

# Debates around sex industry based on 'sexist stereotypes', says report

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More than a third of UK escorts advertising on a prominent website identify as male or trans, with more than two-thirds advertising to women, according to new research that paints a surprising picture of the UK sex industry.

A study by academics from the universities of Birmingham and Lancaster, based on data compiled from a prominent online directory of [sex](#) workers, finds that current debates around the sex industry are wrongly focused on the outdated premise that the industry revolves almost exclusively around men purchasing sex from [women](#).

The researchers call for an urgent reframing of political debates around commercial sex, moving away from 'dominant stereotypes and popular prejudices about sex workers and their clients'.

The study brings together data from more than 27,000 individuals advertising commercial sex services online. It finds that:

- More than one in three escorts self-identify as male or trans.
- Two-thirds of escorts advertise to women.
- Less than half of escorts self-identify as straight.
- Ages range from 18 to 91.
- Four in five identify as white.
- One in five are based in London.
- 40% advertise to disabled clients.
- Male escorts charge lower rates than female and trans escorts;

trans escorts are the most likely to charge very high rates.

The report, referencing the 'End Demand' campaign that calls on the Government to decriminalise the sale of sex and criminalise the purchase of sex, states that 'political debates about commercial sex frequently reproduce age-old sexist stereotypes that women are sexual objects and men are sexual subjects'.

Researchers say that calls for national policy to follow the 'Swedish model' of criminalising the purchase but not the sale of sex depend upon constructions of sex workers as 'victimised women' and their clients as 'predatory men'.

The new research directly contradicts such assumptions and instead points to a 'diversity of identities and practices in the contemporary sex industry'. This highlights the need to 'rethink dominant stereotypes and popular prejudices about sex workers and their clients, and to develop policy that acknowledges and responds to the complex reality of the contemporary UK sex industry'.

The report states that the criminalisation of clients will only increase the dangers that sex workers and their clients may face in their attempts to avoid criminal prosecution. The researchers say the Government should consider the 'wealth of evidence' demonstrating that criminalisation increases the risks and likelihood of violence.

Dr Nicola Smith, Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Birmingham, said: 'These figures underscore the need to challenge dominant prejudices about [sex workers](#) and their clients, which mask the complex reality of the sex industry today. Debates about commercial sex need to move beyond outdated stereotypes that women are sex objects and men are sex predators – desire takes many forms, and the sex industry is no exception to this.'

Dr Sarah Kingston, Lecturer in Criminology at Lancaster University, said: 'The End Demand campaign, which seeks to persuade the Government to criminalise the purchase of sex, is premised on the idea that only women sell to men and is based upon research which is over a decade old. These recent figures clearly challenge these narrow-minded assumptions and demonstrate the complex and multi-faceted nature of the [sex industry](#).'

Provided by University of Birmingham

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