

Beyond the Gaze: The working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK: Project Summary Briefing 1 Nov 2015

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- Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council for three years starting September 2015.
- Our overarching question is: **How has the Internet shaped the 21st Century adult commercial sex industry in the UK and what is the role of regulation?**
- The aims of this research are threefold:
 - a) to understand the wider theoretical significance of new technologies for changing the social practice of sexual consumption and the sex industry.
 - b) to map the trends and understand the working practices in Internet-based sex work markets within the broader processes of the regulation and policing of sex work in the UK.
 - c) to facilitate the integration of Internet-based sex work into safety and health-related provision, policies and agencies.
- Key national partners are National Ugly Mugs (UKNSWP) & we have the support of the SAAFE Forum
- Mobilising a Participatory Action Research model,
- We are using a mixed methodology to gather new empirical knowledge & project design consists of a large national online survey of sex workers; qualitative interviews with sex workers and interviews with regulators of online sex work activities and other stakeholders (such as the police, website designers, directory providers & associated IT specialists).
- Carrying out a qualitative descriptive mapping of UK internet based sector
- Benchmarking of the services sex work support projects are providing to internet based sex workers, identifying good practice via meetings & online survey. We have also established, jointly with NUM (UKNSWP) a BTG Practitioners Advisory Group who will contribute to this guidance.
- This is a Participatory Action Research Projects: sex workers will be involved via an online sex worker advisory & advocates group, as peer researchers and other ways as identified by sex workers
- The project has three key beneficiary groups 1) Sex workers who work online and the broader sex work community. 2) sex work projects and practitioners who work with sex workers - both statutory and third sector, including sexual health practitioners who deliver specific clinical services to sex workers 3) Police through the National Police Chiefs Council and the National Lead for Prostitution & policy makers (local and national government).
- These groups will benefit in a range of ways including:
 - 1) In collaboration with NUM & member projects, the development of a good practice guidance toolkit for good practice models of netreach & developing services responsive to the needs of internet based sex workers.
 - 2) Production of a digital resource for sex workers
 - 3) Production of a digital resource for practitioners (both based on research finding.
 - 4) Pilot with NUM (UKNSWP) an online service for sex workers (all gender identities) providing information on safety & a national signposting gateway to health, welfare & other services. Also working with Basis Sex Work Project (Leeds) to enhance their locally based online information and advice & share learning into guidance.
 - 5) Wider range of impact, dissemination activities & policy relevant findings briefing documents.