





This leaflet is for women who sex work. It explains our recent research, provides a snap shot of sex worker needs and experiences in Greater Manchester, and tells you what MASH are doing with that information. Our thanks to the 151 women who took part.

WHAT YOU TOLD US ABOUT YOUR SEX WORK

Who is sex working in Greater Manchester?

You told us about yourselves. This gave us a picture of who is sex working in Manchester (see box). Across the UK as a whole, there are more sex workers from minoritised groups. About 3-in-10 sex workers are men, but we did not speak to men in this research.

Whereabouts are you living and working?

Sex workers live all across Greater Manchester, in every borough. Two-thirds of you work in Manchester City Centre, but most of you work in other places too. Sex work happens in every borough.

How many sex workers are there?

It's hard to tell, because sex work is taboo and

some people hide what they do. The government estimates there are about 105,000 sex workers across the UK, and we think there are around 4,500 in Greater Manchester.

What kind of sex work are you doing?

On-street sex work is most common: 36% of you work on the streets, 28% of you work in Saunas, 19% online and 19% as escorts. Most of you have worked on the streets at some time (77%).

Why are you sex working?

We didn't ask you why you are sex working, but some of you told us. The reasons you gave (see box) suggest many of you don't always have much choice and control over whether or not you do sex work.

WOMEN AND SEX WORK IN GREATER MANCHESTER

ABOUT YOU AND OTHER SEX WORKERS IN MANCHESTER



**9-IN-10 ARE
WHITE BRITISH**



**8-IN-10 ARE
AGED 20-34**



**7-IN-10 HAVE BEEN
SEX WORKING
FOR 1-5 YEARS**



**2-IN-10 HAVE USED
MASH SERVICES
BEFORE**



**3-IN-10 NEED HELP
BECAUSE OF DISABILITY
OR LONG-TERM HEALTH
CONDITION**

SOME REASONS FOR SEX WORKING

You were groomed into sex work as a child

You were forced by someone else

You experienced trauma as a child (eg: abuse or going into care)

To get essential things like food or clothes for children

To pay rent or bills

To get drugs or alcohol

To support other people, usually your children and families

You have no legal right to work and no other money



WHAT YOU TOLD US ABOUT THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

What practical support would help you most?

Your top priorities are help with basic needs like food and clothes, safety and money. Some of you wanted help with other things including education, referrals to other agencies, advocacy or peer support.

What changes would you like services to make?

How the support is provided is really important. You want more services that are face-to-face and

available at the weekends. You want more female staff. You want friendly staff you trust and know will not judge you.

What are the areas you need support with?

Almost all of you told us you need more help. Your needs are summed up in the table opposite. Some of you haven't been able to access the support you need, particularly those who don't use MASH.

WOMEN AND SEX WORK IN GREATER MANCHESTER

YOUR NEEDS

Physical health

You have a wide variety of health needs. Almost all (85%) need help with your sexual health. More than 3-in-4 need help with your general health.
1-in-4 need dental care. Some of you have very complex health needs. Pain is a big problem for many.

Mental health

Sex work is linked with poor mental health. Trauma is a big issue for many of you, both now and in the past. 1-in-5 of you say you need mental health support and 1-in-4 need counselling.

Housing and homelessness

Homelessness affects some of you very badly. You are more likely to be affected if you do sex work to survive. 1-in-10 of you need help with this.

Drug and alcohol use

Many of you need help with drugs or alcohol. There may be complex reasons why you use, including trauma. More than 6-in-10 of you need needle exchange. 3-in-10 want other help with drug or alcohol use.

Violence and safety

Many of you experience many types of violence, from punters, partners and others. 1-in-4 of you wanted help with safety. 1-in-6 wanted help because of domestic abuse. There are additional risks if you are a woman of colour or migrant sex worker, with approximately 1-in-6 needing help because of trafficking and a similar number with racism.

WHAT MASH IS DOING TO HELP

- We have a sexual health nurse and clinic;
- We provide outreach on the street and in saunas
- We provide contraception, STI tests, smear tests, pregnancy testing and support, first aid, vaccinations
- We can help you to access nurses, GPs, hospitals and dentists

- We offer 1:1 support for mental health
- We can refer you to mental health services and help you to attend appointments
- We provide counselling and alternative therapies

- We offer 1:1 support for homelessness
- We provide outreach for rough sleepers
- We can help you to access emergency accommodation and longer term options

- We offer 1:1 support for substance use
- We provide a needle exchange at our Drop-in Centre and on our Outreach Van
- We can help you access scripts, treatment and rehabilitation
- We provide counselling to help you cope with reducing substance use

- We offer 1:1 support for safety and violence
- Our outreach provides support and safety on the streets at night
- We provide safety alarms
- We can help you access emergency accommodation
- We can help you to report violence to the dodgy punters scheme or the police
- We can offer STI tests after attacks



WHAT YOU TOLD US ABOUT YOUR HAPPINESS, ACHIEVEMENTS, HOPES AND DREAMS

Happiness, achievements, hopes and dreams

Past research has focused on the problems and risks of sex work – i.e. “What’s wrong, not what’s strong”. We asked you about some positive aspects of your lives too. 34 of you responded. This gives us a better idea about some of the positive aspects of women sex workers lives than we think exists anywhere else.

What makes you happy is unique and personal.

Most of you talked about ‘ordinary pleasures’, including spending time with children and other family and friends, relaxing pastimes, creative activities and being useful. Often, your happiness relates to having your basic needs met.

What makes you proud is most often your children (13/34 women). Other common themes include overcoming difficult circumstances; reducing or stopping drug use; securing housing; stopping sex work; creative achievements.

Your wishes for the future are detailed, usually very practical and sometimes poignant. The most common wish (16/34 women) is for better connection with your children, sometimes because they are living apart from you. Other common wishes included financial security; secure housing; becoming and/or staying drug-free; better health; finding a different job; better education; changing bad situations.



THANK YOU

Our sincere thanks to all 151 women who took part in this research and for sharing their thoughts, experiences and opinions.

The independent researchers were Kerry Swain, Julie Wrigley and Fiona Weir. These briefings have been prepared by Fiona Weir and MASH. Throughout these briefings, we define women as anyone identifying as a woman.

▶ To discuss this briefing in more detail, and partnership opportunities, please contact Annie Emery, CEO: annie@mash.org.uk

WOMEN AND SEX WORK IN GREATER MANCHESTER

2021/22 RESEARCH



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