



Dear reader,

In our second year running, we had the amazing opportunity not only to explore a range of needs highlighted to us by women who sell or exchange sex, but to meet and hear from workers like you about the challenges women face and what services are doing to improve responses.

In this special edition, we bring you a roundup of the themes we looked at throughout 2023. We also share a sneak peak of what's coming up this year and an opportunity to contribute to our next CSE Aware theme.

Until next time,
Natalia
Information and Resources Officer

"The webinar with such a variety of input and women's testimonials / case studies, I found particularly powerful. This perspective is key to developing [our] services."

- feedback from frontline worker

March: SUBSTANCE USE

Substance use insights

SUBSTANCE USE INSIGHTS

A UK-based study on selling sex and drug use found that:



50% of the women interviewed became involved in selling sex after developing a drug dependency.

According to research by Swansea University:



80.6% of women increased their drug-taking when they started selling sex.

In March we challenged the incorrect assumptions that are made as to why and how women who sell or exchange sex are drawn into using substances or, conversely, why and how women who use substances start selling sex. Our insights explore the links between using substances and selling or exchanging sex and how these become cycles that can sustain each other.

[READ MORE](#)

A worker's perspective with Scottish Drugs Forum

“

Drugs increase risk for those who sell or exchange sex and make it easy to draw women in and keep them under control. Depending on the drug type, women need more money; and they need it more desperately when withdrawing from drugs. The number of women who described being taken advantage of in that distressed state was pretty high and by the people they least expected it from. This then further distorts their trust in the world and reinforces worthlessness.”

Louise Bowman, National Training and Development Officer, Scottish Drugs Forum



A worker's perspective

What vulnerabilities and risks do women face when using substances? And how are they linked with women's involvement in selling sex? To answer these questions, we sat down with the Scottish Drug Forum and

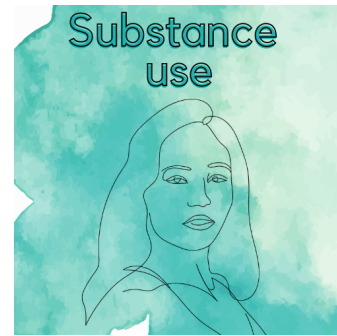
discussed what harm reduction should look like for women who sell or exchange sex who use substances.

[READ MORE](#)

Substance use webinar

On February 2023, we held a webinar with guest speakers from Scottish Drugs Forum, Alcohol and Drugs Action and Simon Community, who shared case studies and their approach to responding to women who sell or exchange sex who use substances.

[Read the event summary](#)



May: SEXUAL HEALTH

Sexual health insights

SEXUAL HEALTH INSIGHTS

They key sexual health concerns reported by women who sell or exchange include:

- Higher risk of unwanted pregnancies
- Experiencing condom removal without consent
- Managing menstruation and menopause
- Heighthened risk of STIs
- Issues with intimacy
- Barriers to access fertility and antenatal care

In May we looked at a vital yet often overlooked aspect of women's experience: their sexual wellbeing. For this topic, we acknowledged the complex strategies that women who sell or exchange sex use to protect their health and keep safe when seeing clients. We considered women's sexual health needs beyond the medical lens. And finally, we explored the unique risks and challenges women face in the 'sex industry' which can hinder their ability to manage their sexual wellbeing.

[READ MORE](#)

A worker's perspective with Simon Community Scotland

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...as support workers, we are supporting individuals with their physical health, their mental health, addiction, housing... if something is going on with their sexual health, it's just as important, because everything is connected. It's a circle where one issue can impact the others.

Harriet, Support Worker at Simon Community Scotland



A worker's perspective

In this interview, Harriet and Olivia, two housing workers, shared their approach to supporting the sexual wellbeing of women who sell or exchange sex who use their housing service. They emphasised that staff in any kind of service must help tackle the stigma surrounding women's sexual wellbeing and in turn facilitate open conversations about this aspect of women's health.

[READ MORE](#)

Sexual health webinar

On April 2023 we held a webinar exploring the sexual wellbeing of women who sell or exchange sex. Guest speakers included a researcher from SERP, Ireland's specialist service Ruhama and the consultant gynaecologist of an Edinburgh-based clinic.

[Request recording](#)

Sexual health



July: MONEY & POVERTY

Money and poverty insights

MONEY & POVERTY INSIGHTS

In Scotland, the Encompass Snapshot 2022 found that among 101 women involved in selling or exchanging sex supported by specialist services in a week:



89% of women were struggling to cover food, energy and housing



46% needed support with debt

July brought a focus to women's financial inequality and how poverty and lack of choices can be some of the key reasons women decide to start selling sex. Our insights article looks at the relationship between money and selling sex, how poverty can drive some women into the 'sex industry' and the additional financial pressures that women have reported while being involved.

[READ MORE](#)

A worker's perspective with Scottish Women's Budget group

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... becoming involved [in selling sex] can actually be about having the opportunity to earn more money, to earn it in a potentially shorter time, and to do so in hours that suit other responsibilities. Selling sex is often portrayed as something that's quite lucrative, and on the face of it, it can look like it's something you can make a lot of money out of in the short term, but there can be huge implications for women's lives in the longer term.

Heather, Lead Trainer at Scottish Women's Budget Group



A worker's perspective

In this interview, Heather Williams delved into why economic crises have a greater impact on women and how the resulting poverty can push women into selling or exchanging sex. We also discussed things frontline workers must consider when supporting women who are struggling financially and who are thinking or are already involved in selling or exchanging sex.

READ MORE

Money and poverty webinar

On July 2023, we held a webinar exploring the financial needs of women who sell or exchange sex. Guest speakers included Financially Included, and specialist services Another Way and Ruhama.

[Request recording](#)



September: CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Criminal justice insights



One of the key areas of discussion around women's experiences of selling or exchanging sex is criminal justice. In September we looked at women's dual and often contradictory engagement with the criminal justice system. On the one hand, criminalisation for prostitution-related and other offenses, and on the other, the high levels of violent crime women experience whilst involved in selling sex. Our insights articles delve into each of these experiences.

EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

CRIMINALISATION

An worker's perspective with Routes Out

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When a woman reports violence to a service, it is essential that she knows she is believed, and that the worker does not attach any blame or judgement on her. Let her know she doesn't deserve to be treated badly, reassure her, and tell her it wasn't her fault. We encourage women to contact the police and report any crimes against them. However, if she has been raped or sexually assaulted and is not ready to speak with the police, we will recommend ... to have a forensic medical examination and explain the importance of gathering evidence in case she ever decides to report the crime.”

Sally Hendry, Case Manager at Routes Out



A worker's perspective

Women have consistently highlighted they challenges the face to access their rights. In this interview, we spoke to Sally Hendry, Case Manager at Glasgow-based Routes Out, who for two decades has been supporting women involved in different aspects of the 'sex industry'. She spoke about what services can do to advocate for women's rights.

[READ MORE](#)

Criminal justice webinar

On September 2023 we held a webinar exploring the dual experience women who sell or exchange sex can have with the criminal justice system. Our guest speakers included Police Scotland, National Ugly Mugs and the Glens Project.

[Request recording](#)

Criminal
justice



November: EXITING

Exiting insights

EXITING INSIGHTS

According to researchers Baker et al (2010), some women might decide to stop selling or exchanging sex due to 'turning points', including:



eye-opening events

(e.g. punters and pimps pressuring women to engage in sex acts they are not comfortable with)



traumatic events

(e.g. experiences of violence, such as rape, attempted murder)



positive life events

(e.g. falling in love, finding work, having a child)

When women decide or need to stop selling or exchanging sex, they can continue to experience severe challenges and difficulties. Some women have said it can be harder to leave the 'sex industry' than to remain involved.

To close the year, we focused on women's reasons for wanting or needing to stop selling sex. Our insights delve into some of the barriers women can encounter along the way and why support services can be crucial as women move on from the 'sex industry'.

[READ MORE](#)

A worker's perspective with Ruhama

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I haven't personally worked with somebody who's come in and decided "guess what? I want to exit"... There isn't this big "oh, I exited the sex trade!" Even for myself, that was many years ago and up until recently I thought "maybe I should go back selling again because this isn't working out for me." It's complex. Exiting is a process. What you can do is start lighting little flames of hope and everything eventually may start to come together.

Trish O'Brien, Education and Development Officer at Ruhama



A worker's perspective

Trish O'Brien is an Education and Development Officer at Ruhama and a woman with lived experience of leaving prostitution. For this interview, Trish shared her perspectives on the need to support women to

pursue education opportunities and explore their aspirations. She also highlighted the importance of thinking of education beyond academic achievement and to consider the development of life skills.

[READ MORE](#)

Exiting webinar

For our final webinar of the year, we looked at women's experiences when moving on from selling or exchanging sex. Our guest speakers included two survivors of prostitution, and organisations SASE and Trevi.

[Request recording](#)



Resources

New CSE Aware infographics



Last November we launched a series of infographics summarising the needs of women who sell or exchange sex that we have explored so far in CSE Aware. This is a great resource for staff to:

- Raise awareness of women's needs
- Have quick information about the link between women's range of experiences like housing, substance use, criminal justice, etc.
- To open discussions about the need for multi-agency work when supporting women.

What's coming up?



ANIMATION: "Building Bridges: supporting you to respond to women's disclosures of selling sex"

In 2024 we are excited to launch our new animation and training pack Building Bridges, a resource for workers to learn how to ask women about their involvement in selling sex and how to respond after receiving a disclosure.

NEW THEMES

This new year we will also explore emerging topics around the experiences of women who sell or exchange sex. These are topics for which there is limited information, yet they are essential to understand women's broad spectrum of experiences. Expect webinars, bulletins and other engagement opportunities around these topics:

- **February-March** - Motherhood
- **May-June** - Immigration
- **August-September** - Disability

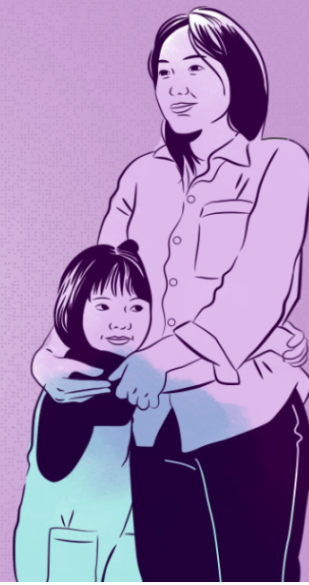
Keep an eye on our website and on this bulletin for more details about webinars, training and other events.

NEXT WEBINAR: Motherhood and women who sell or exchange sex



Webinar Motherhood

and women involved in
selling or exchanging sex



6 March 2024, 11am to 1pm

Join our next CSE Aware webinar in March where we will explore the needs of women who sell or exchange in relation to motherhood.

The 2023 Encompass Snapshot revealed that 57% of women supported by specialist services in Scotland were mothers. To support learning about the needs and challenges of mothers engaged in selling or exchanging sex, CSE Aware are organising a free webinar.

[REGISTER](#)

"I wanted to reach out and acknowledge what excellent resources you have on your website. It has been a really great resource to look at."

- feedback from frontline worker

Over to you!

**SURVEY: Motherhood and women in
the 'sex industry'**



SURVEY

motherhood – the experiences of women in the ‘sex industry’

A SURVEY FOR WOMEN WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE AND SUPPORT WORKERS

Our next CSE Aware topic will be motherhood and to help us build a better picture of women’s experiences, we have designed a survey which has the **option to respond** as either a **support worker** or as a **woman with lived experience**.

You can respond even if you have limited experience of supporting women involved in selling or exchanging sex.

SUPPORT WORKERS

WOMEN WITH LIVED EXP

CSE Aware

an initiative of the Women's Support Project

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