



CSE Aware bulletin

Issue 5:

Substance use

Dear reader,

Welcome to our first bulletin of the year! In this edition, we spotlight another key issue that women who sell or exchange sex have highlighted to us - substance use.

The dynamics between selling sex and substance use are far-reaching and complex, and make it challenging for women to break cycles and have options and choices to move on. We explore these complexities in our insight article, which looks at the links and harms related to substance use and selling or exchanging sex. We have also included an interview with the Scottish Drugs Forum team, who spoke to us about what harm reduction looks like in practice.

Alongside these Insights, we have gathered interesting documentaries, theatre plays, videos, reports and events which could help your understanding of other aspects of the lives of women who sell or exchange sex.

We hope you are as excited as we are to learn together this year! Our next bulletin will look at sexual health. For now, we hope you find the information we have included here helpful.

The CSE Aware Resource Worker

“I had a boyfriend. He was using drugs as well. I would go out and he would be with me and he would stand and wait at a bus stop. Every time I came back from a punter, I would go and give him the money. It wasnae like a so-called pimp really but now when I look back... he was using me for his drug habit to be fed.”

— Joanne, *Inside Outside*



Substance use insights

Substance use, selling sex and vulnerability - overlapping cycles



Whilst a woman's involvement in selling sex doesn't automatically mean that she uses substances, the vulnerability to developing a substance use issue and/or being exploited exists and must be acknowledged. The prevalence of substance use among women in the context of selling sex, as well as the double-stigma that women face when accessing services make it essential for all types of services to be aware of these overlapping situations.

In this article, we explore the links between using substances and selling or exchanging sex and how these become cycles that sustain each other.

[Continue reading](#)

A worker's perspective

Scottish Drug Forum - Substance use, exchanging sex and harm reduction in practice

“

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

Substance use and selling/exchanging sex can be very interconnected issues in the lives of some women. To better understand how these cycles overlap, we spoke to two members of the [Scottish Drugs Forum](#) (SDF): Adrienne Hannah (Programme Manager) and Louise Bowman (National Training and Development Officer).

Adrienne and Louise were part of the team which researched the vulnerability, harm and risk for women in Scotland who use drugs and who also sell or exchange sex – their findings were published in an [academic paper](#) in 2022. In this interview they share insights from this research and from their vast experience working closely with women and service providers.

[Continue reading](#)

Substance use resources

Substance use practice points

In this link we've put together some steps you can take to ensure you respond to women involved in selling or exchanging sex appropriately whilst considering how to reduce harm if they are using substances.

[Read more](#)



Research, reports & other information

- [Vulnerability, Risk and Harm for People Who Use Drugs and Are Engaged in Transactional Sex](#)
- [Prostitution, Drug Use, and Coping with Psychological Distress](#)
- [Improving services for women involved in prostitution and substance use](#)
- [Women and Drug Related Death](#)
- [The Scottish Needle Exchange Directory](#)

[More resources](#)

Events and training

CSE AWARE EVENT

Substance use and women involved in selling or exchanging sex



Substance use and women involved in selling or exchanging sex

1 March 2022
11:30am - 1pm

Free event for front-line workers and support services



Wednesday 1st March, 11:30am - 1pm

Substance use can serve as a pathway into selling/exchanging sex, it can present women with multiple risks whilst they are involved, and poses a double-stigma when accessing support, which ultimately reduces women's options when they decide to move on from both these situations.

Open to services and organisations, this free event will offer an introduction to the needs of women involved in selling/exchanging sex who also use substances.

[Register here](#)

WEBINAR

At the Edge: Women, vulnerabilities and the cost of living crisis

Wed 1 Feb 2023, 10am - 12:30pm

Hosted by the Women's Support Project, this event will explore the gendered inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination and consider how they are exacerbated by a cost of living crisis.

[Register here](#)

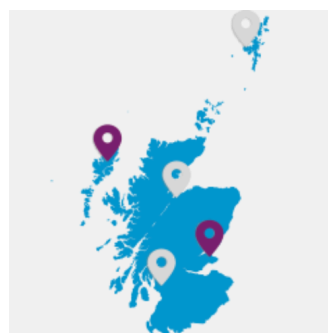


Scottish Drug Forum free e-learning

Ongoing

SDF offer a series of training, self-guided e-learning and webinars exploring different forms of substance use, sexual health, HIV, harm reduction and other awareness raising. Tailored for staff, modules and training dates can be accessed on their website.

[Register here](#)



Bespoke training on commercial sexual exploitation

We offer tailor made training relevant to the needs of your organisation or team. Sessions can be online or face to face and can include basic awareness of commercial sexual exploitation; it's links to abuse and violence, routine enquiry and more.

[More information](#)

Bespoke
training

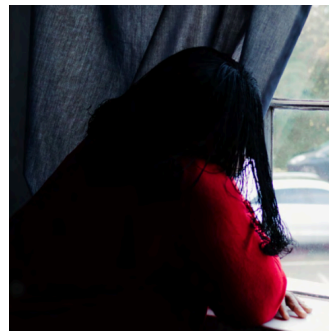
Interesting reads

NEW REPORT

Forced migration and sexual and gender-based violence

This report sheds light on the nature and incidence of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by forced migrants, residing in countries of refuge, including sexual exploitation. It outlines the findings of interviews with survivors and services in Scotland.

[Read more](#)



REVIEW

16 days of activism in Scotland

Each year, organisations around the world organise activities to mark the UN's global campaign of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. In 2022 the CSE Aware team had the opportunity to attend some of the events organised in Scotland, and in this blog, we review some of them.

[Read more](#)



VIDEO: Woman's testimony of the links between homelessness, substance use and selling sex

ONLINE TOUR: Whitechapel Women - beyond Jack the Ripper

How Incels and Mainstream Pornography Speak the Same Extreme Language of Misogyny

A closer look at dissociation

DOCUMENTARY: Barely legal in the porn industry

Homeless, Learning Disabilities and Selling Sex

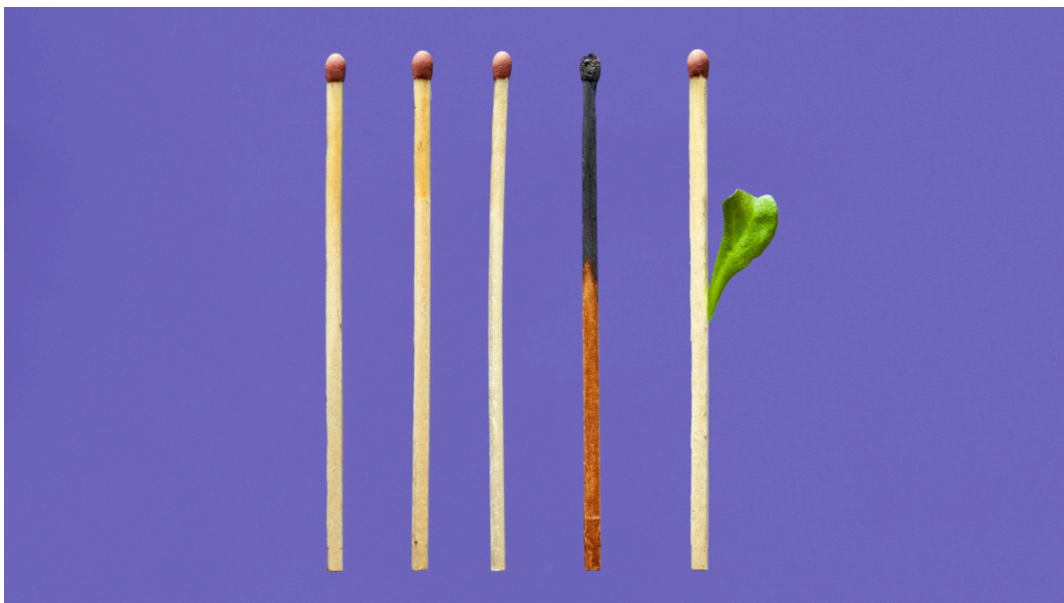
I didnae realise how much the drugs do numb us. I had to leave a punter recently... I had the money and a'hing – and I just got up and went, 'Look I'm sorry I need to go'... I'd been trying to stop working, so obviously I'm no using as much drugs 'cos I've no got as much money. I've realised, 'Fuck I canny stop my drugs and still work' ... Took me years to notice that the two of them come hand in hand. I canny do one without the other.

– Levi, *Inside Outside*



Grab a cuppa, let's talk about...

Coping with vicarious trauma



For this issue, we want to reflect on the impact of vicarious trauma and frontline workers' coping strategies. With this in mind, we asked members of the research project [Women working to support women in the welfare sphere](#) to share some of their learnings and findings. Below is an excerpt from our interview with three of the researchers - Michele Burman, Loraine Gelsthorpe and Joana Ferreira:

The term vicarious traumatisation is often used interchangeably with other terms such as 'burnout' and 'secondary traumatic stress', but it is not the same. Unlike burnout – which is a fairly common experience and can be understood as an overwhelming state of physical and emotional exhaustion caused by excessive work-related stress, and secondary traumatic stress which may be acquired by a single incident of disclosure/exposure to another's experiences, resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder – vicarious traumatisation is a *cumulative process* of psychological and somatic symptoms of acute and post-traumatic stress that can result from the close and constant work of service providers with traumatised individuals. The term captures the impacts of this constant 'exposure' to trauma – it highlights the 'build-up' process that often occurs for those working in these environments.

[Continue reading](#)

Over to you!

Have you supported women who have disclosed selling sex?

We are currently developing a project around handling women's disclosures of selling or exchanging sex and we would like to hear the perspective of services. If you have supported women who have disclosed and you would be willing to take part in a short anonymous interview, click on the button to fill out a contact form.

[Get in touch](#)

CSE Aware

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