

## Slide 1 – Speaker Helen Easton

We would like to thank Hanne for inviting us to present at this conference and share the work that we have been doing over the last two years looking at how women exit from prostitution.

I'm Helen Easton and I'm a senior research fellow at London South Bank University where I have been working for the last 6 years on a number of research projects. The main focus of my research has been women's desistance from crime and women exiting prostitution and also trafficking.

This is Lisa Reynolds who is the Exiting prostitution Link officer at Eaves. Lisa has worked with me on the research and initially conducting field work and supporting women to be involved in the study and later maintaining contact with women to encourage them to participate in second round interviews and ensure the ethical conduct of the research. More recently Lisa and I have been working together with other member of the team to conduct analysis and produce the findings of the study, some of which we will present to you today.

Just as an outline I will talk about the context of prostitution in the UK including legislation and approaches to regulation as well as touch on the dominant academic debates and where Eaves and LSBU are positioned within these debates.

I will then provide an outline of the study including the methodology and research aims. Lisa will then talk to you about how participants were recruited for the study, the sample of participants and profile of women involved in and exiting prostitution participated.

She will then to go on to give you some descriptive statistics about the sample. Lisa and I will then present to you some of the key findings emerging from the research focusing on 2 main themes. One, how women may become trapped in prostitution and two, a model of exiting that is relevant to practitioners and others working with this group of women. The presentation will present as many examples from the research as possible and attempt to make it relevant working in a direct support capacity. Tomorrow's workshop will take this a step further by expanding upon the stages model and providing examples of women's exiting trajectories.

We will close the presentation with what we are going to do later with further analysis and research as well as our plans for dissemination.

## Slide 2 – Speaker Helen Easton

In England and Wales it is estimated that between 80 – 100,000 women and around 600 children are involved in prostitution.

As in many other jurisdictions there is a growing indoor trade facilitated by the increasing use of the internet and mobile phones to make contact and which is further magnified as the result of ambivalent policy responses about indoor prostitution. There has been a widening of the sex industry in general with a proliferation of lap dancing clubs, topless bars and chat lines and associated advertising.

In many cities across the UK, there has been a reduction in the numbers and concentrations of women working on the street, however, women involved in street prostitution are increasingly vulnerable, mainly through their involvement with Class A drugs, particularly Heroin and Crack Cocaine. This high proportion of women involved with Class A drugs has meant that many responses to prostitution have emerged from the drugs and criminal justice field.

Although, prostitution itself is legal in England and Wales, various forms of behaviour associated with the sale of sex are illegal eg. running a brothel, pimping for financial gain and soliciting for instance. There have also been recent changes to legislation that have begun to address men's demand for prostitution and trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. The Policing and Crime Act (2009) for instance made it illegal to pay for sexual services of a prostitute 'subjected to force'. As a strict liability offence the excuse that 'you didn't know' doesn't stand up.

In relation to the policy context, England and Wales remain focussed on the management of disorder related to outdoor prostitution. The Labour Government, however, were taking steps to address issues of gender equality and violence against women which had begun to see concern about all forms of prostitution as harmful. The changing Government has shown that agendas such as these are no longer the priority they once were.

Within this shifting national position, prostitution is managed locally in partnership between the police and other local government services. This has led to significant differences and ambivalence about how prostitution is managed across the country. Some areas take a liberal, harm minimisation and toleration approach while others, often where significant violence has been experienced by women involved in prostitution, take a proactive, coordinated approach viewing prostitution as dangerous and harmful and developing a range of support services which engage women with the idea of leaving the trade. This approach has however, seen issues related to prostitution delegated to departments such as 'waste management' in some areas due to the paraphernalia left behind from outdoor sex and drug use rather than a social welfare response. Academics are equally divided about how best to regulate prostitution, although the dominant view is the liberal perspective that

promotes decriminalisation and that prostitution should be regulated as any other form of work.

While a lot is known about how women enter prostitution and the types of experiences they have whilst involved, less is known about how women exit prostitution and the best ways of supporting them to do so, hence the reason for our focus on exiting in this study.

### Slide 3 – Speaker Helen Easton

The study is a joint research project between Eaves and London South Bank University. Eaves is a feminist women's organisation which works against all aspects of violence against women of which prostitution is included here. They provide direct support services to women wishing to exit from prostitution, to women who have experienced trafficking; provide domestic violence services, a front line advice centre to women experience any form of violence including rape and sexual violence, and it has a Policy, Research and Development branch to the organisation which responds to government consultation and researches wider aspects of violence against women.

We were provided a 2 year grant from the Big Lottery fund to work in partnership to research women leaving prostitution and the key needs and processes that these women undergo. Lisa and I are working with a small research team who also include Professor Roger Matthews of LSBU, Julie Bindel, Project Manager from Eaves, Helen Atkins, Research Officer, Eaves, and Laura Brown, Administrator, Eaves.

One of the aims of the research and the reason for the partnership between an academic institution and a voluntary sector organisation is to maximise the potential beneficiaries for the research. This included providing a benefit to Eaves by capacity building the staff within the research and development team to conduct robust, rigorous and good quality policy research.

Both Eaves and London South Bank University take the position that prostitution is harmful to women, damaging to gender relationships, is an exploitative practice and that women should have adequate provision of effective support to enable them to exit, however, our standpoint was not imposed upon women and was indeed not the focus of the study. The research did however, adopt a feminist research methodology, aiming to empower women to participate in the study and have their voices and experiences documented to contribute to policy making in this area.

The research has obtained ethical approval from both the University ethics committee and an ethics committee within the National Health Service.

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## **Aims**

The key aims of the research were to:

1. Explore the nature, scope and efficacy of existing approaches to exiting prostitution.
2. Expand the evidence base of effective interventions in order to benefit women seeking to leave prostitution by improving professional, political and social understanding of the experiences, needs and expectations of women involved in prostitution.
3. Develop an effective working protocol for practitioners to assist women involved in prostitution to exit in order to promote a sustainable, nationwide framework of good practice.

The research took a multi method approach drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods including contact with women participants –adult women involved in, exiting or exited from prostitution and formerly trafficked women; interviews with practitioners and other relevant professionals; and a short survey of communities affected by prostitution.

## **Interviews with women participants**

The research followed a feminist methodology, central to which was a qualitative longitudinal approach involving two in-depth interviews that incorporated visual methods and the use of personal journals and other written materials by participants.

The first interview involved the collection of demographic and other key information about women's current and personal circumstances as well as an in-depth life history.

The second interview focussed on changes in the participant's personal circumstances and their own reflections upon their experiences since the first interview.

Follow on support was provided by Lisa who maintained contact with women between interviews and facilitated access into direct support services if participants identified this as something that they would like.

Initial in-depth interviews were conducted with 114 women involved in, exiting or exited from prostitution. Seventy-seven of those contacted engaged with the tracking process and welcomed regular contact. Approaching half of the sample (50) participated in a second interview, within six to twelve months of the initial interview.

### **Interviews with Practitioner Participants**

Thirty five semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 46 practitioners providing support for women involved in prostitution along with other specialists working in the field from a range of statutory (9) and voluntary agencies (26) across ten sites in England. These interviews aimed to understand the various approaches to service provision for women involved in prostitution throughout England.

### **Community surveys**

Over 3000 community surveys were distributed by post to local residents in four sites across England. A total of 176 responses were received from residents in Leeds (74), Southampton (62), London (31) and Ipswich (9). The main rationale for this community survey was to attempt to understand and collate responses from the community regarding how prostitution was viewed in their area. A range of questions were asked including views regarding the effectiveness of support services available to women, whether prostitution (including kerb crawling) was an issue in their area and what should be done locally to address issues associated with prostitution.

## Slide 5 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

Women participants were recruited via a range of methods including from direct support services which they were currently engaging with, through direct contact and by publicising the research in a range of locations including word of mouth, escort agencies, adverts.

The service providers through which women were recruited included Health services, drugs services, hostels, exiting services, diversion schemes, women's drop in services.

## Slide 6 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

We conducted a total of 114 first round interviews with women participants, 50 second round interviews with women participants, 35 stakeholder interviews and posted 3000 community surveys across 7 research sites in England.

## Slide 7 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

The women involved in this study were aged 19 – 55 years old. The majority of them were involved predominantly in on street prostitution although a smaller number were involved off street or had been trafficked into prostitution.

Women entered prostitution as early as 6 years old up until 40 years of age. The sample was representative of other studies where women involved in prostitution suffered multiple physical, mental and sexual health issues, had experienced childhood abuse, had used drugs or alcohol during their involvement in prostitution.

The majority of the sample had exited or were exiting from prostitution although a significant number were currently involved in prostitution some of whom were considering exiting.

## Slide 8 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

While the women were categorised for the research into 3 main types of involvement, the research found that the women had often moved between places of involvement ranging from street prostitution to working in private residences, massage parlours, brothels, and some women reported working as escorts or working in clubs, bars, hotels.

## Slide 9 – Speaker Helen Easton

We've decided to focus on 2 of the main themes that have emerged from our research. The first is how women may become trapped in prostitution and the factors that can contribute to this and the second is developing a staged exiting model to help explain the process of exiting and provide a framework through which exiting support can be delivered.

Where possible we have drawn on examples from our research study and have linked the findings to relevant areas of practice. The stages model presented in this section of the discussion will be presented in tomorrow's workshop.

## Slide 10 – Speaker Helen Easton

Within the literature on exiting there is some sense that the factors leading to women's involvement in prostitution are too complicated to unravel. This focus on the 'complexity' of women's underlying needs also exists right throughout the literature on women's offending where it has faced some criticism.

Focussing on the complexity of women's underlying needs has meant that the only conceivable approach to assisting women is to provide 'holistic' support which in practice often means 'throwing' a range of solutions / support at a woman and hoping that something works. This approach is generally undifferentiated according to a woman's needs, does not consider the complex processes in working towards exiting prostitution or consider why the simple provision of support may not be sufficient to help a woman leave.

When this approach hasn't worked a woman may be deemed too 'complex' to deal with and both she and her worker may experience a sense of failure. In some cases, support workers may then maintain a woman in support for longer than is necessary, perhaps psychologising her problems rather than admitting a failure of the support model. In others enforcement is considered the only remaining option as it appears the woman is wilfully rejecting any support she has been provided.

The findings from our study therefore highlight that the 'holistic' approach requires further consideration and while women require a range of practical and emotional support, the nature and timing of this support is all important and that lapses and failures will form part of the process of change.

The next section of the presentation focuses on the elements that might prevent a woman from exiting and how these may combine and influence each other. Several authors have identified such elements as 'trapping factors' (Pheonix 2002, Cusick and Hickman 2005) however there has been some criticism of the methodology and conceptualisation of the notion of trapping within these studies (Matthews, 2008). Firstly, the variables identified within these studies are limited – age of entry into prostitution, 'street / drift' prostitution, and the use of 'hard' drugs for instance. And secondly, the sample from which the analysis is drawn is skewed and fails to recognise that over half the women in the sample had been involved in hard drug use prior to their involvement in prostitution.

Perhaps most importantly, these studies of trapping factors fail to identify other elements which may prevent a woman leaving prostitution and the recommendations from these studies fail to address the underlying issue, that is, how do you then provide the necessary support to assist a woman to exit? Lisa will now talk through how we identified further trapping factors and how they can be used in relation to exiting.

Slide 11 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

The following trapping factors were identified drawing on the finding from the literature and from reading and analysing the data collected in the study.

Reviewing the transcripts it became apparent that several factors re-occurred when women talked about the obstacles that they need to overcome when attempting to exit from prostitution. Based on the information in the transcripts the research team decided upon the 12 most commonly described trapping factors.

TRAP	DESCRIPTION
Dependency	Drug or alcohol dependency
Housing	Homeless or living in unsuitable accommodation
Physical or mental health problems	Physical or mental health problems as reported by participants
Experiences of childhood violence	Sexual, emotional, physical or verbal violence and abuse
Criminal record	Criminal convictions relating to both prostitution or non-prostitution offences
Debt	Personal debts of any amount
Coercion	From partner, pimp, relative or other person
No qualifications	No formal qualifications or training
Age of entry into prostitution	Under 18 years / 18 years and over
Disposable cash	Viewing income from prostitution as 'disposable cash'
Victim of trafficking	As defined by the United Nations Palermo Protocol 2000 (section 3.a)
Entrenchment	Prostitution is not simply a 'part' of the woman's identity but rather all aspects of her life are connected to her involvement. She finds it difficult to imagine a life where she is not involved in prostitution. Entrenchment may be signalled by a lengthy and habitual involvement, however, the duration of a woman's involvement is not the key consideration. As one interviewee described her experiences when asked whether she had ever tried to exit or stop before, " <b>Not really. It's the only life I know.</b> " (32 years old, coerced into prostitution aged 12)

The presence or absence of these traps were identified within the needs assessment and/or qualitative interviews with each of the 114 women.

Slide 12 –Speaker Lisa Reynolds

This table shows each of the traps and how many women from the sample experienced these traps.

The most commonly experienced traps were drug dependency, housing, mental and physical health, any childhood violence and entrenchment.

From this table you can see that women face a range of trapping factors at anyone time and that some traps overlap and interconnect for example there are often overlaps between drug use and debts or between drug use and past experience of childhood violence.

Although we are in the very early stages of our analysis, what we aim to do is look deeper into whether there is a particular factor or combination of factors that keep women trapped in prostitution longer and make it more difficult to leave should they want to? The aim of this work is to try and offer something meaningful to practitioners and services working with women that enables efforts to be focused to the areas that would be most required and hopefully assist women to achieve positive results.

Slide 13 –Speaker Lisa Reynolds.

This slide illustrates the total number of traps experienced by each woman in the study. Most women in the study had experienced between 6 and 8 traps.

All of the women experienced at least one trap and none of the women experienced all 12.

## Slide 14 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

We divided the sample into on street off street and trafficked according to women's main involvement in prostitution. This slide shows how traps varied between the 3 groups.

Eighty-two percent of women involved in off street prostitution reported physical and / or mental health problems compared to 72% of women involved in on street prostitution and 43% of women who were trafficked.

All three groups had very similar reports of childhood violence including verbal violence, physical violence, emotional violence and sexual violence. 66% of women involved in off street prostitution reported childhood violence, 70% of women involved in on street prostitution and 71% of women who were trafficked<sup>2</sup>.

## Slide 15 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

The women were then categorised into three groups according to the number of 'traps' identified. Women who experienced nine or more traps were classified as having a high number of traps, women with five to eight traps were considered to have a medium number of traps, and women who experienced four or fewer traps were considered to face a low number of traps when attempting to exit prostitution. Within the sample, seven women were classified as having a high number, 78 were classified as having a medium number and 29 were classified as having a low number of traps at the time of beginning the exiting process.

Early exploratory analysis indicates that women who experienced a higher number of trapping factors were much more likely to have experienced entrenchment, have a criminal record, have experienced coercion during their involvement in prostitution and to have entered prostitution when under 18 years than women with fewer trapping factors. It is important to note that with an increasing number of trapping factors present, women's attempts to exit become more complicated as each factor interacts with each of the other factors.

Example of SU032 about how traps operate – LR to complete

Example of SU123 about how traps operate – LR to complete

Slide 16 -Speaker Helen Easton

Understanding the processes involved in trapping women in prostitution and beginning to unravel these traps is the rationale and basis for providing exiting support for women. A knowledge of these traps and how they interact together informs how to design support for women who want to leave including the development of an exiting model that includes possible reversals as part of its fundamental ethos.

A number of exiting models have been proposed, however, none have provided the specificity required to work with women exiting prostitution.

Many do not provide a staged approach. A staged model provides a framework within which practitioners and women can identify and measure change and manage the reversals which commonly form part of any change in behaviour. A staged model allows the targeting of interventions to where they will have the most positive results.

Others provide a staged approach without the specificity required to understand exiting from prostitution, for example, models commonly used within drug treatment are not able to deal with the complexity of issues and trapping factors faced or the gender-related issues faced by some women involved in prostitution. On the other hand, Herman's trauma model, commonly used with both women involved in prostitution and women offenders, has become less popular as practitioners recognise that exiting or desistance is possible without the need for deep ongoing psychotherapeutic intervention.

The model we have developed attempts to resolve some of these limitations and provide a framework for the development of exiting programmes. This will be further examined in an academic publication following the completion of the final research report.

## Slide 17 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

From the study a 5 stage model of exiting has been developed.

Important to point out that not all women will fit the model and it is merely guidance to help us understand what is involved in the process of change for different women. It is also important to note that lapses and relapses are considered a natural part of the process and are likely at any stage.

Stage 1 – In order for a woman to come to the decision that exiting would be something they would like to do then there needs to be an understanding that exiting is a possibility. Women may experience negative aspects of their involvement in prostitution and may talk about these experiences but are not taking any action at this stage to reduce or stop. Any current negative experiences are currently weighted against any or a combination of the following: Familiarity of their current situation, fear of the unknown or change, pressure from others to continue, external pressures such as poverty, children, drug use, uncertainty about where or how to seek help, lack of confidence in their ability to make and sustain changes, and having limited support mechanisms in place.

Tipping point – The moment a woman moves beyond stage 1 to stage 2 and has decided it is time to take action. This tipping point can stem from a one off event or a culmination of smaller events. The negative aspects now outweigh any external pressures and the desire to stop is larger than anything else.

Stage 2 - Action. Commitment to stopping, with little or no formal support or by accessing a service that quickly helps to remove practical barriers to exiting such as housing, debt problems, substitute prescribing. Some women stop and can exit prostitution here. No real slow down but a swift stop.

Stage 3 - for women who go through the tipping point and stage 2 slowly, reducing their involvement whilst increasing the support and support networks around them. Building coping mechanisms and taking full advantage of support options available to them including therapy, rehabilitation, detoxification.

Stage 4 – Rebuilding and reconnecting. Making links with family members again, accessing college and courses, creating a meaningful non prostitution related life. This could be similar to stage 3 of Judith Herman's trauma model.

Stage 5 – New identity. Women at this stage have engaged fully with the process of exiting and are able to reconcile their past and present experiences and go on to make positive plans for their future. The chance of lapse or relapse is highly diminished at this stage. Women at this stage have a clear understanding of the route into their involvement in prostitution, the factors that kept them trapped and have means to sustain their permanent exit.

Slide 18 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

From the sample of 114 women, 53 reported that they had stopped their involvement in prostitution anywhere from 2 weeks to 2 or more years.

From our sample of women 34 stopped at stage 2 more suddenly without the need to make a gradual transition in stage 3.

19 women progressed to stage 4 gradually going through the stages in sequence and accessing all the support available to them.

## Slide 19 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

The first example is a woman who exited at stage 2 and who had been involved in street prostitution as well as escorting. She found out she was pregnant and was helped by a support agency to find a place to live. When she gave birth to her daughter to felt she could not continue and went back to her family and stopped prostitution with limited support. The birth of her baby gave her the motivation to stop.

The second example is a woman is a woman who exited at stage 4 and who had been forced by a pimp into prostitution at the age of 14 and had remained involved for 20 years. She been supported over a number of years by a specialist exiting support agency. She had gradually had support to remove the barriers and traps keeping her in prostitution such as alcoholism, coercion, childhood abuse. She went through a gradual transition with support at every stage, counselling, rehab therapy. She was re-engaged with her family members and reached a point of self confidence and had managed to exit and to make many positive changes in her life.

Slide 20 – Speaker Lisa Reynolds

The next stage of our analysis will focus on the profiles of women who go through all the stages and those who don't. We will also examine whether stopping at stage 2 increases the risk of lapse or reversal or whether someone who progresses to stage 4 experience a decrease in the risk of lapse or reversals.

We will also look into what happens for women to enable them to exit at stage 5.

Some of the questions we will be focusing on are;

What are the women's experiences who go all the way through the stages?

What support did they receive and from which model of service provider? Does this aspect of their support make a difference to how they go through the stages?

Slide 21- Speaker Lisa Reynolds

Other areas that we will develop for the final report include documenting the limitations of a drug or criminal justice centred model; the different models of support or service provision available to women in the UK; and the relationships between the routes into prostitution, the traps women experience, and the process of exiting.

We are also seeking further funding to conduct repeat interviews with our existing sample to examine the longitudinal process of exiting over several years.

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The research project is due for completion at the end of June 2011 with the research findings disseminated after this date. Dissemination will include a final research report available on the Eaves website and a number of academic publications will follow. As has been mentioned additional follow on funding is being sought to investigate further many of the issues emerging from this study.

