

PROSTITUTION FACT SHEET

Definition

- The Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines a prostitute as a person who has offered or given services of a sexual nature to another person in return for financial gain on one or more occasions.
- Prostitution itself is legal in the United Kingdom: a person can buy sexual services and working as a private prostitute or outcall escort is legal. However, many related activities are not, including:
 - A prostitute waiting for or soliciting business (to sell sexual services) in a street or public place.
 - Soliciting sex in a public place (to purchase sexual services), including from a motor vehicle while on a street (kerb crawling) or public place.
 - Controlling prostitutes for financial gain (pimping).
 - Keeping, managing or assisting in the management of a brothel (including when a landlord or tenant allows a premises to be used as a brothel).
 - Running an escort agency, if they control the escorts.
- Although the law uses the term prostitution, this strategy acknowledges that all cases of prostitution involving those under the age of 18 are to be considered as Child Sexual Exploitation.
- There is a clear legal definition of a brothel. A premises only becomes a brothel when more than one person uses the premises for the purposes of prostitution, either simultaneously or one at a time. Where rooms or flats in one building are let separately to different individuals offering sexual services, it may be treated as a brothel only if the individuals are effectively working together. It is not illegal to sell sex at a brothel, provided the sex worker is not involved in management or control of the brothel.

Key Drivers and Risk Factors

- Very few women become involved in prostitution through choice. Some may become involved as they feel they have no other options, for others there can be an element of coercion or violence from a pimp. This strategy recognises that prostitution is exploitative, regardless of the context, or whether the person is said to have consented to the prostitution.
- Women become involved in prostitution for a variety of reasons, such as homelessness, child sexual abuse, mental ill health, trauma, previous sexual violence, drug and alcohol misuse, money pressures, coercion by another or poverty. These factors, which serve to lead or force women into prostitution, should not be mistaken for the cause of prostitution itself, which is the demand from men to buy sex.
- Research by Eaves and London South Bank University found that a lack of support services, criminal convictions, alcohol and drug abuse, housing problems, and violence from buyers and pimps are the most common barriers that stop women from exiting prostitution.

Local and National Picture

National

- A Home Office consultation on 'Prostitution Paying the Price' (2004), estimated that 80,000 people work in 'on-street' prostitution in the United Kingdom, with 75% being female and 80% being foreign nationals. 8.9% of men in London aged 16-44 reported having paid for sex in the past 5 years
- Women involved in street prostitution are 12 times more likely to be murdered than other

women in the same age group in the United Kingdom. More than half of women in prostitution have been raped and at least 75% have been physically assaulted.

Local

- Over the four year period 1st October 2010 to 30th September 2014, there were two police recorded offences of Controlling a Prostitute for Gain, with 1 suspect and 2 victims. Both the suspect and victims were Nigerian and both victims were 16. There were no other recorded offences relating to prostitution.
- Following complaints about street prostitution from residents in Plumstead, a partnership operation identified 26 active prostitutes, 24 of whom were White British between the ages of 30 and 50. All 26 were identified as being Class A (Crack Cocaine or Heroin) drug users. All 26 received a non-statutory Prostitution caution and were encouraged to take up a range of support services. Since the end of this operation, reports of street based Prostitution in Plumstead and across the Borough have been minimal.
- In early 2014 a further operation was established, aimed at gathering intelligence related to Off-Street Prostitution and attempting to identify women who may have been trafficked to the United Kingdom to work in the sex trade. This operation identified 61 different adverts (18 online and 43 displayed in newsagents) all advertising sex for sale, some more discreet than others and often under the intentional misrepresentation of a 'Massage Service' or similar. The highest concentration of these adverts was in the Woolwich and Plumstead areas.
- Further work identified ten residential addresses where sex was being sold by at least one prostitute but with no obvious brothel management aspect. None of these women were deemed 'at risk' and they were not victims of trafficking. Three premises acting as brothels were identified, where at least two (and in one case up to eight) women were selling sex at any one time, all with some kind of management structure and with a third party taking a percentage 'fee'. The team encountered eight women, six from either Lithuania or Latvia, one from Italy and one from Thailand. Three of the women from Lithuania and Latvia admitted that they had been trafficked to the United Kingdom.
- It was not possible to positively identify the location of 38 potential brothels that had been advertised. The intelligence gathered during this work would suggest that there are approximately 150 active sex workers in the Royal Borough, with at least 10% having been trafficked into the United Kingdom.
- In the period April 2013-December 2014, the Her Centre supported 54 victims of sexual abuse. Of these victims, 2 were involved in prostitution.
- Of those prostitutes working on the borough, the name and date of birth are known of 48. Of these, 32 had been a victim of crime (in London) between 1997 and 2014, with a total of 599 offences recorded where one of these women was a victim. 45.7% (274) of the offences were Violence Against the Person and 25.9% (155) were Other Accepted Crimes (mostly domestic incidents). 46.2% (277) of the offences were recorded when they were aged 30-39 and 25.2% (151) when the victim was 20-29.

Resources for Professionals

- Association of Chief Police Officers Strategy and Supporting Operational Guidance for Policing Prostitution and Sexual Exploitation. [_____](#)
- Effective Practice in Responding to Prostitution. Available [here](#).
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Helpline (NSPCC): 24 hour helpline offering advice and support for anybody with concerns about a child. 0800 5000 or www.nspcc.org.uk

Services for Victims

- Door of Hope: Offers support and outreach for women involved in prostitution. www.doorofhope.org.uk
- London Exiting Advocacy: Works with women aged over 18 who wish to exit prostitution, assisting in accessing housing, welfare benefits, legal advice, drug and alcohol series and specialist counselling. _____
- Salvation Army: Works with any sex workers or victims of trafficking identified through the MPs SO7 team. Available [here](#).
- Trust London: Community based team, offering support, advocacy and opportunities for women involved in, exploited through and for those who have exited from prostitution. _____
- Childline (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children): 24 hour helpline for young people. 0800 1111 or www.childline.org.uk
- Greenwich Domestic Violence and Abuse Services: Provides a specialist Information Line, outreach and accommodation services for women and children experiencing domestic abuse. www.gdva.org.uk
- Her Centre: Provides support and advocacy for victims residing in Royal Greenwich. 0203 260 7772 or www.hercentre.org
- Metropolitan Police Service Community Safety Unit: Every London borough has a team of specially trained officers whose task is to investigate crimes of domestic abuse. Available [here](#).
- Victim Support: Provides emotional support and practical information for all victims of crime. 0808 1689 111 or www.victimsupport.org.uk

Further Information

This information has been taken from the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2015-18. For more information contact the Safer Communities Team on 020 8921 8396 or community-safety@royalgreenwich.gov.uk