

TRAN SACT IONS.

A PROJECT WITH TRANS PEOPLE WHO SELL SEX

OUR STORY.

TransActions started out as a conversation between researchers at Northumbria University and National Ugly Mugs, an organisation whose mission it is to end violence against sex workers. National Ugly Mugs wanted to understand the needs of trans sex workers so they could provide better services and do more work ending violence and tackling stigma. Researchers from Northumbria University were concerned about the absence of trans sex workers' voices and experiences in the research and policy literature.

As this conversation developed, Open Lab at Newcastle University became involved and offered seed funding. Open Lab use and develop digital technologies to support and foster social inclusion among communities. They use participatory processes for engagement, consultation and representation in the design and adoption of new digital services.

Together, we started to develop TransActions and in May 2017 hosted workshops with sex workers and practitioners. The aim of these workshops was to find out what the key areas of concern for sex workers and practitioners are, with the aim of securing the funding to produce a set of resources to enable knowledge sharing. In the workshop we asked: (i) what topics/areas should new resources focus on; (ii) what type of resources would be useful; (iii) how best to collect the information needed; and (iv) how should we create them.

Initially we thought the workshop itself would just be a 'stepping stone' for the project. However, the workshop itself proved to be a

valuable safe space for knowledge sharing.

The university-based part of the team then analysed the recordings and met again with some of the attendees for further discussion.

This leaflet is the result!

In here, we discuss a number of themes that were covered by both sex workers and practitioners on the day - you will note as you read that there are similarities and differences of opinion on the same topics.

We do not claim that the information provided in this leaflet is representative of all trans people who sell sex, or all practitioners who work with trans sex workers, but it provides a snapshot of the experiences of the 14 sex workers and practitioners who took part in the first TransActions workshops. We hope you enjoy it and find it useful. Please get in touch to share any feedback!

As TransActions progresses, we hope that others will join us and become part of the project team. Interested? Get in touch!

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TRANS WHORE PHOBIA.

Practitioners

Important questions for practitioners are: 'Are trans services sex worker friendly?' and 'Are sex worker spaces trans friendly?' Being inclusive to everyone is vital.

Trans Sex Workers

Trans sex workers can feel marginalised as a trans person in sex worker circles and as a sex worker in trans circles, as well as in HIV and health spaces.

Practitioners

Some trans people who do sex work might not want to disclose this to other trans people, some might work without disclosure, whilst others may be out and proud.

Practitioners

Some critics say that in some LGBT services, the T stands for 'token'. Services who support LGBT people should be trans and sex worker inclusive.

Trans Sex Workers

This kind of tokenism was also discussed by trans sex workers. They also discussed that for some there may be a desire to fit in with society, but that there is often unwanted attention around their trans status.

Trans Sex Workers

Sometimes trans people are asked very personal questions by people of all genders, but "it's none of your business!"

Practitioners

Sex work projects must be cautious about having a gender-binary focus, which could make trans people feel excluded.

Trans Sex Workers

Additional peer support is important for some trans sex workers as "we all go through that stuff and we need each other."

Practitioners

Some trans people who do sex work have felt that some services are ill-equipped to support them, despite being trans and sex worker friendly in theory. Service providers can sometimes lack the language to be inclusive.

Trans Sex Workers

"Why do you need to lose everything to start transitioning?"

Practitioners

Trans masculine experiences and voices must be included. Trans men and non-binary people can feel marginalized and/or under-represented in trans support services.

MIGRATION.

Practitioners

Some trans sex workers are migrant workers.

Trans Sex Workers

It's important to have a wide view of migration to include travelling abroad as well as travelling within Britain: "I travelled the world as a trans sex worker."

Practitioners

Some might be 'on tour' or on tourist or student visas. Some might be waiting for leave to remain in the UK.

Practitioners

A key issue for migrant workers is ensuring they have access to information about their rights in the UK, especially in relation to access to health and medical care, and access to the police if needed.

Practitioners

Trans sex workers accessing services might have very different experiences of sex work and equality law. Practitioners may not legally be able to give out immigration advice, but should know of referral pathways, sign-posting and advocacy.

Trans Sex Workers

"My experience is different I come from a horrible place where people are killed because of their sexuality"

Practitioners

Migrant workers might feel especially marginalized if their cultural needs are not represented, and where possible resources should be made available in multiple languages.

Trans Sex Workers

Some sex workers were impacted by conflict in their home countries, some had to leave education, some were arrested because of their trans status.

Trans Sex Workers

"I think your luck will change because you came to the UK"



TransActions Team

Language should be inclusive and varied, language and terminology is constantly evolving. Some people in the group said that insensitive language could be harmful.

HEALTH AND TRANSITION.

Practitioners

Sexual Health advice is important given varied levels knowledge. It needs to be both trans and sex worker specific.

Trans Sex Workers

“You can never get the right tick box on forms” There should be trans-inclusive language on forms; perhaps a “box for gender and a box for trans history”

Practitioners

Service Users need to feel they can be open about their work and gender identity, the sex they are having, and treatment.

Trans Sex Workers

Non-judgmental support is needed around transitioning and sex work, including open dialogue with practitioners. This is especially important in Gender Identity Clinics (GICs).

Practitioners

Practitioners should be trained, sensitive and non-judgmental; they should provide a safe space for disclosure so the most effective care and treatment can be provided.

Trans Sex Workers

Some cited the concern that trans health care access and treatments can be jeopardised by being a sex worker or outing themselves as sex workers.

Practitioners

Trans sex workers may need support managing hormones which they could have accessed for free on the NHS, or have purchased on-line which may carry different risks.

Trans Sex Workers

“I ran out of meds I couldn't go to the hospital” because of the stigma and shame attached to being trans

Trans Sex Workers

“I was treated like a leper by trans people” because I was HIV+. There are exclusions for trans people in healthcare.

Practitioners

Post-surgery some trans sex workers need extra support, recovery time might mean reduced or no income.

Trans Sex Workers

Concerns about “convincing health care professionals that income is coming from somewhere entirely respectable.”

Practitioners

Complex referral pathways from GP to the GICs can be overwhelming, but continuity of care and support is important.

Trans Sex Workers

Some trans sex workers access both NHS and private services and pay for surgeries themselves.

CHOICE AND ROUTES.

Practitioners

Some trans sex workers see their work as an empowered choice in which they are offering a unique and highly skilled service to a specific market.

Trans Sex Workers

“When I became a sex worker I can do things I like, I choose clients I choose the men I want to see.”

Trans Sex Workers

Being a sex worker isn't always negative. “Many of us make a choice and my choice was made”

Practitioners

Others may feel like a commodity, or see sex work as a response to poverty, or lack of choice. Services and practitioners should recognize diversity of sex work experience and gender identity and remain non-judgmental and supportive.

Trans Sex Workers

People said they ended up doing sex work for different reasons. Some worked because they had to survive illness.

Trans Sex Workers

Others said that choices were made under the system we live in: “I chose sex work in the constraints that I had” someone else said: “I chose to do it within constraints of homelessness”

Practitioners

For some, housing can be a factor in doing sex work. This might be linked to transition as gender identity can be a factor in accessing or losing housing, and sex work and housing/homelessness also intersect in different ways.

Trans Sex Workers

Transitioning can also lead to fetishization where “people want the thing that you don't like”

Trans Sex Workers

The psychology is hard. In marketing as a trans sex worker, the focus is on personal image/identity and it's all about the body, which is often difficult to deal with. The marketed identity might be very far away from who you are as a person

Trans Sex Workers

Some trans people struggle with self perception, one said: “I don't look like a real woman” and another: “once you become a trans woman it's a battle that never ends, a battle that goes everywhere you go.”

VICTIM- ISATION.

Trans Sex Workers

"People believe all sex workers are victims and we are not"

Trans Sex Workers

"We are not victims...I do agree people have a hard time, but it made me a stronger person. When I became a sex worker I learnt I can do what I like; to be a stronger person"

Practitioners

Some trans sex workers report violent responses from clients after sex. This might be from cis-male clients who often identify as 'straight' but seek services from trans women who have not had lower surgery.

Trans Sex Workers

"Clients kill us. It's fairly self explanatory."

Practitioners

Some report violence if trans history is not disclosed.

Trans Sex Workers

"I get assaulted at work quite a lot"

Trans Sex Workers

"I've lost my feeling I don't cry anymore complete depression"

Practitioners

Harassment, blackmail, nuisance phone calls and time wasters can be significant issues for trans sex workers; as can serious violent and sexual crimes.

Trans Sex Workers

"There is not a history of clients being murdered by rampant trans sex workers."

Practitioners

Trans-affirmative hook up apps are on the increase, but safety with a stranger can often be compromised as a result.

Practitioners

Transphobia and harassment in multiple guises are key issues for trans sex workers and services should work to support people to report all types of crime, abuse and violence to the police and National Ugly Mugs.

Trans Sex Workers

Participants had experiences of unwanted touching and said that people fetishize and want to touch them; that they have been asked personal and invasive questions.

Trans Sex Workers

Victimisation ties in closely with transphobia: "people touch us they don't do that to you - it's so hard"; whorephobia: "We are sex workers, 'they are allowed to touch us'" and the intersection of the two, which we have called transwhorephobia.

CRIMINAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Trans Sex Workers

"We shouldn't be arrested, and if clients are positioned as criminal and are arrested for seeing sex workers, then sex workers are positioned as criminal too by implication."

TransActions Team

In all sections of the workshop with sex workers all supported decriminalization although different languages were used to express this and issues of the law were important for all.

Practitioners

Many trans sex workers work alone which is legal in the UK.

Trans Sex Workers

"So many of us are working very precariously"

Practitioners

More than one person working from a premise would constitute a brothel and would be illegal.

Trans Sex Workers

"The laws should allow you to work and make money - decriminalisation allows you to pay taxes and earn a legal income."

Trans Sex Workers

Having someone there makes you feel safer (e.g a maid, but they can also be at risk of prosecution)

Practitioners

Migrant trans sex workers may need support around immigration laws; even those who are EU nationals who might need support around exercising treaty rights.

Practitioners

Loitering and soliciting on the street and carding (advertising in phone boxes) are also illegal; a criminal record can become a barrier to exiting sex work if the individual wants to.

Trans Sex Workers

We already have laws for assault, one sex worker said: "criminalising people in prostitution will never work"

Practitioners

All trans sex workers should be encouraged to sign up to National Ugly Mugs who will support them if they are victims of crime; and will help them access the police if this is what they want.

Trans Sex Workers

"Sex workers are more likely to report violence when working in a decriminalised system."

Trans Sex Workers

"Assaults against trans sex workers are clearly hate crimes."

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS.

TransActions Team

During the workshop practitioners and sex workers talked about the things they thought researchers should think about in the context of their work with trans sex workers.

TransActions Team

Trans experiences are less visible in the research literature compared to those of male and female sex workers.

Practitioners and Trans Sex Workers

There should be research and resources developed by, with and for trans sex workers

Practitioners

'Trans' is not a monolith - it's important to recognize diversity, including trans-masculine identities; research and resources should reflect this diversity.

Trans Sex Workers

There are oppourtunities for learning and knowledge sharing between academics, practitioners, sex workers and other experts: "We all need to learn from each other it should be a balance."

Trans Sex Workers

Wherever possible trans sex workers and experts should lead or be part of projects and act as co-researchers.

Practitioners and Trans Sex Workers

There should be recognition (financial and/or otherwise) for the provision of expertise.

Trans Sex Workers

There must be recognition of the valuable skill set many trans sex workers have in the context of research.

Trans Sex Workers

The voices of sex workers and experts are integral to the process of research; not just data collection and dissemination.

Practitioners and Sex Workers

How trans sex workers advertise in relation to their gender identity was an area highlighted for further research, as were key areas of health, migration, transwhorephobia, victimisation, law and criminal justice, language and entry into sex work.

GET INVOLVED.

We want to grow TransActions. We want more people to become part of the team and part of the project. We want to understand more and share more knowledge. We want to learn from sex workers, practitioners and experts and share this so others can improve the ways in which they work and engage with trans sex workers.

Get in touch to:

- Tell us what you think is important
- Share your expertise and experiences and have your say
- Share ownership of the project
- Be part of a creative process
- Learn and share new skills with others
- Create something that supports trans sex workers
- Help us with grant applications
- Join us at a future meeting or workshop
- Share a story with us on our blog www.transactions.space

If you would like to get involved with TransActions in any capacity including one that is not listed above, please get in touch and let us know!

We are keen to continue to build our networks and areas of expertise and interest to reflect the diversity of trans and sex worker experiences.

If you have any questions, comments, queries, or concerns about the TransActions project, please don't hesitate to get in touch:

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or visit www.transactions.space





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PARTS OF THIS PROJECT WERE FUNDED THROUGH THE EPSRC CENTRE FOR DOCTORAL TRAINING IN DIGITAL CIVICS (EP/L016176/1) AND THE EPSRC DIGITAL ECONOMY RESEARCH CENTRE (DERC) (EP/M023001/1).

WE ALSO WANT TO THANK NATIONAL UGLY MUGS, CLINIQ, HARLEY FROM SWARM, DR. MATT JONES AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY, AND ALL OF OUR PARTICIPANTS FOR JOINING US ON THE JOURNEY THAT IS TRANSACTIONS.