

Institution: University of Leicester		
Unit of Assessment: 21		
Title of case study: Transforming sex industry regulation, policing and safeguarding practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Teela Sanders	Professor of Criminology	2016–Present
Rosie Campbell	Research and Netreach Officer	2016–2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research by Sanders has transformed the regulation of the sex work industry. Historically, police and health practitioners focussed on physical environments as the primary location where crimes against sex workers occurred and support interventions were required. Sanders's research has catalysed a shift in emphasis to digital spaces, which now form the primary location of the sex work market. This scholarship has fostered positive change in policies, practices and interventions focused on online sex worker safety. Sanders's research has transformed approaches to supporting the health and safety of online sex workers to improve support for those who are victims of crime and how the police engage with sex workers.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Sanders is amongst the most prolific researchers in the UK exploring sex work in relation to safety, regulation and working conditions. Her internationally significant research has made a transformative contribution to the social, cultural and regulatory understanding of sex work in the last twenty years.</p> <p>Beyond the Gaze (2016–ongoing): In the last two decades, the sex industry has undergone a substantial transition towards digital technology: most commercial sex work now happens through or on the internet. Sanders led a ground-breaking, large GBP608,000,000 ESRC-funded study, involving 5 researchers and 8 co-researchers for 3 years, to examine this change from the perspectives of sex workers, customers, health and charity workers, police, policy makers and IT adult entertainment web platforms [R1–R5, G1]. The project was underpinned by participatory action research methods, recruiting and training sex workers to be co-researchers throughout. The data sets included a 652-response sex worker survey; a 1,352-response customer survey; 62 interviews with sex workers; interviews with 53 police officers from 16 police forces; and interviews with 12 IT platform experts. Project outputs include a film for public engagement; tools and resources for practitioners; and guidance and safety resources for sex workers—written by sex workers.</p> <p>The project was the first of its kind in the world, gaining significant international media and academic attention. Practitioner partners were involved at all stages of the project to ensure that the outcomes had a direct impact on policy and practice that was timely, relevant and feasible. Before this project, there was very limited knowledge of how the internet affected the working practices and safety of sex workers, or the implications for regulation. Findings have outlined several key issues, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences in the diversity, characteristics and demographics of sex workers using the internet in their work, compared with sex workers in other areas, such as street-based work. 		

- Job satisfaction was high amongst online sex workers given the advantages of working virtually; however, there were also disadvantages such as isolation, stigma and the **fear** of being outed and breaches of privacy.
- An increase in **digitally facilitated crimes** such as doxing, harassment, stalking and unwanted contact. These were experienced by most participants, while other types of violence were reported less.
- The internet makes sex work **safer** and is now the prime space for interventions around safety, health and well-being; yet online outreach is not widely harnessed by support projects. As a result, **netreach as a primary intervention** was established [R6].
- The police are at an early stage in understanding online sex work, and often struggle to differentiate types of exploitation or trafficking. The need for a **nuanced understanding** of online sex work was established and interventions continue to be provided through training, guidance and tools.

Beyond the Gaze [G1], a body of **recommendations and resources**—co-produced with practitioners and sex workers—was made for police, practitioners, health commissioners and advocates. For example:

- 1) Safety Strategies for Online Sex Workers.
- 2) Privacy and Safety Tips published in four languages: English; Portuguese; Romanian; and Mandarin.
- 3) Practice Guidance for working with online sex workers and establishing a netreach intervention.
- 4) Five briefing papers: summary; for customers; for police; for practitioners; and mapping.
- 5) The Film *Online Sex Work in the 21st Century*: to enhance public understanding and demystify what sex work is.

3. References to the research

R1. Sanders, T., Brents, B. G., and Wakefield, C. (2020). *Paying for Sex in a Digital Age: US and UK Perspectives*. Routledge.

R2. Sanders, T., Scoular, J., Campbell, R., Pitcher, J., and Cunningham, S. (2017). *Internet sex work: Beyond the gaze*. Springer.

R3. Campbell, R., Sanders, T., Scoular, J., Pitcher, J., and Cunningham, S. (2019). "Risking safety and rights: online sex work, crimes and 'blended safety repertoires'". *The British journal of sociology*, 70(4), 1539-1560.

R4. Scoular, J., Pitcher, J., Sanders, T., Campbell, R., and Cunningham, S. (2019). "Beyond the Gaze and well beyond Wolfenden: the practices and Rationalities of Regulating and Policing Sex work in the digital Age". *Journal of law and society*, 46(2), 211-239.

R5. Sanders, T., Campbell, R., Cunningham, S., Pitcher, J., and Scoular, J. (2018). "The point of counting: mapping the internet based sex industry". *Social Sciences*, 233-241.

R6. Cunningham, S., Sanders, T., Scoular, J., Campbell, R., Pitcher, J., Hill, K., and Hamer, R. (2018). "Behind the screen: Commercial sex, digital spaces and working online". *Technology in society*, 53, 47-54.

G1. Sanders T. (PI) and Scoular J (Co-I): *Beyond the gaze: Working practices, safety and regulation of online sex work in the UK*. Economic and Social Research Council. September 2015 – September 2018. GBP608,000,000. <https://www.beyond-the-gaze.com>

4. Details of the impact

Transforming the regulation of sex work

Sanders's research has developed clear recommendations for the regulation of sex work, both online and offline. These have underpinned developments in practice and policy, for example influencing new policing guidelines [E3, E8]. The National Police Chiefs' Council stated: *"Professor Sanders' research findings . . . were integral in shaping policy development and revision including in the re-writing of the NPCC Sex Work and Prostitution Guidance"* [E3].

This research has directly influenced the UK government's agenda on sex work through contributions to influential policy briefings, such as her provision of oral evidence to the Women and Equalities Commission [E7]. The work is cited in the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and Global Sex Trade report, "Behind Closed Doors; Organised sexual exploitation in England and Wales" [E5], and the Home Office and Office of South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner's report, "The nature and prevalence of prostitution and sex work in England and Wales today" [E10]. Welsh Women's Aid and Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan's "Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2018" committed to reviewing the findings of *Beyond the Gaze* [E9] and *Beyond the Gaze* research is cited extensively in the Department of Justice 2019 Review of the Criminalisation of Paying for Sexual Services in Northern Ireland [E6].

Recommendations have been adopted by practitioners, specifically the National Crime Agency [E3, E4] and the National Police Chiefs' Council with the College of Policing [E3, E8]. The National Police Chiefs' Council stated: *"The creation of safety resources for police to use on welfare visits have been a direct benefit of working with the Beyond the Gaze project. After resources were produced in English, Romanian and Portuguese, and sent to all Chief Constables to cascade down, at the request of the Metropolitan police, resources were also made in Mandarin to reach the Chinese community. These resources have a direct impact on how police can engage with migrant sex workers and assess their vulnerable status. Such practical tools have been an invaluable resource which have assisted officers on the ground"* [E3].

Introducing a ground-breaking practitioners forum, improving policy and practice

National Ugly Mugs (NUM) – the UK's leading charity supporting sex workers – has transformed its operational focus as a result of *Beyond the Gaze*, taking the national lead in educating police and practitioners and improving policy and practice of online sex work [E2, E3, E5]. As a consequence of the raised awareness of online crimes and safety resulting from the research, NUM has experienced an increase in sex worker membership by 4,100 new members, and an increase in reports of online abuse, stalking and harassment, rising by 23% in 2016, 36% in 2017, and 13% in 2018. The CEO of NUM stated: *"Between 2017 – 2018, when the BtG project [was] at its most visible, NUM experienced increased demands on our services as sex workers were calling in to report online harms, particularly stalking and harassment, with renewed hope that police would follow-up this type of victimisation"* [E2].

New mechanisms for supporting victims of crime have developed from the project, facilitated by a new digital platform at NUM [E2]. NUM leads training directly informed by *Beyond the Gaze* scholarship, to support cross-agency awareness of the needs of online and offline sex workers. In partnership with NUM, training sessions have been delivered to 336 police across 16 forces; and to practitioners across England and Wales [E1, E3]. NUM have established a paid Research and Development advisory group staffed by 'experts by experience' who can progress the NUM business plan based on *Beyond the Gaze* findings [E2, E4].

Training has changed operational practice in the police service, with the implementation of new strategies and interventions by specific police forces and the introduction of Special Point of Contact Officers/Dedicated Liaison Officers across the UK, who are using the resources created by *Beyond the Gaze* around privacy and safety to engage sex workers [E1a]. These Special Point of Contact Officers/Dedicated Liaison Officers are trained annually by Sanders, using evidence generated from *Beyond the Gaze*. [E1a, E3]. This training has transformed the approach taken to policing. The Inspector for the North Yorkshire Police Safeguarding and Vulnerability Unit stated: *"It's not so much changes, as there was nothing before. . . . [A]s a result we set up a sex worker working group . . . that's got police representation . . . a safeguarding manager, health, and we've got someone from the Sexual Assault Referral Centre. . . . [E]very 24 hours [we identify anything that] might have been reported by a sex worker. . . . [We] review every single occurrence or incident reported by a sex worker to make sure that that offence has been properly investigated and that that sex worker has been treated with dignity and respect"* [E1a].

Sanders has designed and introduced a sector-wide Practitioner Forum (sexual health, independent sexual violence advisers, victim case workers, trainers, community development workers, and outreach workers) to improve the quality of evidence-based decision making and practice development across the working practices, regulation and public understanding of online sex work [E4, E1c]. This is currently the only forum/network of its kind providing much needed interactions between often-isolated practitioners across the UK. The Forum has acted quickly to move to a virtual format to address COVID restrictions and new ways of online networking.

Sanders's research influences the everyday practices of police leads, local and national regulation experts and support workers, having demonstrated that online advertising platforms such as Vivastreet and Adultwork provide a digital footprint that enables criminal behaviour to be traced and can warn sex workers about potentially dangerous clients [E1]. These changes have improved online sex worker access to support and advice about safe working practices and facilitated the development of online support services [E1b, E4, E11].

Developing new strategies to support the health and wellbeing of sex workers

Evidence from *Beyond the Gaze* has directly influenced how health and wellbeing practitioners engage with the online sex work community. Practitioners reported a range of changes instituted since their involvement with *Beyond the Gaze* [E1b, E1c]. The Senior Sister of GUM at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust stated: *"It's definitely changed our practice [and] the focus of our work was on street sex workers and therefore . . . there was a huge group of people that we weren't even reaching . . . [our GUM service] only saw females so we changed that as well to look at males and trans too"*. [E1b]. The CEO of a sex worker project stated: *"We had to change how we do netreach, as a result of the information we found out . . . it led us to look at how we as an organisation . . . use marketing in general to meet potential clients [and make them] aware of the services that we offer. I think previously, we were very, very behind on doing that"* [E1c].

Fifty four training sessions have been delivered to 450 health, outreach and charity professionals since 2016, plus individual consultancy on more than 30 projects to advise on their digital netreach strategy. These spanned outreach, health and wellbeing services and charities across the UK and Ireland, including Leeds, Merseyside/Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Cleveland, Leicester, Dublin and Cork. Since March 2020, these requests for interventions and

guidance to set up netreach to respond to COVID have been intense, with more than 30 projects benefiting from direct guidance. As a result, working practices have changed with many practitioners reporting that they have been influenced to develop digital strategies to address the local needs of sex workers. In 2019, Chrysalis, a harm reduction charity based in Dublin, developed a new online outreach service in Dublin using the findings, resources and practitioner guidance from *Beyond the Gaze* [E11]. A Case Manager, Chrysalis Community Drug Project, stated: “without . . . building up my own knowledge base through *Beyond the Gaze*, [I don’t think] that I necessarily would have started looking in that direction [netreach/digital] and then we developed the website as part of that” [E1b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1. Beyond the Gaze Impact Reports:

- (a) Police Testimonials.
- (b) Practitioner Testimonials.
- (c) How did Beyond the Gaze Impact on Practitioners and Police: Evaluation Report.

E2. Testimonial, National Ugly Mugs (UK’s leading charity supporting sex workers), Chief Executive Officer.

E3. Testimonial, National Police Chiefs’ Council, Lead for Sex Work and Prostitution.

E4. Testimonial, Expert by Experience and Co-Community Research Assistant for *Beyond the Gaze*.

E5. APPG on Prostitution and Global Sex Trade report, “Behind Closed Doors; Organised sexual exploitation in England and Wales” <https://www.appg-cse.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Behind-closed-doors-APPG-on-Prostitution.pdf>

E6. “Assessment of impact criminalisation of purchasing sexual services in Northern Ireland” <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/report-criminalisation-paying-for-sex.pdf>

E7. Oral evidence to Women and Equalities Parliamentary Committee 30 October 2019 http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/women-and-equalities-committee/prostitution/oral/106795.html#_ftn1

E8. National Police Chief Council Guidance (2019): “National Policing Sex Work Guidance” <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Sex-Work-and-Prostitution-Guidance-Jan-2019.pdf>

E9. Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy, 2018 – 2023 <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Violence-Against-Women-Domestic-Abuse-and-Sexual-Violence-Strategy-2018-2023-Draft.pdf>

E10. Home Office and Office of South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner’s report, “The nature and prevalence of prostitution and sex work in England and Wales today” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-of-prostitution-and-sex-work-in-england-and-wales>

E11. Chrysalis Community Project, Dublin: <https://chrysalissexworkproject.ie/>