

EVALUATING THE  
IMPACT OF

*SEX WORK HARM  
REDUCTION TRAINING*

REPORT 2017  
EVALUATION BY ELAINE FORDE

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# SEX WORK HARM REDUCTION TRAINING

## Explanatory Note

By Professor Tracey Sagar and Assoc. Professor Debbie Jones

At the time of writing this explanatory note in October 2019 the ‘harm reduction’ training has been delivered to:

- over 600 professionals across Wales
- individuals who report to work for public, private, and third sector service providers

Organisations include, but are not limited to:

- Home Office
- City and Council of Swansea
- Cardiff City Council
- Isle of Anglesey County Council
- National Probation Service
- Fire Service
- Emergency Unit Cardiff
- South Wales Police
- North Wales Police
- Gwent Police
- Dyfed Powys Police
- Merseyside Police
- Cyrenians
- Gibran UK
- Women’s Aid
- Probation Service
- DrugAid
- YMCA
- The Salvation Army
- Amethyst
- SARC
- Public Health Wales
- Safer Wales StreetLife
- NHS (including nurses and GPs)
- Choices
- Barnardos
- Welsh Government

In over 40 locations including urban areas such as: Cardiff, Swansea, Bridgend and Newport but also in more rural areas including Colwyn Bay, Denbighshire, Bangor, Holyhead, Lower Powys, Anglesey, Gwynedd, Flintshire, Porthmadog.

Outcomes of the training continue to centre on (but are not limited to):

- A better understanding of the law surrounding sex work
- Raised awareness on issues relating to sex work and in particular the negative impact of stigma
- An understanding of sex workers' experiences and the range of harms they experience
- Participants armed with the knowledge they need to be better able to support sex workers after the training

This document contains an analysis of 228 evaluation forms from training sessions in 2017. The analysis was carried out by Elaine Ford, a research officer appointed to the College of Law and Criminology in 2017 to evaluate the impact of academic research.

# EVALUATION OF SEX WORK HARM REDUCTION TRAINING

Elaine Forde

One outcome of Sagar and Jones' research programme has been the development of training specifically aimed at a gap in training provision that heightens awareness about the issues faced by Sex Workers, and suggestions for practical approaches to supporting sex workers. The training has been developed with the benefit of Jones and Sagar's research findings.

This section reports on the impact that Sex Work Training has had amongst professionals in support services in the public, third and voluntary sector that come into contact with (or are likely to come into contact with) sex workers.

## Training Feedback Impact Evaluation

Feedback questionnaires were received from 228 respondents over 6 separate training sessions in 2017 (Cardiff, Gwent, Swansea x 2, Bangor, Aberystwyth).

135 of 228 respondents came into contact with sex workers through their work, whether directly, such as some of the police officer respondents reported, or incidentally to providing other services, such as a midwife, perhaps, or as a homeless support worker. A further 18 respondents didn't work with sex workers at present, but acknowledged it was possible. That means that of 228 respondents, 153 were, or were likely to be in contact with sex workers, with 135 of the total respondents being highly relevant to delivering services to sex workers.

I refer to the 135 who are in contact with Sex Workers as the most relevant cohort, and given the objectives of the project (to increase appropriate service provision) and an appraisal of the potential pathways to impact, this analysis

treats this group separately, as indicative of the viewpoint of a set of people where this training package can make the most significant impacts.

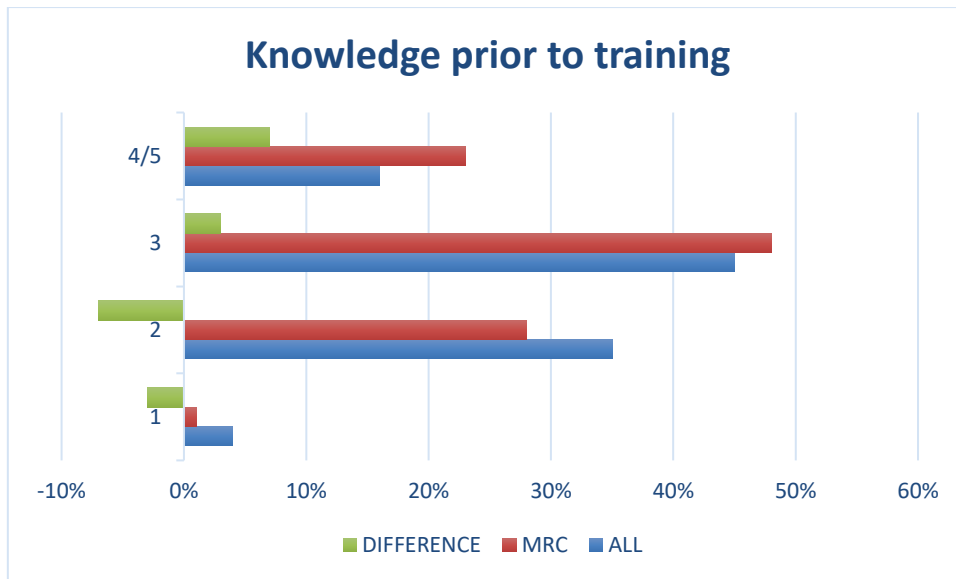
#### Increase in knowledge capacity

37 of 228 rated their prior knowledge about the issues faced by sex workers at 4-5, this includes 31 of the 135 most relevant cohort.

Of the most relevant cohort, only 1 rated their prior knowledge of issues facing sex workers at 1, and their approach (as a worker for home office crime team) could arguably be said to be more punitive and less supportive towards sex workers and their infrastructure. That particular respondent rated their knowledge after training as a 3, and stated they had gained a greater understanding of the considerations of adopting a multi-agency approach. This response could be regarded as an atypical outlier however as by far the most respondents from the most relevant cohort rated their prior knowledge much higher on the 1-5 scale.

N= 31 rated their knowledge at either 4 or 5; n=65 rated at a 3 (including 3.5); and n=38 rated their prior knowledge of the issues faced by sex workers as a 2 (or 2.5).

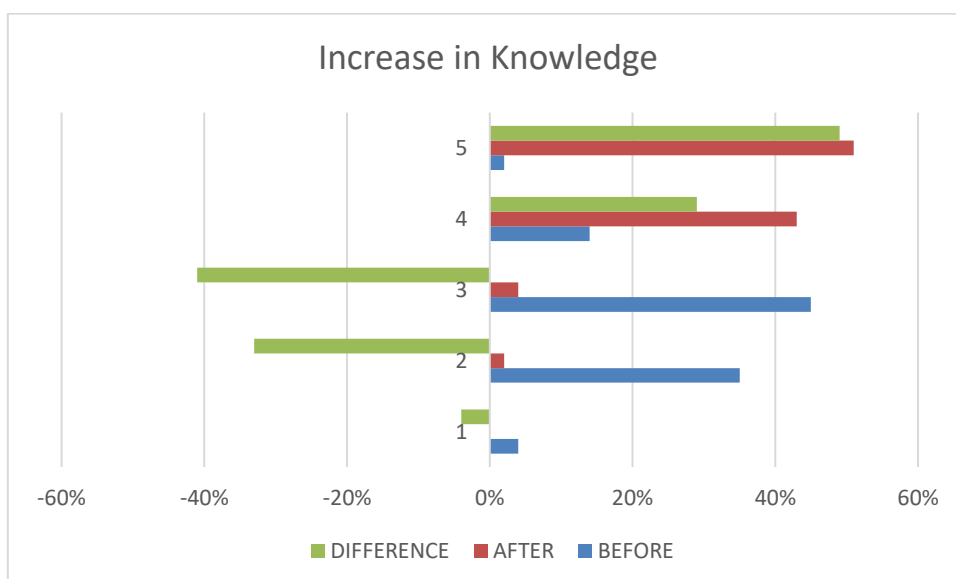
These results show that those who are most relevant as they come into contact with sex workers, rated themselves as more knowledgeable as a cohort than the whole set, which displayed the following results: n=9 rated their knowledge at a 1; n=79 rated it at a 2; n=102 rated knowledge at a 3, and n=37 rated their knowledge at a 4 or a 5.



This chart illustrates that the most relevant cohort were more knowledgeable than the general group prior to training.

(With two records left blank) after the training the most relevant cohort rated their knowledge about the issues faced by sex workers as follows: 1 n=0; 2n= 3; 3 n=6; 4 n=52; 5 n=73. Compared to the set as a whole we can see a similar increase in knowledge because the results were as follows 1, n=0; 2, n=3; 3, n=10; 4, n=97; 5, n=116.

Over the dataset as a whole, a before/ after picture of the knowledge about issues faced by sex workers would look as follows:



The picture after training shows a remarkable increase in knowledge after training, illustrating how the training has directly **enhanced the knowledge of public and third sector organisations.**

### Areas of greater understanding

Focussing now on the most relevant cohort, respondents recorded the areas of training which gave them a better understanding as follows:

The scope of sex work, n=96; the law relating to sex work, n=115 the issues experienced by some sex workers, n= 99; social stigma and its impact on sex workers; n=85; considerations in adopting a multi agency approach, n=90.

This indicates that the single most beneficial part of training was clarity on the legal status of differing forms of sex work.

### Confidence

In the most relevant cohort, happily 123 of the 135 reported that the training had increased their confidence in working with sex workers. 78 comments were left with regard to that question by those whose confidence had increased, whereas of the 12 who did not note an increase in confidence left four comments.

Respondents whose confidence had not increased left specific comments that it would be useful to know more about the law<sup>1</sup>; that they had a better understanding but their tools were limited; they were unsure of the ethical side of working with sex workers; or would like some specific advice on harm reduction.

35 comments from respondents whose confidence had increased have been thematically analysed under the following themes:

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<sup>1</sup> Even though 85% of the knowledgeable cohort reported that the training gave them a better understanding of the law relating to sex work, the largest proportion of respondents to the question of areas of better understanding!

RAISED AWARENESS	11
OPENED DIALOGUE	7
ETHICS	4
HARM REDUCTION	3
SUPPORT	5
LEGAL	3
MOTIVATIONS	2

Respondents felt that just by knowing more about sex work they would be better able to work with sex workers, or “deal with” sex workers as this Police Sargeant’s, (who particularly noted that s/he had benefitted from a clarification on laws pertaining to sex workers) comment indicates:

*“Knowledge is power. Better able to deal with sex workers”*

Respondents indicated that they were more confident in talking about sex work, broaching the subject with potential sex workers and talking to them about their work. Such comments are intertwined with the theme of ethics, as adopting a “non-judgemental” approach to sex workers was also important, and again this linked to the philosophy of harm reduction, which, informed by feedback such as this:

*“Affirmed confidence in a holistic, harm reduction approach, that sees a whole person and encourages the de-stigmatisation of sex”*

*“could also be regarded somewhat as an ethical approach”.*



Respondents reported that they were better able to offer support, or link sex workers to sources of support, as well as being in a better position to share (informally) legal information concerning sex working. Knowing more about sex workers' motivations was also beneficial.

### Changes to practice 1: Personal

Amongst the most relevant cohort, 90 of 135, or 67% reported that they thought the training would change their personal practice. 57 comments were thematically analysed and the following themes emerged:

THEME	NO. RESPONDENTS
IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	2
THE CHOICE TO WORK IN SEX	2
WILL EDUCATE COLLEAGUES	2
LAW	5
IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL SKILLS	5
MORE CONSIDERATE OF PEOPLE AND ISSUES	6
CONFIDENCE TO OPEN A DIALOGUE	7
START OR USE NEW SERVICES	11
INCREASED KNOWLEDGE CAPACITY	15

Again, an increased knowledge emerged as being a particularly strong theme. This indicates that Sex Work Research Wales has generated a research impact as it has significantly **enhanced the knowledge base of public and third sector organisations** that deliver services for sex workers.

Respondents noted that the training would improve their professionalism in a number of ways, such as identifying and getting beyond stereotypes. Specific comments included:

*“just with a different mindset in terms of recognising my own professional stereotypes”*

*“I will be sharing the learning/issues discussed with colleagues, making more use of ugly mugs scheme and promoting it”*

One respondent, a DS working on the area of human trafficking, indicated that s/he was now working towards setting up a multi-agency support project for sex workers:

*“Currently trying to set-up a sex worker group within the police and local authority”*

That particular respondent stated that s/he had increased their knowledge about the issues faced by sex workers from 2.5- 5. This data indicates that the training is affecting **positive change to organisational practices** and more evidence that the research is **enhancing the effectiveness of organisations including public services**.

The 45 who didn't think training would change personal practices left 16 comments that were thematically analysed. It was found that 7 felt they already worked in a non-judgemental way, of the remaining 9, 3 stated structural reasons within their organisations, whilst one felt there was a need for further training:

*“due to the constraints we can only offer morning appointments which is not good for SWs due to being out all night” (Caseworker, Dyfodol)*

The remaining 5 respondents’ comments noted their own length of experience with sex workers; their own personal ethics; and the fact that they were better informed but that this didn’t necessarily translate to practice change:

*I will not change but have a greater understanding (Home Office Immigration Officer)*

*Informative training, however, I have worked in varying capacity with sex workers for many years*

*(Social work assistant)*

This data highlights that there are sectors relevant to the experience of sex workers which are not as receptive to practice change. This is likely due to some procedural rigidity or the nature of the roles, as those involved with home office and immigration in particular showed that the training was impactful on their understanding, but they were largely uncertain about how to apply it at work, mainly due to their very specific remit<sup>2</sup>.

## Changes to Practice 2: Organisational.

54 of 135, or 40% of the most relevant cohort thought the training would change their organisational practice, leaving the remaining 60% (n=81) who did not

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<sup>2</sup> I recommend that I perform a more specific analysis on this cohort with a view to tailoring further training based on their feedback.

agree. Because the proportions of positive/ negative responses seemed to reverse at this point, a thematic analysis of the negative responses was undertaken. Of the 81 who did not think that training would influence their organisational practices, 20 comments were made.

- 7 respondents commented that they were not in the position to implement organisational changes. This indicates that further training aimed at service delivery managers could prove useful in affecting procedural change.
- 8 respondents commented that their organisations were already delivering services that fit with the approach advocated by training.
- The remaining 5 respondents gave a range of answers that cannot be pinned down for this analysis, however one answer stated that the respondent had had a lot of information and now needed time to digest it.

### Changes to Policy

Given the answers to the question did they think training would change organisational practice, where 54 thought it would, it was puzzling that of the 135, 104, or 77% indicated that they did not agree that the training should change organisational policy. It appeared to indicate disapproval after the event.

A closer analysis of the 25 open-ended responses however, shows that respondents in this category already felt that their organisations either:

- a. had robust policies in place (n=6);
- b. worked to a high ethical standard already (n=6);
- c. prioritised a different set of (incompatible?) policies (n=3); and
- d. rather than affecting change, training would help to implement the policies already in place (n=5).

Of the 25 responses, 2 stated they were not familiar with their organisational policy, and 3 had to be written off as not germane to the question.

This demonstrates that there are two complimentary but different pathways to impact, either through accessing and opening a dialogue with senior managers, or by continuing to provide training to organisations where policies are in place, however practices trail behind. This indicates that there is something of a lag between policy and practice regarding how best to support sex workers and, in tune with the key messages coming out of the data, the ethical and moral aspects of sex working produce wildly differing responses from the people delivering services. This vindicates the research and the need for training, however it seems to marginalise overall impacts if policy change is not happening as a direct result. It is interesting to note that in this sector, practice makes policy more or less effective (not vice versa!).

#### Further comments

A range of extra comments were made about what trainees would like to see more of. There was no overall consensus, except a trend towards wanting information about where sex workers could be referred to locally. This notion clearly presents practical issues as trainers cannot simply know local support groups everywhere they go. It is not clear whether there is any directory of services that professionals would acknowledge is useful, however these certainly do exist. Perhaps a link to a suitable directory can be made.

Noteworthy requests included a handout or leaflet summarising sex work law, further details about sex work that does not conform to the stereotypically gendered, specific focus on migrant sex workers and trafficked persons, more practical information on harm reduction.