

Sexual exploitation risk assessment for sex workers

A form to support officers when conducting risk assessments on sex workers to identify their risk of sexual exploitation.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Intelligence and investigation Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	North East
Partners	Police Health services Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	March 2022

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Victims

Aim

The aim of the risk assessment is for officers to communicate with sex workers, to ensure that the relevant questions are asked about potential exploitation.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the risk assessment are to:

- improve intelligence gathering around sex workers
- improve the understanding of risk and identify indicators of exploitation
- enhance safeguarding and educate sex workers around support services and national programmes

Description

North Yorkshire Police conducted a review into incidents involving engagement with sex workers. The review found that questions regarding sex workers' safety were not being asked. This left the exploitation team with no follow up enquiries or potential research opportunities for exploitation indicators. A review with officers also revealed that they were unsure of what questions to ask around services or how to identify potential indicators of exploitation.

North Yorkshire Police worked with the charity Changing Lives and the York Women's Wellness Centre to develop a risk assessment questionnaire. The risk assessment was designed in consultation with staff from Changing Lives, the force's operational officers and an intelligence officer from the exploitation team. The purpose of the questionnaire is to enable officers to establish if there is an exploitation risk and to build trust and rapport with sex workers.

The form was designed using Microsoft Word and embedded into Niche (records management system) as a document. The risk assessment asks for the following information:

- name
- address
- how they became a sex worker
- how long have they been a sex worker
- how many hours a day they work
- how many appointments they have
- what happens to the money they earn
- what services they offer
- whether they feel safe
- whether they have access to contraception and cosmetics for general hygiene
- what websites they advertise on
- whether they pay fees and who to
- who created their profiles

Within the risk assessment, there is a specific section for migrant sex workers, which includes:

- details of their passport / ID cards
- whether they have access to their documents and if not where those documents are kept
- how they travelled to the United Kingdom
- who arranged their travel
- who paid for cost of travel
- which cities they have visited
- when did they arrive in North Yorkshire
- when they planned to leave and where they were going next

The form includes safety advice which officers can pass onto individuals as well as signpost them to support agencies, such as Changing Lives and National Ugly Mugs.

Once the form has been filled in, the exploitation team can assess an individual's risk of sexual exploitation. The form is then attached to the relevant occurrence log on Niche. The researchers within the exploitation team will conduct further enquiries to locate adverts, websites and additional information on individuals, to ensure that appropriate support is provided to sex workers.

There was no cost in the development and roll out of the risk assessment.

Overall impact

The risk assessment has been rolled out across North Yorkshire and has enabled officers to feel more confident engaging with sex workers. By asking the questions on the form, the force have been able to conduct risk assessments and identify indicators of exploitation. The information obtained can assist with further lines of enquiry where there are exploitation concerns.

North Yorkshire Police have received positive feedback from Changing Lives regarding the implementation of this risk assessment process.

Learning

- The force found implementing the risk assessment relatively straightforward. The form was created using the knowledge from an exploitation intelligence officer and the staff from Changing Lives. During the development process, it was essential to identify the relevant questions and how to ask them without causing offence or embarrassment. Once the questioning was agreed, the form was uploaded to Niche, enabling officers to easily access the document. By sending internal communications, officers should know when to use the form and where to send it once completed.
- The force has found it challenging to encourage officers to use form, understand its importance and why the “difficult” questions around services as well as charges need to be asked. This has improved with continuing professional development (CPD) days around modern slavery, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation.

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