modern-day slavery among police forces across the country. You may not be able to answer this yet—you might see this as part of the work you will do with UCL—but are you concerned that when police officers come across a brothel, they might not be aware that it is a situation of modern-day slavery? They have powers to intervene, but they might just write it off as something on the acceptable side, rather than modern-day slavery.

Kate Garbers: This is not from anything we have done, but from speaking with NHS practitioners: their concern is the other way—sometimes, under the guise of modern slavery raids or operations for welfare purposes, people who they would consider to be consensually selling sex get disrupted. I do not know if there is any research to back that up, but I think both those things could happen. Checking on the safety of sex workers could reveal men and women who have been trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Vice versa, going in to look for victims of trafficking might disrupt the other side of things.

Q39 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Have you seen any evidence of women in prostitution being exploited between forces? Anecdotally, I am aware of a situation where a young girl from Hull in prostitution was brought down to Cardiff. She had never been there before, and she didn't know where she was.

Professor Sanders: That is probably more of a trafficking question.

Q40 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Is it unusual, or is it something that you know is happening?



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Kate Garbers: From a modern slavery perspective, part of the definition of modern slavery and trafficking is about control of movement. As Lynette said earlier, there is the act, the means and the purpose—someone is harboured, recruited, transferred, and transported, not necessarily with their consent or understanding. They are then forced, coerced or deceived—it is an exploitation of power and vulnerability dynamics—for the purpose of exploitation.

In a situation like the one you described, if an individual is moved from point A to point B, not knowing where point B is, not having any control over her ability to leave that situation, and being forced into sexual activity—I would think that falls under the definition of trafficking.

Lynette Woodrow: That sounds right. It always depends on the circumstances of a particular case, and what the evidence discloses, but that movement and sexual exploitation could constitute trafficking. It could also be about controlling prostitution for gain.

Q41 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** That is what I wanted to know. Does this happen regularly? Is there evidence about it?

Professor Sanders: At a policing conference on exploitation a couple of weeks ago, it was clear that those on the front line were seeing what you have described, but this is also entangled with county lines, and with young people being moved and used for a range of broader issues. From the police perspective this is not just about one type of exploitation. The issue goes across the board and is seen through a lens of exploitation—four different goods trades, or however you want to explain it—and the focus is on that every day.

Q42 **Sarah Champion:** Could I ask you all to give a quick example? Do any of you know police forces where the modern slavery team and the prostitution team are working closely together? My experience is that they are two independent and it is luck if they are sharing the data.

Kate Garbers: I would like to challenge one assumption—that every police force has a modern slavery team. That is not standard practice. The local forces that we work with have chosen to make looking for, preventing, prosecuting and finding slavery and trafficking part of business as usual. They have trained all their officers, so they do not have a specialised team that deals with this.

Professor Sanders: North Yorkshire, Merseyside and Cambridge are the top ones, I think, which have separate but more integrated teams, or crossing of intelligence and information across the two. Those are the ones I would look to.

Q43 **Sarah Champion:** And the rest? What is your assumption?

Professor Sanders: I thought there were many more. When I have been training police, they normally come from a modern slavery team to learn something a little bit more about generic sex work and non-coercive types of sex work, but I guess the national picture changes, and will be changing all the time as they have to shrink units and merge units.



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Lynette Woodrow: Certainly, as Kate says, not every force has a specific modern slavery unit, so I would recommend asking the police about that set-up. From our perspective, all our modern slavery cases are dealt with by specialist prosecutors in specialist, complex casework units. From our perspective, on the trafficking side, they are handled by specialists.

Q44 **Sarah Champion:** Would all the forces have a specific prostitution team?

Lynette Woodrow: I don't know that, I'm afraid. That is something for the police to answer.

Professor Sanders: I don't think so.

Q45 **Chair:** Moving on a little bit, when a person selling sex is a victim of crime, how does the CPS ensure that the fact that they sell sex does not have an impact on their treatment as a victim?

Lynette Woodrow: That is a really important question. It is addressed specifically in our guidance, and we are really clear that, when anyone suffers violence, including and in particular those who are selling sex, and when there is the evidence to do so, those cases should be prosecuted. That person may be particularly vulnerable for a variety of other reasons. There are a number of factors that a prosecutor can consider throughout the prosecution process—things such as special measures, which I am sure you are all aware of, and in particular visually recorded interviews, captured at an early stage.

There are pilots in three courts around the country on section 28, which is pre-recorded cross-examination. That means, just in those three pilot courts for now, the whole input of the complainant in those cases can be dealt with and concluded at a much earlier stage in the case, so they do not need to wait until the trial. Prosecutors in those particular areas need to be alive to that. There are other measures, such as section 41, which prevents the victim's previous sexual history from being addressed or discussed in open court. There is a rigorous legal process, where the defence need to make an application if they think it is relevant to the case, and the prosecutor has the opportunity to object to that. There are a variety of ways that a prosecutor can assist and manage that process to ensure that those cases are robustly prosecuted, as they should be.

Q46 **Chair:** I am sure Teela will want to come in on this in a moment, but just before we move off your thoughts, Lynette, is there anything that the CPS can do to help to ensure that victims can feel confident in reporting? You have gone through the fact that once they have reported, there are measures available that will hopefully, in most cases if not all, mean that they are dealt with fairly and in such a way that we know justice will be done. Is there anything we can do to ensure that people feel confident in reporting in the first place?

Lynette Woodrow: There is a lot of work done by the CPS, along with the NPCC and other agencies, around building trust between the police and sex workers, ensuring that their safety is prioritised and vulnerability is reduced, to build an environment where more reports can be made. The



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CPS contributed and helped to shape some of the guidance that was published in January this year. Certainly, there are things that we can be doing and that we are doing to ensure that that trust is built and that the reports are made. Once they are referred to the CPS, we then deal with those cases sensitively and appropriately.

Q47 **Chair:** Teela, do you think that is all working in practice in the way you would want it to?

Professor Sanders: The models where the hate crime framework has come in, which rely on the Equality Act around police forces particularly exercising and demonstrating due regard to make sure that people do not experience unlawful discrimination based on their set of characteristics, do ensure that the crime is dealt with and not, essentially, other related factors. The Law Commission, as you will know, are doing a hate crime review and are looking quite seriously at sex work. I have been to several meetings about that.

There was the sex work and hate crime conference a couple of weeks ago up in Merseyside, where there is that exact really great practice between the CPS, the police, the hate crime unit and the support project there called Red Umbrella. That is a really great example of partnership work that uses the hate crime framework to ensure that there is real direct access to justice, as Lynette explained. That is a shining light, however, among not much else.

Q48 **Sarah Champion:** I have a quick question. There is a woman I know who is based in London. From a child, she has always been involved in the direct selling of sex. She has more than 200 cautions and convictions, some from when she was a child. I want to ask Lynette, is that fair and what would you do if you met that woman?

Lynette Woodrow: I do not know the particular case and the particular circumstances, but it certainly sounds like a very difficult and complex issue. What would I do if I met her? I would listen. I would find out what the situation is. Probably, the reality is that if I met her in my work, that would be either as a victim or a complainant of crime, or potentially as an offender—I do not know what the history is.

Q49 **Sarah Champion:** They are mainly for street prostitution.

Lynette Woodrow: The likelihood, then, is that those are decisions that have been taken by the police, but if they had come to court, they would have been prosecuted by the CPS. We play a part when they come to court, of course—I do not want to say that it is entirely the police. We have to consider each case in accordance with the law and in accordance with our policy and make sure that people are treated appropriately, fairly and consistently across the country. That is the key, and that is what our policy is designed to do—to ensure that when prosecutors have cases, they are dealt with consistently across the whole country.

Q50 **Chair:** Before I bring Angela in, can I ask a particular question? What is the impact of criminal records on people trying to exit prostitution?



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Lynette Woodrow: Our focus is on, as I have been saying throughout, targeting exploiters, and not on prosecuting offenders routinely but on helping them to find routes out. That is probably a question that the police are better placed to answer, in terms of some of their guidance and the work that they are doing with other support agencies and non-governmental organisations.

Professor Sanders: The HAC has recommended that those offences are repealed from people who have prostitution-related offences. It affects women much worse—low-level unskilled jobs and childcare-related jobs, which are a natural thing for somebody without skills to go into, will clearly be taken away from them. Anyone with a criminal record, these days, will clearly be at the bottom of the pile. That is a major inequality issue for women, in terms of how those offences will affect them even getting on to college courses, let alone into actual employment.

- Q51 **Angela Crawley:** I will move forward to reform of the law. Lynette, your job as a prosecutor is looking at working within the parameters of the law as it is right now. I appreciate that it is probably difficult for you to comment on what could be done, but I am thinking about Sarah's case in particular, where a woman has presented. You can say, "Well, that's the police that have charged those convictions," but that's over 200 convictions. Is that not in and of itself enough for the Crown Prosecution Service to look at and say, "That's a pattern of behaviour; that's a serial number of offences; there is obviously something more to this". Why does a woman have to go through that system, again and again and again? No one is picking that up and saying, "There is a real issue here. This is going to create some serious problems."

We have received a lot of evidence about a sex buyers law and a recommendation that decriminalisation would help to alleviate some of the barriers that women face. I appreciate you cannot entirely comment on that, but can you comment on the specifics of those two examples—a sex buyers law or decriminalisation? What would the CPS see as a barrier to allowing that to prevent some of the issues we are hearing about today?

Lynette Woodrow: At the moment, we have the offence under section 53A, which is making promises of payment for sex with a prostitute that is exploited. That is our current position. That was introduced in 2010 after the Council of Europe convention on action against trafficking in human beings.

- Q52 **Angela Crawley:** Can you provide statistics on the use of that law, its uptake and how often it is exercised by the police?

Lynette Woodrow: I can. There were six offences charged in the last three years, all of which were changed at court to the kerb-crawling offence—largely kerb crawling—because it was on-street prostitution, so that was the more appropriate offence. There hasn't been a considerable use of that law.

- Q53 **Angela Crawley:** Okay, so there is a provision, but it has not been used, or if it has been used it has then been changed at court. Obviously, it is



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not often used in that case. What is your view of a sex buyers law or decriminalisation? Can you comment on those two specifics?

Lynette Woodrow: It is a really interesting debate. With the sex buyers law there are lots of examples of different ways that it has worked. Obviously, it is a policy decision for the Government. At the moment, such laws are largely in different types of jurisdiction and things to think about include how that would translate to England and Wales. That is a consideration that needs to be taken into account.

The Northern Ireland example is probably closest in terms of jurisdiction. Other legal systems have different frameworks for hearing and gathering evidence. Looking at how it has worked in Sweden or elsewhere and seeing how that can be immediately transferred to work here would be a challenge. The Northern Ireland model is probably the closest one for us.

Q54 **Angela Crawley:** Teela, do you have a view on the sex buyers law or decriminalisation? Can you comment on those options? From your point of view, how can we use them to tackle the harms and inequality?

Professor Sanders: Ultimately the evidence supports the fact that criminalisation has detrimental effects on sex workers, including the sex buyers law. If you are looking at criminalisation of sex work, whether it is against the sale or the purchase, it has some difficult and dangerous side effects for sex workers.

On health outcomes, I was involved in a study with Professor Lucy Platt at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, who did a meta-analysis of 134 studies over a 28-year period that involved 10,000 participants. The extensive harm associated with criminalisation was very clear in relation to health outcomes. What then happens is that police interactions with sex workers change, with increased harassment, increased displacement of sex workers from relatively safer spaces, disrupting peer support networks, and so on.

As Lynette mentioned, Northern Ireland is probably our closest jurisdiction. It made it a crime to pay for sex in 2015. Just a few weeks ago, the impact report came out; you probably have had sight of that. Its headlines demonstrate that there was a higher number of online advertisements in the period from 2015—so, more people moving online—with lower numbers of street sex-working women, but an increasing demand for sexual services.

More worryingly, there was an increase in reporting of crimes to the Ugly Mugs Ireland service, which is the same as national Ugly Mugs, and a definite increase in fear of crimes among sex workers, because ultimately the spotlight is on their customers. There are studies from Vancouver in Canada, where there has been a similar type of sex buyers law since 2013. Again, both quantitative and qualitative studies demonstrate that sex workers did not experience a reduction in violence under those laws, so that evidence needs to be looked at carefully when we are thinking about this.



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- Q55 **Angela Crawley:** What, if anything, needs to change on the ground to improve the safety and the lives of those involved in selling sex? If that is a concern you have, could you make any recommendations?

Professor Sanders: As mentioned already, the hate crime framework is a very positive one, and we have some really good examples of progressive police forces that are working in partnership to make sure crimes against sex workers are addressed as hate crimes. The NPCC guidelines are very much about harm reduction and not prosecuting sex workers, as Lynette has mentioned, but it is guidance and has very little weight. Again, the disparity about who is even seeing that guidance, let alone implementing it, is pretty amazing. Much more work needs to be done on consistency of policing and protection of sex workers when they have experienced crimes.

- Q56 **Angela Crawley:** Kate, do you have anything to add to that?

Kate Garbers: I am not in a position to land on either side, and would not advocate for either side where we are now, but I have some points, if that is okay. I think it is wise to learn from others, but we do need to contextualise it for the UK. As we have heard, Northern Ireland is potentially the closest, but there are other models and other research out there. We need to acknowledge, but also focus on understanding, the interplay between prostitution and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. We need to be careful not to conflate those issues, although we appreciate the overlaps, and appreciate that modern slavery and trafficking is far wider than just sexual exploitation.

I also think, as we said earlier, that we need to appreciate the consequences—positive or negative, intended or otherwise—of a change in one area, and what that might do to the other areas that interplay with it. I was really pleased to see that this Committee is going to be taking views of people who have worked in the sector, and I encourage you to take as wide as possible a range of lived experience, from those who have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation to those who are saying, “This is our choice.” It is really important. We can sit here as professionals with different experiences of different sectors, but that lived experience piece is really important. I am not going to land on either side—I am not in a position to do that—but those are the things I would be thinking about.

- Q57 **Sarah Champion:** Two very quick questions. Teela, is there any difference between decriminalisation and full legalisation?

Professor Sanders: Decriminalisation would ultimately take any regulation under an occupational framework, so that would be treated like a job. Full legalisation would obviously have to have some licensing processes or some acknowledgement around signing up to be a sex worker.

- Q58 **Sarah Champion:** I meant more on the other side of it. For example, we were talking about the Sexual Offences Act, section 53A. Would those sorts of Acts also fall with the decriminalisation model?



Professor Sanders: Yes. There would have to be a rethink, definitely.¹

- Q59 **Sarah Champion:** Lynette, what would be the implications of Northern Ireland and potentially Scotland having different laws about sex buying to England and Wales?

Chair: I was just about to ask the same question. Can I add even more, about the international level? Organised crime is facing criminalisation in Germany, as well as changes to the law in Northern Ireland and possibly in Scotland. There have also been changes of the law in other European countries, which mean that England particularly could be seen as the soft touch for people who are part of organised crime and use people for sexual exploitation. To what extent are you looking at that? Lynette.

Lynette Woodrow: The role of the prosecution service is to implement the law as set out by the Government—

- Q60 **Chair:** You might be worried about more people being involved in this sector. You would have a view on that, wouldn't you?

Lynette Woodrow: It is not within my expertise to talk about the impact on demand; that is probably within Professor Sanders's expertise. But you talked about international reach and our co-operation, and I can certainly speak to what we are doing about that. There is a great deal of experience among prosecutors and a particular central division that is focused on a number of the international links.

We have criminal justice advisers in a variety of different countries who can facilitate that information sharing. They can also facilitate co-ordination meetings, where some prosecutors on my team meet prosecutors from other countries, with a particular focus on—having on a trafficking hat—working with source or transit countries to establish ways of disrupting organised and criminal immigration gangs. A lot of work is being done.

- Q61 **Chair:** So there are opportunities there. Teela, Kate, is this something you are concerned about? Is this something that is on your radar? Is this something we should be worried about?

Professor Sanders: In terms of organised crime related to sexual exploitation?

Chair: No: in England's being seen as having a very different approach in the law, creating a magnet effect for people who are involved in sexual exploitation.

Professor Sanders: I think this is a trafficking question.

¹ Professor Sanders made the following point of clarification by email on 30 October 2019: "It is important to highlight to the Committee that decriminalisation does not mean that laws to prosecute exploiters like section 53A will cease to exist. These laws would if still be important and are not exclusive of the decriminalised model".

Kate Garbers: I think your original question was, were we aware of it? I am not sure. You mentioned Germany and different laws and things—I do not know about that. I am not up to speed on whether those changes had an impact.

Professor Sanders: I am not aware of those changes.

Q62 **Chair:** Do you think it is something we should be looking at?

Professor Sanders: In the broader remit of organised crime, and how the UK fits within a broader international landscape of organised crime in relation to lots of different elements of crime, including human trafficking, I guess there will be a lens there. But in relation to the sex industry, I have not heard anything.

Q63 **Chair:** But particularly on Sarah's question about the change of the law in Northern Ireland or the proposed changes to the law in Scotland, do you not think that would then have an impact on England, where prostitution laws were not changing? In Scotland, I think, the proposal is to have it as a crime to purchase—and obviously we know that is the position in Northern Ireland.

Professor Sanders: Certainly in the Northern Ireland context, drawing on our survey of 1,300 men buying sex in the UK, we asked, "Would a change in law affect your behaviour?", and only 17% said it would. If you are thinking about whether laws change behaviour, we can already see that the demand for sex work, or its sale or purchase, has not gone down in Northern Ireland. People have not stopped selling sex; they are just doing it in more difficult and dangerous situations.

Q64 **Chair:** Some might argue that in Northern Ireland the new law has not been implemented very strongly, possibly because of the lack of a Government being in place at the moment. Would you have a view on that?

Professor Sanders: Possibly, but the strict liability law in the UK has not been implemented very much either, and we have had that since 2009. I am not sure. If you look at places like Sweden and other places that have those models, I am not sure about the level of implementation of those laws.

Q65 **Chair:** A final question from me. There is to be an online harms Bill—maybe, who knows: general election and all that—but potentially in the future there may be an online harms Bill. Teela, you talked about the shift to the use of online as a sales tool. Is there anything that we should consider in that Bill, whether to regulate how those pages are used, or to control in some way what is potentially a way of significantly increasing the sector without people really being aware of it?

Professor Sanders: Work has already been done through the National Crime Agency with the key players. In adult work sites, there are two main players in the UK. They are very much onboard and are working with the Home Office on gold standards of practice, being socially responsible, engaging with enforcement where issues around trafficking flag up. That



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has been in reaction to the laws brought in in the US, the SESTA-FOSTA laws, which have been very damaging. Lots of platforms were closed down, because all platforms under those laws were liable for anything related to trafficking, so all prostitution became entangled with trafficking online. That had a real detrimental effect on sex workers, often pushing them back on to the street.

From our research, we know very much that working online, even advertising online, increases safety. There are lots of ways of screening, and a digital footprint of who is trying to contact you and who your customers are. We would encourage partnership working with the adult platforms and enforcement agencies. There is quite a lot of work already being done on that with the NCA.

Chair: Fantastic, thank you so much. That was incredibly helpful input. Thank you for bringing your expertise to the session.

That ends the first session. We have a second panel joining us, so please exit stage left. One of our next panellists is joining us via Skype, so we need a couple of minutes to set that up.

Examination of witness

Witness: Professor Marianne Hester.

Chair: We are now joined via Skype by Professor Marianne Hester. We are very grateful to you for your time and for your agreement to take part in this evidence session. We understand that the research you were involved in with the Home Office has now been published.

Professor Hester: It was published this morning.

Chair: It was, indeed, so we shall feel free to refer to that in as full detail as we want to in this session. That is incredibly helpful. We are going to start our questions with Angela.

Q66 **Angela Crawley:** Marianne, thank you for spending time with us today. We understand that your research was published this morning. Could you please give us an outline of your findings?

Professor Hester: Perhaps I should say that what we have done is look very broadly at the issue of prostitution and sex work. I don't know whether you have seen the definition, which we agreed with the Home Office, that we would look at: "Prostitution and/or sex work constitutes the provision of sexual or erotic acts or sexual intimacy in exchange for payment or other benefit or need." That was the starting point.

We did a big online survey for which we had 1,180 responses, out of which nearly half were individuals who were currently or had been involved in sex work and prostitution. So we heard their voices. We have also done a systematic literature review of the international literature.

We also did a big consultation exercise. We thought it was very important for this work to get a really wide view of what was going on. Often in the past in the UK, we have looked more narrowly, for example, just at online or perhaps indoor work and so on. We wanted to see more broadly what was actually going on, in terms of the nature of prostitution and sex work now.

So, we did the work through a very extensive consultation, where we were in contact with some of the people you have just had on the panel. We were in contact with something like 90 organisations altogether, who were working with supporting or had some link with sex work and prostitution as well.

Once we had some of the findings written up, we then consulted further. We had meetings in four areas of England and Wales, where we shared the findings, again with about 55 people across those different areas, from different organisations, including the police, health, NGOs and some



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individuals involved in prostitution and sex work, so that they could feed back and we could refine the findings further.

If I could explain the background to this, we also did look at prevalence. We tried to look at what data we have and what is quality and what we can say from that data. You asked about the findings.

Q67 Angela Crawley: Yes, on that point, we heard from the first panel some of the challenges around collecting information and around the people involved in selling sex. I know, from what you have just said in terms of background, that you have done a lot of work to address some of those challenges.

Were there any other particular challenges that you faced in terms of building that data? Secondly, I know it is a big piece of work, but perhaps you could indicate to us the headlines of your report: the key points that you feel you should bring to the Committee's attention.

Professor Hester: In terms of the challenges, we were using this extensive online survey so it did rely on people being able to access an online survey. We did also send out our questions through NGOs, and some for those who had language or access issues in using online feedback and participating online.

At the same time, it meant that we were not able to reach some of the very exploited and some of the trafficked individuals either. What we have is a very broad view of what is going on, but although some of the NGOs talked about these much more exploited groups, we did not have direct voices from some of those groups.

On our headline findings, we were able to identify cross-cutting themes and things that are happening, including some of the things that you are interested in around risk and harm and managing safety. We asked about those things. I must say that the online survey was qualitative, and we were really interested all the time in in-depth information. We did not pre-set what people could tell us.

We asked what they do, what was going on, what they were up to, how payments work, how they manage safety, how they got involved and so on. We ended up identifying 14 settings and services that described some of the activities going on in England and Wales now, including bar-based sex work, brothels, erotic dance, escorts, street and outdoors, sugar arrangements, text and TV-based services and therapeutic services and webcamming.

Q68 Chair: Is there anything else on the top-line findings that you want to draw to our attention?

Professor Hester: We can talk about some of the issues around, for example, risk and harm and managing safety, which you are interested in, and also entry. One thing that really stands out from this work is around the economics and the fluidity of the work. People are getting involved because of issues around benefits or because they may be students and finding the cost of being a student very difficult. There are issues with



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people with disabilities and mental health issues, and there is intersection there with the benefit issues. It may also be because they are able to do this kind of work in a few hours or in a flexible way that fits with when they are feeling better or not.

There are people who get work to get paid when it fits. There are people who add this on to other work because, again, of the issues around other work not being necessarily enormously well paid. The influence of the economics in the UK seemed to really stand out this time in the work we have done, with the impact of austerity and the cuts, and of the cuts on support services for those involved in prostitution and sex work as well. I think those things really stand out.

Chair: That is really helpful. Thank you.

- Q69 **Sarah Champion:** Thank you very much for being here, Marianne. I have gone through your report and I share your frustration that the data was mainly gathered online, and therefore that people had access issues. I was also frustrated that the survey was in English. Was that something that you would have liked to expand, so that more people could have accessed it?

Professor Hester: That would have been really useful. We had particular constraints when doing this work. We had to do the work within 12 months—it was a huge piece of work to do in 12 months. If we were to have done it with different languages, setting it up online could have been more difficult. We tried to use our links with the NGOs to get through to people with different languages, as well.

- Q70 **Sarah Champion:** This inquiry is particularly focused on prostitution—the direct selling of sex. Of the people that you surveyed, how many were in that sector?

Professor Hester: Some 529 said they were involved in or had been involved in sex work in some way.

- Q71 **Sarah Champion:** Sorry, I was specifically asking about the direct selling of sex. How many of those 500 people were involved in that?

Professor Hester: In the direct selling—

Sarah Champion: What would legally be termed prostitution.

Professor Hester: I think all these people in some way were or had been involved in activities where payment was involved.

- Q72 **Sarah Champion:** Yes, but I am not talking about bed-web camming; I am talking about person-to-person exchange of sexual services. If you could supply that information, it would be helpful.

Professor Hester: I will send that to you later.

- Q73 **Sarah Champion:** Thank you. Are there specific harms, in your opinion, involved in selling sex?



Professor Hester: People talked about all sorts of different harms, mainly around harms from the clients, but also potentially from police, in terms of some of the policing. But in terms of the client, which is probably what you are asking about, it links very much to setting, and there were differences between women and men who were involved.

For example, the men were much more focused around sexually transmitted infections and managing social stigma, whereas the women were much more concerned about some of the other psychological or physical harms, rape and so on. They talked much more about those, as well as physical violence.

We had people talk about anything from things like the risk of emotional numbness through to coercion in relationships. We had all sorts of individuals talking about STIs and problems around being forced to have sex without condoms—especially oral sex, which seemed to be much more usual without condoms. The adult film industry: people were again emphasising not having protection and those issues around STIs.

There were problems around chemsex, especially for male workers and their clients, and how that also created a context of danger. One man said male independent escorts get high with clients, meaning they are vulnerable to robbery, rape and attack, regardless of muscle mass. Most of my clients are recovering from the chemsex scene, meaning that they are so used to sex on drugs that they are afraid that they cannot enjoy sober sex. Drugs and alcohol increase forms of assault on individuals as well.

In terms of other harms, there were issues around not having equal access to justice, potentially, because of being a migrant or being seen differently by the police, because of having been involved in sex work. Even if they are a legal migrant worried about being seen, that is problematic in terms of the law and being worried about getting help from the police because of that.

There are also individuals talking about how the combination of financial need and the regulatory environment creates what they call a “cocktail of conditions” for undermining safety. One woman who was an erotic dancer talked about how it can often become “a free-for-all race-to-the-bottom of transgressive behaviours—rules and boundaries may become flouted if dancers are in need of cash”, and “the greater the pressure to earn...which then gives customers an upper hand”. There are those sort of issues.

Q74 **Sarah Champion:** Can I push you further on that? Were there particular inequalities that you were seeing among the people who were selling sex that were influencing behaviours?

Professor Hester: Yes, in terms of perhaps being able to get away with certain things with migrant women, who ended up being more vulnerable because they felt they could not take up what was actually happening. There is more alcohol and drugs, more chemicals being used, that create greater vulnerabilities. There are different contexts.



Others have talked about how some of the online contexts can provide certain forms of safety. If you are on your own with clients, that can also create more problems. Some of them talked about the danger of being abducted and also rape and other assaults if they were actually on their own, so they found it was better to be linked with others or to work with others to manage those kinds of safety issues. We need to think about different contexts creating different forms of potentials for harm, really.

- Q75 **Sarah Champion:** Did your research show up any intersections of inequalities? I am thinking of a woman with disabilities who I found out about this week. She was saying that, because of her disabilities, people were more brutal towards her and she was expected to do things for less money. People buying sex were playing on that intersectionality. Did any of your research come up with anything on those lines?

Professor Hester: I think it did in terms of being able to, again, exploit people in a number of different circumstances. Your example fits very well with some of the things that we found. Again, what came through was the issue for migrants. When you are also a migrant, that creates a particular vulnerability. Where women are financially in much more difficult circumstances, that provides more scope for exploitation. For example, we had taxi drivers who suggested that they were being paid through sex, instead of payment.

Individuals were being exploited because of homelessness. We found in particular that people were having to use sex to get shelter. We had a lot of examples of what individuals themselves called "survival sex". That is the intersection between poverty, really difficult financial services, difficulty around benefit, and added issues around things such as migrants. Even just the financial circumstances in themselves create particularly difficult circumstances for exploitation.

- Q76 **Sarah Champion:** A final question from me. I think the report is great and very helpful—thank you—but I recognise the restrictions: for example, that you had only 12 months. Would it be helpful to get more research done? Yours was basically a typology, but do we need to look more at the prevalence of the different forms of sex trade that you found, and the harms associated with them? In particular, should we consider the psychological impact that different types of sex work might have on the individual?

Professor Hester: On the different types, we are mapping so many more of the activities where these things take place, and showing how people move between them—I didn't talk much about that. People move between different settings, partly for safety. They move from being an erotic dancer to becoming an escort. That could be because they feel they are being exploited in terms of payment, and they could gain more control over that.

We need to consider that fluidity between sectors, and it is also about negotiating harms. I think we need more research to understand more about those different settings. We tend to ignore some of those areas, but all sorts of things are taking place across those different sectors that may



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be harmful, and we need to learn more about the way that people are using them.

You asked about prevalence. There are currently no robust data in England and Wales, in the UK, on this whole issue, but it is possible to begin to create that. We linked up with the police and other services to see what kind of data they had, and we started to consider what we could do to link different data and create more robust figures. We need to do that properly with localities and link them up—we think we could get much more robust data by working by locality. We developed the templates and toolkit to begin to provide that data. We think that the Wellcome organisation standards and guidelines on data quality give us a way forward. There is the possibility of doing a lot more work in this area.

Q77 Sarah Champion: Is that something that you recommended to the Home Office?

Professor Hester: It is.

Q78 Chair: Finally, do you think there is merit in looking at the long-term impact of involvement in the sex trade on individuals? You were talking earlier about people moving in and out of the sector and its different parts. Would some sort of longitudinal analysis be an interesting piece of research to complement what you have done?

Professor Hester: That would be very useful and important. From my context of working in university, I am obviously horrified at the big number of students who seem to be getting involved in these kinds of activity.

One aspect we looked at was sugaring—we are definitely seeing students going into that, as well as into other aspects of sex work. Students are going into sugaring. They perhaps start out by thinking, “This isn’t really sex work; this is just a way of linking up with someone who will give me some food and pay me, and I will just chat with them”, and then it moves into being pushed into having sex and being exploited in other ways.

We are not clear what the impact of that will be in the longer term. We must consider the impact on people who start out in this sort of activity not thinking that it is harmful. Some of them talk about that harm in the longer term, and about how they didn’t think about it at the time. It was one of the issues that really struck them once they were getting out and once they did get out. Longitudinal work would be very important.

Q79 Chair: A very final question: you referred to the prevalence of people with migrant backgrounds being involved in the sector, and in our previous session we heard that it was estimated that around 50% of people involved in selling sex are migrants. To what extent do you think research could look at that in more detail, particularly the concern about changes in laws in other countries, where selling—or indeed buying—sex might be criminalised or decriminalised in a way that leaves England particularly out of step with some of our near neighbours? Is that something that research could help to provide any more evidence on, in



terms of the potential harms in the UK?

Professor Hester: There are obviously a lot of different aspects to what you were just asking about. In terms of the individuals who worked in a lot of the sectors we were looking at, it is much more predominantly British. There are migrants—eastern European migrants seem to be there in particular—but we were also given access to the very big online platforms and their data, and we could see that people are presenting as one nationality but are actually a different one, and that is to do with what may be selling and what may be fashionable to sell at the time. There are questions about what people are anyway in terms of nationality.

Getting at some of these issues is very difficult if you are looking at some of the individuals who are trafficked and so on. As I said, we did not have that data in our research. You have to do a completely different kind of research—you can get at it, but you have to do things in a very sensitive way to get at some of those trafficked and other migrant groups, who are much, much more vulnerable and much more exploited. To do that research means that you really need to think about the methods.

Q80 **Chair:** So, again, an additional piece of research might be looking particularly at migrant individuals, to really understand the dynamics of that in more detail?

Professor Hester: I think so.

Chair: Great. Thank you. We could literally go on all morning with a discussion around your research, because it is incredibly important, given the paucity of data in this area. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us this morning. We are really grateful.

As I explained when we opened this session today, while this is unfortunately a one-off evidence session for us, given the dissolution of Parliament next week, we are hopeful that any successor Committee will look at the evidence that we have taken this morning and understand the importance of moving forward with an inquiry in this area. Thank you very much for your time and for being with us today.