



East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee

Commercial Sexual Exploitation in East Lothian and Midlothian Briefing Paper Executive Summary

'A strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse – and the attitudes that perpetuate it'

Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence
against women and girls
Scottish Government and COSLA – November 2016

Executive Summary

Background

Commercial sexual exploitation is a significant public health issue. It adversely affects physical, sexual and mental health and, in relation to access to health and social care, women involved in sex work experience considerable inequalities in comparison to women in the general population.

Following a Lothian wide seminar in 2016 to consider the issue of commercial sexual exploitation in the Lothians, the East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery sub-group, established a short-life working group to take forward recommendations from that event to ensure that Equally Safe is delivered across the localities. Specifically, the remit of the working group was to:

- Ensure that commercial sexual exploitation is explicitly addressed in the local Violence Against Women and Girls improvement plan and strategy.
- Ensure adults are included along with the current focus on child sexual exploitation.
- Explore further the extent of commercial sexual exploitation in local areas (e.g. scope issues and needs in East Lothian and Midlothian).

The short-life working group (SLWG) was convened in May 2017 and a scoping exercise undertaken from June to October 2017. Information was sought around activity relating to: prostitution, adult entertainment and human trafficking, as well as the extent of specialist service provision and sources of information and support in the area. A wide range of agencies were contacted who it was considered might be aware of levels of activity across the region either through direct contact with people working in the sex industry or indirectly (e.g. through the licensing of premises to accommodate adult entertainment services).

Extent of activity in East Lothian and Midlothian

Third sector organisations who work with women experiencing domestic and sexual abuse have provided some evidence of commercial sexual exploitation in East Lothian and Midlothian, particularly among women experiencing substance misuse. Women are also coming forward in relation to historical cases of commercial sexual exploitation. In addition there is anecdotal evidence of the increasing use of online platforms to advertise and deliver sexual services and reports of perpetrators of abuse resorting to revenge porn. This activity appears to be largely hidden from statutory providers of services, as requests for information uncovered little or no evidence or awareness of, commercial sexual exploitation activity across the region. No evidence was uncovered of human trafficking or criminal activity relating to commercial sexual exploitation.

Conclusions

There is sufficient evidence from women coming forward with historical reports of abuse to justify a programme of awareness raising and information provision. In addition, there is a general failure to equate activities such as prostitution, lap dancing and escort services with gender inequality and gender based violence which needs to be challenged. To this end, attention needs to be directed toward prevention through relationship education in a variety of settings in order to effect a shift in culture and challenge demand.

Recommendations

- 1) Seek the commitment of Elected Members and Integration Joint Board members to champion the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda which includes commercial sexual exploitation, and to provide sustainable trauma informed services available to those who are harmed by this.
- 2) Recognise the harm caused to vulnerable women, men and young people involved in commercial sexual exploitation by scoping comprehensive trauma-informed services which support exit and provide realistic and viable alternatives to involvement in the sex industry.
- 3) Explore the opportunity for providing enhanced sexual health services for women, men and young people involved in commercial sexual exploitation in both localities, through the Integration Joint Boards.
- 4) Develop our evidence base by ensuring commercial sexual exploitation is included within the Midlothian Community Safety / Violence Against Women and Girls strategic assessment, by developing a similar strategic assessment for East Lothian and by working alongside other local organisations to continue to gather evidence, particularly for young people.
- 5) Provide awareness-raising on commercial sexual exploitation across communities and organisations, which enables people to understand the issues and to challenge attitudes and demand.
- 6) Support the delivery of relationship education within the Health and Wellbeing Curriculum based on understanding the interaction between gender inequality and gender-based violence and reinforcing gender equality and positive aspirations for girls and boys.

- 7) Ensure all staff receive Violence Against Women and Girls awareness which includes commercial sexual exploitation and that relevant staff from universal and targeted services receive further training as appropriate.

Author's name	Helen Smart
Designation	Senior Health Promotion Specialist
Date	14/12/17
Review date	N/A