

Institution: Swansea University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA18		
Title of case study: Sex Work in Wales: Transforming Policy and Practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004-2015		
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:
Professor Tracey Sagar Mrs. Deborah Jones	Professor of Criminology Associate Professor in Criminology	2002 – present 2009 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 to 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>This programme of sex work research, led by Sagar and Jones at Swansea University, has had a direct and significant impact on policy and practice in Wales in increasing the safety and wellbeing of sex workers. The research has benefited police, policy makers, practitioners and sex workers in a variety of ways that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of harm reduction interventions for sex workers (information sharing, risk assessments, diversion from the Criminal Justice System). • Improved service responses through enhanced learning and understanding (professional practice improved through training; sex worker involvement in policy development and delivery; expansion of outreach services). • Harm reduction approaches for sex workers embedded into the Welsh policy framework concerning housing, substance misuse, sexual exploitation, modern slavery and domestic abuse. • Empowerment of sex workers through project design and delivery. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>In Wales, there is a long tradition of approaching sex work as a 'harm' against the community: sex workers were mainly targeted as community <i>offenders</i> and had very little access to support services [R1]. Sagar and Jones' research challenges traditional notions of harm associated with sex work. This research comprises two strands:</p> <p>a) Identification of sex workers' needs from their own perspectives</p> <p>Work completed between 2010 and 2015, with publications including R2, R4, R5 and R6 appearing between 2010 and 2015. Key researchers: Tracey Sagar and Debbie Jones (Swansea University), Emma Jones (née Harris) and Louise Clark (both at Gibran UK, a not-for-profit organisation) and Pete Clark (Terrence Higgins Trust (THT), a charity).</p> <p>This was the first research into the experiences and needs of sex workers in Wales. It found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street based workers are at high risk of sexual and physical violence from clients and members of the community [R2, R5], with the majority of sex workers not reporting violence [R2, R5, R6]. • Sex workers feel safer when engaging with outreach services and would like better access to sexual health services [R2, R4, R5], drug treatment, counselling, housing advice, and mental health support services [R2, R5, R6]. <p>The research re-conceptualised harm to include harms experienced by sex workers such as physical and sexual violence, verbal assaults, judgement and stigma, all of which act as obstacles</p>		

to sex workers accessing services. This has clear implications for policing, policy and practice responses to sex work in Wales.

b) Sex work as a contested community issue

Work completed during 2010-2014, with publications including **R2**, **R4** and **R5** appearing during 2010-2014. Key researchers: Tracey Sagar and Debbie Jones (Swansea University), Emma Jones (née Harris) and Louise Clark (both at Gibran UK).

This research strand focused on community perceptions of street sex work in Wales. Surveys and national and local interviews found that:

- Sex work was actually only a community issue in 6 out of 891 Welsh electoral wards [**R4**].
- For most people in the community, sex work is not a nuisance [**R3**, **R5**].
- Most respondents worry about the health and safety of sex workers [**R3**, **R5**], with a vocal minority perceiving them to be 'dirty', 'lazy' and 'disgusting' [**R3**].

The research contradicted commonly held assumptions that sex work has a negative impact on communities. Instead, sex workers were mainly identified as vulnerable community members.

Recommendations stemming from the findings of (a) and (b)

The research underscored the urgent need to tackle the high levels of violence sex workers were facing [**R2**, **R5**, **R6**]. It revealed that the wide-ranging harms experienced by sex workers were made worse by ineffective policies and practices [**R4**, **R5**, **R6**]. It found that service provision was lacking, particularly sexual health outreach [**R4**]. Furthermore, although sex workers' needs were often inter-connected (such as drug use and homelessness), there was little joined-up working amongst services [**R5**, **R6**]. Recommendations included the need for: policing responses to prioritise harm reduction for sex workers rather than law enforcement; joined-up harm-reduction interventions; better understanding of sex work through education and training; non-judgmental services which understand need from the perspectives of sex workers and for harm reduction for sex workers to be embedded within the wider policy framework in Wales. The Swansea research brought the voices of sex workers into the Welsh Government policy-making framework for the first time.

3. References to the research

The quality of the underpinning research is evidenced by its publication in a peer reviewed international journal [**R1**], the award of peer reviewed funding [**R4**] and being commissioned, quality assessed and endorsed by external bodies [**R2**, **R3**, **R5**, **R6**].

[**R1**] Sagar, T. (2004) Street Watch Concept and Practice: Civilian Participation in Policing Street Sex Work, *British Journal of Criminology*, 45(1): 98-112. doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azh051

[**R2**] Sagar, T. and Jones, D. (2010) Reaching Out to Sex Workers in Cardiff: Findings from Engagement Events. *Research commissioned, quality assessed and endorsed by Cardiff Sex Work Forum* <https://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa17431/>

[**R3**] Sagar, T., Jones, D. and Harris, E. (2010) Community Perceptions of Street Sex work in Cardiff. *Research commissioned, quality assessed by Welsh Government and endorsed by the Cardiff Sex Work Forum* <https://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa51098/>

[**R4**] Sagar, T., Jones, E.; Jones, D. and Clark, L. (2014) Sex Work Research Wales: Summary of Findings. <https://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa26759/>

[**R5**] Sagar, T., Jones, D. and Clark, P. (2011) Off Street Sex Work in Cardiff, Identifying Service Provision Needs. *Commissioned, quality assessed and endorsed by Terrence Higgins Trust and funded by MAC Aids*. <https://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa17432/>

[**R6**] Sagar, T., Jones, D. and Symons, K. (2015) Sex Work, Drug and Alcohol Use: Bringing the Voices of Sex Workers into the Policy and Service Development Framework. *Commissioned, quality assessed and endorsed by Welsh Government*. <https://gov.wales/substance-misuse-sex-work-drug-and-alcohol-use>

4. Details of the impact

The following initiatives/interventions were implemented as a direct result of the research.

4.1 Harm Reduction Interventions for Sex Workers

National joined-up strategic planning: the 'Wales Strategic Sex Work Safety Group'. **R4** called for a national strategic response to sex work. Following the presentation of the research findings at a national conference, hosted by Sagar and Jones, the Modern Slavery South Wales Police Partnership adopted these findings and set up the Wales Strategic Sex Work Safety Group in 2015. This *national* group of policy makers, police, academics and front-line professionals uses evidence to produce priorities and action plans to support sex workers across Wales. The Chair of the group (2015-2018) writes that our research was “*vital towards understanding the experiences of those involved in the sex industry [and a] driving force behind the development of the [Wales Strategic Sex Work Safety Group], ... pivotal in providing a vital conduit between the academic world and statutory agencies through partnership working to bring about real change*” **[C1]**. This research played a crucial role in the group’s delivery plan 2017/2019 **[C2]** which steered the group’s strategic harm reduction priorities for policy and service delivery in Wales. For example, Priority 1 of the delivery plan is to ensure that issues relating to sex work are aligned and referenced in all relevant Welsh Government strategies including: Violence Against Women, the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDSV) Framework; Community Safety; Substance Misuse; Health; and Housing.

Managing the risk of harm to sex workers in Cardiff: the 'Sex Worker Operational Team' (SWOT) and the 'Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference' (MARAC). Established by the Cardiff Sex Work Forum (CSWF) in direct response to Sagar and Jones’ recommendation for tailored support to alleviate the risk of violence **[R2]**, SWOT and MARAC provide a formalised structure for joined-up responses for sex workers deemed to be at high risk of harm. Since 2014, it has resulted in at least 150 multi-agency risk assessments of street sex workers with highly complex needs **[C3]**. Writing in 2019, the Chair of the Forum observed the far-reaching impact of the initiative on the safety of sex workers: “*We have been able to risk manage some of the most chaotic and vulnerable women in Cardiff, identified women in insecure housing and move these into safer hostels, found information on partners and the dangers these may bring, worked with police to develop disruption techniques for pimps, fast tracked individuals into health services, and ultimately saved lives – this just happened again last week*” **[C3]**.

Policing in South Wales: New approaches to policing sex work and modern slavery. Sagar and Jones’ recommendation of a change in policing from law enforcement to harm reduction **[R2, R3]** was presented to South Wales Police and other members of the CSWF. This resulted in a new ‘Diversionary Pathway’ to steer sex workers away from the Criminal Justice System. Adopted in 2010, it has ongoing and significant impact on policing. As the Chair of the CSWF notes, the Criminal Justice System is used much less now in response to sex work, with only one Criminal Behaviour Order issued against a sex worker since 2014 **[C3]**. Further, the success of the SWOT and MARAC initiative as a harm reduction model led to its adoption by Gwent, South Wales, and Dyfed-Powys Police to support those at high risk of modern slavery **[C3]**.

4.2 Improving Service Responses for Sex Workers

Better understanding through training. The research identified a deficit in understanding by service providers of the complexities of sex work and a need for training **[R4, R6]**. The Welsh Government commissioned Jones and Sagar, in recognition of their expertise, to develop and deliver training to raise awareness of sex work, motivations, needs and the impact of stigma, and to encourage harm reduction practices **[C4]**. The *Sex Work Harm Reduction Training* is based on findings from the full programme of research and was developed in collaboration with external partners, front-line services and sex workers themselves. It was designed and rolled out in 2016 and since then has been delivered to over 600 individuals including representatives from statutory agencies, police, policymakers and third-sector organisations. The Cardiff Partnership Development Lead stated “*... the demand for this training has been huge – in 2017 we organised multiple training*

sessions, where one had over 50 delegates. In 2018, the training has been oversubscribed. In the research-based training, we are using the evidence to inform a very large number of professionals across Wales” [C3].

Organisational change. Sagar and Jones recommended the diversification of services to encompass off street workers [R4]. As a direct result of this research, third-sector organisation Cyrenians (Swansea) expanded their services to include indoor (as well as street-based) sex workers and changed its organisational focus to prioritise harm reduction. According to the centre manager (writing in 2018), the findings in R4 “made us engage more deeply with issues pertaining to sex work, and broadened our point of view moving away from ‘exiting’ strategies towards harm reduction focused service delivery...[It] helped us provide non-judgmental services for sex workers, broadened the kinds of services we provide, widened our client-base and enabled us to provide client-led services that make it possible for sex workers to work more safely” [C5].

4.3 Embedding Harm Reduction for Sex Workers into the Welsh Policy Framework

Addressing the needs of substance-using sex workers within housing policy in Cardiff. Sagar and Jones’ research identified the connections between substance misuse, sex work, and homelessness in Wales [R4, R6] and this evidence was instrumental in the development of Cardiff Council’s *Rough Sleepers Strategy* in 2017. This resulted in a pilot to provide 18 female- only accommodation units for women who misuse substances while sex working [C3].

Recognising the needs of sex workers within the Welsh substance misuse policy. The senior policy manager at the Welsh Government confirms that the Sagar and Jones’ recommendations to bring sex worker voices into the substance misuse policy development framework [R6] “informed the development of the three-year Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-2018. Further, the good practice recommendations from the research updated Welsh Government’s Harm Reduction Compendium to include those engaged in sex work in April 2017”. The research also “resulted in sex workers being recognised as a specific ‘at risk’ and often vulnerable group of people in Wales with complex and wide-ranging needs and who are today the focus of Welsh Government harm reduction strategies addressing substance misuse and also a range of other connected issues such as violence against women and sexual exploitation and human trafficking” [C4].

Recognising the diversity of sex work and sexual health need in sexual health policy. The Sexual Health Programme Lead (Public Health Wales) confirms that the recommendations in R4 which included the need for improvements to sexual health services for sex workers “informed responses for policy development in Wales” [C6]. This resulted in “the inclusion of sex workers within the national Sexual Health Review that was undertaken in 2017/18” [C6]. R4 recommended accessible and non-judgemental services as well as the creation of sexual health services for off street workers and this “enabled [Public Health Wales] to present a case for addressing the needs of sex workers in more diverse work environments, rather than focusing solely on street-based workers” [C6].

Prioritising the connection between sex work and violence within sexual exploitation policy. R2, R3, R4 and R5 are cited as underpinning research in Cardiff Council’s Addressing Exploitation Programme Sex Work and Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: Strategic Priorities 2016-2018 and Delivery Plans 2015-2017 [C7] where, for the first time, sex work is recognised as a welfare issue requiring harm reduction responses. For example, Priority area 7 seeks to “Improve the reporting of sexual and physical assault against sex workers” and strengthen “the role of the police with front line services, sex workers and off street sex work establishments to encourage the reporting of violence”. The research projects directly impacted on evidence-based service development [C8].

Recognising the connections between sexual exploitation and forced prostitution within the Welsh modern slavery policy framework. R4, R5, and R6 form the research bedrock of the priorities and actions of the Wales Strategic Sex Workers Safety Group, one of four subgroups of Welsh Government’s *Wales Anti-Slavery Leadership Group*. As a result, the Swansea research has

directly influenced the strategic direction of the *Modern Slavery Agenda for Wales* which addresses forced prostitution/sexual exploitation [C1].

Identifying sex workers as a vulnerable group within the Welsh domestic abuse policy.

In 2016, sex workers were identified for the first time as a potentially vulnerable group at risk of violence/abuse in the Welsh Government's National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence 2016-2021. This was directly influenced by Sagar and Jones' research [R2, R4, R6]. Prioritising the public protection of sex workers, the Strategy expresses its commitment to working with the All Wales Strategic Sex Work Safety Group to "support the delivery of their work-plan" to "increase protection and access to appropriate services for this often vulnerable group" [C9 p.14]. This landmark step ensures that the "priorities and progress" of the All Wales Strategic Sex Worker Safety Group feeds into the work of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisory Group in Wales [C8].

4.4 Empowering Sex Workers through Project Design and Delivery

An overarching aim of the research has been to work *with* sex workers to ensure they have a voice in finding ways to reduce stigma and improve sex workers' safety and wellbeing. Sagar and Jones' projects have worked with over 100 sex workers in Wales, including through inclusive engagement events [R4, R6] and peer research opportunities [R4]. Sex workers who became peer researchers felt confident and valued. The following statement from a sex worker peer researcher [R4], whose knowledge and experience is now steering front-line initiatives, confirms the positive impact of this approach: "it was the first time I'd ever been able to speak to people outside of the relatively closed community of sex work openly and without judgement, and most importantly I was made to feel that my contribution was useful and valued. This had a great impact on my self-esteem, and gave me the ability to go on and use my experience to actually get work based upon it...[I was] able to illustrate the ways in which my experiences would benefit the organisation...it was a major turning point for me" [C9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[C1] Equality, Diversity & Community Engagement Manager, Wales; Anti-Slavery Operational Delivery Group Lead; Chair of the All Wales Strategic Sex Work Safety Group (2015-2018). Testimonial.

[C2] All Wales Strategic Sex Worker Safety Group Priorities 2017/19.

[C3] Partnership Development Manager for Cardiff Partnership Board (2007-2019); Chair of the Cardiff Sex Work Forum from 2008. Testimonial.

[C4] Senior Policy Manager Substance Misuse Policy, Government & Corporate Business, Welsh Government. Testimonial.

[C5] Centre Manager Cyrenians, Swansea (2014-2017). Testimonial.

[C6] Sexual Health Programme Lead for Public Health Wales. Testimonial.

[C7] Cardiff Council, Addressing Exploitation Programme Sex Work and Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: Strategic Priorities 2016-2018 and Delivery Plans 2017-2018.

[C8] Welsh Government (2016) National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence 2016 – 2021.

[C9] Testimonial from a sex worker (name and place of work redacted to protect anonymity in accordance with leading ethical guidance on sex work research).