

# **Young People, Vulnerabilities and Prostitution/Sex for Compensation in the Nordic Countries**

A Study of Knowledge, Social Initiatives  
and Legal Measures



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*Charlotta Holmström (Editor), Jeanett Bjønness, Mie Birk Jensen,  
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Tara Söderholm, Charlotta Holmström and Ylva Grönvall*

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# Summary

In 2007, the Nordic Council of Ministers initiated the research project *Prostitution i Norden* (Prostitution in the Nordic countries) with an aim to map and contextualise welfare services, criminal law and knowledge production on prostitution (Holmström and Skilbrei 2008). *Young people, vulnerabilities and prostitution/sex for compensation in the Nordic countries* is a follow-up study, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, focusing on knowledge about young people's experiences of sex for compensation in the Nordic countries. The aim of the project has been to collect, analyse and problematise knowledge about young people who have experiences of sex for compensation in the Nordic countries. The project has been guided by the following objectives: (1) present existing knowledge about such experiences in each country, but also to critically discuss the various methods used in knowledge production within the field. (2) describe and analyse how the needs of young people selling sex are addressed by social initiatives in each Nordic country, and (3) describe and analyse legal measures relevant for young people selling sex in the Nordic countries.

Previous research on young people who have had experiences of sex for compensation shows that such experiences are seldom conceptualized as "prostitution". In the report each researcher has chosen concepts suited to their specific national context, to the literature referenced in their study, and to the terms and concepts used by their informants. Thus, the concepts used in this report vary.

Levels of knowledge about young people selling sex varies between the Nordic countries. Consequently, some of the country reports are mainly based on previous research and grey literature, and others are mainly based on qualitative interviews with professionals working in the field. The aim has been to identify relevant and sound knowledge and to fill in gaps where necessary, and to ensure that the material covers the topic in a broad sense independently of gender and sexual identity.

The five country studies show how research on the extent of, and the motivations and conditions for, young people having sex for compensation in the Nordic countries is rather scarce and that there are few social initiatives that target young people specifically. Young people selling sex is described as an existing, but rather marginal phenomenon. Previous research indicates that young people who have experiences of sex for compensation report other activities of concern, for example drug use and alcohol consumption, experiences of abuse, self-harm and mental illness to a greater extent than young people who do not report experiences of compensational sex. However, research also shows a variety of experiences in relation to the reasons and motivations for having compensational sex and the frequency of such experiences. In addition, referred research indicates differences concerning gender and sexual identity: more young men than women, and more young LGBTQ people than heterosexual and cisgender young people report having had such an experience. The content of and the

conclusions in the country studies can be seen as contributing to constructing a shared picture of a specifically vulnerable group: young people who have sex for compensation. At first glance, the picture, based on previous research, grey literature and interviews with service providers, appears quite clear, with sharp contours. But once carefully analysed, another quite indistinct picture emerges. Young people who have experiences of compensational sex are described as particularly vulnerable. However, the literature and the interviews also point to other aspects of the phenomenon. Previous research has found that the majority of those who reported having had compensational sex have had the experience less than five times. Besides presenting reasons for having sex for compensation as needing money or anxiety/mental illness, respondents also reported that they sold sex because they found it exciting and liked sex. Service providers are also reflecting upon other important aspects related to the phenomenon of young people having compensational sex, such as the impact of digital development and the influence of media images of selling sex. In addition, service providers describe how they encounter people who are not represented in the literature; young migrants selling sex. In all the country reports, the service providers reflect on the importance of terminology; how to conceptualise young people's experiences of sex for compensation and how these conceptualisations impact on whether they can reach out, identify individual needs, and give adequate support. Several of the interviewed professionals found that using the term "prostitution" jeopardises an often fragile relationship with the young people they encounter and may contribute to increased stigmatization. Service-providers are struggling with how to understand and approach the issue, requesting more knowledge, and more specific and detailed guidelines for how to approach young people who have had experiences of compensational sex. The Nordic countries have different legislation targeting the selling and purchasing of sexual services specifically, yet the purchase of sexual services from a minor is criminalised in all the Nordic countries. Also, other laws affect the life of young people engaged in commercial sex, but what laws apply and how they are implemented typically depend on whether they are under or over the age of 18. Taken together, the interviews with service providers and the literature reviewed point to individual vulnerabilities and, to a much more limited degree, to structural vulnerabilities related to young people's experiences of compensational sex. Such an individual focus places a great deal of responsibility on service providers to intervene and perhaps also to prevent young people from selling sex. In that role, service providers reflect upon the risk of being patronising, moralising and even oppressive, for example by using certain terminology or through certain interventions. This kind of risk should also be reflected upon in knowledge production on young people having experiences of selling sex. An even more central question concerning young people who have experiences of compensational sex in the Nordic countries is the lack of knowledge about structural factors related to experiences of compensational sex. In order to develop preventive measures and tackle structural vulnerabilities, research on structural factors is urgently needed.

# 1. Young people, vulnerabilities and prostitution/sex for compensation in the Nordic countries

*A study of knowledge, social initiatives and legal measures.*

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## 1.1 Introduction

The commercialization of sexual relations is a topic of great concern in Nordic public debates as well among practitioners and policymakers in the Nordic countries. In 2008, a research report on prostitution in the Nordic countries was launched by NIKK, the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research<sup>1</sup>, initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers (Holmström and Skilbrei 2008). The following research report presents results from a follow-up study conducted in 2018. The study focuses on knowledge about young people having sex for compensation in the Nordic countries and has been conducted by a Nordic research team consisting of Jeanett Bjønness and Mie Birk Jensen, Aarhus University, Denmark, Minna Seikkula, University of Helsinki, Finland, Hildur Fjóra Antonsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland, May-Len Skilbrei and Tara Söderholm, University of Oslo, Norway and Ylva Grönvall and Charlotta Holmström, Malmö University, Sweden.

The aim of the research project in 2008 was to present and discuss research on prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes in the Nordic countries. Ten Nordic researchers<sup>2</sup> analysed material on the extent of prostitution and human trafficking, and on legal and social measures targeting the issue. Their report also included results from quantitative and qualitative studies on attitudes to prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes (Bjønness 2008; Jahnsen 2008; Kuosmanen 2008; Marttila 2008; Siring 2008; Tveit and Skilbrei 2008). The project identified key issues concerning knowledge and facts about prostitution and human trafficking in the Nordic countries: 1) Estimates

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<sup>1</sup> Today NIKK is the abbreviation for Nordic Information on Gender.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanett Bjønness, Aarhus University and Marlene Spanger, Roskilde University, Denmark; Synnøve Jahnsen, University of Bergen, Marianne Tveit and May-Len Skilbrei, FAFO, Norway; Anna-Maria Marttila, University of Helsinki, Finland; Gisli Hrafn Atlason and Katrín Anna Guðmundsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland; Jari Kuosmanen och Annelie Siring, University of Gothenburg, Charlotta Holmström, Malmö University, Sweden.

concerning the extent of prostitution presented in reports and academic research are dependent on the definitions being applied, the methods being used and the context in which the data is collected; 2) During the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of people coming from abroad selling sex in the Nordic countries; 3) During the last decade, developments in IT have digitalized the prostitution market; 4) Within social services and NGOs, how to address the issue varied in the Nordic countries – some organisations explicitly used a harm reduction approach, while others had adopted a zero tolerance approach; and 5) At the time, the Nordic countries had chosen different legal approaches ranging from decriminalization in Denmark and Iceland, to criminalization of the purchase of sex in Sweden and partial criminalization of the purchase of sex in Finland. In 2008, legal reforms concerning prostitution were debated in several of the countries. A Swedish study showed strong support for prohibiting the purchase of sexual services and around 50% also supported the idea of criminalizing the selling of sexual services (Kuosmanen 2008;2011). The increased interest in legal approaches to prostitution in the Nordic countries was interpreted as a shift in political focus; from conceptualizing prostitution as a social problem to be addressed with social initiatives, to an increased focus on the legal aspects, approaching prostitution as a legal problem (Holmström and Skilbrei 2008; Skilbrei and Holmström 2013). The project identified a number of themes to be explored further: 1) LGBTQ people and commercial sex; 2) Migration; 3) Young people selling sex; 4) Differences within the prostitution-market, and their implications for the development of social measures; and 5) The effects of the legal measures. In 2019, these themes remain of great concern. The digitalization of the market, and its consequences, is an even more topical issue today. Migration, globalization and commercial sex are as current as in 2008. During the last decade, legal reforms have been the focus of the political debate, and Norway and Iceland have followed the Swedish example, criminalizing the purchase of sexual services. There is still a lack of knowledge about the needs for social initiatives and the effects of legal approaches on various target groups, for example LGBTQ people and migrants, but also for young people.

Against this background, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in Sweden initiated a follow-up study of *Prostitution i Norden* when Sweden had the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2018. The aim of the follow-up study entitled *Young people, vulnerabilities and prostitution/sex for compensation in the Nordic Countries* is to specifically focus on the situation for young people who have experience of prostitution in the Nordic countries. In the subsequent report, results from this study are presented.

## 1.2 Background

Research shows that people's first experiences of selling sexual services occur in their teens, and that young people who have experienced selling or trading sexual services constitute a specifically vulnerable, risk-taking group (see for example Svedin and Priebe 2004; 2009). Despite this, studies also show that young women's and men's experiences of trading sex can vary depending on context, continuity and motive (van de Walle 2012). Previous research indicates that young people's experiences of sex for

compensation are seldom conceptualized as prostitution, and rarely done in traditional arenas for prostitution. Neither do professionals always refer to young people's experiences of trading or selling sex as prostitution, but rather as sex for compensation, transactional sex or simply selling sexual services. In surveys focusing on young people and sexuality, experiences of having sex for compensation are reported by both young women and men (see for example, Svedin and Priebe 2004; 2009; Hulusjö and Abellsson 2008; Public Health Agency of Sweden 2017). Several studies show that LGBTQ youth report having the experience of sex for compensation to a greater extent than heterosexual youth (see for example Hulusjö and Abellsson 2008; Larsdotter et al. 2011; Public Health Agency of Sweden 2017). As stated in the report from 2008, the commercial sex market has become digitalized, and the number of digital advertisements marketing sexual services has increased dramatically (see for example County Administrative Board 2015). Contacts between sellers and buyers are established on websites explicitly marketing sexual services as well as on other digital platforms. According to previous studies, however, young women's and men's initial contact with buyers of sex seldom occur on explicitly commercial sex websites, but rather happen through communication on other digital platforms, and through buyers' offers for compensation in exchange for sex (see for example Jonsson 2015). Previous research also shows that young women and men who are contacted and offered compensation for sexual services, and who are in various types of vulnerable situations, accept such offers to a greater extent than young women and men who are not in such situations. Youth in institutional care for example, report having experiences of sex for compensation to a greater extent than other young people (Lindroth 2013). Experiences of trauma, sexual abuse or other difficulties during childhood also seem to be related to experiences of selling sex (see for example Svedin et al. 2015). In the public debate and among practitioners, various perspectives on young people selling sex have been expressed. In the Swedish context for example, sex for compensation as a means of anxiety release and self-harm has been studied and debated (see for example Jonsson and Lundström Mattsson 2012; Jonsson et al. 2017; Fredlund 2019). There is growing concern about young people's sexual vulnerability online, for example through 'sugar dating' sites (see for example Lokaltidningen Helsingborg 181108). In addition, a number of representatives from NGOs and social services report cases of sexual exploitation and survival sex strategies among unaccompanied young migrants (see for example SVT 181210). This brief review of knowledge about young women and men who have had experiences of sex for compensation raises several questions about the extent of the phenomenon, social initiatives, and legal measures, but also about methodology and conceptualizations. What do we know about the extent of young people's experiences of sex for compensation in the Nordic countries? Are there studies estimating how many people report having had this experience? If so, how are these studies designed and what concepts have been applied? To what extent are young people's experiences of prostitution addressed by social initiatives and how do legal measures affect them?

### 1.3 Aim and objectives

The aim of the project entitled *Young people, vulnerabilities and prostitution/sex for compensation in the Nordic Countries* has been to collect, problematize and analyse knowledge about young people who have experiences of prostitution in the Nordic countries. The project has been guided by the following objectives:

- What type of knowledge about young women and men having experiences of prostitution in the Nordic countries exists, and how can this knowledge be interpreted in the national and Nordic contexts?
- What types of social initiatives target young women and men who have experience of prostitution, what is the knowledge base for these initiatives, and how do different stakeholders collaborate?
- What legal measures target the issue, and how are they implemented? How can these legal approaches be understood in the national and Nordic contexts?

### 1.4 Conceptualizations and limitations

There is a great variety of terms and concepts defining young people's experiences of sex for compensation: prostitution, sexual exploitation, compensational sex, selling sexual services, trading sex, selling sex, transactional sex and survival sex. Previous research on young people who have had experiences of sex for compensation shows that such experiences are seldom conceptualized by them as "prostitution", and that this term is often associated with a stigma. In addition, the choice of terminology within the research field is challenging, since conceptualizations of commercial sex are often associated with specific political or ideological positions. In this report, results from five country studies are presented, in which each researcher has chosen concepts suited to their specific national context, to the literature referenced in their study, and to the terms and concepts used by their informants. Thus, the concepts used in this report vary. This approach to conceptualizations of young people's experiences of sex for compensation is also reflected in this introduction.

The original project description had included limitations concerning gender, sexual orientation and age. Since previous research has shown that LGBTQ youth report having experienced sex for compensation to a greater extent than young people not defining themselves as LGBTQ, such limitations are problematic and thus all materials and knowledge about young people who had experienced sex for compensation, independently of gender and sexual identity, have been included. Another limitation presented in the original project description was age, with a suggested focus on young people between 18 and 25 years. Since the study is based on existing literature and secondary sources, this limitation has been difficult to apply. Previous research also shows that people who have experience of sex for compensation often had their first experience before the age of 18. Taken together, such an age limitation has been

problematic to apply as well. Instead, the knowledge presented in the literature and in the interviews with professionals has determined what to include.

## 1.5 Method

The following report is based on country studies conducted by researchers in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The first objective was to compile knowledge about young people who had experience of sex for compensation in the Nordic countries. The aim was to present existing knowledge about such experiences in each country, but also to critically discuss the various methods used in knowledge production within the field. The conditions for this task have differed however, due to the fact that the extent of current knowledge about young people having sex for compensation varies in the Nordic countries. While several Swedish studies have been published, there are very few studies conducted in the Icelandic context, for example. Consequently, some of the country reports are mainly based on previous research and grey literature, and others are mainly based on qualitative interviews with professionals working in the field.

The second objective was to describe and analyse how the needs of young people who have sex for compensation are addressed by social initiatives in each Nordic country. The aim was to identify organisations targeting this particular issue and to examine their knowledge base, specific perspectives and overall goals. The material presented regarding social initiatives is based on reports and interviews with stakeholders (social workers in government and non-government organisations and volunteers) targeting young people who have sex for compensation in the Nordic countries.

The third objective was to describe and analyse legal measures relevant for young people who have sex for compensation in the Nordic countries. The country reports include a description of current legislation addressing the specific issue, and also a discussion of how different statutes are interlinked. This section also includes some discussion on the consequences of specific legal approaches to young people who have compensational sex. The material is based on existing literature but also on interviews with social workers, police, and volunteers within NGOs.

## 1.6 Summary of the country reports

The following section presents a thematic summary of the five country studies, organised under the main objectives of the project: knowledge base, social initiatives, and legal measures.

### 1.6.1 Knowledge base

Four out of the five country reports point to a great scarcity of knowledge concerning young people having sex for compensation in the Nordic countries. There has been only limited research focusing on this specific target group in the Nordic region, and compiling

information and knowledge about the issue was initially perceived as quite a challenge for the researchers. The material looking at knowledge about young people's experiences of compensational sex has thus been collected using different methods, and with somewhat different focuses. The Swedish country report, for example, is mainly based on grey literature and academic literature, while the Icelandic and Finnish contributions are mainly based on interviews with practitioners in the field, a review of media discussions (Iceland), a few studies, and grey literature reports. The Danish and Norwegian contributions are based on interviews, grey literature, and some academic research.

In the *Danish country study*, Jeanett Bjønness and Mie Birk Jensen conclude that existing research on "prostitution" in Denmark has not generally focused on young people. Both grey literature reports and practitioners in the field point to a significant lack of knowledge, including a lack of systematized research on the extent of young people exchanging sex for compensation in Denmark. In the interviews with the Danish practitioners, Bjønness and Birk Jensen found that young people involved in transactional sex are generally described as a particularly vulnerable group, often with troubled backgrounds, unhappy childhoods and a high rate of child sexual abuse. The understanding of young people who start to sell sex is thus framed to a large extent by a focus on individual and troubled social backgrounds. In addition, financial problems, drug abuse and general marginalization are also mentioned by the practitioners as reasons for young people becoming involved in transactional sex. Bjønness and Birk Jensen conclude that accessible reports in Denmark indicate that the numbers of young people who have experience of exchanging sex for compensation have been relatively stable in the past 17 years. At the beginning of the century, reports from Nordic countries estimated that between 1 and 2% of young people had received payment or other compensation for sex (Pedersen and Hegna 2003; Svedin and Priebe 2004; Pedersen and Grunwald 2005). Both grey literature reports and interviews with practitioners express assumptions concerning the extent of young people having the experience of sex for compensation. In addition, the relatively recent development of "sugar dating" websites is also assumed to have an impact on the extent of young people having sex for compensation in Denmark in the future. Practitioners interviewed in the Danish context also expressed concerns about the influence of the media: firstly, because they find that the Danish media portrays sugar dating as glamorous so that it is not necessarily perceived as transactional sex; and secondly, they stress that social media have made young people particularly susceptible to engaging in compensational sex. Their statements are based on reflections and observations in their specific contexts, and not on systematic knowledge production or research. Bjønness and Birk Jensen conclude that more qualitative research on how young people perceive the phenomenon may enable future studies to account for how young people themselves attach different labels and meanings to different forms of compensational sex.

In *Finland* too, knowledge about compensational sex among young people is very limited. Minna Seikkula concludes that the period during which compensational sex has been addressed as a question of sexual health and well-being seems relatively short in Finland, and that a focus on young people and compensational sex in the academic context is almost non-existent. The lack of research-based knowledge is also

recognized in the field, such as in the Finnish action plan on sexual health and well-being and in discussions led by NGOs. Thus, professional perspectives on the topic seem to be relatively recent, according to Seikkula. In Finnish public debate, young people having compensational sex is brought up occasionally, but in comparison with some of the other Nordic countries, the topic has not received much attention in the media or political debates, Seikkula concludes. The lack of research-based knowledge is a serious challenge for making any estimates regarding the extent of the phenomenon in Finland. Seikkula points to the unreliability of any estimates and argues that young people engaging in compensational sex are likely to be a very heterogeneous group, and that conceptions of what compensational sex is are likely to vary between the young people themselves and professionals. However, referring to survey results from the Finnish School Health Promotion Study and interviewees' experiences, Seikkula finds that these results indicate that compensational sex among young people is an existing, albeit rather marginal phenomenon in Finland. Results from this particular school study show that some groups, such as young people in foster care and young people of foreign background, might receive propositions to engage in compensational sex more often than the average respondent might. Seikkula argues that understandings of compensational sex should not be limited to these specific groups. The interviewed professionals and also the few existing sources on compensational sex point to the fact that there are a variety of reasons that render young people vulnerable in regard to compensational sex, and Seikkula finds that a discussion of vulnerabilities also requires some recognition of the intersectional positionalities of young people and the needs arising from these different positions. For example, the interview data for Seikkula's report gives some indication that compensational sex might be more easily recognized when the buyers are older men and the recipients of the compensation are young, white, Finnish women. According to Seikkula, such a limited perspective on the phenomenon is likely to provide only a partial picture of the phenomenon, which points to a need for further discussion in which the different intersectional positionalities of young people possibly involved in compensational sex are carefully considered.

In the *Icelandic context*, Hildur Fjóra Antonsdóttir concludes that the state of research-based knowledge stemming from research on the experiences of young women and men in prostitution in Iceland is extremely limited. Little is known about the scope of prostitution in Iceland, apart from a survey conducted in 2000, and no studies have been conducted on the experiences of young people or others in prostitution apart from the study commissioned by the Ministry of Justice (Ásgeirsdóttir et al. 2001; Ásgeirsdóttir 2003). Results from this 20-year-old study showed that 1% of the female respondents and 3.1% of the male respondents among high school students in Iceland between the ages of 16–19 reported having at least once accepted a favour or money for sex. Antonsdóttir also points out that since there is lack of information about the extent to which people engaging in prostitution seek professional services, studies based on public documents, police records, and interviews with policymakers and service providers only give a limited picture of prostitution in Iceland as seen through the lens of these professionals. Little or nothing is known about (young) people engaging in prostitution or sex work who do not seek professional services. Based on a review of news items on the topic over the past

three years, Antonsdóttir discerns two different media narratives. Firstly, there are media reports, often given by the police, about an assumed increase in young foreign women coming to Iceland to sell sex based on an increase in the number of advertisements for international escort service websites. Secondly, there are news items reporting on prostitution among people, largely women, living in Iceland, often related to sexual violence, drugs, poverty and other vulnerabilities. These reports are often based on interviews with service providers. According to these news reports and interviews with service providers, young foreign women tend to use international escort websites to advertise their services while women living in Iceland tend to use Icelandic dating websites and social media. Prostitution among (young) men is rarely mentioned.

In *the Norwegian context*, May-Len Skilbrei and Tara Söderholm conclude that there is limited relevant knowledge on the extent of commercial sexual activities among youth or young adults. A study from 2002 investigated the prevalence of the sale of sexual favours among youth under the age of 18 and found 2.1% of boys and 0.6% of girls reported that had ever given sexual favours for payment (Pedersen and Hegna 2002). As commercial sex is something that in Norwegian society is mostly associated with female sellers of sex, these findings attracted great attention in public debate. A more recent survey among young people in Oslo (Bakken 2018) found that 3.5% of the respondents had performed sexual services in exchange for goods. The numbers are a bit higher among boys than girls, 3.9% and 3.1%, respectively, which supports Hegna and Pedersen's findings from 2002. Regarding the internet as an arena for contacts for commercial sex, Skilbrei and Söderholm refer to a study on the use of the internet and sexual violations online, that addresses the question of whether the availability and characteristic of internet as an arena, impacts on the extent of young people's involvement in commercial sex. The referred study does not find evidence if the anonymity that the internet provides, leads to an increase in youth selling sexual services (Suseg et al. 2008). In more recent years, several reports from Norwegian service providers have been published. Skilbrei and Söderholm refer to one of these reports (Bjørndal 2017), stating that trading sexual favours is not the norm or considered acceptable by most young people, but that certain groups of young people are more at risk of becoming involved in it. The same report also shows how trading sex happens in different forms and in different arenas (ibid). Within this context, the exchange is not confined to monetary gains, but includes gifts, things, clothes, a place to sleep, travel, trips and experiences. Some also exchange sexual favours for contact with an adult, a sense of belonging, or access to different groups or milieus (ibid). Another theme raised by the service provider reports is experiences of sex for compensation among men/boys and/or transgender persons (Bjørndal 2010; Haaland 2011). Skilbrei and Söderholm conclude that there is limited knowledge of male prostitution in Norway, even though there has been an increased interest in this specific target group in recent years (ProSenter 2018).

In the *Swedish country study*, Ylva Grönvall and Charlotta Holmström present a review of current knowledge about young people having sex for compensation in Sweden. The review gives a comprehensive, although somewhat fragmented, picture of the phenomenon. There are several Swedish studies that included questions about

experiences of sex for compensation. These studies differ in terms of their samples and data collection methods, which explains the great differences in reported extent of between 1 and 9% of Swedish young people in the age group 16–28 years reported that they had experience of sex for compensation. Grönvall and Holmström argue that these figures should be interpreted with caution, since they risk being both over- and underestimated. Most studies indicate a gender difference: more young men report that they have sold sex than young women. Other Nordic studies show similar results (Mossige 2001; Pedersen and Hegna 2003; Helweg-Larsen 2002). Several reports point to the fact that polarized images of the female sex seller and the male sex buyer make young men's experiences of selling sex invisible (see for example Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008; Larsdotter et al. 2011). Results from a number of different studies conducted in Sweden show that young LGBTQ people report having sold sex to a greater extent than heterosexual and cisgender youths. Grönvall and Holmström emphasise the importance of considering multifaceted experiences regardless of gender identity or sexual identity. The review shows that young people's motives for having sex for compensation are heterogeneous. The reporting of a low sense of mental well-being, sex as a form of self-harm and experiences of physical and sexual abuse among young people who have experience of sex for compensation is highlighted in several studies. The interviews with social workers and the police also stress the need for more knowledge about young people's experiences and vulnerabilities in relation to selling sex. In addition, the Swedish country study shows that social workers and the police also encounter young adults who are temporarily in Sweden to sell sex. Both representatives of the police and social workers emphasize the particularly vulnerable situation for this group. Grönvall and Holmström concludes that migrants are scarcely mentioned in the literature.

### 1.6.2 *Social initiatives*

The country reports show that there are few organisations or social initiatives that specifically target young people engaging in sex for compensation in the Nordic countries. However, interviews with service providers show an increased interest and awareness. The majority of the respondents have met young people who have had experiences of selling sex, and reflect on their specific needs in relation to what services are currently being offered.

In the *Danish country report*, Jeanett Bjonness and Mia Birk Jensen describe Danish service providers' way of targeting the issue. There is one social initiative, *Reden Ung*, that explicitly addresses young people involved in transactional sex. *Reden Ung* is run by the Danish YWCA's *Sociala Arbejde* organisation, which is a member-owned organisation that since 1947 has been offering support to socially disadvantaged people in Denmark. A more recent initiative is *pigegruppen*, (the Girls Group) which targets socially disadvantaged and vulnerable young women. The service providers within this initiative encounter young women who have experiences of substance abuse, crime and sex for compensation. The Girls Group is part of a social initiative called *De Unges Hus* (House for the Young), run by the City of Copenhagen. Both of these organisations aim to prevent or limit young people's involvement in transactional sex, especially among minors. They also

work to limit the possible consequences of such involvement, also for young people over the age of 18. Bjønness and Birk Jensen stress how both of these organisations underline the importance of recognising the perspectives, terminology and experiences of the young people they encounter. In addition, there are other Danish service providers targeting people who have experiences of selling sex which include NGOs (*Reden, LivaRehab*) and GOs (*Kompetencecenter Prostitution*). There are also Danish organisations that do not have people selling sex as their main target group but are working actively against the stigmatization of sex workers (*AIDS-fondet* and *LGBT+ Denmark*). Bjønness and Birk Jensen found that although different stakeholders use different terminology, and have different aims with their work, they all say that they feel that there is a lack of knowledge concerning young people. In spite of this perceived lack of knowledge however, Bjønness and Birk Jensen found that stakeholders' experiences with and knowledge about, the target group did grow and develop, and this knowledge was employed in practice. The Danish country report also shows that different organisations have contact with different groups of young people, and that these organisations identify young people's involvement in transactional sex in a broad variety of ways.

Within the field of service provision for young people involved in compensational sex in *Finland*, Minna Seikkula found that the social initiatives that directly address compensational sex have mainly related to raising awareness of the issue and educating various professionals. Social initiatives that explicitly address compensational sex are few. There are three NGOs in particular that provide services, train other professionals, and do advocacy work related to commercial and/or compensational sex: *Pro-tukipiste*, *Exit*, and the Family Federation. Furthermore, compensational sex is acknowledged in some policy documents produced by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, but there are no specific social initiatives that target compensational sex specifically, organised by governmental bodies. There are also initiatives in Finland that seek to meet the needs of specific target groups, for example youth in foster care and young substance abusers. Seikkula argues that professionals working in different services, in particular those connected to issues of sexual health and well-being, are likely to encounter young people involved in compensational sex, even if the services are not planned to target this particular phenomenon. According to Seikkula, compensational sex is understood as being associated with some marginalized groups, that are also the ones targeted by the few social initiatives explicitly related to the phenomenon. Seikkula argues that understandings of compensational sex should not be limited to these groups. The professionals interviewed and the few existing sources on compensational sex point to the fact that there are a variety of reasons that render young people vulnerable in regard to compensational sex.

There are no specialised services for young people who have experienced selling sex in *Iceland*. Hildur Fjóra Antonsdóttir points to the fact that the services available to young people are services which are generally available for people who are 18 years or older. *Stígamót* (Education and Counseling Center for Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Violence) is an NGO in Iceland that offers free counselling for women and men, 18 years or older, who have been subjected to various forms of sexual violence. In addition, *Stígamót* runs self-help groups led by trained group leaders. The work of

this organisation is informed by a gender-based and feminist ideology where sexual violence is understood in a structural context as a form of gender discrimination. Another organisation in Iceland is *Bjarkarhlíð* (Family Justice Center for survivors of violence), an NGO that has only been running for two years. This organisation offers coordinated services for people who have been subjected to violence, including people who have experiences of prostitution. In addition, there are other initiatives that encounter young people who have experiences of sex for compensation. The Icelandic Red Cross runs programmes that provide harm reduction services for people who use drugs. Within this context, experiences of selling sex are conceptualized as sex work in the effort to enable people to separate themselves from what they do and to promote self-care and self-respect. In addition, service providers at the National Center of Addiction Medicine are familiar with the issue of prostitution or exchanging sex for favours, as it occurs in their work with their clients. In such cases, people are sometimes referred to specialised counselling. Antonsdóttir finds that for other service providers, prostitution seldom occurred as an issue in their work with clients. They did not either have any particular response strategies for such cases other than referrals to counselling and/or general welfare services. The knowledge base among the service providers is primarily informed by their field of education, their work-based experience and their ideological perspective, while some also referred to domestic and international research, according to Antonsdóttir.

In *Norway*, since around the 1970s there have been targeted social services that typically offer welfare and health services related to prostitution. What is considered appropriate assistance has varied considerably over time: from catering to the needs of mostly Norwegian women with drug addiction in the 1980s and 1990s, to services oriented towards helping with the immigration authorities, language classes and assertion of the rights of victims of trafficking to migrants from outside Schengen. Services are offered by municipal organisations in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, and civil society organisations, in particular the Church City Mission, which runs outreach and in-house services in Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim (to start up in autumn 2019). The service providers collaborate across the public private divide, and typically make sure to offer complementary services to prevent overlap and competition. Services are offered broadly, with an emphasis on outreach work for street prostitution and some areas of the indoor prostitution market. Interviews confirmed that existing organisations work mainly with women who sell sex, and only to some extent with transgender people and often even less so with men. There are also other organisations that work with the issue. The Norwegian sex workers' rights organisation, PION, is involved in efforts to safeguard the reproductive health of sex sellers and offers services to sellers, especially legal aid. The organisation *Sex og Samfunn* is involved in preventive work as it provides information in schools, together with the Pro Centre, to prevent prostitution. After the introduction of a prohibition of the purchase of sex in 2009, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security has offered additional funding to providers of health and welfare services to people involved in prostitution. This has created funding opportunities that both the already established and newer service providers have made use of to develop new services. Several organisations have set up services with this funding, most of which are oriented towards

victims of trafficking for the purpose of prostitution. Neither public nor private service providers offer special services to people under the age of 18 who sell sex. Young people over the age of 18 have access to the same services as other adults, and services are most clearly organised based on gender and nationality, not age.

In the *Swedish context* there are three specialised units: *Mikamottagningen* Gothenburg, *Evonhuset* Malmö and *Mikamottagningen* Stockholm. All three units are located in urban areas in Sweden and are run by the local municipality. The units provide counselling, support and practical help for people who have sex for compensation, hurt themselves with sex or are victims of human trafficking, and have different age limits (Stockholm 18, Malmö 15 and Gothenburg none). People under the set age limit are referred to other organisations. These units also do outreach work in physical and digital environments where sex for compensation takes place. In the Municipality of Stockholm, one social worker specifically targets young people under 18 through performing outreach work together with the police. This social worker accompanies the police in their efforts to provide support for people selling sex. The services are adapted to the age of the recipient; a minor is offered different services than an adult. The collaboration between the police and social services is organised differently in different parts of Sweden. All three units emphasise that everyone is welcome, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. The units are connected to or collaborate with health clinics that specialise in offering support to people who have experience of selling sex. In addition, there are several non-government organisations in Sweden that offer support to people who have been sexually exploited and are suspected victims of human trafficking for sexual purposes (Talita, Noomi and the Salvation Army). There are also other NGOs with an explicit harm reduction approach that offer support to people who sell sex (*Fuckförbundet* and RFSL Red Umbrella). Two NGOs offer specific support to young people who sell sex: Pegasus Advice and Support, an initiative of RFSL Youth, and *100omöjligheter*. Previous research shows that there is a lack of knowledge about how to approach the issue among professionals not working primarily with the issue. Yet another challenge in providing adequate and equal support for young people who have experienced selling sex is that their rights to receive support differ based on the client's residence status in Sweden. Practitioners' possibilities to offer adequate support are thus conditional on the legal framework that applies.

### 1.6.3 *Legal measures*

How young people who have had experiences of sex for compensation are approached legally differs based on age. Several different legislations may be relevant for young people selling sex. The Nordic countries have different legislation targeting the selling and purchasing of sexual services specifically. The purchase of sexual services from a minor is criminalised in all the Nordic countries.

In the *Danish context* the purchase of sexual services by a person under 18 was criminalised in 2003. Bjonness and Jensen refer to a book entitled *Prostitution and diverging opinions* (Berthelsen and Bømler 2004) which discusses the wording of the Act

on “youth prostitution” from 2003, in which all purchases of sex from people under 18 years became punishable. The authors criticised the Act for retaining the term “customer”, saying that by using this term it misses other aspects of the relationship between the parties; for example, that a contact may be initiated via chatrooms, and thus be based on trust, but that the relationship is still understood as sexual exploitation of a child by an adult (ibid: 93). Furthermore, participants from Danish organisations that focus specifically on transactional sex in their work all stress the importance of the Act on their notification obligation – their duty to report to the authorities when young people under 18 are involved in transactional sex. Despite generally agreeing with this obligation regarding minors, some participants also said that the law places them in an ethical dilemma. This is because they need to make sure that the young people trust them enough to talk openly about the issues that they need help with, without feeling that their confidentiality is breached. Bjønness and Birk Jensen conclude that the professionals often find it hard to apply the law because they generally conceptualize the phenomenon of transactional sex as complex and not black and white. For the same reasons, they seem to regard the laws governing taxation, social welfare benefits and employment as more important to their own work than the law governing prostitution.

When it comes to compensational sex in *Finland*, Seikkula found that the legislation primarily concerns cases that involve adolescents. An important distinction made in the Finnish legislation is the age of consent, which is 18 where the sexual relations contain an element of commercial transaction, and otherwise the age of consent is 16 years. The current legislation criminalises the purchasing of sexual services from a young person, i.e. a person between 16 and 18 years (Criminal Code 20: 8a). Performing a sexual act on a child younger than 16 years is always regarded as sexual abuse of a child or aggravated abuse of a child (Criminal Code 20:6). Purchasing sexual services refers to a wide range of sexual activities, of which sexual intercourse is deemed to be the most objectionable in the eyes of the law. Besides money, the forms of remuneration recognised in the legislative materials (HE 6/1997) are goods, services or providing housing. The perpetrator is thus anyone who promises or provides remuneration to an adolescent in exchange for sexual acts. This does not require persuasion or coercion, and even if the adolescent plays an active role in initiating the purchase, an adult person is still the criminally liable party (also Hirvelä 2006, 63). The maximum penalty for purchasing sexual services from a young person is two years in prison. An attempt to purchase sexual services from an adolescent under 16 years is also punishable. Seikkula found that the experts interviewed for her report were positive about the legislation and interpreted it as a clear signal regarding how to relate to adolescents’ engagement in compensational sex. However, the extent to which different professionals are able to recognise the instances of suspected criminal activity and to report these to the police remains an open question. Seikkula found that the question of the duty to notify the authorities was an issue that would require further investigation with regard to its effects in practice. In the interviews, the duty to notify was discussed as being occasionally a challenge for creating relationships of trust with young people seeking help even if the interviewees saw this as ultimately being in the best interests of the young person. Seikkula argues that the Finnish country study does not contain enough

data to give an indication of what the actual effects of the duty to notify are, but found that exploring the possible adverse effects of the support system is something that future research could shed light on.

In *Iceland*, buying sex from a person under 18 was criminalised in 2002. Selling sex was decriminalised in 2007, and the purchase of sexual services was criminalised in 2009. According to the police, the number of police investigations registered under Section 206 of the Penal Code varies considerably from year to year as they are largely based on proactive investigative measures. Consequently, the efforts put into such investigations are based on how much time the police allocate, or can allocate, to these cases. Given that the maximum penalty for buying sex is relatively low, one year in prison, the police currently do not prioritise these cases. However, the penalty for deriving income from the prostitution of others is higher, a maximum of four years in prison. In recent years, very few such investigations have been conducted. In addition, Antonsdóttir found that there is considerable tension between the intent of the legislature and judicial practice. One of the main aims of the law was to decrease the demand for prostitution. However, since the court proceedings are closed, with only relatively low penalties being imposed, and verdicts not made public, there is reason to believe that the legislation has had only a limited deterrent effect according to Antonsdóttir. In a sense, current judicial practice could be said to be undermining the intention of the legislator Antonsdóttir argues. More research is needed to determine how the legal environment is impacting (young) people engaging in prostitution but there are indications that several other Acts can come into play including Acts dealing with narcotics, immigration, entertainment, and children.

In the *Norwegian context*, the purchase of sex by people over the age of 18 is prohibited since 2009. Versions of commercial online sexual activities are included in the prohibition. Buying sex from minors under the age of 18 has been criminalised since 2000 and is punishable by a fine or a maximum of 2 years of imprisonment. Gross violations are punishable by 3 years of imprisonment. It is completely legal to sell sexual services, something which has been the case since 2000. To organise someone else's prostitution, even when no exploitation or profit is involved, constitutes pimping/procurement, and is prohibited. Skilbrei and Söderholm found that the background to the introduction of these Acts and the political discussions leading up to their concrete formulations has been well researched (Jahnsen 2008, Skilbrei 2012; Jahnsen and Skilbrei 2017). The implementation of these provisions and the implementation of the Aliens Act vis-à-vis people who sell sex has also been subjected to research, and this has covered specifically how several provisions are implemented in a way that affects people who sell sex negatively (Jahnsen and Skilbrei 2018). This research also demonstrates that in debates and implementation, the most visible forms of prostitution are prioritised, and this means that commercial sexual activities taking place on digital platforms may pass below the radar of the police. This is also the case with prostitution that involves men as sellers.

In the *Swedish context*, the legal age of consent in Sweden is 15 years of age. It is a crime to purchase sexual services from an individual of any age, with a maximum sentence of one year of imprisonment (Swedish Penal Code, Chapter 6, Section 11). Children are seen as especially vulnerable and in need of protection, which is the reason

for special legislation regarding adolescents between 15 and 18 years of age. It is a crime to purchase a sexual act from an individual under the age of 18, with a maximum sentence of two years of imprisonment (Swedish Penal Code, Chapter 6, Section 9). If the child is under the age of 15, the act is considered rape. Other legislation that may be applicable in relation to sex for compensation is procuring and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes. The legal measures aimed at targeting the purchase of sex affect young people selling sex in different ways. Since the legal framework mainly addresses the purchase of sexual services, and human trafficking and procuring, there is no specific focus on young people who sell sex. There is a dividing line at the age of 18, and the legislation and social services' responsibilities differ if the young person selling sex is under 18. For young people over the age of 18, there are no legal measures specifically focusing on this group in a way intended to protect them. As highlighted by the interviewed social workers, other legal measures such as the Aliens Act might affect young people selling sex in a negative way and increase their vulnerability.

## 1.7 Discussion

This report presents descriptions and discussions about the concepts, knowledge, social initiatives and legal measures concerning young people who have experiences of sex for compensation in the Nordic countries. The five country studies show how research on the extent of, and the motivations and conditions for, young people selling sex in the Nordic countries is rather scarce and that there are few social initiatives that target young people specifically. Young people selling sex is described as an existing, but rather marginal problem. Even so, the country reports show how young people selling sex are constructed as a specifically vulnerable group, in research as well as in grey literature and by service providers.

Research indicates that young people who have experiences of selling sex report other activities of concern, such as drug use and alcohol consumption, experiences of abuse, self-harm, mental illness and relationship problems with parents to a greater extent than young people who do not report experiences of sex for compensation (see for example Svedin and Priebe 2009). However, research also shows a variety of experiences in relation to the reasons and motivations for having compensational sex and the frequency of such experiences. In addition, referred research indicates differences concerning gender and sexual identity: more young men than women, and more young LGBTQ people than heterosexual and cisgender young people report having had such an experience.

The research results are largely supported by service providers: young people selling sex are considered a vulnerable group, most often in need of different kinds of support. Several service providers confirmed that they encounter socially disadvantaged young people, young people who have experienced mental illness, abuse and/or alcohol or drug abuse, and who have experiences of sex for compensation. In all the country reports, the service providers reflect on the importance of terminology; how to conceptualise young people's experiences of selling sex and how these

conceptualisations impact on whether they can reach out, identify individual needs, and give adequate support. Several of the interviewed professionals found that using the term 'prostitution' jeopardises an often fragile relationship with the young people they encounter and may contribute to increased stigmatization. In Denmark, Bjønness and Jensen concludes that there is a growing awareness of the importance of terminology in the various social initiatives working with vulnerable youth, and of how that terminology might contribute to stigmatising young people if used in non-reflective ways. Seikkula found in her study about Finland that the majority of the interviewed professionals emphasised that because young people might not have a clear idea of what compensational sex is nor recognise situations where compensation is given, it is very important to choose sensitive language when working with youth. Seikkula also points out that, while any terms that refer explicitly to commercial sex might appear alienating for young people, compensational sex might also appear to be stigmatising. In the Norwegian country report, Skilbrei and Söderholm points out the fact that public and private welfare providers apply different terms, and the choice of terminology is often up to the individual social worker. Also in Sweden, professionals' experience is that "prostitution" is not a term used among young people. In the Swedish context, Abellsson and Hulusjö argue that how young people term what they do has implications for how they answer questions about their experiences (Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008).

The content of and the conclusions in the Nordic country studies in this report can be seen as contributing to constructing a shared image of a specifically vulnerable group: young people selling sex. At first glance, the picture, based on previous research studies, grey literature and interviews with service providers, appears quite clear, with sharp contours. But once carefully analysed, another quite indistinct picture emerges. In the literature and in the interviews, young people who have experiences of sex for compensation are described as socially disadvantaged, having problems such as mental illness, relationship problems with parents, drug- and alcohol consumption, self-harm behaviour, experiences of violence or abuse. However, the literature and the interviews also point to other aspects of the phenomenon. Previous research has found that the majority of those who reported having had sex for compensation have had the experience less than five times. Besides presenting reasons for selling sex as needing money or anxiety/mental illness, the respondents also reported that they sold sex because they found it exciting and liked sex. Service providers also reflect on other aspects related to the phenomenon of young people having compensational sex, for example the impact of digital development (first and foremost sugar dating websites) and how media images of selling sex influence young people. Service providers also encounter young people selling sex whose situations are not represented in the research literature: migrants selling sex in the Nordic countries. Taken together, this empirical data challenges the aim to present a shared public picture of a homogenous, vulnerable group: "young people having sex for compensation in the Nordic countries".

Sociologist Kate Brown has explored the ethical and practical implications of "vulnerability" as a concept in social welfare and concluded that the concept should be handled with care (Brown 2011). Brown identifies two opposing understandings of the

concept in the social science literature: on the one hand, the notion of vulnerability as being problematising, patronising and oppressive; and on the other hand, the concept as being able to act as a theoretical basis for the achievement of equality, autonomy and freedom in society (ibid:314). Brown argues that the tension between these two perspectives on vulnerability reveals the ethical implications of the concept:

“For some, invoking the term ‘vulnerability’ can act as a deterrent against the urge to condemn and as legitimisation for resources. For others, notions of vulnerability contrast with rights and contribute to the patronising and negative treatment of some groups in society.” (ibid:318)

The tension between these two positions can clearly be found in the interviews with service providers. On the one hand, service-providers are struggling with how to understand and approach the issue, requesting more knowledge, and more specific and detailed guidelines for how to approach young people who have had experiences of sex for compensation. On the other hand, the majority of the service providers emphasise the importance of choosing terms with great care and in dialogue with people seeking support, in order to offer help based on individual and situational needs and to avoid further stigmatisation. The interviews with service providers and the literature reviewed point to individual vulnerabilities and, to a much more limited degree, to structural vulnerabilities related to young people’s experiences of sex for compensation. Such an individual focus places a great deal of responsibility on service providers to intervene and perhaps also to prevent young people from selling sex. In that role, they reflect upon the risk of being patronising, moralising and even oppressive, for example by using certain terminology or through certain interventions. This kind of risk should also be reflected upon in knowledge production. An even more central question concerning young people who have experiences of sex for compensation in the Nordic countries is the lack of knowledge about structural factors. In order to develop preventive measures and tackle structural vulnerabilities, research on structural factors is urgently needed.

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## 2. Denmark: Young people engaged in transactional sex – taking stock of current knowledge and social initiatives in the field

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### 2.1 Introduction

The history of policy on prostitution in Denmark provides a contrast to similar histories in the other Scandinavian countries. Sweden (1999), Norway (2009) and Iceland (2009) have criminalized the purchase of sexual services, while in Denmark only the purchase of sexual services from minors (under 18) is punishable by law.

The debate regarding criminalization in Denmark has also differed from that of the other Nordic countries (Skilbrei and Holmstrøm 2016). From around 2004, different groups of sex workers (Den røde tråd, SiO) and their advocates, for example *Sexualpolitisk Forum*, The Street Lawyer and liberal political parties, have managed to have a voice in the public debate (Bjonness 2008). Thus, the construction of prostitution as a social problem and sex workers as victims, so prominent in Sweden for example, has been challenged in Denmark.

Another difference between Denmark and the other Nordic countries lies in the recent focus on “sugar dating”. “Sugar dating” refers to a younger person, often a woman exchanging sex or intimacy for money or other forms of compensation with an older person, often a man. The phenomenon is currently receiving significant attention in Denmark and, according to the media, the number of profiles on sugar dating websites has increased from 8,000 in 2014 to 78,000 in 2017 (DR 2014; Berlingske 2017). Interestingly, the term “sugar dating” is hardly present in the public debate in the other Nordic countries.

In Denmark, there is relatively little research-based knowledge about young people’s involvement in commercial sexual activities, for example in comparison to Sweden (VFC Udsatte 2004; Rasmussen 2007; Socialforvaltningen 2007). The limited knowledge we do have is mainly based on interviews with professionals who are in

contact with vulnerable young people, or on interviews with adults involved in transactional/compensational sex who have also had experiences with transactional sex before the age of 25 (Schwalbe 2018; Weiskopf 2015).

In order to assess the current situation, the aim of this report was to survey the relevant knowledge and discussions in Denmark about young people who have experiences with sex for compensation, and furthermore to problematize and analyse these findings. We present and discuss the existing knowledge from research as well as from reports by NGOs and GOs working with this group, and from interviews conducted with key professionals specifically for this report. In addition, we compare these findings with those in other Nordic countries. Furthermore, we surveyed the existing social initiatives and the practical work being directed at the target group in different parts of Denmark, including recommendations from key organizations and professionals on how to improve the help and services offered to the target group. Since the findings presented below are centred on reports as well as on the concrete experiences of professionals working with young people involved in transactional sex, it is important to describe the legal context in which their work takes place. In Denmark, it is legal to purchase sexual services from adults over 18, but it is a criminal offense to buy sexual services from young people under the age of 18. Therefore, young people under the age of 18 cannot act as “prostitutes”, nor be presented as such in advertisements and the like (Rasmussen 2007, p. 40).

Through discussing the central themes from relevant reports as well as the interviews, we aim to contribute to a knowledge pool about young people involved in commercial sexual activities, as well as to inspire future knowledge-based initiatives for vulnerable young people involved in such activities. It is important to note that the reports and the professionals who took part in the interviews present specific perspectives. This means that the knowledge presented by different professionals in the field reflects the situated experiences that they have, which are impacted by the aims and target groups of specific organizations. These differences are reflected for example in the different terminology used by different social initiatives, ranging from “prostitution” to “paid sexual exploitation”.<sup>3</sup> Also, the terminology is changing. For example, the term “youth prostitution” has been replaced by “grey zone prostitution” and increasingly “sugar dating”. A major discussion among professionals is whether “sugar dating” is something qualitatively new, or whether it is simply a new term for something previously labelled “youth prostitution” or “prostitution-like relations”.

In the report, which mainly focuses on young people between 18–25 years of age, we apply the term “transactional sex” or “sex for compensation”, but since the terminologies used in reports and by professionals are arguably linked to specific aims and approaches, we have found it useful to use their own terminology when referring to their findings and standpoints.

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<sup>3</sup> Prostitution: “an act, where two persons on market terms buy and sell sex for payment” (Kofoed & Dyrvig 2011), grey zone prostitution: “sale or exchange of sexual services” (Vedeler et al. 2006), grey zone prostitution among children and adolescents: “Sexual services are given for money, gifts, drugs, shelter, food, care, protection, exploring own sexuality or recognition” (Schwalbe 2018:12).

## 2.2 Methods

This report is based on data derived from a literature review and from qualitative interviews with practitioners.

### 2.2.1 Literature review

We have reviewed the literature about young people's involvement in "commercial sexual activities" in Denmark. In the literature search, the following databases yielded useful results: Bibliotek.dk, Google Scholar and the Research Database, with approximately 370 hits in all. We went through all hits in relation to their relevance and included reports where young people were (at least partly) in focus in this report. Databases such as Scopus, Psycinfo and Anthropology Plus were also searched, but without yielding relevant results. The searches used keywords that we expected to yield the most results in the Danish context, such as "sugar dating", "prostitution", "grey zone prostitution", "sugar daddy" and "young people". In the international databases, we performed searches with and without Denmark as a search term. In the latter, we limited the search results to hits with Denmark as an included country.

We used block searches in combination with the Boolean operators "AND / OR" (AND / OR when searching in international databases), for narrowing (AND) or expanding (OR) the search, respectively. For example, "sugar dating AND young" and "sugar dating OR grey zone prostitution" have been used as search terms. In searches where it has been relevant, keywords have been used to qualify the results. In addition, truncation has been used with \* in cases where keywords with different endings were relevant, for example when searching for "sugardat \*", the words sugar dating, sugardate and sugardates were also searched for. The searches were limited based on publication type, publication date and geography.

In our general literature search of the database Bibliotek.dk, we encountered several articles about sugar dating, and we also searched Google using the same search words as in the general search. The section on the impact on mainstream media is based on 25 articles from these searches.

The literature search showed that there is very little research focusing on young adults' involvement in commercial sexual activities in Denmark, and when young people are mentioned, it is often in brief only. As these studies represent quite different standpoints, and use different methods and terminologies, they are hard to compare. In addition, reports on youth engaged in transactional sex are scarce and are often published by social initiatives, thus reflecting their specific perspectives on the issue. This report provides a thematic overview of the most relevant reports and evaluations produced over the past two decades and discusses their central conclusions.

### 2.2.2 *Interview data*

In order to be able to provide a more updated picture of the situation, and to be able to analyse how the target group and the debate have changed over the last years, we found it necessary to look to the practitioners currently working in the field. We asked key professionals from the eight most relevant social initiatives/organizations for an interview. These professionals are considered key-persons because most of them have considerable and current experience with vulnerable young people. All consented to participate. Seven participants were interviewed face-to-face<sup>4</sup>, and one answered our questions by e-mail.

The interviews were conducted by the authors, and they lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed us to ask questions about central themes, but also left room for the interviewees' specific insights on the topics that they found to be of most relevance. The interview questions centred on knowledge about the target group. This included a focus on their personal experiences with and perspectives on scope, motives, current initiatives, ethical issues, terminology, collaborations with other stakeholders and legal aspects.

As there obviously may be other and different perspectives and experiences than those of the professionals interviewed for this report, it does not give any full picture of the situation. We anticipate however, that the presented experiences and reflections may be useful both for future research and social work.

### **The organizations and social initiatives**

For this report, we surveyed the relevant social services offered to vulnerable young people aged 18–25 in Denmark. P1-P8 are used as synonyms for the interviewed representatives for the eight initiatives that we found to be most relevant. Five of the initiatives specialize in "prostitution", "grey zone prostitution" or "sugar dating". These are *Reden Ung* (RU, P1), *Reden Århus* (RA, P4), *Reden Aalborg* (RAA, P3), *Socialstyrelsen* (NBSS, P5) and *Liva Rehab* (LR, P6). One initiative, the Girl Group (GG, P2), addresses socially disadvantaged and vulnerable girls between 15–18, another one, *Aids-Fondet* (AF, P7) addresses people who have concerns about HIV and sexual health more generally, and one addresses LGBT + young people (LGBT, P8). Together, these organizations give insights into work with young people involved in transactional sex.

## 2.3 **Assessment of the existing knowledge: research and professionals**

In this section, we present the existing knowledge about young people exchanging/selling sexual services in Denmark after 2002. The included research as well as the professionals we interviewed both emphasized that the knowledge base of the few existing social

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<sup>4</sup> In two of the interviews, two professionals were present.

initiatives for vulnerable young people is deficient.<sup>5</sup> Many expressed their lack of knowledge about the different motives for entering into transactional sex/sugar dating, and about the consequences and possible problems that these young people experience. The professionals also expressed a lack of knowledge about the young people's social backgrounds, including a lack of knowledge about how gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality may affect both the decision to trade in sexual services and the experience of these transactions.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the virtually unison call for more knowledge, perhaps surprisingly, a lot of experiences, assumptions and reflections were produced among the practitioners involved in social work with this group.

To begin with, we present the existing, and very limited, research specifically on young people and compensational sex. Our main emphasis is on the various surveys that have tried to determine the extent of the phenomenon but, when possible, we have also included insights of a more qualitative manner. From there, we go on to briefly describe the mainstream media coverage on the subject, because it has been debated heavily in recent years due to popular portrayals of "sugar dating" on TV. We then present discussions on the importance of terminology among both researchers and the professionals interviewed. Finally, we highlight the qualitative insights into the phenomenon provided by both the research and the professionals.

### 2.3.1 *Existing research on the extent of young people involved in transactional sex*

The existing research on "prostitution" in Denmark has not generally focused on young people (VFC Socialt Udsatte 2004) and there is no systematic research on "grey zone prostitution", which is a term often used for young people engaged in transactional/compensational sex (Johnson and Murakami 2017). Therefore, there is widespread uncertainty about the extent and characteristics of "prostitution", "grey-area prostitution" and "sugar dating" among Danish young people (Thomsen 2004; Johnson and Murakami 2017).

Early this century, the numbers of young people engaged in compensational sex seemed to be more or less consistent across the Nordic countries. Reports from the Nordic countries estimated that between 1 and 2% of young people had received payment or other compensation for sex (Pedersen and Hegna 2004; Svedin and Priebe 2004; Pedersen and Grunwald 2005). Helweg-Larsen and Larsen (2002) found that 1.1% of boys and 0.8% of girls under 18 in Denmark had had this experience. Even though the numbers were quite similar, the Danish research reports about young people who had experience of exchanging sexual services, like the Nordic reports in general, repeatedly indicated an uncertainty about the extent of "prostitution" and "grey area

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<sup>5</sup> Knowledge about young people who identify as LGBTQI+ is almost non-existent. We do present perspectives on gendered and sexual minority groups when mentioned by interview participants and in the reports, but the existing knowledge does not allow for a more specific focus on these groups.

prostitution". But in spite of this uncertainty, Danish research reports often refer to the same Norwegian (Pedersen and Hegna 2000) and Swedish surveys (Svedin and Priebe 2004) about the extent of young people engaged in transactional sex and make estimates based on these<sup>7</sup>, as well as on the experiences of social workers. For example, Socialforvaltningen (2007) estimated that between 1 and 2% of young people between 15 and 17 years of age had received money for sexual services in Copenhagen based on these Nordic country surveys, which means between 110 and 220 young people. They noted though, that this should be seen as a minimum range, because social workers had noted an increase in the number of young women from Eastern Europe on Halmtorvet in Vesterbro in Copenhagen<sup>8</sup>. The women claimed to be over 18, but *Reden*, a social initiative working in the area, estimated that they were between 15 and 18.

Lautrup (2003) estimated that a smaller group (between 2 and 20) of young people under 18 sold sexual services in the drug and prostitution milieu in the same Vesterbro area of Copenhagen between 1992 and 2004. Rasmussen (2007, p.42) also reports that before 2001, a small group of young women was involved in "paid sexual exploitation" in this area. Between 2001–2006, however, she holds that social workers did not report there being any young people under 18 in "street-prostitution" in Denmark, indicating a significant change at the turn of the century. In addition, *VFC social Udsatte* (2004) concluded that there were no minors involved in street prostitution in Denmark, in contrast to other larger European cities.

However, Rasmussen noted that existing surveys only concerned adolescents in the "regular" public school system, which led her to assume that the actual numbers were higher, and that some adolescents may pass under the radar of the social welfare system. Furthermore, Rasmussen suggested that a possible explanation for why social workers did not locate young people who had received compensation for sex could be that young people received these offers from people they already knew, from people they met around town, or via the internet. Instead of money, they may also have received gifts, clothes, phones, etc., and these types of trades were not included when the question was whether they received payment for sex. Interestingly, the "Girls Group" a social initiative working with vulnerable girls under 18, did not see "paid sexual exploitation" as a common thing among their users in 2007, but they noted that a considerable proportion of the young women they encountered were involved in "prostitution-like relationships" or had "prostitution-like behaviour" (Socialforvaltningen 2007, p. 36). In line with Rasmussen's argument, this indicates that sex was increasingly acquiring the character of a commodity and that it was being traded for other "benefits" than money. In the same vein, Socialforvaltningen (2007) stated that professionals in social initiatives for vulnerable young people did not experience "youth prostitution" as a widespread problem, even though several of the girls who used the social initiatives were involved in "prostitution-like relationships".

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<sup>7</sup> It is often noted however, that these surveys were only distributed to young people enrolled in the regular educational system, and not distributed to young people in special care institutions for example. So the reports, even though they refer to these numbers, often presented them as unreliable.

<sup>8</sup> This is the 'prostitution area' in Copenhagen.

Christensen (2003) also assumed that there were unreported cases in the field. He wanted to shed light on the extent of “youth prostitution”, and on adolescents at risk of engaging in “prostitution” by focusing on adolescents in residential care institutions. Surveys were distributed to all of the 275 municipalities in the country. In total, 203 municipalities (73.8%) responded. Sixteen municipalities (7.9% of the respondents) reported awareness of 51 young people in “prostitution”. Many were based in and around Copenhagen (StorKøbenhavn), 80% were girls of Danish origin, and more than half of them were under 18. On third of the municipalities that responded were aware of young people whom they thought were at risk of engaging in prostitution (477 young people in all). Interestingly, Christensen characterized these numbers as unexpectedly low, and he explained them by assuming that the municipalities had discounted the problem. This assumption, that there is a considerable number of unreported cases and that there are a lot of young people out there that the social welfare system does not reach, is a trend in most of the research as well as in the interviews with professionals.

According to Pedersen and Grunwald (2005), another explanation for why it is so hard to estimate the numbers of young people in “paid sexual exploitation” is that it is a criminal act, and also, that there are no ads for sexual services by persons under 21 years. Even though it is legal to buy sexual services from persons over 21 (Section 228, second paragraph of Denmark’s Criminal Code), it is illegal to aid or abet a person under 21 to do so. This means, for example, that it is illegal to rent a room in a massage parlour or post ads on the internet for sexual services from a person under 21.

Weiskopf (2015) also tried to assess the number of young people involved in compensational sex. In a survey on “grey area prostitution” among vulnerable young people, Weiskopf asked 90 professionals working with this group whether they had experienced or suspected young people of being involved in relationships that included the sale of or trade in sexual services for something else. Ninety per cent of the professionals had had such suspicions, and 70% characterized these cases as continuous or repeated. Furthermore, Kofoed and Dyrvig (2011) report that about 10% of the women they interviewed had started to engage in compensational sex/paid sexual exploitation before they were 18, but they provide no specific information about this group.

There are interesting gender issues regarding the assumed extent of young people engaged in transactional sex. In spite of Nordic research demonstrating that more boys than girls have received payment for sexual services, the initiatives we present in this report have virtually only had contact with girls (e.g. Thomsen 2004; Socialforvaltningen 2007; Weiskopf 2015). Sørensen and Nørlykke (2006) also noted that all the professionals they interviewed were familiar with young people who were currently, or who had been, subjected to “paid sexual exploitation”, and they were generally more aware of young girls than boys. They reported being specifically aware of young women exhibiting sexualized behaviour (in their dress, behaviour, social settings, etc.) and/or of those who had been subjected to sexual assault. However, with such an awareness of a specific group, Sørensen and Nørlykke emphasized that they may pay less attention to signs of paid sexual exploitation among other groups, including boys and less obtrusive girls. In addition, Thomsen (2004) noted that the gender differences could possibly be explained

by the stigma attached to selling homosexual services, which may make young men more inclined to hide their involvement in compensational sex.

A survey among 15–25 year olds (Ungeprofilundersøgelsen 2015) shows that 1.69% of boys (N=7445) and 0.86% of girls (N=8805) said that they had provided sexual services for gifts or other goods, while 2.82% of the boys (N=7450) and 6% of the girls (N=8798) had received offers to accept gifts or other goods for sexual services. Even though these numbers include a wider age range than some of the early reports, they are interesting because they are quite similar to what has been reported before, including that more young men than young women are engaged in transactional sex. Also, the numbers indicate that more young women than men are offered gifts or other goods for sexual services, but that fewer women than men accept them.

Given these recent numbers, there is not much evidence suggesting that the numbers of young people involved in compensational sex are growing. However, in spite of these strong indications of the stability of the numbers, many of the professionals we interviewed have experienced an increase in the number of young people engaging in commercial sexual activities, and many of them also assume that there are many unreported cases in this field.

Given the lack of research on young people involved in transactional sex, it is not surprising that researchers report that this knowledge is lacking in social work with young people. For example, Christensen (2003), who wrote about the knowledge situation in the municipalities, concluded that “the social initiatives do not see or are unable to cope with the problems that young people may have in relation to prostitution or paid sexual exploitation”<sup>9</sup> (p.3). Many of the existing studies and reports (e.g. Berthelsen and Bømler 2004; VFC Socialt Udsatte 2004) highlight a need for qualitative work that focuses on the processes that contribute to some young people becoming involved in transactional sex. They also emphasized the need for more knowledge about the possible mechanisms in young people’s lives that influence their decisions before, during and after such a transaction. In addition, they emphasize the need for knowledge about the gender differences indicated by the aforementioned surveys, where young men seemed to trade in sex more often than young women do.

### 2.3.2 *The impact of mainstream media*

Before we go on to present the knowledge situation in more detail, we think it is useful to briefly comment on the recent media coverage of “sugar dating” in Denmark. We find that the media discourses provide an important backdrop, because not only do the professionals interviewed frequently refer to the impact of the media coverage of “sugar dating”, the media also plays a central role in shaping opinions about, and perceptions of, a controversial subject in a more general sense. This is illustrated by the fact that even though the majority of Danes have no first-hand experience of compensational/transactional sex, the public debate on sugar dating indicates that it

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<sup>9</sup> We do not present the findings here, as the information is very detailed and no longer relevant.

constitutes a highly relevant and controversial subject in Danish public opinion. It is interesting to note that the media focus on “sugar dating” is very “Danish” in the sense that the other country reports in this Nordic compilation report do not report anything like the recent media hype in Denmark<sup>10</sup>.

The media’s coverage of “sugar dating” has been criticized for glamorizing the phenomenon (Gosh 2017), but also for creating hype and moral panic (Dreehsen and Højbjerg 2018). In general, however, the opinions and definitions represented by the media depend on who is given a voice. The debates on sugar dating seem to have been sparked by a documentary series about the now famous “sugar babe” Gina Jaqueline (DRtv 2017). The series portrays her “luxury life”, while “sugar daddies” are often referred to as wealthy men with a “double life”. Although we are given insights into some of Gina’s concerns, insecurities and doubts, we are mainly presented with some of the benefits of being a sugar babe in the series: Chanel handbags, nights at hotels and gourmet dinners. Gina does not frequently use terms like “prostitution” or “grey zone prostitution”, and she presents sugar dating as not directly sex for money because it is also romantic and exciting.

In the vein of this series, Gina has become a media darling in Denmark, and after the series, she stopped sugar dating, and began a romantic relationship with one of her sugar daddies. She also wrote a book about her life, and in 2018 another documentary was released about her (DR 2018). In this later period, Gina focuses more on the negative aspects: “For me it was sheer prostitution as well as dating with advantages” (Baunø 2018). This way of presenting the phenomenon seems to be more in line with the general media coverage than her earlier statements. Here, the general opinion also seems to be that when sexual services are traded for forms of compensation other than money, it is indeed a form of “prostitution”.

The fact that there is little research about compensational sex among young people in general, and “sugar dating” in particular, affects the media discourse, and it creates a lot of room for generalizing from individual cases and the experiences and opinions of specific stakeholders. Interestingly, many of the individual stories presented by the media are provided by social initiatives working with people involved in transactional sex, for example *Reden* and *LivaRehab* (Nielsen and Nissen 2015). The focus is often on the fact that the benefits, for example “diamonds and piles of money” (Ahlmann-Jensen 2018) in “grey-zone prostitution” or “sugar dating” come at a high price and “create terrible scars on body and soul” (Petersson 2015).

It is also striking that – whether the phenomenon is defined as “sugar dating”, “grey-zone prostitution” or “prostitution” – there is a degree of uncertainty in the discussion. For example, some articles discuss, as we shall also see the professionals doing later in this report, whether the media focus may be contributing to a normalization and legitimization of “sugar dating” (Radio 24/7 2017), even though it also focuses on the more problematic aspects.

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<sup>10</sup> The term is also quite common in the US and the UK.

### 2.3.3 Terminology

In parallel with the increasing media focus, some organizations reported that more and more young people are experiencing problems in connection with “sugar dating” (RedenUng 2017; LivaRehab 2017). While there is little knowledge about the exact numbers of young people engaging in transactional sex, and despite the existing survey data (Ungeprofilundersøgelsen 2015) not indicating any growth, the media, and as we shall see below, professionals, do express a strong *sense* that the numbers are growing. Some professionals also stressed that there are important changes regarding sexuality going on in public discourse and in youth culture more generally, about which they lack knowledge. With this in mind, it is highly relevant to gain more insight into the kind of situated knowledge professionals in the field are basing their work on according to the existing research and the interviews. This section therefore contains a presentation and discussion of the main themes from the most relevant research reports about young people exchanging sexual services written after 2002, supported by narratives from the eight professionals interviewed for this report.

#### Terminology used in research and reports

Between 2002 and 2004, there was a heightened interest in “youth prostitution” in Denmark, and a couple of reports were published on this topic. These reports, as well as the interview data, show that there was a growing awareness of the importance of the terminology used in the various social initiatives working with vulnerable young people, and of how that terminology might add to the stigma of having experienced transactional sex for young people if used in non-reflective ways.

One of the first reports that dealt thoroughly and explicitly with terminology was the report entitled *Unge i prostitution og lovgivning. Evaluering af straffelovens § 223a* (Lautrup 2003) which intended to shed light on general awareness of, and attitudes toward, youth prostitution and Section 223 a of Denmark’s Criminal Code. The report was concerned with how this section corresponded to the reality in which young people who “sold sex”, and also people’s perceptions of what role society should play in the regulation of “prostitution”. Lautrup defined “youth prostitution” (15–18 years) as a “grey area phenomenon” because they are not defined as children since they are above the legal age of consent, but they are not of legal age, which is why society sees them as in need of extra protection compared to young people over the age of 18. Aside from “youth prostitution”, terms such as “grey area prostitution” and “prostitution-like relationships” were employed in the report.

The report *Redegørelse om prostitution i Danmark* (VFC Socialt Udsatte 2004) contains a relatively short chapter on young people noting, like Lautrup (2003), that knowledge about and social initiatives targeting paid sexual exploitation were very scarce (2004, p. 82). Like nearly all Nordic reports in this area, the report refers to the findings of Pedersen and Hegna (2000) and Svedin and Priebe (2004), and also adopted the term “paid sexual exploitation” (*betalt seksuel udnyttelse*). The argument for using this term was that young people engaged in “paid sexual exploitation” had many difficulties in their lives, and that they had “conspicuous sexual experiences” at an early age, including sexual exploitation. The report also noted the existence of a small group

of young people within this group who did not report difficulties however (2004, p.81). It was also argued that the limited knowledge we do have about "paid sexual exploitation among young people" stems from interviews with adult sellers of sex or social workers, and *not* from interviews with young people themselves (ibid, p.82). Like previous reports, this report concluded that paid sexual exploitation among young people was not a theme in social work at the time, and called for more knowledge and better qualified social work in the area (ibid, p.83).

The report *Anbragte unge, seksualitet og prostitutionslignende relationer* (Thomsen 2004) on children and adolescents in care, sexuality and prostitution-like relationships outlined the general understandings of children and young people's sale of sexual services in Denmark. This report, like its predecessors, aimed to include the experiences of professionals working in care facilities to enable an integration of their experiences into future preventive and care efforts. The report is based on 12 interviews with personnel working with disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people in care facilities, outreach programs, and other similar institutions, as well as in two focus group interviews with participants from the project's advisory board. The report employed the terms "young people's sale of sex" or "sex trade". But the report also criticized such terms as inadequate to describe the processes of exchanging sex for other services or commodities. Furthermore, Thomsen notes that terms like "prostitute" can invoke an image that is not necessarily reflected in the everyday practice of social workers in their interactions with young clients. Thus, this report constitutes an attempt to discuss and nuance the terminology in the field.

The report entitled *Betalt seksuel udnyttelse af socialt udsatte unge* (Sørensen and Nørrelykke 2006) investigates the "paid sexual exploitation" of socially marginalized youth. The aim was to provide further information for *Kompetencecenter Prostitution* as part of its in-service training concerning "paid sexual exploitation" targeting personnel working with marginalized youth. Furthermore, the report aimed to provide more general information about marginalized youth subjected to "paid sexual exploitation". The report applies the term "paid sexual exploitation" because the study concerned young people/adolescents below the age of 18. Like Thomsen, the authors of this report saw the term "youth prostitution" as misleading, as minors cannot actively engage in "prostitution" as defined in the law. The authors stressed that the Criminal Code was meant to protect, not criminalize, minors.

The report *Redegørelse om prostitution i København* (Socialforvaltningen 2007) aimed to identify the extent of "prostitution" and to shed light on existing preventive and social efforts in Copenhagen, and a small part of the report concerns young people. In this report, young people below the age of 15 (the age of consent) are considered children. Like the government's action plan for the area of prostitution (Socialministeriet 2005), the report defined "prostitution" as a social problem, and employed the term "prostitution-like behaviour" to refer to behaviour that was different from the traditional "sale of sexual services". The argument for this term was that even though sex was traded for commodities other than money, there was nonetheless an expectation that the person would be sexually available in exchange. It was noted that in

relation to “prostitution-like relationships” among adolescents, there may be doubt about what constitutes “normal” sexually experimental behaviour for a new generation.

Like Sørensen and Nørlykke (2006) among others, the report problematized the term “youth prostitution” because it emphasizes the young person’s active involvement, which indicates that the young person perceives/or ought to perceive him/herself to be a “prostitute” rather than a victim of a criminal act. Therefore, and to emphasize the responsibility of the client, the report employed the term “paid sexual exploitation” about relations where young people received payment for sexual services.

After a long period without much interest in young people engaged in transactional sex, Weiskopf (2015) published a report entitled *Unge til salg* (Young people for sale) from a project on grey area prostitution among disadvantaged and vulnerable children and adolescents that aimed to outline and analyse the phenomenon of “grey area prostitution”. It is important to note that this report had a preventive perspective, and that its stated ambition was “to reduce grey area prostitution among children and youth in Denmark” (Weiskopf 2015, p. 8). Even though it used the term “grey area prostitution” in its long title, the report employs the term “sale of or trade in sexual services” when talking to young people themselves. Weiskopf argues that to use terms such as “grey area prostitution” or “prostitution” when working with children and adolescents may invoke shame and thus create distance between the professional and the young person, who may not perceive his/her behaviour in the same way. “Grey area prostitution” is defined as distinct from “regular” prostitution insofar as it takes place among children and adolescents, and sexual services are provided in exchange for money, gifts, drugs, shelter, food, adult contact, care, protection, exploration of sexuality, or approval. “Grey area prostitution” is considered a phenomenon on a continuum between “prostitution” and “regular” teenage sexuality. Because this definition is very broad, the report calls for more in-depth knowledge on the issue.

In the discussion above, we can conclude that a more consistent focus on trade in sexual services for compensation other than money is underway in Denmark. In the same vein as this focus, it seems that there is an increased awareness of the implications of different types of terminology, specifically in relation to minors and different type of trades. These discussions on terminology are also becoming increasingly relevant, as for example a small study by RedenUng (2018<sup>11</sup>) on young Danes’ dating practices found that the term “sugar dating” is becoming more mainstream. As we shall see in the following section about professionals’ reflections on terminology, they also present the term “sugar dating” as becoming more and more common in their work.

### Professionals’ reflections on terminology

The professionals interviewed stressed that the choice of terms is very important in their relations with the young people as well as in their work in general. In the following, we present some of their reflections about their own use of terminology, and also about the terms used by young people, practitioners and the media.

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<sup>11</sup> The investigation was made on Facebook (N=2000), and is not representative.

The most commonly mentioned terms among the professionals were “prostitution”, “grey area prostitution” and “sugar dating”, and as we have seen in the presented reports, the tendency is increasingly to use the last two, because “prostitution” is regarded as a “heavy” term with negative connotations and conferring a stigma. Nevertheless, the participants relate to the term in very different ways. For example, P1 (RU) sometimes finds it necessary to use the term “prostitution”, when it describes what a young person is *actually* doing. She says:

“In some of the counselling sessions I have had, there have been some girls or women who have felt really, really bad about what they were doing. They wanted me to find out what possible consequences sugar dating could have, where I had to tell them that what they were actually doing is escort prostitution.”

In contrast, P7 (AF) preferred not to use the term “prostitution” in their counselling services – even if the people seeking counselling did:

“It has something to do with all the connotations of the word ‘prostitution’, and the way it has been used historically, and the feeling it often invokes in people to be called a prostitute. So, we try to refrain from using that word. That is also why we aren’t keen on the term ‘grey area prostitution.’”

A7 says that in the Danish Aids Foundation they would also correct the use of such terms amongst themselves to be able to focus on the topic without reproducing a stigma in their everyday work and in counselling.

In many organizations, they found it crucial to use the young people’s own terminology. The political and cultural connotations were thus less important, as P4 (RA) says:

“I would never start out by using the word ‘prostitution’, unless they use the term themselves. It is simply because I see no reason for further stigmatization, which I think is embedded in that word already. So yeah, if they say ‘sugar dating’ or ‘dates’, then it doesn’t matter to me. It is not about what we call it, it is more about getting behind it and figuring out what kind of damage they may have suffered.”

As these quotes illustrate, the participants in our study are concerned about the stigma attached to the term “prostitution”, but depending on the specific aim of the organization, they found the term to be more or less problematic in practice. The same applied to the term “grey area prostitution”, although the professionals generally seemed more inclined to talk about “grey areas” than “prostitution”.

Similarly, the participants differed regarding the use of other terms. They were very familiar with “sugar dating”, but this term appeared to be more prevalent among those working with young women than in relation to young men or other genders. As mentioned above, some participants also expressed concern that the media may have legitimized sugar dating, leading to a glorification of transactional sex.

Only the two counselling services LGBT Denmark and the Danish Aids Foundation used the term “sex work”. Both organizations also expressed an awareness of trying to refrain from reproducing a negative view of “sex work”. For example, P7 (AF) explains<sup>12</sup>:

“We are generally an extremely sex-positive organization. That means that our message to those who use our services is ‘do whatever you like to do. Enjoy everything you want to enjoy. Play with everything you want to play with’. We would like to inform them about what they need to be aware of in different situations concerning risks, and how to minimize such risks, but it is never us who say to them that there are things you should not do.”

P7 also stressed that they are not normative in their work, in that they aim to teach the young people about safety and about how to minimize risks, instead of trying to persuade them to avoid engaging in sex work.

In a similar manner, P8 (LGBT+) explained that they were very aware of not reproducing a general tendency in society to shame “sex workers”.

As described, all of the participants talked about how they actively reflected on what terms to use in their work. Although the participants agreed on the importance of terminology, nevertheless their opinions diverged on what terminology they found to be most useful and ethical. These differences seem to reflect the specific aims of the organizations, for example if their main focus was to combat stigmatization, or if they were more focused on providing help to young people who experience harm from their involvement in transactional sex. This points to the need to consider how the choice of terminology is rooted in specific contexts, reflecting the respective aims of organizations and their experiences with different groups in terms age, gender, sexuality and level of vulnerability.

#### 2.3.4 *Characteristics of the target group in the existing research and reports*

##### **Motives and consequences**

It was generally assumed in the reports that within the group of young people who had received “payment for sexual services”, there was an overrepresentation of young people with social problems (Socialforvaltningen 2007). Thomsen (2004) describes the professionals as being attentive to certain signs in young people, but that there is not at all the same focus on “signs of prostitution” as there is on signs indicating alcohol and drug abuse, for example. For this reason, some researchers, such as Christensen (2003), argue that young people with a drug problem are generally referred to a social initiative faster than young people “in prostitution”.

Socialforvaltningen (2007) described how young people with a drug addiction, who also “prostitute themselves”, did this in order to get their needs for drugs or care met. They were described as generally bad at caring for themselves, and likewise as difficult to help. Some of the signs emphasized as cause for concern were sexualized behaviour, contact with significantly older men, little contact with the institution where they had

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<sup>12</sup> The conversation centred on young adults, and it is important to note that this does not concern minors under 18.

been taken into care, many gifts or the like, and reactions related to sex that the professionals found to be problematic (see also Christensen 2003).

A general theme in the reports is a professional concern about boundaries. For example, Sørensen and Nørlykke (2006) noted that the family relationships of young people “in prostitution” are often marked by a lack of sexual boundaries. Some watch porn with family members or do other things that are considered transgressive behaviours. In general, the professionals characterize young people who engage in transactional sex as having low self-esteem, suffering from emotional and material hardship, having a lack of knowledge about their body, fleeting social connections, and multiple problems in addition to sexual ones (see for example Thomsen 2004). There is also some concern among professionals about a more generalized sexualization of society (Socialforvaltningen 2007), and the professionals also explained that financial or psychosocial motives were important in these young people’s decisions to “prostitute themselves” (Christensen 2003). Also, adolescents in care institutions, especially girls, are described as particularly vulnerable (Sørensen and Nørlykke 2006).

In recent years, quite a few reports have focused on the work of the organization *LivaRehab*, among them being the work of Weiskopf (2015) and Schwalbe (2018). Both of these reports (re)produce the picture of vulnerability by using specific cases. Weiskopf (2015, p.10) presents Emilie, who gives a blowjob for a taxi ride:

“Emilie has no people with resources around her. The lack of care and love that all children deserve and are entitled to, and also to live a special kind of life, has lead Emilie along a path that no child should walk. A path she is not mature enough to leave by herself.”

The case of Karla in Schwalbe (2018, p.15) also has some of the same characteristics: “It was difficult for Karla to connect the story of the happy family with the betrayal and mental abuse she later experienced”. These reports confirm some of the characteristics presented above, but their ways of presenting the young people are somewhat emotional.

*LivaRehab* also have an article in the Social Year Report in which they describe the social problems that, in their experience, “follow from grey area prostitution” (Johnson and Murakami 2017, p. 32). The authors criticize the tendency in the media to portray “grey area prostitution” and “sugar dating” as a choice that young people make to sweeten their daily lives. On the contrary, the authors take as their point of the departure that “grey-zone prostitution” may be harmful. They note that there are no representative analyses of this phenomenon in Denmark, but they claim that among the 800 people they have supported between 2011 and 2017, most come from vulnerable families and about 75% have experienced sexual abuse in childhood.

It is worth noting that social initiatives like *LivaRehab* thus (re)produce estimates that are not backed up by research, and also, that they tend to assume that the problems they see are only the tip of the iceberg.

### 2.3.5 *Characteristics of the target group – the professionals' view*

In the interviews, the professionals provided different kinds of knowledge about young people involved in transactional sex. This knowledge was rooted in work with young people themselves, experiences from other practitioners in the field, the literature, and also sometimes assumptions. To qualify and nuance the knowledge presented in the reports, in the following we present the central themes that came up during the interviews with the key professionals, and link these to the knowledge from the research and reports presented above. We also aim to discuss the different perspectives of the professionals in the light of the aims and purposes of the social initiatives they represent.

#### **Arenas of contact**

The professionals had different explanations for why young people become engaged in transactional sex and mentioned many different arenas of contact that enabled this involvement. One of the websites frequently mentioned was [sugardaters.dk](http://sugardaters.dk) which, according to many participants, has become popular after the documentary series on sugar dating mentioned above. Some found that the series had glossed over the harms of transactional sex and made it sound glamorous, thus encouraging young women to begin "sugar dating". P6 (LR) says:

"There is kind of like a Julia Roberts vibe about it, right? We hear about it in the media with Gina Jaqueline, when she says that it was a good life. It may be the case for a few, but that is why they get into it, right? The fast money without the stigma."

Aside from the effects of the media, all of the participants mentioned how the internet played a significant role. This included direct sale of sex on specific websites; not only on [sugardaters.dk](http://sugardaters.dk), but also on social media, as P5 (RAA) describes in the following:

"For some, it is something they seek out, because they heard about [sugardaters.dk](http://sugardaters.dk), that they can make money there. And then there are some of those who we talk to, who have been asked by someone (on Facebook or Snapchat. ed) and then accepted the offer (...) And then, maybe they are already doing something that corresponds to what we would call sugar dating, and then they figure out that they can get a profile on [sugardaters.dk](http://sugardaters.dk)."

Thus, different types of websites and social media were involved. However, this also included unsolicited offers from strangers. P4 (RA) told about a recent experience with young people between 16 and 25 years at an educational institution, where a lot of the young people told her that they, or somebody they knew, had been contacted on Facebook by men who had offered them some amount of money for sex.

Many of the participants thus painted a picture of how young women in particular are increasingly contacted through various types of media, and how they themselves may seek out certain types of transactional sex online, because it has become less stigmatized. The professionals emphasized that the media has had a significant impact as new platforms for transactional sex emerge, and also, that the lines between what is "regular" dating with sex and what is transactional sex have become blurred.

For young men involved in transactional sex, P7 had the impression that apps such as Grindr were used to facilitate contact, but also, that sites such as Hunqz.com and PlanetRomeo.com were popular. However, P7 was unsure of the actual age of the young men on these sites.

Furthermore, some also mentioned how transactional sex could emerge more ad-hoc as people met as part of the nightlife in a city, in the street, etc. Some participants also mentioned how some may begin sugar dating after hearing about it from their peers in the care institutions where they live, or through peers more generally. Furthermore, as we mentioned in the previous section, some young men may become engaged in transactional sex as they are “taken under the wing” of older men in the “gay scene”.

### Personal boundaries and sexual abuse

Most of the professionals interviewed, similar to the reports presented above, spoke about how young people became involved in transactional sex because of a problematic social background in which many of them had been subjected to sexual abuse or in other ways had had their personal boundaries and autonomy compromised, and thus later in life had difficulties in asserting their own boundaries. For example, C4 (RA) focusses on their troubled upbringing:

“A lot of them have been subjected to sexual abuse and have had their personal boundaries crossed at an early age. So they haven’t actually felt that it was a big step, rather it just kind of felt natural in some way.”

Some say, C4 continues: “I was already with so many different men, so I might as well get paid for it”. As illustrated here, a central argument emphasized by some professionals was that young people, especially young women who have not learned to set proper boundaries at home, or who have been subjected to sexual abuse, struggle to set boundaries in sexual relations and to recognize when sexual behaviour is transgressive. P1 (RU) even suggested that for many young people, sexual abuse was the main explanation for their engagement in transactional sex: “In a way, it doesn’t matter if it is because they sugar-date, feel lonely or have a psychiatric diagnosis; when you dig a little deeper, you see it is *that* [sexual abuse] which is their core challenge.”

Furthermore, two professionals presented their vulnerable status as refugees as a possible explanation for some young people becoming involved in transactional sex: because their upbringing was marked by trauma due to their own or their parents’ refugee status; or because their parents lacked the resources and/or were unwilling to teach their children about sexual health and boundaries. P2 (GG) says:

“They come from really marginalized and vulnerable families, and many of them are poorly integrated, if you can use that term here (...) The girls, they have been kept on a ‘tight leash’ at home, but when they turn 13, 14, 15, they cannot be controlled and they have no sexual education, no sense of what is okay and not okay. (...)”

As illustrated here, P2 argues that ethnicity plays a significant role in her work, insofar as certain groups of ethnic minorities tend to be overrepresented in her workplace.

### Seeking approval and validation

In relation to how a troubled background may make young people more inclined to become involved in transactional sex, many participants also spoke of how such sexual relations may fulfil emotional needs, and that transactional sex can be a way for some young people, especially young women, to get validation and approval. As P1(RU) noted, to some young people it serves as a way to “feel attractive, feel appreciated, being courted”. Receiving money or gifts can thus provide a way for some young people, who struggle with low self-esteem, to feel worthy. Transactional sex and the financial aspect of it could thus fulfil an emotional need. Other professionals argued that among those who had not received proper love and care in their upbringing, transactional sex was experienced as an opportunity to receive approval through others’ willingness to pay, and this could enable them to feel like they were “good at something”. While most professionals regarded these strategies as problematic, services targeting young LGBTQ+ adults for example did not problematize that transactional sex could have an emotional value to people in the same way. For example, P7 (AF) emphasized that there were many different types of power balances at play, depending in the type of transactional sex, and the emotional role of transactional sex was only seen as problematic if it involved a disproportionate or harmful power imbalance.

### Financial concerns

As noted above, many professionals emphasized financial concerns as a common motivation for young people to become involved in transactional sex. For example, P2 (GG) argued that money could be a matter of necessity, especially for adolescents growing up in care institutions:

“There is something about not understanding how the system works, when you turn 18 (...) These girls simply can’t provide for themselves, and some of them have also been placed in care, and then they have to get into the labour market, and they have to live up to a thousand demands to avoid being sanctioned, losing their apartment, and stuff like that.”

In this quote, the participant illustrates and opposes a widespread tendency in our data, and in the field more generally, to conceptualize young people’s involvement in transactional sex as primarily intertwined with a deprived social background, and a need for validation, approval and care following from that. Also, from her point of view, it may be a matter of an experienced necessity (see also Bjønness 2012), for example, as some young people struggle to provide for themselves and to find their way in the labour market. In a similar vein, P3 (RA) stressed how young people in care in particular struggled to afford furniture for an apartment, a computer for school, etc.

The financial aspect of transactional sex was also seen as important because of the pressure on young people to keep up with their peers in terms of dress, lifestyle and technology: “to have these cool new clothes, the latest phone, and we have to keep up

with fashion in so many areas” (P<sub>4</sub>, RA). Thus, P<sub>4</sub> argues, aside from turning to transactional sex out of economic necessity, and as a response to peer pressure, “inspiration” may also come from the media.

#### **Other factors: drugs, mental illness and sexual curiosity**

A few of the professionals mentioned how young people may begin engaging in transactional sex as a way to procure drugs. For example, P<sub>5</sub> (NBSS) explains:

“We often hear about drugs. When I talk with teachers who work with young people more generally, we often hear about trading sex for drugs. The whole ‘blowing for lines’, like, giving a blowjob for something.”

Two participants also mentioned a possible connection between mental illness and a willingness to engage in transactional sex. P<sub>1</sub> (RU) sees an overrepresentation of people with mental illnesses in their counselling:

“There are some who tell us that they have been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, and there are some where we assess that this is the case (...) and it makes sense that people diagnosed with BPD work well in this group of sugar daters. Their lack of boundaries fits in with this segment.”

A few professionals, for example P<sub>1</sub> (RU), mention that it is possible that some young people will seek out relationships involving transactional sex because they are curious or find it exciting or pleasurable. However, this is not seen as a major motive among the young people.

Participants from two organizations also experienced that some young men became involved in transactional sex because it was a way to be introduced into a new milieu among gay men. For example, P<sub>7</sub> (AF) explains:

“If you are new to ‘the scene’ or are in the process of coming out, then it is pretty common that someone offers to take you under their wing. For example by introducing you to the right people and taking care of you in the nightlife.”

P<sub>7</sub> thus found that, for some, “being taken under someone’s wing” could be a path into transactional sex, whereas for others it was an opportunity for new experiences. The professionals were also aware of whether the young person felt pressured to engage in a sexual relationship, in particular relations with older men.

#### **Consequences of transactional sex**

The professionals mentioned a wide range of possible consequences of transactional sex, including both physical and psychological harms. For example, P<sub>4</sub> (RA) explained that some of the young women – even the young, so-called “curious” women who are from fairly “normal” families – already, after a relatively short engagement with transactional sex of some type, experience negative consequences:

“Social anxiety, something about intimacy problems... and in relations with family and friends. New boyfriends, etc. In our work, we also see that even if you have only been in it for six months, you can experience some of these harms that we also see among women who have been in a brothel for five years.”

P6 (LR) stressed that the harm from transactional sex also came with the risk of being in contact with men who would not respect their boundaries and treat them badly:

“The harms they suffer. You go in with this expectation that it is going to be good. No commitment, I get money and all that stuff. But some clients don’t behave like human beings, they don’t respect the boundaries of the young girls.”

Most professionals also presented potential harms from transactional sex as dependent on factors like socio-economic background and motivation for being involved, ability to assert boundaries, and level of autonomy. For example, P4 (RA) says:

“We have an assumption that young people who come from a troubled background struggle more with making specific deals with the man when meeting him, in terms of how far they will go. Their boundaries may change more easily as they become involved in a relationship, even though they thought differently beforehand. We think that the women who had a more ‘normal’ childhood have an easier time when trying to sense what their boundaries are and then asserting them.”

In this way, many participants found that the harms of transactional sex were influenced by the same factors that made young people more susceptible to engaging in transactional sex in the first place, including their upbringing and their sense of personal boundaries and autonomy.

Not all the professionals talk about transactional sex as harmful in itself however, except when involving minors. P1 (RU) argues:

“If you only have just one risk factor, if you only sugar date, but everything else is fine, then fine. Like when we talk about alcohol – if you just go out for a drink a few times per month, it seems safe enough. But if you go out for a drink a few times per month, and you sugar date, and you have mental health problems, then it adds up.”

P7 (AF) also adopted the sex-positive approach mentioned above in which “sex work” could also be a positive experience, and P8 (LGBT+) emphasized that due to the services they offered, they only had contact with people who needed help with problems relating to sex work, but they did not see this as representative of sex work more generally. Furthermore, in those cases they found that the consequences of transactional sex most often related to challenges from being from a minority group needing to keep their sexuality hidden for example, or to navigate a new environment. Thus, the less problem oriented approaches that dominated the perceptions of the possible consequences of transactional sex within the LGBTQ+ community were in sharp contrast to the perceptions of most of the other professionals, who were not working with sexual or gendered minorities per se.

### 2.3.6 *Summing up – Existing knowledge: research and professionals*

In this chapter, we have assessed the existing knowledge about young people involved in transactional sex. The reports provide some insight into relevant debates in recent years, whereas the interviews with practitioners in the field give insights into the reflections and assumptions that shape current day-to-day work with this group. All point to a significant lack of knowledge, including a lack of systematic research on the extent of young people exchanging sex for compensation.

In the reports and among the interviewed practitioners, terminology was a central concern, reflecting a growing awareness of how the choice of language is intertwined with political aims and social consequences. Many reports emphasized that minors should be protected, and not criminalized or compared to adults involved in transactional sex. Therefore, the reports employed terminology that characterized transactional sex as an exploitive and criminal act when it involves minors. The practitioners also highlighted the importance of terminology, but although they all emphasized the need to employ terms that were ethical in the sense that they allowed them to help young people without stigmatizing them further, they did not agree on what the best terms were.

Many of the reports and the practitioners found young people involved in transactional sex to be a particularly vulnerable group, in particular as they emphasized how young people became involved in such behaviour because they came from troubled backgrounds, had unhappy childhoods and there was a high rate of child sexual abuse among them, which made them more susceptible to offers of sex for compensation, but also motivated them to actively seek out such relationships. The majority of professionals argued that this was rooted in the need for validation and care, but also as due to their inability to assert healthy boundaries. In addition, the reports and practitioners alike also stressed financial reasons, drug use and general marginalization as reasons for young people to become involved in transactional sex.

The media played a central role on several levels. Firstly, the media was of concern because it arguably portrays sugar dating as a glamorous relationship that is not necessarily perceived as transactional sex. Secondly, the practitioners stressed that social media had made young people particularly susceptible to engaging in sex for compensation. This was because young people were able to more actively get in contact with people who wanted to engage in transactional sex with them on online platforms, including unsolicited offers.

Although some of the surveys reported a higher rate of young men involved in transactional sex compared to young women, the professionals interviewed and the reports were generally more concerned with young women. The exceptions were a few targeted interests in young gay men.

## 2.4 Social initiatives and professional experiences

In this section, we describe the main information, treatment and counselling services offered to young people who trade in sexual services or are at risk of doing so in Denmark. We briefly present the various social initiatives addressing this group by using information from their websites, and then we go on to further explore and discuss the ways in which key professionals in these social initiatives describe their work with the target group. Large differences among the professionals interviewed were noted. The majority have many years of in-depth experience with the target group, while others are less experienced. In addition, some have a more or less pronounced focus on prevention while others focus more on assisting these young people based on their own expressed needs. Some themes recur in all interviews, and they are quite similar to the ones presented in the reports described above. Firstly, there is a common focus on recognition of the relationship and not phrasing questions in a way that would contribute to the stigmatization of these young people. Secondly, in the interviews many of the professionals also reflected on how to make these young people recognize their behaviour as a possible problem without overstepping their personal boundaries.

We start by presenting the work of the social initiatives that are the most specialized in dealing with young vulnerable people who trade in sexual services, and then go on to present the relevant work of the more generalized initiatives that target vulnerable youth. In each section, the interviews with professionals are used to unpack and nuance the aims and work of these social initiatives.

### 2.4.1 *Working with young people involved in transactional sex – the importance of validation*

#### **Reden Ung**

On their website, *RedenUng* ([www.redenung.dk](http://www.redenung.dk))<sup>33</sup> (RU, P1) present themselves as a national service working specifically to prevent young people from engaging in “prostitution”, “grey area prostitution” or “sugar dating”. They offer support, including anonymous online and offline counselling to young people who are engaging in transactional sex, and they counselled 103 young people in 2018. In addition, RU provides information to teachers and other professionals on “sex trade” and “sexual boundaries” in relation to young people.

P1 tells us that even though the organization works to prevent young people under 18 years of age from becoming involved in some kind of transactional sex, their approach is different towards young people over 18:

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<sup>33</sup> *RedenUng* is part of KFUK, the Danish chapter of the organisation YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association), and of a specific group of organisations (“Rederne”) under KFUK, all of which focus specifically on vulnerable and disadvantaged women in ‘prostitution’ and with substance abuse problems. *RedenUng* differs from Reden Aalborg and Reden Aarhus, insofar as their target group is young people specifically.

“You assume that they are adults and able to think for themselves, but not everyone is. But then our first job is to guide them. Our goal is never to tell them that they need to get out or move on, but to make them see whether there might be other options. If it is the only option for them, then we need to do our best to prepare them for that, but also show them options for doing other things.”

Thus, the organization aims to prevent young people under 18 being involved in transactional sex, but also to limit the extent and the harms associated with it for those over 18 and already involved in it. Their counselling includes attempts to teach about basic online safety, because, as P1 says: “Then maybe you can sift out all of these men who do not understand boundaries, and who cannot set boundaries, and who are not interested in doing so.” She goes on to say that she sees her job as assisting the young people over 18 to keep themselves safe, and she says to them: “If you want to do this, fine, but then be aware of these things that you shouldn’t do, or how to keep yourself safe”.

P1 also stresses that the young people they counsel have reached out to them themselves, often through online chat, but that they do not always talk directly about transactional sex to begin with:

“She writes that she feels bad and that her stomach hurts, and all that stuff. If we are chatting to sugar daters (for example on [sugardaters.dk](http://sugardaters.dk), where they counsel), then we ask why that is the case. We talk about how come their stomach hurts. Some of them connect it to their sugar dating or selling sex, and for others it may be something else.”

P1 goes on to explain that in cases where transactional sex is not a concern, they suggest a better suited service. If they sense that there is something more serious going on, such as sexual abuse or the like, P1 says that they will suggest that the young person meets with the organization’s psychologist. However, in order to help young people more effectively, she finds that it would be beneficial if the many different services offered to and targeting young people were all centred on a more holistic view of young people’s well-being, as an effective and nationalized effort to prevent the problems that these young people face.

### **The Girl Group (pigegruppen)**

On their website, the “Girl Group”<sup>24</sup> ([www.deungeshus.kk.dk/artikel/pigegruppen](http://www.deungeshus.kk.dk/artikel/pigegruppen)), (GG, P2) present themselves as a service targeting socially disadvantaged and vulnerable girls aged 13–18. They provide individual and collective support to the girls involved, who typically participate in the group for two or three years. Approximately 100–150 girls are in contact with them annually, of whom many have experiences with substance abuse, crime and grey area prostitution/sugar dating.

P2 stresses that GG values mutual respect, equality and validation of the girls, regardless of their backgrounds and experiences, and that they make sure they are inclusive in their educational work. She emphasizes that the young people are there on a voluntary basis, and that it is important that they are given some influence over how

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<sup>24</sup> The Girl Group is part of a larger organisation, the Young People’s House (*De Unges Hus*, Municipality of Copenhagen) who aim to help marginalised youth in various ways.

the place is run: “they are part of figuring out what should happen and where we are going – and it has worked well.”

Furthermore, P2 stresses the importance of talking about sexuality with these young people. She has found that in groups especially they were able to talk about their experiences with sexuality and boundaries, which provided an opportunity for them to support one another. She explains:

“We talk about needing to maintain your boundaries, and not let them be overstepped. Often one of them will share an episode and that is where the members of the groups impact one another: they can talk about something that happened, but they are together, and they support and influence one another.”

P2 stressed that direct interventions with the girls often came out of a concern for their sexual and personal well-being, including making sure they did not become young mothers and pointing out when they might not be maintaining their own personal boundaries. They did not see the young girls as capable of being mothers and they assumed that the child would be taken away from them anyway.

Although sexuality was a central topic sometimes talked about directly, P2 also explained that it would sometimes be a more subtle, underlying topic that she would note by listening to conversations among the girls. When engaging in these conversations, P2 stressed the importance of not rejecting and of respecting the young people’s own experiences whilst educating them about the specific options and kinds of consequences that their choices could have. She experienced however, that their backgrounds often made it difficult for them to trust adults and social workers.

### **Reden Aalborg**

*Reden Aalborg* (RAA, P3)<sup>15</sup> ([www.kfuksa.dk/reden-aalborg](http://www.kfuksa.dk/reden-aalborg)) presents itself as targeting women and men who sell or have sold sexual services for money, shelter, material goods, or other things, including those who are or have been involved in sugar dating, escort services, the private and discrete sale of sex, and/or brothels. RAA offers anonymous counselling and health care as well as group talks for those who are motivated to improve their current circumstances based on the idea of “help-to-self-help” and user-to-user support. RAA is also engaged in preventive measures concerning “grey area prostitution” for example through providing education for students, teachers and social workers.

P3 talks about three major strategies in RAA’s work: to be there when a women needs help and/or therapy in relation to something acute; to offer preventive interventions with women they know; and finally, to build bridges to other stakeholders such as the mental health system.

While P3 (RAA) stresses the importance of improving the current life circumstances of their users, she also maintains that a main aim of their work is to provide an

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<sup>15</sup> Reden Aalborg is, like Reden Aarhus and Reden København part of KFUK, the Danish chapter of the organisation YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association). Unlike the others however, Reden Aalborg provides services for both young men and young women.

opportunity for women to leave prostitution through their exit program if that is what they want. She notes that RAA also provides services for men, but that they rarely encounter male users of their services. Furthermore, she notes an increase in young people who use their services, including more enquiries from local municipalities referring young people to them.

P<sub>3</sub> emphasizes that RAA's work is holistic, insofar as they make sure that they take into account multiple factors influencing the women's current life circumstances, and that "factors other than prostitution take up space in their life". She exemplifies this holistic approach by their awareness of substance abuse in their talks with the women: they are not only aware of the harms of prostitution, but also of how these harmful effects are intertwined with the more general life circumstances of the women.

### Reden Aarhus

*Reden Aarhus* ([www.reden-aarhus.dk](http://www.reden-aarhus.dk)) (RA, P<sub>4</sub>)<sup>16</sup> presents itself as an anonymous counselling and residential centre for women over 18 who find themselves in difficult life circumstances, for example having experienced prostitution, having substance abuse problems or being homeless. The centre aims to provide care and practical support such as free condoms, free meals and a place to sleep at night. They also offer to stand in as lay representatives at meetings with social services, during home visits, and visits to hospitals and treatment centres.

The majority of RA users are over 30, but P<sub>4</sub> notes that they have started to assist younger women who are in and out of psychiatric institutions, who are on medication, and who drink too much and smoke hash. Some of them engage in "sugar dating", but P<sub>4</sub> do not feel that RA has the right skills to assist these "sugar daters", and he also thinks that the environment in RA is too rough for these young women:

"They tell us that they have been told that they could get a free meal, a shower or some clothing – then we are always like yes, yes, come in and have a cup of coffee and let's talk for a bit. And then, if it is not about them being involved in substance abuse or prostitution per se then we say to them that it is better to go to this or that place (...). If it is just because they are poor, we often say: you should not be here, because you will get introduced to the rough environment too well and too soon."

Thus, unlike many of the other organizations, the professional interviewed for this organization found it necessary to make sure that they did not offer services to young women who could receive more relevant help from other institutions.

In line with the GG above, P<sub>4</sub> (RA) also maintains that working with this group demands an appreciative approach. Like all the professionals interviewed, P<sub>4</sub> stresses that to be able to counsel and help, it is important not to question that the young person is engaging in transactional sex, and to validate the group as it is.

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<sup>16</sup> Reden Aarhus is a part of the same organization as Reden Aalborg, but provides services for women only, and offers shelter in addition to counselling, unlike Reden Aalborg.

### The National Board of Social Services (Socialstyrelsen)

The National Board of Social Services ([www.socialstyrelsen.dk](http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk)) (NBSS, P5) offers different services related to prostitution. As part of the NBSS, the Competency Centre for Prostitution runs an anonymous hotline for phone counselling, providing counselling and information to citizens involved in prostitution. They also provide information, training and counselling for professionals who are in contact with citizens who need assistance to leave prostitution or who are experiencing social problems as a result of prostitution. Furthermore, the NBSS aims to provide specific information on the quantitative aspects of prostitutions, but this has proved to be difficult, especially regarding young people.

P5 explains that compared to other counselling services, they are primarily contacted by young people who already identify what they are doing as a form of "prostitution", which makes the numbers quite low. Like the professionals described above, she stresses the importance of an appreciative approach, and she maintains that in their counselling services the NBSS use a specific conversation technique to facilitate open conversations with individual citizens:

"It is a very open and validating way of talking with people, so we are always as free of prejudice as we can be. We never tell the citizen or the young person what they ought to do (...) The method we work with is adapted to the citizen: their own wishes and their desire to change. So that is our starting point, we make no demands of them for example wanting to leave prostitution."

P5 finds that this open approach makes it possible for the young person to talk freely about subjects that they might not be able to talk with others about; in part because in different settings they might feel the urge to keep their involvement in transactional sex a secret.

This open approach means that these conversations are not structured around the specific aim of exiting prostitution, or even harm reduction. However, P5 notes that they do aim to structure the counselling around the individual's desire to change:

"If you want something over a longer period of time with us, then you need to have some kind of desire to change. But that can also be a desire to work with something concrete, something you have experienced, or wanting to 'prostitute yourself' in a different way, to become better at taking care of yourself when you are in it. There is in fact a large group who contact us with a desire to stop."

The counselling provided by the organization is therefore rooted in a recognition of the individual's needs and aims, but it seems that the goal they tend to work towards often involves an ambition to stop or decrease the person's engagement in transactional sex.

### Liva Rehab

*Liva Rehab* ([www.livarehab.dk](http://www.livarehab.dk)) (LR, P6) presents itself as providing treatment and rehabilitation for people who have been engaged in prostitution and who have experienced harmful repercussions from it<sup>17</sup>. LR runs centres in Copenhagen, Aarhus

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<sup>17</sup> LR also offers anonymous phone counselling to people who have been subjected to sexual assault, incest, and gender-based violence and discrimination.

and Vordingborg, offering counselling from social workers, psychological and psychiatric support, and financial debt counselling. The centre in Vordingborg has a specific focus on young people aged 18 to 35.

P6 notes that they see more young people in LR now than before, and when young people reach out for counselling, she explains that her approach is to try to figure out what the individual needs:

“Come here so we can talk about it. And then we listen, and together we figure it out. Okay, what do you need? How can we support you? Some young people say that they just need a psychologist. Then I say yes, but we also need to look at other factors, right? How about finances, what are they like? How are things with your education? Do you have any good friends, whom you can trust? (...) The solution is in their head.”

She explains that LR do not necessarily advise against transactional sex per se. Instead, and in line with the other initiatives, she stresses the importance of being appreciative, and helping people who seek counselling to make informed choices:

“As professionals, we also have to say to them that they need more options. If a person has five choices and then chooses prostitution then I think that she or he has chosen that as an empowered woman (or man). But it is also important to tell these people that they need to assess the situation: Does it make sense for you that you need to spend so much energy on these things? That is very, very important to tell them. And in practice we see that when the young people get other options, they do not choose prostitution.”

P6 explains that after counselling, the young people take some time to think about what they want, and if they return, they start out with a meeting with a social worker and a psychiatrist. She finds that this session is an important part of the process, because the psychiatrist can inform the other professionals if there is anything of which they need to be aware when they have interdisciplinary meetings to discuss an individual case and decide on how to proceed.

### **The Aids Foundation (Aids-fondet)**

*Aids-fondet* ([www.aidsfondet.dk](http://www.aidsfondet.dk)) (AF, P7) works with HIV and AIDS, and areas related to HIV prevention. AF provides different types of counselling, primarily centred on sexual health, and in their service Checkpoint they offer specific STI tests and counselling on safe sex practices. Their services thus do not specifically target people involved in transactional sex, but their focus on sexual health and stigmatization provide some contact with people, mainly men, who are involved in transactional sex with other men, which is not the primary target group of many other organizations working with transactional sex<sup>18</sup>.

P7 has had contact with a few young people around 18 years of age. In order to assess the extent of people selling sex, they ran an outreach project, and in doing so they found multiple online ads about selling sex from men who emphasized their young age. However, they doubted that the age stated online was the real age,

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<sup>18</sup> AF also provide counselling for other genders and sexualities.

because they assumed the existence of a general interest in presenting oneself as younger to attract more clients.

P7 explains that they meet young people who seek out their services to talk about difficult things in their lives and that transactional sex can pop up as a theme:

“I have had conversations with people who think that it is difficult to live a life that is hidden for others, just like the case for everyone else who sells sex (...) Often the motive for that kind of conversation is to talk and have someone listening, reflecting with you about it. It is rare that those kinds of conversations are results-oriented.”

In their counselling, they employ what they label a sex positive approach:

“In general, we are an extremely sex positive organization, and our message to our users is: ‘do everything you want to do. Enjoy everything you want to enjoy. Play with everything that you want to play with’”

It is important for P7 to emphasize that they are not normative in their work, but that they aim to teach the young people who seek their assistance about safety and about how to minimize risks.

### **LGBT+ Denmark**

LGBT+ ([www.lgbt.dk](http://www.lgbt.dk)) (LGBT+, P8) is a non-profit organization working to promote the rights, equality and well-being of LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexual and gendered minorities) people in Denmark. Their work is divided into three separate areas including politics, counselling and social networks. Their counselling is done by people who themselves identify as LGBT+, over the phone or in person in Aarhus and Copenhagen. In their counselling, they have had few enquiries concerning transactional sex. The young people they have met, P8 says, have received forms of compensation other than money for sexual services. For example, they might get access to specific LGBT fora or specific experiences that they exchange for sex or boyfriend experiences. Also, some may provide sex in exchange for someone keeping their sexual orientation a secret. P8 stresses that their counselling is not therapy, and that their point of departure is to appreciate the individual’s needs. At the same time, P8 maintains, they also work actively to incorporate their political aims more generally:

“Our approach is to break with the mechanism of shame that LGBT people often experience in a cis<sup>19</sup>-normative society. That is why we are careful not to reproducing the societal shaming of sex workers in our practices.”

Thus, they work with the individual’s needs, but also actively reflect on how the issues raised in counselling are intertwined with a broader political and cultural context.

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<sup>19</sup> A cis-gendered person is a person who identifies with the gender they were ascribed at birth, and who is recognized as such by others. A cis-normative society thus refers to a society that favours cis-gendered people over other groups of people (see for example [www.lgbt.dk/ordbog/ciskoennet](http://www.lgbt.dk/ordbog/ciskoennet)).

### Summing up – Social initiatives and professional experiences

RU and GG work specifically with young people: in RU they work explicitly with those involved in transactional sex, whereas GG includes marginalized girls more generally, but the groups overlap, as many of them also engage in sex for compensation. They aim to avoid or limit young people's involvement in transactional sex, especially among minors. Both P1 and P2 emphasize how they do so through working specifically with how to set healthy sexual boundaries. Furthermore, they work to limit the possible consequences of such involvement (pregnancies, emotional harm, etc.) also for those above the age of 18. They also reflect on how to engage the young people themselves in the process of getting help, based on their own perceptions of the issues and types of guidance the young people need.

RU and GG, like RA, RAA and the NBSS, stress the importance of validating the perspectives, terminology and experiences of the young people they meet. AF and LGBT also highlight validation. Although not the main target group of their work, both organizations work actively against the stigmatization of sex workers. They do not have the same problem-oriented approach to transactional sex as the other initiatives. As both of them provide specific insights into young men selling sex to other men, the combination of their specific aims and their experience may indicate that men engaging in sex for compensation might not generally experience the same problems, or seek out the same type of counselling services, as do young women.

#### 2.4.2 Collaborations

All of the participants in this study reported collaborations with other initiatives. These were generally divided into three separate categories: the municipalities; NGOs working in the same field; and NGOs working outside of the field (for example with substance abuse or homelessness). There were vast differences between the different participants in terms of how they experienced collaborating with each of these categories of initiatives.

The professionals who collaborated with the municipalities were particularly divided in their experiences. For example, P5 (NBSS) stressed the need for bridge-building in order to make sure that the young people who contact them are able to get the right kinds of social services. However, P5 goes on to emphasize that they find it important to educate professionals in the municipalities on what it might mean to people to be involved in prostitution, and furthermore, she stresses her organization's role as a bridge-builder, aiming to make sure that people feel comfortable about opening up to other professionals about their involvement in transactional sex. She says:

“Some citizens contact us and are already involved with other services, but those other services don't know that they are selling sex because it is taboo and it is difficult to talk about for many reasons (...) Then it is our job to collaborate with the citizen calmly, for example accompany them and write statements to make the other services aware of the fact that the citizen actually wanted help with this, but just never knew how to say it.”

Here P5 stresses that not only do they collaborate with other social initiatives when they find that they cannot provide the necessary services for the citizens who contact them, but because P5 finds that her colleagues' experience with people involved in transactional sex makes them especially aware of the sensitivity of the subject, she also presents these collaborations as a means for the NBSS to improve the services of other providers.

In contrast to this approach, P2 (GG) emphasized that the collaborations they have with the municipalities often do not function well. P2 finds that the municipality often does not provide the necessary help to young people involved in transactional sex, especially if they are ethnic minority women. She stresses that these young people are not getting adequate help in terms of placement in residential facilities, and therefore the GG sometimes provides housing for very young people until they are able to collaborate with the municipalities.

"We have these emergency places, and then we might just start here and set up a meeting. If we cannot come to an agreement with the social worker, we keep the young person here, and we might keep trying, because this young person needs these services."

Furthermore, when the GG collaborates with the municipalities, they do not disclose to social workers that the young person is involved in transactional sex. P2 explains:

"I would never tell a social worker, unless the young person tells them. This is because it is so taboo-ridden (...) I might say that they have transgressive or sexualized behaviour – but I might not even use those words (...) I would use other words, like them not being able to take care of themselves."

Thus, in this social initiative, they sometimes find it necessary to under-communicate users' experiences with transactional sex. This is in contrast to P5 (NBSS) above, who argued that one of their key tasks is often getting this out in the open in order to provide the relevant help. There are thus obvious and significant differences in the organizations' experiences with the social services provided by the municipalities. Perhaps their stance is affected by their own involvement: P5 works within the government herself – and with young people over the age of 18, whereas P2 works in an NGO with minors.

P1 (RU) explained that in their counselling, they refer the young people to other organizations, insofar as these may be better suited to help them with issues that are not related to transactional sex. However, she and other professionals would like to see better collaborations among NGOs in the field. She finds the collaboration with other NGOs engaged with similar issues to be particularly difficult:

"I experience the organizations who work with different groups than I do as very beneficial, whereas the collaboration with those who work with the same group is less beneficial, or less good so to say. I would like to collaborate much, much more with others who are engaged with this target group too (...) I would very much like it if we were more focused on going in the same direction."

P1 goes on to explain how collaborations with other NGOs are sometimes challenging because they use various approaches, aims and terminologies. For example, she explains, there is sometimes a tendency to use terms like “grey area prostitution” or “prostitution” instead of – like her organization does – “using the same words that the young person uses to try not to scare them more than necessary”. We can see that P1 presents her organization as eager to collaborate, but that collaborations often work better with those that do not work in the same field, because they then avoid challenging each other’s aims and approaches.

In contrast to these issues stressed by P1, for example about different terminologies, some professionals emphasized that they collaborate with others to compensate for their own lack of specific knowledge about young people involved in transactional sex. Here, P7 (AF) explains:

“When we have had enquiries from people who buy or sell sex here, it is very practical stuff they want to know more about; specific knowledge about what risks they run in relation to STIs in specific sexual scenarios, or testing. It is not the counselling that is the main part (...) So it [the collaboration] has primarily been about what they see, and what we see, and if there are any specific problem areas that we need to be attentive to and vice versa (...) We have been very interested to know from Reden about whether they see a much younger segment of boys selling sex to other men. Because if so, we of course want to be attentive to that (...) We need to talk together to get a bigger picture of what is going on, because we can’t read about it.”

It seems that collaborations have become increasingly important to AF in order to bridge the existing knowledge gap on the actual content of the problem. However, her positive experiences with collaborations may also be rooted in the fact that P7 works in an organization that does not primarily focus on transactional sex. Unlike the NGOs working with transactional sex as their main focus, P7 reports different, well-functioning collaborations with a range of partners that they can seek out when necessary.

On this basis, it seems that there are significant challenges in terms of collaborations due to the different aims and approaches of the initiatives and organizations. These challenges may stand in the way of providing the needed social services for young people involved in transactional sex, insofar as the municipalities and the NGOs do not necessarily work (well) together. This may have the immediate consequence that the municipalities are unaware of important issues and, as some argue, their awareness of transactional sex may invoke significantly different responses. Thus, where some find that the municipalities can assist them in improving the lives of young people involved in transactional sex, others find that they can make the situation worse for the marginalized young person, for example due to financial distress created by the existing system.

While these issues are important for NGOs working specifically with young people involved in transactional sex, they do not seem to arise in collaborations between NGOs working in different fields. Accordingly, since other NGOs may rely on NGOs focusing on young people involved in transactional sex to compensate for the existing knowledge gap, consequently the information they receive may be very different depending on what NGO they work with.

### 2.4.3 *Legal aspects*

Prostitution was first banned in Denmark in 1683. In 1866, a new Criminal Code was adopted making prostitution and procuring illegal and punishable by imprisonment or rehabilitation house. The “prostitutes”, however, could still carry out their profession if they were registered as “public women”. This law was again abolished in 1905, when “prostitution” became punishable under the Vagrancy Act. In 1930, the Criminal Code of 1866 was amended so that prostitution was only punishable if the entire person’s income derived from “prostitution”, while “prostitution” as a part-time profession was not punishable. The most recent change in the Criminal Code concerning prostitution is from 1999, when the sale of sex was decriminalized. According to the Criminal Code Section 228 paragraph 2, it is legal today to buy and sell sexual services as long as the provider is over 18 years old. However, “prostitution” is not recognized as a legal occupation, which is why people in “prostitution” cannot receive unemployment benefits or sick pay.

Regarding people under 18 (Section 223 a of Denmark’s Criminal Code): Any person who, as a client, for a payment or a promise of a payment, has intercourse with a person under the age of 18, shall be liable to a fine or imprisonment for any term not exceeding two years. The nature of the punishment for a person guilty of such as a crime is determined by Section 228 of the Criminal Code. Section 228 states that any person who 1) induces another to seek a profit by sexual immorality with others; or 2) for the purpose of gain, induces another to indulge in sexual immorality with others or prevents another who engages in sexual immorality as a profession from giving it up; or 3) keeps a brothel; shall be guilty of procuring and liable to imprisonment for any term not exceeding four years. Paragraph 2 of Section 228 states: The same penalty shall apply to any person who aids or abets a person under the age of 21 to engage in sexual immorality as a profession, or to any person who partakes in conveying some other person out of the country in order that the latter shall engage in sexual immorality as a profession abroad or shall be used for such immorality, where that person is under the age of 21 or is, at the time, ignorant of the purpose

#### **Professionals’ concerns about legal measures and their effect**

Lautrup (2002) noted already in 2002 how participants from the police force and social workers suggested campaigns about prostitution to increase awareness of the legal aspects of “youth prostitution”, including Section 223a.

The book *Prostitution og meninger der brydes* (Berthelsen and Bømler 2004) concerning differing opinions about prostitution is one of the few research-based publications that provides a full chapter on young people. The authors did not themselves conduct interviews or surveys, but they introduced an interesting discussion into the debate about the wording of the new Act on “youth prostitution” from 2003, which made all purchases of sex from people under 18 punishable. They criticized the new Act for keeping the term “client”, claiming that by using this term the Act misses other aspects of the relationship between the parties. They claimed, for example, that a relationship may be initiated via chatrooms, and thus be based on trust, but that the relationship should still be understood as sexual exploitation of a child by an adult (ibid: 93).

Similarly, many of the professionals we interviewed criticized the existing law on prostitution for being too vague or too difficult to implement. P1(RU) says:

“I think that the law on prostitution is a bit vague. It does not take into account the grey areas. So that’s why we sometimes see police who do not know what to do. Is it prostitution if a 14 year old sells her panties to a man who is 58 years old? Can we go after the man, because she sold her panties to him?”

For her, this is obviously not prostitution, but it is still a sexual service in exchange for money. This prompted her to suggest the need for a broad discussion about the societal norms surrounding prostitution: “I think that prostitution just fell between two stools in Denmark. It is not forbidden, but it is not legal either”.

P1 emphasizes here the lack of clear legislation concerning prostitution, particular in relation to so-called grey areas. Also exemplified here is how the participants’ reflections about the existing law are intertwined with discussions of the moral implications of the legislation on transactional sex. Some participants were doubtful about both legalization and criminalization, regardless of the specific aims of their organization, because they found that the existing law had different consequences for different groups of people involved in transactional sex.

Some professionals also emphasized how the existing law could make their work more difficult, or may have the unintended consequence that it could further marginalize people involved in transactional sex. For example, P3 (RAA) explained that she heard people working at a job centre talk about how they would approach a woman who was involved in prostitution in a way she experienced as confrontational:

“They would approach her as if she were doing work in the black economy, and report her for fraud and stuff like that. I think that it is a problem that we have such contradictory law on prostitution (...) We definitely should be working for a free process and safe behaviour, where you make sure that you provide some better services instead of punishing these women; meeting them in a positive way instead of a negative way. As it is now, how you are met by the system is sometimes extremely negative.”

As exemplified in this quote, P3 experienced how the existing law, and the ways in which the relevant legislation is implemented by the system more generally, was in downright opposition to the work that she wants to do. She experiences that the uncertainty about how they would be dealt with by the social welfare system sometimes made the women chose not to talk about their experiences with transactional sex, and thus to miss the opportunity to receive relevant help. This way of questioning the working of the legal system is also accentuated in relation to other legislation, for example on employment, social welfare benefits, education, etc. In spite of not being directly about transactional sex, some of the participants found that this legislation had serious repercussions for young people involved in transactional sex, as well as for the services they were able to provide to these young people.

Finally, the participants from the organizations that focus specifically on transactional sex in their work (P1–P6) all stressed the importance of the law concerning their notification obligation – the duty to report to the authorities when young people

under 18 are involved in transactional sex. As P6 (LR) stated, she feels that LR has “a special responsibility when it comes to minors under the age of 18”. In spite of this general agreement on complying with their legal responsibilities regarding minors, some participants also said that the law places them in an ethical dilemma. This is due to their need to make sure that the young people trust them enough to talk openly about the issues that they need help with, without feeling that their confidentiality is breached. P1(RU) explained that she deals with this dilemma in her work by telling the young people straight away about the criteria related to her obligation to notify the authorities. She does this to inform the young people in order for them to be able to make their own choices on what kind of information they disclose.

We conclude that professionals often find it hard to apply the law because they generally conceptualize the phenomenon of transactional sex as complex and not black and white. For the same reason, they seem to regard the legislation regarding taxation, social welfare benefits and employment as more important to their own work than the legislation on prostitution.

## 2.5 Recommendations from the reports and the professionals

The recommendations in the existing reports from social initiatives and from professionals seem to have been quite consistent over the last 17 years, with the most general request being for more knowledge. The lack of knowledge seems to cover many possible topics for future research, from the extent of the phenomenon to the harmful effects of transactional sex. For example, Thomsen (2004) suggest an increased focus on the topic and an assessment of the extent of young people’s engagement in transactional sex, as well as an expert assessment of the possible harmful effects from a child and adolescent psychology point of view. Thomsen also suggested the development of a questionnaire on young people’s sexual habits, which could ensure that social workers would become more attentive to the issue, as well as more communication between the relevant institutions in the field.

In the same vein, 11 years later, Weiskopf (2015) suggests investigating the phenomenon of “grey area prostitution” on a national level, and that such research should be carried out in collaboration with organizations that target children and adolescents. Furthermore, Weiskopf recommends developing a toolkit for the institutions providing education in social work (see also Socialforvaltningen 2007). She also recommends a national interdisciplinary action plan for prevention, a guide to the available options for help, and the implementation of mandatory education on the issue in relevant university courses and study programs.

These recommendations are based on the fact that only 20% of the respondents in Weiskopf’s study found that their education had given them the necessary information to work with these young people, and only 35% of the respondents found that they had sufficient information on the available options for help from authorities, etc. (Weiskopf 2015). Furthermore, only 20% of the professionals interviewed stated that they had sufficient knowledge of the law and legal procedures concerning grey area prostitution,

causing Weiskopf to suggest a review of the relevant legislation and legal procedures for social workers. The report also suggests increased attention on the role of social media, because these platforms make it easy for perpetrators to establish contact with a victim.

Thus, the existing reports, like the professionals interviewed, all point to a gap in research in the field, and they provide suggestions on how bridge this gap and how they might implement this knowledge in practice.

In addition to these suggestions, Fremtidsfabrikken (2015) provided other interesting recommendations in terms of prevention. They asked 44 young people (aged 15–20, from different educational settings in different parts of Denmark) about their knowledge about and attitudes to prostitution and grey zone prostitution, and conclude that young people in general had a positive attitude to sugar dating, and that they did not equate it with prostitution (ibid, p.70). However, the participants saw it as more “ok” to sugar-date when it concerned people other rather than their own friends and family. Regarding legal issues, young people in rural areas are more inclined to want to ban prostitution than are urban young people (ibid, p.72–73). On the basis of these findings, Fremtidsfabrikken (p.74) recommend a nuanced and unprejudiced campaign, in which young people themselves can take part, which focusses on “real stories” and on the long term consequences of grey zone prostitution. In this way, Fremtidsfabrikken came to the same conclusions as P3 for example, that there has to be a more consistent focus on the experiences of young people themselves, and on “their own perspectives on what we can do better, so that they avoid getting involved in sugar dating”. Hence, both the research reports and interviewed professionals see it as of the utmost importance to engage young people themselves in discussing the meaning of different types of sexual behaviour. This includes a strong focus on how new developments in social media are affecting young people’s lives in general and involvement in transactional sex in particular.

## 2.6 Conclusion – Denmark

This report has aimed to present and analyse the most relevant knowledge about young people involved in transactional sex as well as social initiatives targeting them. We have created an overview of key knowledge in the field among practitioners and in the research, and we hope that this can pave the way for future studies that focus on young people’s own experiences of the phenomenon and give voice to their perspectives on the matter as well.

By reviewing the most relevant reports and social initiatives, and conducting qualitative interviews with key professionals, we have shown that although different stakeholders use different terminology and have different aims for their work, a feeling of a lack of knowledge seems to be something that most have in common. In spite of this lack of knowledge however, we encountered a lot of experience with, and knowledge about, the target group that has been developed and deployed in practice. However, such knowledge is affected by the specific context and the aims of each organization, and promoting collaborations between them could allow for an exchange

of different perspectives on the field that might assist them in reaching broader groups of young people and making sure that they receive the services or help that they need.

Regarding the extent of young people engaged in compensational sex, the accessible reports indicate that the numbers have been relatively stable over the past 17 years. However, in both the reports and the interviews with professionals, there is a strong sense that there are many unreported cases, and that the recent trend in “sugar dating” may result in the numbers rising. These reflections are seen frequently, but are so far not backed up by research. More qualitative research on how young people perceive the phenomenon may enable future surveys to give an account of how young people themselves attach different labels and meanings to different forms of compensational sex.

This report also shows that different organizations have contact with different groups of young people, who identify their involvement in transactional sex in a broad variety of ways. Even though not highlighted by the participants in this study, it seems that the concerns that have been voiced by different researchers (Bjønness 2008, 2012, Skilbrei and Holmstrøm 2013; Spanger 2008) about the use of terms in social work have been integrated into the work of many social initiatives. For example, many highlight the use of the term “prostitution” as likely to jeopardize their often fragile relationships with these young people.

Currently, it also seems that there are differences in perceptions of how ethical the use of different terms is, although all parties agree that terminology is of the utmost importance. The importance of terminology needs to be taken into account in future studies as well as in relationships with young people themselves as part of social work, as indications are that young people may respond to terms in different ways. Furthermore, a broader discussion of ethics in relation to the use of different terminology, and the possible consequences thereof, could be fruitful to ensure that different organizations do not spend too much energy on promoting their specific political aims, but rather focus on how various types of terminology may resonate with different groups of young people involved in transactional sex. This could allow professionals to provide the best type of assistance and help to young people involved in transactional sex and facilitate collaborations between those working in the field.

Regarding the characteristics of the target group, most stakeholders agree that the majority of young people who engage in compensational sex are vulnerable in terms of their social background, mental health, alcohol and drug use and other issues. However, disagreements exist between the different types of organizations and one such disagreement arises because some work more to recognize “sex work” as a profession. It seems that these differences to some extent are rooted in perceptions of gender and sexuality, as the organization working primarily with LGBT+ people tends to take this approach. Thus, there are vast differences in how this vulnerability is presented, depending on variables like gender and the social background of the young person, and more efforts to map social and gendered inequalities would be useful in order to ensure that young people are receiving relevant help. This seems to be the case in particular in the reports, in which young men are overrepresented in the statistics, although the same reports and the professionals seem to contradict one

another in claiming that it is both more and less stigmatizing for gay men to engage in transactional sex than it is for young women.

An increased focus on the impact of social inequalities seem achievable, as the professionals already express a heightened awareness of these issues in their social work, albeit in very different ways. More research in the field, both quantitative and qualitative, could pave the way for more evidence-based work with these different groups, targeting their potentially different needs for services and help.

The professionals also report that in their social work, they are very concerned about not contributing to the stigmatization of young people involved in transactional sex. This is often demonstrated in their emphasis on the importance of an appreciative approach that recognizes the individual's needs. All the professionals stated this to be an important and useful development, but more collaborations between the organizations could make it possible to engage even more constructively in critical reflection on how to avoid stigmatization. Also, analysing the role of the media and social media is seen by the professionals as of the utmost importance to understand the experiences of young people who engage in transactional sex.

In 2019–2022, two surveys about young people and sex for compensation in Denmark will be conducted, as well as a large qualitative project on young sugar daters. This project, and others in the pipeline, will begin to bridge the existing research gap, thereby providing the professionals in the field with some of the knowledge that they so unanimously request.

## 2.7 References – Denmark

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### 3. Finland: Young people, sex for compensation and vulnerability

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In order to respond to the research task set for this report, i.e. to map the current knowledge on young people's experiences of compensational sex, social initiatives targeting young people involved in commercial sex and related legal measures in the Nordic countries, this chapter explores these themes in Finland. In other words, this chapter focuses on the knowledge available, social initiatives and legal measures related to compensational sex and young people in the Finnish national context. With regard to this context, the research findings in the report entitled *Prostitution in the Nordic Countries* from 2008 showed that research-based knowledge about commercial sex is relatively scarce (Marttila 2008a). Mapping the knowledge resources available on young people engaged in compensational sex and their vulnerability resulted in similar findings. In Finland, young people engaged in compensational sex is acknowledged to some extent but is a topic that is relatively rarely discussed.

As will be explained in more detail in this chapter, although compensational or transactional sex is recognized as an existing phenomenon among professionals who work with young people, and although compensational sex features in occasional media debates, there are few published sources and research on the topic. Although discussions about compensational sex are relatively rare as well as recent, as explained later, this chapter draws attention to the definitions used in discussions related to compensational sex. In other words, this chapter looks into the ways in which compensational sex is conceived in the literature available and in discussions among professionals. Furthermore, it addresses the questions of what can be said about the extent of the phenomenon in the light of current knowledge, to which groups and vulnerabilities is compensational sex connected, and how is it regulated by law.

When commercial sex or sex for compensation is discussed in relation to (young) age, the discussions often concern minors, which then turns the issue to a question of sexual abuse and maltreatment. Also, the term compensational sex (*vastikkeellinen seksi*) is often associated with minors specifically. For these reasons, this part of the report discusses not only young adults but also adolescents' involvement in compensational sex. As the Finnish language-term *vastikkeellinen seksi* corresponds to both "compensational sex" and "transactional sex", the English-language terms compensational and transactional are used synonymously in this chapter.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. Firstly, I address some of the methodological choices made in the data collection, after which I will go on to discuss the current knowledge on compensational sex and the possibilities it provides to understand the phenomenon. The chapter draws on primarily two sources: existing literature and interviews with professionals, which are discussed in the second and third sections of the chapter. After this, social initiatives addressing compensational sex in Finland are briefly presented. Finally, I visit briefly the legal framework and professionals' views on it.

### 3.1 Methodological remarks

In this section, I reflect on the scope of this chapter more specifically. I start by explaining why it is not meaningful, and perhaps not even possible, to discuss compensational sex in Finland without also taking into account adolescents' possible involvement in it and noting the geographical focus of the report. After this brief discussion, I present the data.

As already stated, the Finnish language debates on sex for compensation or compensational sex (*vastikkeellinen seksi*) often refer to compensational sex acts involving minors as the receivers of the compensation for sex acts. In other words, the term is used to distinguish adolescents' involvement in compensational sex, which is criminalized in Finland, from adults trading in sexual services. For instance, some of the experts interviewed for this study saw that the Finnish language term as specifically coined to point out that adolescents can never *sell* sex and from the viewpoint of the law they are always victims of abuse when it comes to sexual relations with adults that involve compensation. A similar tendency is seen in the media debates as well. In other words, linking compensational sex mainly with adolescents reflects the legislation, according to which purchasing sexual services from an under-age person is criminalized, and invoking the term "sex for compensation" in Finnish is likely to lead the debate to adolescents. At the same time, neither academic nor grey literature addresses the age group (18–25) identified as the primary object of study for this report, and the limited amount of public debate and advocacy work tends to focus specifically on adolescents. Therefore, compensational sex is discussed here in relation to both young adults and adolescents. The two age groups are discussed in parallel throughout the chapter. Given the different legal implications of the two cases among other things, I have tried to always specify whether the statements being discussed refer to young adults, adolescents or both.

With regard to the geographical extent of the phenomenon, the Nordic report from 2008 also suggested that in a country like Finland, studying regional differences in commercial sex would be relevant (Marttila 2008a). However, given the lack of systematized information on compensational sex in Finland, which is described in more detail below, a focus on geographical differences in this knowledge mapping is not possible. Instead, the primary geographical focus here is on Helsinki and the region surrounding the capital.

The data for this knowledge mapping consists mainly of two components. First, in order to map the current knowledge on young people and compensational sex, searches in both scholarly (Finna) and grey literature (Finna and Julkari) databases were conducted using the following keywords: "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "compensational sex" (*vastikkeellinen seksi*); "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "selling sex" (*seksinmyy\** or *myydä seksiä*); "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "sexual services" (*seksuaalipalvelu\**); "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "commercial sex" (*kaupallinen seksi*); "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "prostitution" (*prostitution\**); "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "child prostitution" (*lapsiprostituutio\**); "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "sexual abuse" (*seksuaalinen hyväksikäyttö*); "youth" (*nuor\**) AND "sexual maltreatment" (*seksuaalinen kaltoinkohtelu*); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "compensational sex" (*vastikkeellinen seksi*); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "selling sex" (*seksinmyy\** or *myydä seksiä*); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "sexual services" (*seksuaalipalvelu\**); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "commercial sex" (*kaupallinen seksi*); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "prostitution" (*prostitution\**); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "child prostitution" (*lapsiprostituutio\**); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "sexual abuse" (*seksuaalinen hyväksikäyttö*); "child"\* (*laps\**) AND "sexual maltreatment" (*seksuaalinen kaltoinkohtelu*).

Most of the searches produced no results at all or only a few results, with the exception of the search criteria *child\** AND sexual abuse, which resulted in 120 hits in the database for scholarly literature. The results were checked for relevance, i.e. whether the publications addressed the Finnish context and whether they related to compensational or transactional sex somehow. In other words, publications discussing compensational sex elsewhere or publications discussing (other) forms of sexual violence were excluded from the data. For instance, with regard to the search parameters "child\* AND sexual abuse", I excluded 103 of the 120 hits based on the title of the article, which referred to another context (research done in other countries), or phenomena irrelevant to the scope of this report (e.g. child pornography or incest) or because of being duplicates. The 17 remaining publications were then selected for a close reading. Based on this, I identified four scholarly publications that addressed phenomena related to compensational sex, mainly in the field of law. Altogether, the searches in the two databases led me to do a close reading of 24 publications, the majority of which are grey literature (for instance, government action plans and handbooks for professionals). None of them can be categorized as independent research on the topic, and the majority of the publications link to the theme of compensational sex by citing Chapter 20 Section 8(a) of Finland's Criminal Code that criminalizes the purchase of sexual services from a young person (see the section on the legal framework). In other words, when addressed in the literature describing the Finnish context, discussions about compensational sex do not necessarily provide new information on the phenomenon but rather remind professionals of the existing legislation.

In order to gain a more comprehensive idea of discussions related to compensational sex among young people in Finland, I also searched for other sources using a snow-balling methodology, i.e. I searched for non-published sources cited in the media discussions, for instance. In addition, I refer to non-published materials produced by NGOs on the topic, and as illustrative examples I refer to some news pieces from

different media outlets (however, the knowledge mapping presented here does not include a thorough media analysis). I also explored how scholarly and grey literature on commercial sex has discussed age, which the next section touches on briefly. Some few of these publications refer to survey results, available for research use, but which have not yet been discussed in published research. I also mention these later on.

Given the limited amount of literature on young people and compensational sex, the literature review has been supplemented with expert interviews. For this report, I have conducted 9 semi-structured interviews with 16 professionals who in their work encounter and/or support young people who have experiences of compensational sex. The interviewees were also selected using a snow-balling methodology. I started by contacting three NGOs that work in related fields – Pro-tukipiste; Exit Prostitution Association and Family Federation of Finland – and contacted other interviewees based on the recommendations that the experts working in these organizations gave me.

The interviewed experts were from NGOs working directly on issues related to commercial sex (Pro-tukipiste; Exit Prostitution Association); sexual health and welfare and/or support services for victims of sexual violence (Family Federation of Finland; Girls' House Helsinki; Boys' House Helsinki); services for migrant women and victims of gender-based violence (Monika, the Multicultural Women's Association ); services for under-age asylum seekers (Housing unit for under-age asylum seekers); youth work (Helsinki city outreach youth work) and the police (Helsinki police force, sex crimes unit). In other words, the interviewees represent different perspectives on and experiences of phenomena that could be labelled as compensational sex. It should be noted that the perspectives of professionals working with issues related to sexual violence are represented in the sample in particular. At the same time, the interviewed professionals also work with different age groups: services provided by Pro-tukipiste for professionals working in the field of commercial sex are meant for adults only. Given the legal framework, the interviewed police inspector works only with under-age victims of sex crimes. Simultaneously, many of the services target young people both under and over 18 years of age (e.g. Girls' House; Boys' House). With regard to commercial sex and young adults' involvement in compensational sex, some of the organizations also have contradictory political positions, as discussed in the section on social initiatives.

The explored material is arranged thematically. In the next section, I first discuss the nature of current knowledge on compensational sex and explore it in light of the question concerning the extent of compensational sex in Finland. In the second section, based mainly on the interview data, I discuss what kinds of vulnerabilities the professionals' discussions recognize in relation to compensational sex. The second section as well as the third section on social initiatives are based mainly on the findings from the interview data. Finally, in the fourth section on the legal framework, I briefly visit the current legislation also in the light of secondary literature and the interviewees' views on the legislation.

## 3.2 Understanding compensational sex and vulnerabilities among young people in Finland

### 3.2.1 *Limited knowledge about compensational sex and young people*

In this section, I briefly present published resources available on compensational/transactional sex among young people in Finland. As already indicated, knowledge about young people engaged in compensational or commercial sex is scarce. The lack of research-based knowledge partly resembles the situation described in the report on *Prostitution in the Nordic Countries* from 2008, which concluded that research on prostitution and human trafficking has been modest in Finland in comparison to other Nordic countries. Furthermore, the experts interviewed for this report agreed that there is not sufficient knowledge about commercial sex in Finland. (Marttila 2008a, pp. 126 and 148.) With regard to systemized knowledge on sex for compensation, there may be even fewer sources to draw on. Both peer-reviewed research and grey literature on the topic is scarce, and in comparison with Sweden for instance, the timeline of addressing compensational sex as a question of sexual health and well-being appears to be shorter. Compensational sex is explicitly addressed in a handful of reports and surveys, as well as in training and advocacy materials produced by NGOs.

Scholarly research on commercial sex in Finland touches upon the question of age only briefly (Kontula 2008) or does not address it at all. In grey literature on commercial sex, age is mentioned on some occasions. As the report *Prostitution in the Nordic Countries* highlighted, the transnational aspects of commercial sex are particularly relevant for the Finnish context, given the border with Russia that still marks a remarkable difference in standard of living (c.f. Marttila 2008b) among other things. Therefore, it is not a surprise that scholarly research on or related to commercial sex has focused on the perspectives of borders and migration (Diatlova 2016, Diatlova and Näre 2018; Marttila 2008c; Vuolajärvi 2019) and thereto related policies and legislation (Vuolajärvi et al. 2017; Roth 2012). In the field of Youth Studies (including work on sexual education), compensational or commercial sex does not figure as a focus area in Finnish academia.

In comparison to scholarly research, grey literature and survey results provide a more useful knowledge base concerning young people who have experience of compensational sex, even if the question is not dealt with directly or at great length in the grey literature either. The Finnish government action plan on sexual and reproductive health for 2014–2020 (Klemetti and Raussi-Lehto 2016) also recognizes that despite some survey results indicating that a small proportion of young people in Finland are engaging in compensational sex, there is no scholarly research on the topic. The referenced survey results are the School Health Promotion (SHP) survey and Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study. SHP monitors well-being and health in children and adolescents bi-annually at the national level in Finland. It contains a question on whether the respondents have been offered money, goods or intoxicants in exchange for sex (cf. SHP 2017). The question on compensational sex has been included in the study since 2011. The Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study, which is directed at 9th

graders every four years, also studies young people's experiences of being victims, and as part of this, it also contains questions on experiences of sexual harassment.

Compensational sex is recognized as an existing phenomenon in reports by government and non-government organizations. The Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking commissioned a study on child trafficking in Finland (Kervinen and Ollus 2019), which is the first report of its kind as it focuses on victims of trafficking who are either minors or young people between 18 and 21 years old. One of the forms of trafficking the report discusses is sexual exploitation, which can take the form of purchasing sexual services from a minor, and the report discusses compensational sex to some extent too. The report is based on a survey of professionals working in related fields, expert interviews, statistics on human trafficking and the verdicts in criminal cases on human trafficking, where the victims have been minors or just turned 18. Another recent report is by Save the Children Finland (2019). It explores the commercial sexual exploitation of children and sexual violence, and the results indicate that compensational sex between adolescents and adults is as an existing phenomenon in Finland. Save the Children have also published a survey on sexual harassment and related bullying on digital media as experienced by children and adolescents (2018). That report does not mention compensational sex explicitly, but it does give an indication of the prevalence of online sexual harassment and grooming. Other reports on related themes give an indication of the prevalence of compensational sex among adolescents in institutional care (Lehtonen and Télen 2013) as well as young adults' (under 25 years) involvement in commercial sex as erotic, escort and sex workers (Liitsola et al. 2013).

A definition provided by Save the Children (2019) gives an indication of the customary uses of the term compensational/transactional sex:

"Commercial sexual exploitation of children and sexual violence or trafficking a child to sexual purposes refers to purchasing sexual favours from a minor. A term 'transactional sex' or 'material exchange for sex'<sup>20</sup> are used when money, food, inebriating substances or a place to stay for the night are offered in exchange for these sexual favours." (Save the Children 2019, p.2)

In other words, the report suggests a commonplace definition that ties compensational sex to minors. As is discussed in the next section, not all professionals would agree with the focus on age. However, the definition provided by the more recent report also offers an interesting point of comparison. In the early 2000s, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health carried out a project entitled *Children and Commercial Sex*. The project publication (Anttila 2004a), which focuses mainly on the "harmful effects of mass culture which is steeped in sex", addressed young people's attitudes to compensational sex in 2003. The survey of students in a number of vocational schools on their attitudes to commercial sex, also with regard to their willingness to fulfil another person's sexual needs if they were receiving "a big enough compensation in money, clothes, new commodities or *other economic gain*" (Anttila 2004b, p.72; italics mine) gives an idea of the terminology used in the early 2000s for the phenomenon. Sexual acts in

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<sup>20</sup> In the Finnish language translation, the report uses only one term (*vastikkeellinen seksi*) – transactional/compensational sex.

exchange for some form of value are labelled as selling and buying sex, providing sexual services or prostitution. Compensational sex does not figure as a term, and compensational sex is primarily connected to seeking economic gain (and not a means of survival or fulfilling psychological needs, as in the more contemporary debate, as explained later in this report).

One of the experts interviewed for this report described the initiation of the current debate in a way that provides a comparative perspective on the separate debates on the topic in Finland and in Sweden.

“It was in approximately 2006 that a journalist from Sweden contacted me. The journalist asked to what extent does the phenomenon of ‘compensational sex’ figure among young people in Finland. Apparently it was a big discussion in Sweden at the time; it was featured in the media that young people were trading sexual services for a hamburger. I remember being confused about it. Well, it did not take such a long time, maybe a year, before the topic started to figure in Finnish debates too. Still, it has remained in the margins, even in professionals’ discussions about sexual abuse.”  
(Interview, the Family Federation Finland)

The interviewee from the Family Federation in Finland explains that at the time, when there was somewhat heated debate about young people having compensational sex in Sweden, for a professional working to support young victims of sexual abuse in Finland, the topic appeared at first to be somewhat foreign. This does not mean of course that compensational sex among young people was a new phenomenon. Instead, the narrative describes a timeline for sex for compensation having started to figure as a theme in the fields of youth work and sexual health and well-being. The fact that compensational sex is recognized as a social problem also becomes apparent in that it is addressed in a number of Master’s theses (see Korja 2017; Vuorelainen and Elonheimo 2013) and Bachelor’s theses in the current decade.

Since 2010, the issue of compensational sex has been increasingly taken up by some social initiatives as well. For instance, the one NGO (Exit) that explicitly defines their niche as the prevention of compensational sex among adolescents stresses that compensational sex is a known phenomenon among youth work professionals but that there is hardly any research on the topic (Exit 2017, p. 13). A shared view among the majority of the professionals interviewed for this report was that key sources of information on the topic are the NGOs/third sector service providers Exit and the Family Federation Finland, primarily through the courses they have provided. They also agree that youth work professionals are aware that compensational sex can be thought of as a form of “silent knowledge” (Interview, the Family Federation). The social initiatives in Exit and the Family Federation have produced training materials and manuals, which also reflect understandings of compensational sex by third-sector professionals. At the same time, the potential knowledge accumulated through experience by school nurses, school social workers and other youth workers has not been systematically gathered (ibid). Also, in the context of sexual education, compensational sex is likely to remain a marginal theme (Interview, the Boy’ House).

In the public debate, young people having compensational sex is brought up occasionally, but in comparison to (some of) the other Nordic countries, the topic has not received much attention in the media or political debates in Finland. NGO advocacy

around the theme since early in the current decade features in news stories, but the amount of media coverage on the topic has been relatively moderate. In the media, compensational sex has been discussed primarily in relation to adolescents and also in relation to NGO advocacy on the topic, or in connection with the reporting of verdicts on court cases involving the sexual abuse of children or the purchasing of sexual services from a young person. For instance, the public broadcaster YLE aired a report on “sugar dating” in 2018, which provided evidence that minors are also involved in sugar dating on platforms that claim to target only adults (c.f. Kervinen and Ollus 2019, p. 55).

### 3.2.2 *Varying conceptions of what compensational sex is*

*A reference to young people having sex for compensation points to a very diverse group of people from different backgrounds and with distinct motives (Interview, Pro-tukipiste).*

“Sex for compensation” is seemingly easy to define – a sexual relation that would not happen without a material or intangible form of compensation. But, as reflected in this section, it can be understood to be referring to a broad range of phenomena, from looking for company on a sugar dating platform in exchange for receiving restaurant dinners (ibid) to being randomly propositioned for a blow job in exchange for a bottle of spirits (Interview, Police), or becoming involved in an intimate relationship or trading sexual services to obtain a marriage contract in order to get a residence permit based on family ties (Interview, outreach youth worker). In other words, the sexual acts and the elements of the compensation vary greatly, and compensational sex might be used to label many things from sexual experimentation out of curiosity about one’s own sexuality to survival sex.

The fact that knowledge about sex for compensation is sparse is also undoubtedly reflected in the ways in which professionals, young people themselves, and the general public understand sex for compensation. While in the interviews professionals in youth work and related areas were seen as sources of “silent knowledge” on the topic, they also emphasized that how young people in particular and the general public understand compensational sex can be vague and guided by a number of misconceptions. Also, the professionals’ understandings of compensational sex were not unanimous. As also indicated earlier, the legal framework (to be discussed in more detail soon) steers understandings of compensational sex towards being connected with minors. However, using the label compensational sex is not limited to minors, and when it comes to young people over 18, the professionals’ conceptions and framings of compensational sex also varied. Consequently, what is then understood as the broader context of the phenomenon varies.

Compensational sex might be understood as sexual abuse or maltreatment, which in the context of the law is a given when it comes to minors, but in some (abolitionist) discussions this is the way in which all compensational sex is understood. Also, when compensational sex is talked about in the context of various social initiatives or in service provision, the focus of the services provided is likely to define how compensational sex is understood and what types of sexual relations are perceived as compensational sex. For instance, when compensational sex figures as a theme in counselling for victims of sexual violence, it is also understood as a form of sexual violence. Furthermore, Kervinen and Ollus recognize that compensational sex is used as the term for a form of sexual abuse in which “an adult bribes a child or gives them a present in exchange for a sexual act” (2019, p. 54). The following quote illustrates how an understanding of compensational sex as abuse is extended to young adults too when commercial sex is understood from an abolitionist perspective (i.e. when all forms of commercial sex are understood as abuse).

“In sex for compensation, sex is exchanged for some form of compensation. It can also be things other than money, for instance, intoxicants, a ride, a place to stay, anything. Sex for compensation refers to under 18-year-olds, one can’t talk about prostitution, it’s sexual abuse of children and young people. [...] We see compensational sex as part of sexual maltreatment. Also, when it comes to over 18s, we don’t talk about sex work, as we see it from the perspective of power relationships. This is also the case when working with young adults, we talk about compensational sex then too.”  
(Interview, Exit)

However, sex for compensation might also be used to differentiate compensational sex, which includes consent, from sexual abuse. The professionals also stated that in compensational sex between adults who are legally able to consent to sexual relations that include compensation, compensational sex might not be clearly distinguishable from other forms of intimate relations. Some of the interviewed professionals also reflected on the undefined terrain between compensational sex and (other) intimate relations. Also, as pointed out in the following quote, relationships between people evolve over time, which adds another layer to the challenge of pinning down a definition.

“We see that if there is a relationship that contains sex and that would not be formed without the compensation, then it is sex for compensation if the contact would not happen without the compensation. In our view, sex for compensation needs to be distinguished from sexual abuse, which is a separate thing. [...] Drawing the boundaries is not simple. For instance, a trip abroad that has been agreed on a sugar dating platform if both parties are then enjoying themselves, and actually feel that they would like to have sex, should that be labelled sex for compensation?”  
(Interview, Pro-tukipiste)

“[In conversation with young people, it was brought up] how or if compensational sex is different from dating. In the adult world, if someone is repeatedly offered something on a date, and the other party has an expectation that this might lead to sex, how do you draw the boundary? That is an interesting question.” (Interview, the Family Federation)

In any case, “compensational sex” – let alone commercial sex, sex work or prostitution – are not likely to be terms that young people would likely identify with. Also, concerning adolescents and thus being a criminalized activity, young people themselves might not comprehend the situation as abuse, but instead even see the receiver of the compensation as the one benefitting from the situation or as the party guilty of a criminal act. The report on child trafficking, for instance, stated that “a young person might imagine that they are in a dating relationship and they might not comprehend that they are being taken advantage of” (Kervinen and Ollus 2019, p. 54). Compensation might be understood as receiving gifts as part of a dating relationship (this of course does not mean that gift-giving in all intimate relationships should be understood as a form of compensational sex). In addition, even in cases where young people are knowingly involved in compensational sex, they might not see it as a problem and therefore these young people are not (necessarily) within the orbit of various support services. These are some of the factors in light of which the survey results on compensational sex should be reflected on. It is possible that young people regard situations that professionals or other adults would label compensational sex in a different manner.

Consequently, the majority of the interviewed professionals emphasized that because young people might not have a clear idea of compensational sex nor recognize situations in which compensation is given, it is very important to choose sensitive language when working with them. While any terms that refer explicitly to commercial sex could seem alienating to young people, compensational sex might also seem to be stigmatizing. In other words, biased views and stigmas related to sex work shape the discussions about sex for compensation. Furthermore, young people may also feel shame and guilt when the issue of compensation is brought up, for instance, as part of a legal process, even when the term is used in a case against their accused abuser.

“Young people, they might think they are beautiful and magnificent, which of course they are. They don’t want to see the situation from the perspective of it being compensational sex, when the other person is older, for instance. They don’t instrumentalize themselves. That’s why we need to be very careful about how these things are discussed.” (Interview, the Girls’ House)

While it was emphasized that young people might not identify with potentially stigmatizing terminology, even professionals working with these issues can have biased attitudes, where they are moralizing and judging of young people involved in compensational sex for instance.

“Sex work is such a loaded subject, we are not able to have a constructive discussion about sex workers’ rights in Finnish society. If this was possible, perhaps it would also facilitate the debate about compensational sex; in order to distinguish between adults and adolescents as well.”

“In the media, but at times also in discussions with youth work professionals, young people are perceived as criminals, as a problem.” (Interview, Family federation)

In discussions about compensational sex, the ways in which the phenomenon is portrayed in the media are likely to be influential too. Examples from news headlines from the biggest news outlets in Finland give an idea of the media coverage of the kinds of stories

that circulate in the media sphere and hence shape the public imagination with regard to compensational sex. Stories about compensational sex have been given headlines like: “When a teenager is selling sex – recognize the symptoms” (Uusi Suomi, 2013); “Teenagers’ sex trade is a silenced issue in Finland” (YLE, 2013); “Experts worry: sex-bought from young people in exchange for goods – Always be wary when a strange adult behaves too nicely” (MTV, 2016); “There are even 12-year-old sex sellers in Helsinki – adolescents’ sex trade not spoken about but people working with young people know the phenomenon” (Helsingin Sanomat, 2017); “Experts worry about young people’s sugar dating: ‘Glamour might be tempting for young people who don’t know that much about the reality’” (YLE, 2018). In other words, the emphasis is on *young people selling* or otherwise *providing* sexual services. Also, many of the professionals interviewed for this report critiqued the perspective that problematizes the behaviour of young people and largely leaves the buyers unmentioned.

“This week I was contacted by a journalist who asked about adolescents selling sex at a shopping mall. I had to correct the journalist that, in fact, it is not the adolescents selling but adults buying. It is also the purchasing that is criminalized by the law, and the buyer, the adult then has the liability. It doesn’t matter if the initiative comes from the adolescent, it’s a wrong perspective that young people are selling.” (Interview, Police officer)

Limits and biases concerning the recognition and descriptions of sex for compensation have an impact on being able to estimate the extent of the phenomenon, as discussed in the next section.

### 3.2.3 *Extent*

The challenges of estimating the extent of commercial sex in Finland found in the report *Prostitution in the Nordic Countries* are magnified when looking at compensational sex. Marttila (2008, 130–1) discussed the methodological challenges of and debate about estimating the number of people working in commercial sex. According to her, the different estimates given by different service providers and similar entities are related to the services they provide. And if estimating the number of people involved in commercial sex is difficult, getting an idea of the extent of compensational sex which, as described in the previous section, appears to be even harder to do. The lack of research-based knowledge makes it close to impossible to estimate the number of young people who have experience of sex for compensation. In addition, given that young people engaged in compensational sex are likely to be a very heterogeneous group, and both the young people’s and the professionals’ conceptions of what compensational sex is are likely to vary, any numerical estimates are likely to be very unreliable.

One way to approach the question of young people involved in compensational sex is to look at the number of people providing services for those engaged in commercial sex, given that the provided/received compensation is money. However, since there is no research that explicitly focuses on the issue of age, what can be concluded is that there are some young adults engaged in commercial sex. In Kontula's (2008, 43) research, one third of the people engaged in sex work, whose age was known from police reports or through them being research informants, were under the age of 25. Similarly, a report on the health and well-being of erotic, escort and sex workers in Finland (Liitsola et al. 2013) gives an indication that some proportion of erotic, escort and sex workers are under 25 years old. At the same time, this report, which is based on data collected by means of a multilingual questionnaire, already indicates that these young people, the majority of whom are women, are not a homogenous group. Between 25 and 30% of the voluntary participants in the study, recruited mainly through Pro-tukipiste's services and peer networks, who responded to the study's questionnaire either in Finnish or English, reported being under 25 years old. In contrast, only very few or none of the respondents who choose Thai or Russian stated that they were under 25 years old. The vast majority of the respondents who answered in Finnish stated that they were born in Finland, while half of those who answered in English reported Romania as their country of origin.

That some of the people working in commercial sex are young adults below 25 years of age which corresponds to what the interviewed experts from Pro-tukipiste confirmed about their service users: some are under 25, but the majority are older. However, these types of estimates might be biased, as reflected in the following interview.

"We provide services for professionals in the sex and erotic industry, and the ways for people to find their way to our services vary. It is possible to estimate the number of people in the sex and erotic industry in Finland based on the number of contacts we have, but it is a rough estimate. However, with regard to sex for compensation and phenomena like sugar dating, there are likely to be many people who don't think of themselves as being involved in the sex and erotic industry. Relying on statistic provided by the authorities is also likely to provide a very skewed view."  
(Interview, Pro-tukipiste)

In other words, the interviewees emphasized that while giving estimates based on Pro-tukipiste's service user contacts is likely to give a skewed idea, you cannot rely on the statistics available through the authorities, since they reach an even narrower selection of people engaged in commercial sex.

At the same time, contact records from other service providers focusing on young people are likely to be skewed in their own ways. None of the services directly target young people involved in compensational sex, but are directed more broadly towards young people based on the themes sexual health and well-being: "It's not that we explicitly invite young people to discuss compensational sex" (Interview, the Family Federation) is how one of the interviewees described the situation. In other words, people who are not in need of support do not seek assistance from these services: "If the young person feels that they are gaining from the arrangement, they might have no reason to approach our services" (Interview, Exit). At the same time, professionals

working in the sexual health and well-being services that target young people (the Family Federation, Exit) or young people who have experienced sexual violence (the Family Federation, the Girls' House, the Boys' House), saw that cases and questions of compensational sex were very few in number.

A somewhat different view was provided from the perspective of services for support to young substance abusers who have encountered sexual violence (Usva project, Exit). Professionals working with young substance abusers report visiting the topic of sex for compensation more frequently in comparison to the professionals working with young people who have encountered sexual violence without a pronounced emphasis on substance abuse. According to Exit's Usva project, compensational sex was counted as being the main topic of conversations between the professionals and their clients in 15% of all conversations, and in general, compensational sex was estimated to be relatively common among young substance abusers (Usva 2019).

With regard to adolescents, the aforementioned SHP survey and Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study give an indication of self-reported phenomena related to compensational sex among adolescents. The Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study, which is directed at 9th graders every four years, also studies young people's experiences of being victims, and as part of this it also contains questions on experiences of sexual harassment. In the latest Study from 2016, 8% of all respondents had experienced sexual harassment by another young person, and 6% of all respondents had experienced sexual harassment by an adult during the preceding 12 months. The Study included a follow-up question, asking the respondents who recognized having had experiences of harassment whether "the perpetrator gave you money or some other reward". This was answered in the affirmative by 6% of the respondents who had been harassed by an adult and 3% of the respondents who had been harassed by another young person. Of the total number of respondents, these were very small proportions: 0.2–0.3% of all the respondents recognized that they had been offered money or some other reward by their harasser.

The SHP survey gives an indication of the frequency of adolescents *recognizing and reporting* having received unsolicited suggestions to engage in compensational sex. The question of whether the respondents have been offered money, goods or intoxicants in exchange for sex features in the questionnaire directed at 8th and 9th graders and the first 2 years of secondary education (vocational school and upper secondary school).

The SHP results show that adolescents in Finland have had experiences of being offered compensation in exchange for sex. However, the numbers at the level of the whole population are relatively low, and suggest that encountering offers for compensational sex is a relatively rare occurrence (see Table 1). In secondary school, girls also report having received unsolicited suggestions for sex for compensation slightly more often than boys; and young people in vocational schools report having received unsolicited suggestions for compensational sex slightly more often than their peers in upper secondary school.

**Table 1: SHP (2017), Has been offered money, goods or intoxicants in exchange for sex.**

	8th and 9th grade	Vocational	Upper secondary
All	3%	3%	2%
Girls	3%	4%	3%
Boys	3%	2%	1%

However, when the SHP results are examined in light of the background information on what the respondents report concerning the special groups they belong to, the situation appears somewhat different (see Table 2). Respondents who report having a disability, being of “foreign background” (born in Finland but with at least one parent born outside of Finland; born outside of Finland and with at least one parent also born abroad), having a mother who has not completed secondary education, or being in institutional care, also more frequently report experiences of receiving unsolicited suggestions to engage in compensational sex.

**Table 2: SHP (2017) Has been offered money, goods or intoxicant in exchange for sex, special groups.**

	8th and 9th grade	Vocational	Upper secondary
All	3%	3%	2%
Disability	7%	7%	4%
Foreign background	16%	9%	5%
Mother with low level of education	10%	6%	5%
In institutional care	19%	n/a	n/a

The breakdown of responses by special groups gives an idea of groups that are possibly rendered vulnerable when it comes to compensational sex. This response rate is high among adolescents who come from a foreign background or who have been placed in institutional care. There is also some previous indication that young people who run away from institutional care institutions are particularly likely to be subjected to offers of compensational sex (Lehtonen and Telen 2013). It is noteworthy too that respondents with a disability report somewhat more frequent experiences of being offered compensation for sex in comparison to the average of all the respondents. Another group possibly particularly vulnerable are LGBTI young people. Ten per cent of the respondents to an online questionnaire for LGBTI young people (between 15 and 25 years) indicated that they had been approached online by someone with the intention to purchase sexual services (Alanko 2014, p. 32).

### 3.2.4 *Vulnerability according to the professionals' understandings of compensational sex*

This section discusses the interviewed professionals' views on young people engaging in compensational sex and the factors in the interview data and grey literature seen as rendering young people vulnerable to engaging in compensational sex. The Family Federation's training material (Väestöliitto n.d.) lists different reasons for young people engaging in compensational sex. These include: a quick and easy way to get money and/or other goods; one-time experiment; seeking new experiences with a friend; a shared secret; seeking physical closeness (e.g. being held); lack of self-worth; rebellion against authorities; experience of being important and capable of running a business; feeling of profiting from or abusing the buyer; having no other choice (to get a place to stay, food or money); the ease of initiating contacts; young people knowing that they are wanted (by adults). In other words, the recognized reasons for engaging in compensational sex are many and relate (or do not relate) to different vulnerabilities in different ways. In addition, the results from other questionnaires presented above can be interpreted as indicating factors that render young people vulnerable with regard to compensational sex. Similar themes were also brought up in the interviews, which I will reflect on next. However, it was also emphasized that in the broad spectrum of acts that might be regarded as compensational sex, not all young people's motivations for engaging in sexual relationships have to do with vulnerability.

As the focus of this report is on vulnerability, that is the main perspective from which young people's engagement in compensational sex is discussed here. At the same time, as the list of motivations also suggests, and as was brought up in the interviews, young people who engage in compensational sex might themselves feel good about it, and thus, it is likely to be meaningful to understand some cases of compensational sex primarily from a perspective other than vulnerability. However, a feeling of profiting from compensational sex does not mean that compensational sex is without certain types of risks – and, to give an example of an extreme such, the report on child trafficking sets forth that in cases of survival sex, convincing oneself that one has a choice may be a survival strategy (Kervinen and Ollus 2019, p. 55). Furthermore, as explained in more detail in the section on the legal framework, when it comes to adolescents, compensational sex is criminalized and the liability always lies with the buyer.

Several of the recognized reasons for engaging in compensational sex that the training material by Väestöliitto mentions, from seeking adventure to seeking a sense of security or acceptance, situate the discussion on compensational sex at the level of individual psychology. With regard to young adults involved in sugar dating, it was recognized that "there are the ones who feel that they are doing great, they get the restaurant dinners and other things, and they give interviews to the media about how wonderful it is" (Interview, Pro-tukipiste) as one interviewee expressed it. *Enjoying the engagement in or the outcomes of compensational sex*, receiving positive recognition, restaurant dinners and other items or services that the young person could not afford, and/or being part of a power play with an older person or adult providing the compensation were also mentioned in the interviews as reasons for young people to engage in compensational sex.

It was also pointed out in the interviews that compensational sex might be *a way of living out one's sexuality*: "A young person might think that I like sex and this is fun" (Interview, the Family Federation). With regard to same-sex relations between men, this was given a particular meaning as it was pointed out that for some the compensation might serve as a means to avoid the stigma still attached to homosexuality as reflected in the following quote, which also underscores how similar experiences might have different significance for different individuals.

"With regard to sex between men, for some, who don't want identify as homosexuals, the fact that there is the compensation might serve as a justification for their sexual acts. For others, it might increase shame and difficulty talking about it, it becomes about this experience such that 'then I'm a whore'" (Interview, the Boys' House)

With regard to same-sex relations, it was also pointed out that in rural environments, where the number of potential intimate partners is limited, contacts formed through dating apps might lead to engaging in sexual relations with older people containing an element of compensation.

Seeking fun or luxury items through compensational sex or realizing one's sexuality through it does not mean that this type of behaviour does not make young people vulnerable at all. Pro-tukipiste's experts explained that the information they seek to provide to young adults engaging in sugar dating if needed has to do with minimizing potential risks such as agreeing explicitly beforehand what type contact they wish to get into and considering what they post online about themselves (e.g. pictures).

Seeking excitement, curiosity and exploring new things with friends were mentioned in the interviews too. "It might be something they try on a whim with a friend" (Interview, the Family Federation) as one interviewee expressed it. In the interviews conducted by Vuorela (Vuorela and Elonheimo 2013), maintaining peer relationships among young people was suggested as one motivation for engaging in compensational sex. Furthermore, it was brought up in the interviews for this report that in some cases *peer pressure* might render young people vulnerable. For instance, professionals from outreach youth work explained their view as follows:

"Being in a group of friends might have an effect on how young people are exposed to these types of relations. We know of cases where young people are afraid of being seen as turning their back on their group of friends, or being thrown out from the 'group of cool kids' if they speak up later on."  
(Interview, Outreach youth worker)

In the context of *psychologising explanations*, the interviewed experts working in the area of sexual violence mentioned *previous experiences of sexual abuse*, in relation to which compensational sex was described as a symptom. Lack of self-worth and lack of integrity were also mentioned as reasons (also Kervinen and Ollus 2019, 55): "some might think, 'what does it matter – at least it's not like getting beaten'" (Interview, the Family Federation). Related to lack of integrity, receiving physical contact that provides a sense of security was also mentioned.

The significance of *socioeconomic background* with regard to the vulnerability of young people engaging in compensational sex was discussed in varying ways. Vuorelainen and Elonheimo (2013), who base their discussion on findings from Vuorelainen's Master's thesis on professionals' views about young people engaging in compensational sex, state that some but not all of the interviewed social workers connected it to a disadvantaged socio-economic status. With regard to the level of (parents') income, the interviewees had contradictory observations. First, it was stressed that economic disadvantage and poverty might render young people receptive to compensational sex – or, as one of the interviewees explained young adults' reasons for selling sex: "freedom of choice is narrowed down by economic realities" (Interview, Exit) and the lack of economic resources or poverty was seen by some interviewees as a vulnerability [...] "there is that vulnerability if you are not getting any money from home" (Interview, the Family Federation). At the same time, in another interview, it was stressed that "being poor does not take away one's ability to make choices [...] choices with regard to compensational sex should perhaps be considered in parallel with other choices related to providing for oneself" (Interview, Pro-tukipiste). Furthermore, economic disadvantage as an explanation for compensational sex was also contrasted with the following:

"It is difficult to characterize at a general level who the young people are who are affected by this, for instance, socio-economic background does not seem to be significant. In fact, there are also young people from well-off families [who engage in compensational sex]." (Interview, police)

As an indication of socio-economic background, it was also observed that young people, who live in "well-off neighbourhoods" or "whose parents are successful entrepreneurs" (Interview, outreach youth worker) might also be engaged in compensational sex.

When it comes to socio-economic background, poverty and compensational sex as a means to obtain material resources, it would be useful to differentiate between forms of *enhancing consumption opportunities* and *survival sex*. In connection with the discussion on economic disadvantage, some forms of compensational sex were linked to consumer culture, as in the following quote, rather than a means of sustaining oneself:

"We live in a very materialistic society. You're supposed to have your iPhone, be very well equipped when it comes to cosmetics. That can be the reason for the young person wanting very expensive make-up products. If all their money goes to everyday expenses, compensational sex may be seen as a means to provide oneself with luxury items." (Interview, the Family Federation)

The setting described in this quote is rather different from the descriptions of compensational sex when it comes to adolescents placed in institutional care and on the run from institutional care, young people with drug addictions and, at least in some cases, young people seeking asylum or living without a residency status.

Adolescents in institutional care were seen a particularly vulnerable group. The interviewees saw a clear correlation between compensational sex and institutional care and/or receiving other support from child welfare services. In the report on youth who run away from care institutions (Lehtonen and Telen 2013), the professionals working in institutional care saw that runaways are subject to many kinds of risky behaviours, compensational sex being among those. Young people in institutional care are also named as a group with special needs with regard to sexual health and well-being in the National Action Plan on sexual and reproductive health and well-being (Klemetti and Raussi-Lehto 2016). Adolescents “on the run” [hatkassa] were seen as a particularly vulnerable group given that they often lack the resources to sustain themselves and hence are dependent on someone providing for them: “runaway kids need a place to sleep and food” (Interview, outreach youth worker). In other words, being on the run without access to resources was seen to render a young person vulnerable to compensational sex.

“Those young people who are clients of institutional care services, and who therefore have very little leeway in life... everything is controlled by adults. Particularly, if they run away, they need a ride, a place to stay and so forth.” (Interview, the Family Federation)

At the same time, when it comes to adolescents, compensational sex was also seen as a *lack of parental supervision*. Adolescent asylum seekers who come to Finland alone were mentioned as a special group.

“When they are alone, parents are not here and so forth, it might be easier to get into these situations also out of curiosity. I wouldn’t say it’s necessarily about coercion or persuasion, but the young person might also feel they are getting something from a new and exciting situation, even if from the perspective of an adult practitioner it is wrong.” (Interview, housing unit professional)

Also, according to Vuorelainen and Elonheimo (2013), some experts connected compensational sex with a lack of the presence and supervision of parents. In this regard, it was also pointed out that placement in institutional care might decrease risky behaviour, for instance, hanging out at places where contacts with buyers happen: “after they’ve been taken into care, you see them leaving the railway station much earlier” (Interview, outreach youth worker).

In the case of adolescents engaged in compensational sex, and more specifically those actively seeking sexual contacts in exchange for money, contacts with child welfare services seemed to be frequent to many interviewees. For instance, Pro-tukipiste experts explained that where they have been consulted by other professionals in cases of young people under 18 years selling sex, the adolescents have always been clients of child welfare services. This does not mean of course that contact with child welfare services as such is an indicator of being involved in compensational sex. Instead, adolescents in this group who are engaged in compensational sex more systematically than at the level of an experiment/curiosity might be likely to have other elements in their lives that render them vulnerable. Furthermore, it was also pointed out that contact with child welfare services, in the best case scenario, might facilitate recognizing situations

where an under-age person is engaged in compensational sex: “a good child welfare services officer might know to ask something that parents do not know to ask about” (Interview, Monika).

Compensational sex was connected to both *recreational substance abuse and substance addictions*. In particular, for adolescents, gaining access to intoxicants was seen as a motivation for compensational sex. The interviewees working with adolescents described different situations in which receiving intoxicants in exchange for sex appeared:

“Young people might be fond of trying out new intoxicants. For instance, snuff as a criminalized intoxicant has proven to be a tempting enough offer. In other words, the person involved in a criminal act knows how to push the right buttons.” (Interview, Police)

In other words, intoxicants can serve as the means to “push the right buttons” for adults to persuade adolescents to engage in compensational sex. Cases of young people hanging out in the city centre and ending up spending time at an adult’s apartment, an adult who possibly provided an intoxicant (in addition to a place to sleep) were also described. It was brought up that such situations might make the adolescent feel that they cannot refuse sexual contact.

“There is a group of kids who hang out together, they go together to stay overnight at someone’s (an adult’s) place. There might be alcohol provided. They might also feel that it is expected of them, or that they cannot say no.” (Interview, Outreach youth worker)

With regard to young people who are substance abusers, substance addictions were repeatedly seen as one of the factors that increase their risk of engaging in compensational sex, and compensational sex was described as a form of sexual violence among substance abusers (also Kervinen and Ollus 2009, 55). The sexual violence support services for young substance abusers described the setting this way: “in the world of substance abuse, trading sex for intoxicants is regarded as normal, sex serves as something to transact” (Usva 2019). At the same time, in another interview, it was pointed out that selling sex is a non-criminalised way of getting financial resources for intoxicants and thus possibly the non-illegal alternative available.

Compensational sex as *a means to secure housing* was also mentioned in the case of substance abusers but also other vulnerable groups, in which case compensational sex could be described as survival sex. One group that has not been referred to at all in the public debate, or any of the materials on compensational sex, are female asylum seekers who find the state-provided housing in reception centres unsafe:

“One example are young women who are seeking asylum and who feel that reception centres are unsafe places for them. They might end up in a situation where they trade sex for private housing or another housing solution where they feel safer.” (Interview, Monika)

Contacts for compensational sex were seen to be initiated *both in online environments and in physical encounters*. With regard to both, several interviews raised the fact that

adults or older people looking for the company of adolescents or young adults will seek out the venues where they regularly hang out.

When it comes to physical meetings, shopping malls, railway stations and similar public or commercial spaces where young people hang out were mentioned. Since the interviewed experts for this report were from the Finnish capital region, their comments regarding physical meeting places came from a Helsinki-centred perspective – the main railway station in Helsinki as well as the shopping mall Kamppi in the city centre were mentioned as likely meeting places in several interviews.

“At the railway station and Kamppi shopping mall, where young people hang out, there are adults who are interested in young people’s company, and that is where they find them. There is this exchange of cigarettes constantly going on, which might be nothing more than that. But if someone wants to get to know a young person, it is easy after having offered a cigarette to hang out with them and chat a bit.” (Interview, Outreach youth worker)

The professionals doing outreach youth work in particular described a setting where a group of young people, possibly both over and under 18 years, spend time in public spaces and are approached by an adult or an older person. The interviewee explains in the previous quote that at times such contacts might not be about anything more than scrounging cigarettes. Nonetheless, the easiness of such contacts facilitates initiating further contacts, which of course are not necessarily related to compensational sex. However, outreach youth workers saw public places as an important contact arena where contacts are initiated that might also, for instance, lead to the adult or the older person providing a place to sleep for the group of young people. Here, providing cigarettes or alcohol was seen to play an important role. At the same time, the boundary between physical and online meetings was seen to blur in these types of encounters.

“When there is this encounter between two people in real life, and they might also exchange contact details on Snapchat, for instance, after that both, the adult and the adolescent might add their friends. Then it becomes a connection between people who have never met each other.” (Interview, Outreach youth worker)

With regard to online environments, dating apps (Tinder, Qruiser) and sugar dating platforms as well as in some cases escort sites were mentioned as sites for establishing contacts with buyers. Different dating apps supposedly have age limits that restrict adolescents from using them. However, the interviewees stated that they know of cases of adolescents looking for alcohol or a place to sleep on Tinder. Furthermore, in a similar manner to the physical environments, the online environments where young people hang out (Instagram; Snapchat) were seen as important sites for initiating contacts leading to compensational sex. At times, compensational sex is presented as a phenomenon generated by the digital environment. However, it was emphasized in the interviews that sexual relations that are based on some kind of transaction of value pre-date social media. However, it was pointed out that firstly, the digital environment renders users of these apps vulnerable in a particular way since they upload photos of themselves that then might end up being circulated; and secondly, the digital environment allows transnational connections to a greater extent than the analogue world.

“What has changed is that it no longer remains within the borders of Finland. It might be that in Finland there is someone looking for company on a website that exists on a Danish server. There they meet a German man, with whom they travel together abroad.” (Interview, Pro-tukipiste)

With regard to how different vulnerabilities are recognized, the interviewees reflected on the role of gender. Although there is no evidence that compensational sex would not concern all genders, the possibility was raised that it is regarded as a phenomenon associated with girls and young women as the providers of sexual services or as objects of sexual abuse. For instance, “perhaps some school nurses and other professionals ask girls, but I wonder how it is with boys, are they asked the question, and non-binary young people too” (Interview, Girls’ House). Similarly, the expectation might be that the buyers are always men – which might also shape perceptions of who are vulnerable with regard to compensational sex. In the following quote, the interviewee describes the situation in a housing unit for under-age asylum seekers, as it turned out that some of the adolescent boys living in the unit had been approached by Finnish women suggesting compensational sex and some of the under-age boys living in the unit were also engaged in such relations.

“I think we [professionals working in the housing unit], were caught by surprise. Even those of us who have previously worked in child protection services for Finnish kids. Maybe the image is that it is a white Finnish girl and an older man. [...] We were prepared for concerns with regard to contacts with Finnish girls, that was the concern that nearby schools and neighbourhood associations raised, not that we wanted to feed that either. But we were not prepared for this, that the young people would be approached by white, Finnish women in their 40s.” (Interview, Housing unit professional)

These examples suggest not only the importance of gendered understandings shaping conceptions of compensational sex, but also the relevance of other intersectional power relationships: boys and young men seeking asylum might be regarded as perpetrators of sex crimes rather than possibly vulnerable to exploitation. Also, while many forms of compensational sex have been recognized in the public debate on the issue, at least to some extent, a phenomenon that has not been reported at all are women seeking asylum who, according to one interviewee, end up exchanging sex for housing that they felt to be safer than the services provided by the reception centre.

The perspectives presented in this section represent primarily the views of professionals who work in different services provided for young people and in law enforcement and hence they work often with young people who need support and/or are victims of crime. This means that their views on compensational sex relate to different forms of support needed by young people, or on the experiences and needs of victims of crime. In other words, the majority of the professionals interviewed encounter compensational sex as a phenomenon related to social problems. At the same time, since the professionals are based in different organizations, they develop selective knowledge due to their different experiences, perspectives, professional practices and ideologies. While some of the interviewees, such as the ones working to support victims of sexual violence or the ones working with adolescents, emphasised compensational sex as a form of abuse or violence, others working more broadly with the issues of sexual health and well-being talked about compensational sex as a

complex phenomenon. Similarly, professionals in service provision for adults working in commercial sex emphasised the multiplicity and diversity of the phenomena potentially labelled as compensational sex. Such perspectives were in the minority however in the interview data sample, with the majority of the interviewees framing compensational sex straightforwardly as a problem.

### 3.3 Social initiatives

Social initiatives intended to somehow explicitly address compensational sex are not numerous in Finland, and these few initiatives have been/are carried out by third sector service providers/NGOs. There are three NGOs in particular that provide services, train other professionals, and do advocacy work related to commercial and/or compensational sex. These are Pro-tukipiste, Exit and the Family Federation. For instance, when topics related to compensational sex are discussed in the media, the interviewees are often representatives of these organizations and/or from the police. Furthermore, compensational sex is acknowledged in some policy documents and/or handbooks produced by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, but there are no specific social initiatives being implemented through government agencies that are intended to target compensational sex specifically.

With regard to the official policies concerning sexual rights, the second National Action Plan on sexual and reproductive health for 2014–2020 (Klemetti and Raussi-Lehto 2016) by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health identifies compensational sex as an area that requires further research. This is a change since the first action plan (MSAH 2007), which does not mention compensational sex at all. But the action plan does not suggest any specific measures with regard to compensational sex other than the need for further research. Compensational sex is also mentioned in some materials for sex education and the promotion for sexual health by government agencies. In a handbook directed at professionals providing counselling on sexual and reproductive health, compensational and commercial sex are listed among issues related to sexuality with regard to which the professionals should acknowledge their attitude biases (Ritamo et al. 2011, p. 25). Another handbook for professionals providing sex education names compensational sex involving adolescents as a form of sexual violence (Bildjuschkin 2015, p. 122). Compensational sex is not discussed any further in these publications, and they do not provide explicit instructions how the topic ought to be discussed in sex education, for instance. However, the acknowledgement of compensational sex in these publications indicates that issues related compensational sex ought to be acknowledged as part of the provision of public services. In this regard, some of the interviewed professionals raised a concern about whether good quality sex education is available in all regions in Finland, and whether youth workers and health professionals are always able to set aside their moral judgments in order to provide appropriately targeted assistance when needed (Interview, the Family Federation).

As also stated in the National Action Plan, the main service provider for people working in commercial sex is Pro-tukipiste. Given that their services are targeted at

professionals in the field of commercial sex, they are targeted at adults and therefore Pro-tukipiste does not actively seek contact with adolescents. However, Pro-tukipiste provides consultation for school nurses, child welfare services workers and other professionals or parents concerned about issues related to compensational sex if needed. In the interviews for this report, other interviewed professionals referred to Pro-tukipiste as an important resource and source of knowledge, in particular for cases where compensational sex resembles commercial sex. The interviewed professionals from Pro-tukipiste stressed the importance of avoiding marginalizing, stigmatizing and moralizing ways of discussing the topic. When it comes to young adults involved in compensational sex, Pro-tukipiste's representatives emphasised that they aim to be available also to young adults who have tried sugar dating where "something in the experience has left them wondering".

Besides providing counselling services, the Family Federation in Finland does awareness raising and advocacy work on the topic. They have also carried out a project entitled *Sex education for child protection institutions (Seksuaalikasvatusta lastensuojelulaitoksiin)* in 2013. As a part of the project, professionals working in institutional care facilities and the young people placed there were interviewed about their needs for knowledge and their interests. Compensational sex was brought up as a theme, and the educational materials for professionals and for young people that the project produced address compensational sex. At the moment, the Family Federation does not have any ongoing project that aims to focus on compensational sex in particular, but they provide various services and information on sexual health and well-being for young people.

The NGO Exit and one of its functions, Youth Exit, provide awareness raising, do preventative work and provide an online counselling service on sexual rights and sexual integrity. These services are directed at young people between 13 and 29 years of age. Their preventive work also entails school visits and educating professionals working with young people. Exit also promotes the Usva project (2017–2019) which targets young adult substance abusers. This project is piloting a model of recognizing and addressing the sexual maltreatment and violence to which the target group is subjected. The target group is reached through services for substance abusers and homeless people.

As also explained in the previous section, in some extreme cases compensational sex is associated with human trafficking (Kervinen and Ollus 2019). The national authority to support victims of trafficking is the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking. Since its establishment in 2006, after being recognized as victims of various forms of trafficking, one quarter of the people who have received support through the assistance system have been young adults or adolescents (ibid., p. 9). However, to what extent young people who have faced sexual abuse are recognized as victims of trafficking remains an open question (ibid.). In the NGO field, Pro-tukipiste, MONIKA, the Multicultural Women's Association of Finland, Victim Support Finland and the Finnish Refugee Advice Centre provide services for victims of human trafficking.

With regard to the political stands and various ideological positions of the organizations working in the field, Pro-tukipiste and Exit have taken opposite stands when it comes to the question of general ban of purchasing sexual services between

consenting adults. As discussed more thoroughly in the next section, purchasing sexual services from an under-age person and from a victim of trafficking is criminalized. The question of the criminalization of purchasing sexual services is a politicized subject, although it has not been debated recently as much as it was in relation to the proposed legislation on criminalization in the early and mid-2000s and the years proceeding (c.f. Marttila 2008b). However, the NGOs whose niche is directly related to commercial sex have their own positions of course with regard to the current legislation and the need to develop it. While Exit has taken an abolitionist stance regarding commercial sex and they lobby for a ban on all purchasing of sexual services, Pro-tukipiste interviewees commented on how even partial criminalization might impact the field of commercial sex in a harmful way. Pro-tukipiste experts also emphasized that extending the ban of purchasing sex to consenting adults would put young adults, in particular, in a vulnerable position as they are likely to be new to the field. The positions were described in the interviews in following ways.

“Being a prostitution client should be criminalized in general. In our view, the preventive effect of this would be more effective where there is no situation-based assessment.” (Interview, Exit)

“The criminalization of purchasing sex means the criminalization of the transaction, and when the transaction between the one buying and selling is criminalized, it always has an effect on the person selling too. [...] When a transaction is criminalized, it can have a marginalizing effect on everyone [involved in providing commercial sex]. For instance, agreements are hastily negotiated in unclear circumstances. At the same time, speaking of young adults who might be new to the industry and who thus don't have a known clientele, it needs to be taken into account that they might not have the same negotiation skills as people with more experience and they might end up with more unclear agreements.” (Interview, Pro-tukipiste)

While their positions on commercial sex are opposite to each other, a shared view in the interviews, even among professionals in other organizations, was that in their practical work with service users, these conflicting views take second place. Furthermore, it was stressed that in their work with service users, professional and sensitive work practices are what count the most.

To sum up regarding providing services for young people involved in compensational sex or other social initiatives related to the topic, the social initiatives that directly address compensational sex have mainly been about raising awareness about the issue and educating various professionals. Furthermore, there are/have been initiatives that seek out specific target groups (children and adolescents in institutional care; young substance abusers). At the same time, professionals working in various services, in particular those connected to sexual health and well-being, are likely to encounter young people involved in compensational sex. In other words, it seems likely that compensational sex often comes up in the work of professionals in providing services related to sexual health and well-being, even if the services are not specifically planned to target compensational sex.

### 3.4 Legal framework

In this section, I briefly discuss the legal framework with regard to compensational sex in Finland from the perspectives of the criminalization of purchasing sexual services from an adolescent or a victim of trafficking as well as the legal obligations of professionals with regard to adolescents' engagement in compensational sex.

#### 3.4.1 *The criminalization of purchasing sex from a young person or a victim of trafficking*

With regard to the legal treatment of acts that might be regarded as compensational sex, an important distinction made in the Finnish legislation is the age of consent, which is 18 where sexual relations contain an element of commercial transaction (otherwise the age of consent is 16 years). The current legislation criminalizes *purchasing sexual services from a young person*, i.e. a person between 16 and 18 years of age (Criminal Code Chapter 20 Section 8[a]). Performing a sexual act on a child younger than 16 years is always regarded as sexual abuse of a child or aggravated abuse of a child (Criminal Code Chapter 20 Section 6). Purchasing sexual services refers to a wide range of sexual activities, of which sexual intercourse is found to be the most objectionable in the eyes of law. Besides money, the forms of remuneration recognized in the legislative materials (HE 6/1997) are goods, services (e.g. paying for a trip) or providing housing. Furthermore, the remuneration might also be non-material, for instance, a reference or study credits. An exchange of remuneration constitutes an offence where there is a promise of compensation or the transaction takes place prior to the sexual engagement. In other words, the perpetrator is anyone who promises or provides remuneration to an adolescent in exchange for sexual acts. This does not require persuasion or coercion, and the adolescent may also have an active role in initiating the purchase; however the adult person still has the criminal liability (also Hirvelä 2006, 63). The maximum penalty for purchasing sexual services from a young person is two years in prison. An attempt to purchase is also punishable. The experts interviewed for this report reflected positively on the fact that the age of consent is higher in cases of purchasing sexual services than in sexual engagement with another in general. The majority of the interviewees interpreted this as a clear signal on how to relate to adolescents' engagement in compensational sex.

The current legislation prohibits purchasing sex from a person who is being abused in sexual trade, victims of trafficking and persons who are targets of procurement (Criminal Code Chapter 20 Section 8), and also the act of pandering/procurement and aggravated pandering/procurement is criminalized (Criminal Code Chapter 20 Sections 9, 9[a]). With regard to criminalized acts of *trafficking in human beings and aggravated trafficking in human beings* (Criminal Code Chapter 25 Sections 3, 3[a]), the recent report on trafficking of children and young people underscores that victims of trafficking might not always be foreigners but the constituent elements are also fulfilled by victims who are Finnish citizens by birth, also in cases of sexual abuse (Kervinen and Ollus 2019, 9 and 55). Kervinen and Ollus (2019, 55) maintain that although trafficking by definition

is taking advantage of the dependent status or vulnerable state of a person (Criminal Code Chapter 25 Section 3), sexual abuse of young drug users might not be recognized by the authorities, especially in cases where there is no third party involved in the abuse. Also, an attempt at trafficking is punishable and the maximum sentences are six years (trafficking) and ten years (aggravated trafficking).

### 3.4.2 *Adolescents and professionals' duty to notify the child welfare services*

People working with adolescents have a legal duty to notify social services if they discover in the course of their work that a child's needs for care are not being met, or if circumstances related to the child's development, or the child's own behaviour, provide reason to investigate the need for child welfare services (Child Welfare Act Chapter 5 Section 25). Adolescents' engagement in compensational sex requires people working with adolescents to notify social services. Furthermore, they are required to report an offence if they suspect that an adolescent has been a victim of a sex crime.

The duty to notify social services and to report an offence were discussed in the interviews. On the one hand, there is the fact that the constituent elements of these criminal acts are not necessarily well-known even among people working with young people was raised in the interviews, and in cases where compensation is not money, or it is matter of an attempt, it may be particularly difficult for some professionals to connect what they see with a criminal act.

"For instance, if there is a school nurse who learns that one of the students has been offered sex for compensation. In such a case, the nurse should notify social services and report an offence to the police, but to begin with the nurse has to recognize this. It is very likely that there is much to improve when it comes to recognizing these situations." (Interview, Police)

On the other hand, given the discretion that working with young people was seen to require, the duty to notify was also seen as a challenging (although necessary) part of their work with young people.

"In the case of adolescents, some professionals might experience the requirement to notify social services and to report an offence challenging. When it is a young person, whose trust the professional has just gained, taking the case further entails the risk that the young person will disappear." (Interview, the Family federation)

Similar reflections were shared by other interviewees. It was emphasised that young people need to be well-informed in advance about the decisions and procedures concerning them. In the area of work on sexual violence, adolescents being aware of this duty to notify and possibly wanting to avoid it was raised. One of the interviewed professionals spoke of a case where the young person had deliberately sought counselling in a case that also contained elements of compensational sex only after turning 18 in order to avoid being reported to social services. In other words, the interviews also gave an indication that the legal obligation to notify the child welfare services might work against some adolescents seeking the assistance they might need.

To sum up, when it comes to compensational sex, the legislation in Finland primarily concerns cases that involve adolescents. The criminalization of purchasing sex from an adolescent sets the age of consent to 18 years when the sexual engagement also involves compensation, which seems to correspond to the ways in which compensational sex is most frequently understood in everyday discussions too. However, to what extent different professionals are able to recognize instances when there could be a suspicion of criminal activity and report this to the police remains an open question. Furthermore, when it comes to the measures required by the law with regard to adolescents involved in compensational sex, the question of the duty to notify the authorities seems to be an issue that would require further investigation about what its effects are in practice.

### 3.5 Conclusion – Finland

One of the aims of this report was to explore the knowledge available on compensational sex. In Finland, there is very limited amount of knowledge on compensational sex among young people, and the timeline of addressing compensational sex as a question of sexual health and well-being seems to have been relatively short. While professional debate about compensational sex seems relatively recent, scholarly perspectives on the issue are virtually non-existent. This means that key sources of information are likely to be professionals and, in particular, NGOs/third sector service providers working with related issues. The lack of research-based knowledge is also recognized in the field too, for instance, in the National Action Plan on sexual health and well-being as well as in discussions led by NGOs. Consequently, there is no systematically gathered data on what means and what knowledge base professionals working in various roles to support young people have to support young people involved in compensational sex. In addition, the extent to which compensational sex is addressed in connection with other sexual health and well-being related issues, such as in the context of sex education, remains unclear.

With regard to the question of defining the extent of the phenomenon, the lack of research-based knowledge imposes a serious challenge for making any estimates. The term itself is often connected to adolescents, and there is some survey data on the prevalence of experiences of being propositioned for sex for compensation among under 18-year-old persons. If anything, the survey results as well as the interviewees' experiences of the user profiles of different support services related to sexual health and well-being indicate that compensational sex among young people is an existing but rather marginal phenomenon in Finland. However, the SHP study results indicate that some groups (e.g. young people in institutional care and young people of foreign background) might face unsolicited propositions to engage in compensational sex more often than the average respondent.

The survey results as well as other debates about compensational sex, a term that in the Finnish language debates can refer to a myriad of practices, need to be interpreted in light of possible limits and biases. For instance, the interview data for

this report gives some indication that compensational sex might be more easily recognized when the buyers are older men and the recipients of compensation young, white, Finnish women. However, limiting understandings of compensational sex to these types of relationships is likely to provide a very limited picture of the phenomenon and it is important to take into account young people of different backgrounds (for instance, all genders, LGBTI young people, young migrants, young people with disabilities) when discussing the phenomenon further. In other words, further discussion about compensational sex among young people should carefully consider the different intersectional positionalities of young people possibly involved in compensational sex.

At the same time, in the field of social initiatives, compensational sex is seen in particular in connection with some marginalized groups, who are also the ones targeted by the few social initiatives explicitly related to the phenomenon. However, understandings of compensational sex should not be limited to these groups either. As agreed by the majority of the interviewed professionals and as underscored in the few existing sources on compensational sex, compensational sex should not be explained solely by socio-economic background as there is a variety of reasons that render young people vulnerable with regard to compensational sex. Of course, survival sex by runaway kids, recently arrived migrants or substance abusers is a different situation from engagement in compensational sex due to peer pressure – and the discussion about vulnerabilities also requires recognizing the intersectional positionalities of young people and the needs arising from different positions. At the same time, although here the emphasis has been on vulnerability, there is no indication that all compensational sex by consenting young adults should be interpreted in relation to the notion of vulnerability.

The legal framework sets the age of consent at 18 years when it comes to compensational sex and thus criminalizes compensational sex where minors are involved. At the same time, much of the focus on compensational sex (in social initiatives, surveys and the media) has been on minors. In other words, discussions about compensational sex understandably follow the setting provided by the legal framework. Furthermore, the law obliges professionals working with adolescents to notify the child welfare services and report to the police in cases of attempts to or actual purchases of sexual services from a young person. In the interviews, the duty to notify was discussed as being occasionally a challenge in relation to creating trusting relationships with young people seeking help, even if the interviewees saw this as being in the best interests of the young person in the end. This chapter does not contain enough data to give an indication of what the actual effects of the duty to notify are, but exploring the possible adverse effects of the support system is something future research could shed a light on.

With regard to future discussion about compensational sex, the interviewed professionals emphasized that in order to reach the young people and to provide the support they may need, it is very important to approach the issue of compensational sexual relations in a sensitive manner. This means that compensational sex should not be framed as sex work, nor should the focus in public debate be on young people

“selling sex” in the context of discussions that address young people directly. Instead, a more fruitful point of departure for further discussions would be a discursive space that leaves room for finding suitable definitions and terminology that will not stigmatize young people engaged in different forms of compensational sex.

### 3.6 References – Finland

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## 4. Iceland: (Young) People and Prostitution: Knowledge Base, Social Initiatives and Legal Measures

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In this chapter, I seek to answer the following questions which guide this Nordic research project: What is the current state of knowledge on young women's and men's experiences of prostitution? Which social programmes address young women's and men's experiences of prostitution and what ideology informs these programmes? What is the legal environment in this context and how is it being implemented? Research on prostitution in Iceland is scarce, let alone research focusing on different groups of people such as young people between the ages of 18 and 25. Given the scarcity of secondary literature on the subject matter in Iceland, the topic will be approached more generally with special mention of young people when such information is available. No social programmes specifically address the experiences of young women and men in prostitution in Iceland and only a few service providers offer specialised services for people with experiences of prostitution. In 2009, Iceland followed Sweden and Norway and criminalised the buying of sexual services. There is reason to believe, however, that this legislation has had limited impact due to the way in which it is being implemented.

The author is aware of the political context of the terminology in this field of research. In Icelandic, the most common term used for prostitution is *vændi* while some use the word *kynlífsþjónusta* (sexual services) or *kynlífsvinna* (sex work). In informal parlance, *vændi* is also referred to as selling oneself or *að selja sig*. While there is an ideological dichotomy in the literature between those who understand prostitution as inherently violent and those who regard it as sex work, many contemporary scholars understand prostitution as exploitative while also acknowledging that it can be interpreted as work and something that sex workers choose to engage in (Skilbrei and Spanger 2019). I align myself with the last group and in this chapter I mostly use the terms prostitution and engaging in prostitution, or selling sex, apart from when my sources use the term sex work.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I would like to note that since 15 April 2019 I have been a board member of Stígamót, an NGO which led the lobbying efforts in Iceland for the implementation of the Swedish legal approach to prostitution.

## 4.1 Background

Recent discussions on prostitution and trafficking in Iceland can be traced back to the establishment of the first strip clubs in Iceland in 1995. Within the space of a few years, Iceland had the highest number of strip clubs per capita in Europe, of which many were associated with prostitution (Ásgeirsdóttir et al. 2001). This rapid development in a country with little if any tradition of publicly visible prostitution such as street prostitution brought the phenomenon into sharp focus (Atlason and Guðmundsdóttir 2008a). In a study commissioned by the City of Reykjavík in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, Snædal (2003) mapped the development of what she called a “nascent but growing sex industry in Iceland”. This included massage parlours, strip clubs, hotlines, escort services, websites and advertisements. In 2007, a survey conducted by Capacent-Gallup showed that 70% of the general public agreed that the buying of sexual services should be made illegal, or 83% of women and 57% of men (Atlason and Guðmundsdóttir 2008a). In 2007, the selling of sexual services was decriminalized and in 2009, as a result of extensive lobbying on behalf of the women’s movement along with a new left-wing government that took over the reins of government after the economic collapse in 2008, Iceland adopted the “Swedish” legislation on prostitution. Profiting as a third party from the prostitution of others was and remains illegal. Furthermore, in 2010, it became illegal for clubs and restaurants to profit from the nudity of their employees (Parliamentary document 857, 2009–2010). As a result, the strip clubs closed, although a few “champagne clubs” have remained. The Icelandic approach to prostitution has been characterised by prioritizing efforts to decrease the demand for prostitution in order to prevent trafficking (Valdimarsdóttir 2009). This is also reiterated in a report on actions against trafficking by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Félags- og tryggingamálaráðuneyti 2009) and in the government action plan against trafficking, 2013–2016 (Áætlun ríkisstjórnar Íslands um aðgerðir gegn mansali 2013–2016, n.d.). Strategic assessment reports published by the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police (2015, 2017 and 2019) have repeatedly warned that prostitution is on the rise in Iceland and that there are strong indications that it is related to organised crime and sex trafficking and that the police are unable to adequately respond due to a lack of resources. There are, however, no specific social policies on how to support (young) people who are engaged in prostitution or want to exit prostitution.

## 4.2 Method

Firstly, a literature review will be presented of research on prostitution in Iceland. A search was conducted on Leitir.is which contains entries from most libraries in Iceland using the following search words, which yielded the following hits: “vændi” (prostitution) (338 hits), “kynlífsþjónusta/u” (3 hits, BA thesis [1], ML thesis [1], magazine article [1]), “kynlífsvinna” (sex work) (1 hit, BA thesis), “kynlíf gegn endurgjaldi” (sex for compensation) (1 hit, BA thesis). The 338 hits for *vændi* include 125

books, which includes reports as well as Icelandic and translated biographies and novels, 84 electronic books, which includes reports as well, 72 journal and magazine articles, and 61 Bachelor's or Master's theses. Some of these entries are duplicates and for most of them *vændi* is not the main focus of the text. There is only one entry for a peer-reviewed article, the main focus of which is surrogate mothers (Finnsdóttir 2013). After limiting the search from 2008 onwards, or from the time of the last NIKK publication on the topic of prostitution, and excluding biographies, the search word *vændi* yielded 62 hits in Icelandic which includes theses (49), electronic books and reports (10), books (3), and journal and magazine articles (10). Again, several of these entries are duplicates, as the 10 electronic books and reports are all theses. The 10 journal and magazine articles are mostly either based on theses or are in the field of literature and philosophy or are not research-based, apart from a couple of articles which will be discussed in the literature review. The three books include a report on the Icelandic chapter which was published in Danish in the NIKK publication mentioned above (Atlason and Guðmundsdóttir 2008b), one book on verdicts in court cases concerning sexual violence (Bragadóttir 2009) and a book on crimes in Iceland (Gunnlaugsson 2008). These books, however, are based on material generated before the legislation on prostitution was changed in Iceland. In the literature review, I will focus on the most relevant material from before 2008, which was also discussed in the previous NIKK publication (Atlason and Guðmundsdóttir 2008a). In the literature review from 2008 onwards, I will focus on the handful of reports and publications available as well as relevant Master's theses.

Secondly, given the scarcity of secondary sources, these have also been supplemented with a review of reports from the news media in order to give some sense of the public debate on prostitution in Iceland. According to a survey conducted by Market and Media Research (MMR), 50% of people in Iceland rely primarily on online media outlets for news, while 18% primarily watch news on TV and 9% listen to news on the radio ("Fréttir" 2018). *mbl.is* and *visir.is* are the online media outlets that have the highest numbers of users, at least from 2015 onwards ("Topplisti innlend umferð" 2019). On 8 June 2019, a search was conducted of those two media outlets using the search words "*vændi*" and "*kynlífsvinna*" and news items hits published between 2016 and 8 June 2019 were reviewed. On *mbl.is* the search for domestic news yielded roughly 80 news items for "*vændi*" and none for "*kynlífsvinna*". On *visir.is* it is not possible to select searches for only domestic news and so a general search yielded roughly 100 news items for "*vændi*" and 16 for "*kynlífsvinna*" but some of these results are duplicates as the news items are registered more than once in different categories. Some of the domestic reports on both media outlets pertain to the same news focus and some refer to other media outlets as a source which was then used. These news items were reviewed, and a short narrative constructed drawing on those news items that are presented as factual and evidence based. The review does not focus on individual police investigations, which excludes most of the news reports from *mbl.is*. In March 2019, *Kveikur*, an investigative news programme produced by the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service aired an episode focusing on prostitution in Iceland out of which several online news items were generated. The programme garnered

considerable attention and is also included in the review. In addition, a Google search was conducted of interviews with people who have engaged in prostitution, which also included lengthy interviews from other sources such as stundin.is and mannlif.is.

Thirdly, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 professionals who, through their work, (might) encounter (young) people who have experiences of engaging in prostitution. These are professionals who offer services for: people who have been subjected to violence (*Stígamót, Bjarkarhlíð*, the Women’s Shelter); people who use drugs intravenously or have a problem with drug and/or alcohol use (Red Cross, the National Centre of Addiction Medicine); people who seek medical assistance for STDs (Dermatology and Sexually Transmitted Diseases at the National University Hospital of Iceland); people who seek social services (the Counsellor Unit of the Reykjavík City Welfare Department); LGBTQ+ people who seek psycho-social counselling (the National Queer Association), immigrants who seek legal counselling (the Icelandic Human Rights Centre); and the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police. The interviews were recorded and the main points arising from them were summarised.

### 4.3 Knowledge base

As already noted, research on people’s experiences of prostitution in Iceland is scarce. The only research directly focusing on prostitution among young people in Iceland was conducted in the early 2000s, commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs and published in two parts (Ásgeirsdóttir et al. 2001; Ásgeirsdóttir 2003). Only one other research project on prostitution in Iceland had been conducted prior to that, which is from 1985, where interviews were conducted with people who had engaged in prostitution. The findings indicate that there were three types of prostitution practised in Iceland: prostitution among young people with substance use problems, organised prostitution, and more expensive “services” offered by young women through classifieds ads in the newspapers (Einarsdóttir 2000, in Ásgeirsdóttir et al. 2001).

The study commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs included a survey conducted in 2000 among all high school students in Iceland between the ages of 16–19, a total of 7,239 students. The following percentages of students reported having at least once accepted a favour or money for sex.

**Table 3: Percentage of high school students who reported having had sex for compensation**

High School Students			
	16–17 years	18–19 years	Total
Girls	1.2%	0.7%	1.0%
Boys	3.9%	2.0%	3.1%
Total	2.4%	1.2%	

Source: Ásgeirsdóttir 2003, p. 108.

In numbers, around 131 students reported having accepted compensation for sex or around 95 boys and 36 girls. According to the study, these results can only give an indication of the frequency of prostitution among young people, as it can be assumed that prostitution is most common among groups of young people who are socially and financially vulnerable, which surveys like these have difficulties capturing (Ásgeirsdóttir 2003).

Interviews were also conducted with 22 professionals to inquire if individuals in prostitution sought assistance from their institutions, but no such information existed, neither formal nor informal.<sup>22</sup> In addition, interviews were conducted with 22 individuals, 8 of whom had received compensation for sex (7 girls and 1 boy, 15–30 years of age) and 14 who knew about prostitution while not having personally experienced it themselves (4 girls and 10 boys, 15–30 years of age). Of those who had not experienced exchanging sex for compensation themselves, 6 had witnessed prostitution among their acquaintances in relation to their drug use, 1 boy had supplied girls with drugs and received sex in exchange, and 7 individuals were connected to strip clubs (3 strippers between the ages of 18–27, 3 staff members at strip clubs, 1 contact person at a strip club). Of those 22 individuals, at least 15 had turned to public institutions for assistance, e.g. counsellors, and some had been involved with the police (Ásgeirsdóttir 2003).

The findings indicate that prostitution among teenage drug users takes the form of “survival sex” where they engage in it in exchange for housing, food, drugs, money or other things. This is more common among girls, as the boys finance their drug use more through illegal activities and crime, including the selling and distribution of drugs. These young people often have a difficult background or have experienced some form of trauma. The buyers are usually older, between 20 and 50 years old. Prostitution among older people seems to be more organised, where women selling sex have regular buyers. This type of prostitution often takes place in homes or at other prearranged places. Ad hoc street prostitution does exist among older individuals and is often characterised by more drug use and violence. Those who use more targeted ways to attract buyers do so through ads in the newspapers, telephone hotlines, the internet, and through strip clubs (Ásgeirsdóttir et al. 2001).

Third parties who profit from organising or the mediation of prostitution can be divided into four groups according to the relationship they have with those who sell sex: 1) boyfriends, 2) sexual partners, 3) those who sell more than one individual as in a brothel or special apartments, and 4) those who work in connection with strip clubs. It is known that one way for third parties to get into contact with young women is to admit themselves to rehab centres for drug use problems. Based on interviews with employees at strip clubs, there are indications that organised prostitution takes place in connection with these clubs. Unorganised prostitution also takes place in strip clubs, where individual dancers sold sex to clients, either in private dancing sessions or in other places. There is a strong indication that young women from specific countries

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<sup>22</sup> These included 5 health care professionals, 4 police officers, 1 staff member at the Directorate of Labour, 3 staff members at drug addiction treatment facilities, 2 staff members at social services, 2 staff members in the Child Protection Authorities, 1 staff member at Stígámót, 1 staff member at the Red Cross, and 1 at the Women's Shelter.

outside the European Economic Area (EEA) are more often hired in strip clubs where prostitution is involved. Agencies abroad offer different types of strip dancers, some of whom are called XXX girls, which stands for “sex” (Ásgeirsdóttir et al. 2001).<sup>23</sup>

In 2003, the City of Reykjavik in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice published a study mapping the scope of the sex industry in Iceland based on public documents and interviews with business owners, service providers, policymakers, and anonymous informants. Snædal (2003) found that prostitution was being advertised on on-line dating sites, such as einkamál.is, and through hotlines such as Rauða torgið (the Red Square), and newspapers, such as DV, where the keywords used were (looking for a) “financially independent man” and “confidentiality” (promised). While strip club representatives all denied that prostitution takes place in their clubs, the author’s informants confirmed that it was possible to buy sex through most of the strip clubs with individual dancers. In some cases, the dancers referred the informants to the bar without denying or confirming that prostitution was available. According to an owner of one of the strip clubs, they refer clients who want to buy sex to the erotic massage parlours. Most of the informants confirmed that the erotic massage parlours were places where it was possible to buy sex (Snædal 2003). However, since 2003, both the legal environment and information technology have changed considerably.

In 2009, the Icelandic Red Cross together with the Centre for Women’s and Gender Research at the University of Iceland published a study on the nature and extent of trafficking in Iceland. In the study, Valdimarsdóttir (2009) conducted a literature review and reviewed domestic and international policies on trafficking which pertain to the Icelandic context. In addition, she interviewed 19 public officials, counsellors, lawyers and NGO representatives about examples of cases that they have come across in their work which they believe are cases of trafficking, including sex trafficking. Valdimarsdóttir selected and presented 16 examples from the interviews and discussed them in the context of the Palermo definition of trafficking. Two of these examples pertain to the exploitation of the prostitution of others. The first included two separate cases of women who sought assistance from the service provider. They both came from low- or lower-middle-income countries and their husbands sold them into prostitution. One was afraid that she would be deported because her husband threatened to inform the authorities that she had been involved in prostitution. The other was afraid of losing custody over her child because her husband, whom she was trying to divorce, threatened to inform the authorities that she had been involved in prostitution. The second example is instead a pattern which the police and NGOs find concerning. Several service providers knew of examples of women who come to Iceland and sell sex in hotel rooms. They appear to be travelling alone. A considerable number of Icelandic men buy sex from them over a period of a few days or until they leave again. This pattern has been found in cases of sex trafficking in other countries, where women have been found to be part of international networks and are sent from one country to the next for the purposes of exploitation (Valdimarsdóttir 2009). Since

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<sup>23</sup> This was at a time where the Directorate of Immigration issued work visas for erotic dancers from countries outside the EEA.

then, there has been one case which resulted in convictions for trafficking (Supreme Court Case no. 224/2010), and one case where a woman was charged for trafficking offences but acquitted of these charges and instead found guilty of basing her employment on the prostitution of others (Supreme Court Case no. 105/2010). However, it should be borne in mind that convictions in a criminal court are a limited yardstick for the extent of trafficking in a given context.

In a new report by the Icelandic chapter of the international NGO Stop the Traffik, interviews were conducted with service providers, policymakers and stakeholders about the current state of affairs with regard to trafficking in Iceland in order to identify areas of intervention (Sigurðsson 2019). One of the main areas identified was the lack of outreach services for sex trafficking victims and sex workers in general in Iceland. An outreach test was conducted where an email was sent to 50 persons advertising sex for sale in Iceland on international escort websites with information about services available to sex workers in Iceland and information about their rights. In total, 6 replies were received. One woman responded saying that she was fine and thanked them for the support. Later she asked for a reference to a psychologist whom she then met at Bjarkarhlíð. The second woman responded saying that she and the other women she worked with were fine but that she was worried about a woman she had heard about who was recruiting girls and exploiting them. Stop the Traffik members decided to seek legal counselling and ended up reporting the case to the police. The third woman responded and said she was okay. The fourth woman thought the message was from an interested client and sent a photo of a girl who looked very young. Stop the Traffik members then sent the information to the authorities. The fifth woman answered saying she was worried that her profile had been stolen, and they then heard no more from her. The sixth woman thanked them for the email and said she was okay, but that it was good to know that they were someone she could contact. The report concluded that it is possible to confirm that some of the women know each other and sometimes live and travel together, and that they also share information with each other and with clients. There is seemingly some form of organizing occurring between some groups of young women in relation to sharing ads and photos. Also, recruitment takes place in Iceland and there are drug trafficking connections to sex work in Iceland (Sigurðsson 2019).

The National Security Unit (NSU) of the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police has published several reports assessing the threat of different types of organised crime in Iceland using the UN Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) model. According to the NSU's assessment, the economic upswing in recent years coupled with an increase in construction work and tourism are associated with risks of organised crime, including organised prostitution (National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, 2015; 2017; 2019). According to the 2015 assessment, there are indications that prostitution is connected with what are termed "champagne clubs" but there is insufficient information on whether the mainly young non-Icelandic women working there are doing so of their own accord or whether they are being forced to in some way. They generally do not want to cooperate with the police, which makes police investigations challenging. Due to a lack of resources, the police are reportedly unable to conduct proactive investigative actions (National Commissioner of the Icelandic

Police, 2015). According to the 2017 assessment, prostitution has been on the rise as per the increase in the number of online advertisements, especially among young women from Hungary and Romania, which could be connected to trafficking. The report states that trafficking and prostitution in the Nordic countries is thought to be connected to organised crime, which also applies to labour market crime and money laundering. Indications of these activities are found in Iceland. The report also claims that some prostitution in Iceland is without a doubt connected to organised crime, and has some of the hallmarks of trafficking (National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police 2017). The 2019 report reiterates the previous reports in this regard and also states that from 2015 until 16 March 2019, the police registered 5 cases of forced marriages and 24 cases of trafficking for sexual purposes. According to the NSU assessment, the risk of organised crime in relation to trafficking and organised prostitution is now at maximum level (National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police 2019). However, this most recent NSU report has been criticised by some members of the police force for being generally alarmist, xenophobic and having an over-emphasis on foreign criminal gangs at the expense of Icelandic ones (Ámundadóttir 2019).

Since the laws decriminalizing the selling of sex and criminalizing buyers were passed, the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland has conducted two surveys which included questions on people's attitudes towards prostitution.<sup>24</sup> The results show that 58% of the general public are in favour of the legislation criminalizing the buying of sexual services; 75% of women but only 40% of men. Younger people are more in favour of the legislation than older people (Gunnlaugsson and Jónasson 2014). In 2015, the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland again conducted a survey including questions on attitudes towards prostitution.<sup>25</sup> Their findings showed very similar results in that 58% agreed that that the buying of sexual services should be illegal, or 77% of women and 39% of men, while 24% disagreed, or 12% of women and 36% of men. People living in the Reykjavík metropolitan area were more in favour of the legislation than those living in rural areas, and there was an indication that younger people are more in favour of the legislation than older people. Participants were also asked if they think that the selling of sexual services should be made illegal. The findings showed that 37% thought that the selling of sexual services should be criminalised, or 45% of women and 29% of men, while 35% did not agree, or 42% of men and 28% of women. People in rural areas were more against criminalising the selling of sexual services than those living in the Reykjavík area. Younger people also tended to be more against criminalizing the selling of sexual services than older people (Gunnlaugsson and Jónasson 2015).

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<sup>24</sup> These results are based on two internet panel surveys conducted by the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland in 2014. The internet panel is comprised of a randomised sample from the National Registry and includes people 18 years and older, nationwide. The sample sizes were 1,483 and 1,476 the response rates were 61% and 58%, respectively. The responses were weighted based on gender, age and residence.

<sup>25</sup> These results are based on an internet panel survey conducted by the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland in 2015 which included a stratified random sample of 1,176 people. The response rate was around 60%. The data was weighted for gender, age, residency and education levels.

A number of Master's theses have been written on the topic of prostitution, some of which also include a focus on trafficking. Those that address the topic directly have been in the field of law (Steingrimsdóttir 2011; Hilmarsdóttir 2013; Vignisdóttir 2014; Úlfsson 2016; Þorsteinsdóttir 2018), political science focusing on domestic and international policies (Hauksdóttir 2010; Eydal 2010), and one thesis was written in the field of economics (Albertsdóttir 2012). These theses are largely based on an analysis of legal and policy documents in addition to the limited existing research on the topic in Iceland. Þorsteinsdóttir's (2018) thesis, however, includes an analysis of the verdicts in cases of prostitution, which will be discussed further in the section on legal measures. In addition, a couple of the theses focus on the experiences of people who use drugs intravenously where some have mentioned that they have sold sex to finance their drug use. Sigurðardóttir's (2018) thesis in the field of social work is based on interviews with six women who have been homeless and who used drugs intravenously, about their trauma history and their recommendations for improved rehabilitation services. As a part of the discussion on how these women's addictions developed, it was reported that two of the women talked about having engaged in sex work to finance their drug use and the following quote is presented:

"... there were rumours everywhere that I had begun to sell myself for drugs...I always thought that was ridiculous...I had begun to sell myself for drugs but I didn't realise it until I went to rehab..."  
(author's translation from Sigurdadottir, 2018, p. 79)

Otherwise the topic of sex work is not addressed further in this thesis apart from in the literature review, where it is mentioned in relation to groups of people who are marginalized and that those who have drug addiction problems are more likely to engage in sex work. Another thesis in the field of education is based on interviews with 6 young people who have used drugs intravenously about their drug use and why they use drugs (Friðriksdóttir 2019). The main findings indicate that the reasons for their drug use can be traced back to trauma or difficult experiences when they were children such as bullying, violence, difficult homelife, learning disabilities or severe distress. The participants were all aware of the connection between their prior experiences of trauma or severe distress and their drug use. In Friðriksdóttir's (2019) discussion about their experiences of trauma, one young man is quoted as saying:

"... I was raped ... or [was] abused when I was 8 or 9 years old. [...] And then I go into prostitution when I'm 15 years old to finance the drug use ... which got me into all kinds of mess ... I just have a steady 'sugar daddy'" (author's translation from Fridriksdottir, 2019, p. 45)

The topic is not explored further in the thesis.

It is safe to say that the state of knowledge stemming from research on the experiences of young women and men in prostitution in Iceland is extremely limited. Little is known about the extent of prostitution in Iceland, apart from the survey conducted in 2000, and no studies have been conducted on the experiences of young people or others in prostitution apart from the study commissioned by the Ministry of Justice (Ásgeirsdóttir et al. 2001; Ásgeirsdóttir 2003). Since there is a lack of

information about the extent to which people engaging in prostitution seek out public services in that context, studies based on public documents, police records, and interviews with policymakers and service providers can, at best, only paint a limited picture of prostitution in Iceland as seen through the lens of these professionals. Little to nothing is known about (young) people engaging in prostitution or sex work who do not seek out the public services.

#### 4.4 Media debate

The aim here is not to give a comprehensive analysis of debate on prostitution in the Icelandic media nor to assess its validity. The aim is rather to capture some of the themes or discussion points related to prostitution in Iceland as portrayed in the most frequently viewed online news media and in interviews with people who engage or have engaged in prostitution. News reports on prostitution can be divided into two categories. Firstly, there are news reports about how prostitution is on the rise in Iceland among young foreign women where the police suspect trafficking. Secondly there are more ad hoc news reports that pertain to prostitution among people, largely women, living in Iceland. These news items tend to be presented in relation to drug use, poverty and other vulnerabilities.

##### 4.4.1 *Prostitution among young foreign women in Iceland*

In recent years, there have been several reports stating that prostitution is on the rise in Iceland which are largely based on interviews with members of the police force (Hálfðánardóttir 2016; Yaghi 2016; “Prostitution on the rise in Iceland” 2017; Gunnarsdóttir 2017; Eyjólfsson 2018; Sæmundsdóttir 2018b). The police largely base this estimate on a rise in the number of advertisements on international escort websites where mostly young foreign women offer prostitution in Iceland. The women are between the ages of 20–25 and only stay in the country for a short period of time. According to the police, the women say that they are in Iceland of their own accord, but the police suspect trafficking in at least some cases. The women receive between 5–8 buyers per day and often rent Airbnb apartments or hotel rooms. According to the police, most of the women come from Eastern European countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, and also from Spain. Based on this pattern and information from Europol, the police suspect trafficking in these cases (Hálfðánardóttir 2016; “Jafn auðvelt og að panta pizzu” 2018), as some have also been working in the other Nordic countries before they come to Iceland (Sæmundsdóttir 2018a). One media outlet contacted 20 women through the international escort website City of Love and pretended to book appointments. According to the report, many of the women seemed to be working independently. However, someone called the journalist and asked why he had booked appointments with six girls in such a short period of time. This, according to the journalists, indicated that a third party was making a profit from the prostitution of others (Valgeirsson and Alexandersson 2018).

According to the police, they have visited a number of women and informed them about the Icelandic legal environment. Some of the women say that they are sex workers and choose to sell sex, and that they work independently. The police, however, suspect that at least in some cases there are third parties involved (“Skiptast á reynslusögum af vændiskonum á Facebook” 2016). When the police have contacted women advertising prostitution and offered support, they have not accepted it (Sæmundsdóttir 2018a). According to the police, the reason for this stated increase in prostitution is that Iceland has been in an economic upswing in recent years coupled with increased tourism (Eyjólfsson 2018). The average price for prostitution in Iceland is ISK 35,000, which is high in international comparisons according to the police. In Sweden, the average equivalent price is ISK 10,000 (Sæmundsdóttir 2018b). Although an increase in prostitution has been linked to an increase in tourism, the police have confirmed that most buyers are Icelandic men (Ómarsdóttir and Drengsson 2019).

The police have also been drawing the public’s attention to the use of Airbnb apartments in prostitution. The police believe that Airbnb apartments might be being used in connection with trafficking (Guðmundsdóttir and Sigfúsdóttir 2017) and the head of the police trafficking team has urged those who rent out apartments short term to check the backgrounds of their prospective occupants (Sigfúsdóttir 2017). The police trafficking team and the violence prevention council of the City of Reykjavík have been collaborating to increase awareness of prostitution and trafficking in Iceland through seminars and projects. These efforts have targeted the hotel industry and rental agencies who offer short term apartments (Sæmundsdóttir 2018b; Hauksson 2019). In an interview, a guesthouse owner expressed concerns that his Airbnb services were being used for trafficking purposes. His suspicions are based on unusually frequent bookings, unusual behaviours of guests, problems with payments. He has informed the police but due to lack of manpower and case prioritisation, the police do not follow up on these reports unless there is clear evidence of wrongdoing (Egilsson 2018).

In 2012 and 2013, there were a few cases where the police charged a number of buyers, but since then such cases have decreased considerably. According to the police, this decrease stems from their prioritization of cases against the backdrop of limited resources and lack of manpower (Sindradóttir 2017). While the police have predominantly focused on trafficking and organized crime, as opposed to prostitution buyers, there has been only one indictment for trafficking since 2010. According to the annual report on trafficking published by the US Embassy, Iceland has now been categorised as a 2nd tier country, having been categorized as a 1st tier country for years. One point of criticism is the lack of indictments in trafficking cases. The Minister of Justice has responded and said that the conclusions in the report are based on a lack of understanding of the Icelandic criminal justice system. However, she also stated that more resources have already been put into such cases (Eyjólfsson 2018).

A few “champagne clubs” have remained in operation in Iceland after the ban on strip clubs was enacted into law 2010. In spite of the legislation, there have been ongoing rumours that it is possible to buy private lap dances and prostitution in many of these clubs. The women working there are largely from abroad. The police have regularly investigated the champagne clubs in relation to organised prostitution and

trafficking and in some cases shut them down (Hauksson 2013; Þrastardóttir 2014). A former owner of a champagne club was found guilty of a tax violation but charges for organized prostitution were dropped (Yaghi 2017). Currently there are three champagne clubs operating in Iceland. According to an investigative TV programme, *Kveikur*, informants were offered private strip dancing in two of the clubs and prostitution in one. One of these clubs was subsequently closed by the police on suspicion of organised crime including prostitution and trafficking being carried on there, but later reopened. Again, *Kveikur* sent an informant to the club who reported that nothing had changed (Ómarsdóttir and Drengsson 2019).

According to the police, as reported by *Kveikur*, there are around 60 individuals advertising prostitution online at any given time, mostly young women from other countries who come to Iceland for short periods of time. The programme includes some short interviews with young foreign women selling sex in Iceland who seem to be in their twenties or early thirties. One woman said that she looks at prostitution as a job and is in it for the money. She says that she is not being forced into it; that women who are forced into it wouldn't talk to journalists. Another woman with an African and South American background says that the dream of a better life pushed her into prostitution. She comes from poverty and her family does not know that she is engaged in prostitution. She is paying for her siblings' education as she does not want them to end up like her. She does not see prostitution as a future job for herself. She has a boyfriend and wants to get married, but he does not know what she does for a living. Another woman from Moldova says that engaging in prostitution is easy and gives you the possibility to get a lot of money. She says that she knows a lot of women in this business and they generally think it is okay. She says that engaging in prostitution is not difficult, each buyer does not take much time and it is over quickly. She says it is like going to a club and going home with someone you do not know, the only difference is that she gets paid. She does not feel anything when she is with the buyers. When she is with her husband, however, she has feelings for him. She describes it as having two personas, "twins" (Ómarsdóttir and Drengsson 2019).

Information in news reports on prostitution or sex work by young foreign women in Iceland is largely based on interviews with representatives of the police force whose knowledge on the matter seemingly stems from their monitoring of domestic and international websites, discussions with women selling sex, and police investigations. These media reports are generally short and interview-based, with limited journalistic analysis. The narrative that emerges from these reports is that prostitution has been on the rise in Iceland largely due to an increase in young foreign women coming to Iceland for short periods of time to engage in prostitution and advertise through international escort websites. Little else is reported about the women. The buyers are largely Icelandic men as opposed to tourists. The police believe that organised crime or trafficking could be involved and have offered the women assistance which they have not accepted. The police and authorities have focused on preventing prostitution by raising awareness among those who rent out

short term apartments or hotel rooms. The police, however, does not prioritize these cases in terms of proactive investigations.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.4.2 *Prostitution among (young) women living in Iceland*

News reports on prostitution by people living in Iceland are more ad hoc and less prominent than those about foreign women. According to *Kveikur*, the investigative news programme, the police know less about prostitution among people in Iceland than about the young foreign women who come to Iceland to engage in prostitution. If the situation is similar to that in Sweden and Norway, according to the police then it can be estimated that three out of four women engaging in prostitution in Iceland are from abroad, which would mean that there are 10–20 women living in Iceland engaged in prostitution at any given time. A woman who has been engaged in prostitution for 8 years says that she has trained about 30 girls. She says that many of them start selling sex when they run into financial difficulties but then they stop, for example, if they get a boyfriend. She does not know any girls who have been in prostitution for as long as she has (Ómarsdóttir and Dregsson 2019).

As will be discussed in more detail below, the Red Cross in Iceland operates harm reduction services for people who use drugs intravenously. In 2018, several news items focused on reports from Red Cross staff about the increased difficulties for this group to acquire the drugs they need since the Directorate of Health tightened the controls around the prescription of addictive drugs which were implemented in stages in 2017 and 2018 (Gunnarsdóttir 2017; Ámundadóttir 2018; Ólafsson 2018a). The project manager of one of the Red Cross programmes in this field has been quoted several times where she points out that the decrease in the supply of opioid prescription drugs has made life on the streets for this group of people much harder, resulting in increased burglaries, theft and prostitution (Gunnarsdóttir 2017; Ámundadóttir 2018; Ólafsson 2018a; Ólafsson 2018b). The project manager is quoted as saying: "People are breaking into cars and businesses and then we are seeing a huge increase in sexual services, which we call 'sex work', this is both bad and harmful for the individual and society as a whole." She also says that their clients are much worse off today than a few years ago (Ólafsson 2018a).

In 2018, the Icelandic movie *Lof mér að falla* (Let Me Fall) was released and attracted considerable attention (Pálsson 2018). The movie is largely based on the diaries of Kristín Gerður Guðmundsdóttir, an Icelandic woman who committed suicide in 2001 after struggling with the consequences of a life where she was subjected to sexual violence as a child and became addicted to drugs which she financed by prostitution in which she was subjected to profound levels of violence by pimps and buyers. After Kristín Gerður stopped using drugs, she dedicated a big part of her life to raising

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<sup>26</sup> The media search included news items published between 2016 and 8 June 2019. However, around the end of July 2019, additional news reports were published based on information from the police. It was reported that around 80 women in Reykjavík have an active profile on international escort websites. According to the police, most of them are from Eastern Europe and say that they choose Iceland because the price for buying sexual services is higher in Iceland than in many other European countries and that they feel safer in Iceland. This year, the police have taken the testimonies of around 50 alleged buyers of sexual services and in some cases there is suspicion of trafficking (Yaghi 2019).

awareness in Iceland about the harms of prostitution until her death (Alexandersdóttir 2018). There have also been interviews with young women who have talked about their experiences of becoming addicted to drugs which they have financed with prostitution in which they have also been subjected to brutal sexual violence (Másson 2018).

In 2017, it was reported that around 70 young women and 15 men in Iceland are registered on an international Sugar Daddy/Sugar Mommy and Sugar Baby website. Many of the young women are university students according to their website profiles. In the report, one anonymous young woman, a university student, was interviewed about her experiences of having met at least 8 men through the website. She talks about having had sex with some of the men she met through the website but that most of the men expect that sex is included. She says that she didn't only do it for the extra money but also because she liked the person. She is quoted as saying: "I realise that this is a grey area but I don't experience it that way. I would agree that this can be understood as prostitution, that's what it looks like." She had since stopped using the website: "It's stressful to go meet someone whom you don't know. And it wasn't always worth it, either they weren't offering enough money, or they were asking for something that I didn't want to do." (Sigfúsdóttir 2017).

A woman who has been actively engaged in prostitution for the past 8 years, and, according to the report, is well-known among men buying sex in Iceland, says: "This is exciting and fun and then you also make money out of it". She says that she had been depressed and feeling low before she started working in prostitution. Her friend suggested that he buy sex from her and then things developed from there and she found clients online and started to feel better. She indicates that she does this because she is "horny" and that it is old-fashioned to think that people engaging in prostitution are somehow down and out. When asked why she does not have sex for free, she says that the men want to pay and with paying comes confidentiality, which allows them to ask her to do things that they would never dare ask of other women without being thought of as a "pervert" (Ómarsdóttir and Dregsson 2019).

A few reports have focused on men soliciting sex from women who are not advertising prostitution. A couple of reports have focused on examples of women being offered lower or no rent in the housing market in exchange for sex (Gunnarsdóttir 2017; Guðjónsson 2017). Housing costs in the Reykjavík metropolitan area have increased considerably in recent years, partly due to an increase in tourism and people renting out their apartments on Airbnb, and partly due to the increased activities of rental companies. This has created a housing crisis for large groups of people, especially young and low-income people (Júlíusson 2017). According to the team leader at *Bjarkarhlíð*, many women have complained that when they use the dating app Tinder and are not interested in someone, then they are asked: What if I pay? She says that those groups of women who are more vulnerable are more at risk of accepting these kinds of offers (Eyjólfsson 2019).

In 2018, it was reported that around 440 men were members of a closed Facebook group where they discuss women in prostitution in Iceland. The group was established in 2016. The men talk about what they think about different women, what they cost, who they recommend and do not recommend. For example, they warn against women

who are drug users and comment on women's dis/ability status (Sæmundsdóttir 2018a). In 2018, it was also reported that over 50 men had bought sexual services from a woman with a disability over a period of a few months (Yaghi 2018). According to the team leader of *Bjarkarhlíð*, they know of several such cases and she says that women with mental health issues and intellectual disabilities are a particularly vulnerable group. She says they are more vulnerable to being subjected to violence by buyers and often get paid less or are not paid (Helgason 2018).

*Kveikur*, the investigative news programme, reported that according to research in the Nordic countries, 10–13% of men buy sex. They are mostly married or have a partner and are between 30–50 years old. *Kveikur* set up an account on a dating website in order to get in touch with buyers. A few hundred men responded. Some asked directly how much, others offered money for sex, others engaged in some discussions before asking about the price. One man asked if this was about prostitution and said that he didn't want to participate in that. Some of the men used very coarse language while most of them were generally courteous. The majority of the men were in a relationship or married, had children or grandchildren. Efforts were made to interview buyers, but *Kveikur* only found one man willing to be interviewed. This buyer was a married man with two children and says that he buys sex because sexual relations with his wife are poor and he is looking for a thrill. He says that he assumes that Icelandic women who are selling sex do so of their own free will but that he does not buy sex from foreign women due to the risk of trafficking (Ómarsdóttir 2019).

As will be discussed in more detail below, court proceedings in cases of prostitution are usually closed, verdicts are not made public and fines are relatively low. Several news items focus on how this judicial practice is not conducive to acting as a deterrent for buyers, which was one of the main aims of the law criminalising the buying of sexual services. News reports have quoted parliamentarians critically raising this issue ("Vændiskaupendur verði nafngreindir" 2019) as well as the police ("Réttarhöld í vændismálum verði opin" 2018) and researchers ("Vændismálum lokið fyrir luktum dyrum" 2018).

In recent years, media interviews with people who have sold sex have been with women who are no longer in prostitution. The women are apparently in their 30s or 40s and are often anonymous to protect their children. Most of them have been in counselling and attended self-help groups at *Stígamót* and or *Bjarkarhlíð*. Most of these women talk about having started to engage in prostitution due to financial difficulties and that their previous experiences of sexual abuse and violence made them vulnerable in terms of seeing prostitution as an option. They describe the buyers as all kinds of men. Most buyers are older and most of them are married with children or grandchildren. They describe some as likable and others as disgusting, some are nice while others subject them to degradation and violence. These also include powerful and/or well-known men in Icelandic society. Many describe how when they first started to engage in prostitution, they felt in control and even empowered. However, after some time they stated that things start to change. Many describe having had mental breakdowns after having engaged in prostitution for some time and how they have struggled with feelings of low self-esteem, shame and self-loathing, as well as social

isolation and health-related problems. Many talk about finding it difficult to have to run into former buyers in their daily lives or see them on TV and think that the buyers should bear the shame and not them; that it is not acceptable to buy access to another person's body in this way (Kjartansdóttir 2015; Antonsdóttir 2018; Aðalsteinsdóttir 2018; Yaghi 2019; Ómarsdóttir and Drengsson 2019).

While interview sources in news coverage about young foreign women are usually the police, the sources interviewed in media reports on women living in Iceland are often service providers offering different forms of counselling and self-help. These media reports are, however, also generally short and interview-based, with limited journalistic analysis. Interviews with women who have exited prostitution are lengthier however and sometimes were originally in the form of TV interviews that are later turned into online news items. News items about prostitution among women living in Iceland tend to be related to sexual violence, drugs, poverty and other vulnerabilities, although there are a few exceptions. While young foreign women tend to use international escort websites to advertise their services, women living in Iceland apparently tend to use dating websites or social media. However, there are also indications that women and girls are being solicited online where there is no reason to believe that prostitution is on offer. The buyers seem to be all kinds of men and there have been reports about Facebook groups where buyers exchange information about their experiences and recommendations.

## 4.5 Social initiatives

There are no social programmes in Iceland that specifically address the experiences of young women and men between the ages of 18 and 25 who have engaged in prostitution. There are, however, social programmes which address experiences of prostitution among people who are 18 years and older. It is possible to divide these social programmes into two groups: social programmes targeting people who have been subjected to violence (*Stígamót* and *Bjarkarhlíð*); and social programmes run by the Red Cross targeting people who use drugs intravenously (*Frú Ragnheiður*) and homeless women (*Konukot*). Interviews were conducted with representatives of these programmes. Other service providers do not run specific programmes that address prostitution but interviews were conducted with service providers who (might) encounter people selling sex in to the course of their work.

### 4.5.1 *Stígamót*

*Stígamót*, an education and counselling centre for survivors of sexual abuse and violence, is an NGO that offers free counselling for women and men, 18 years or older, who have been subjected to different forms of sexual violence. In addition, *Stígamót* runs self-help groups, which are closed groups with 4–6 members facilitated by a trained group leader. One such group is called the Swan group, which is for women who have been in prostitution or are in prostitution and want to get out of it. The Swan group

was established in 2011 and has been running ever since. It is based on a Danish model developed by Dorit Otzen at Redet in Copenhagen (Stígamót's Annual Report 2013).

The work of *Stígamót* is informed by a gender-based and feminist ideology where sexual violence is understood in a structural context as a form of gender discrimination. Those who have been subjected to sexual violence are considered to be individuals who have survived the violence and as experts on the consequences of sexual violence. The work at *Stígamót* is about supporting people to realize their own strength and see the violence in a social context as opposed to being a product of their own individual failings ("Hugmyndafræði" n.d.). *Stígamót* led the lobbying efforts in Iceland for the implementation of the Swedish legal approach to prostitution.

Between 2001 and 2018, 173 people sought the services of *Stígamót* because of their experiences with prostitution, or between 4–17 per year. This group, constituting overwhelmingly of women, has made up 0.7 to 3.9% of people seeking assistance from *Stígamót* each year. These numbers, however, do not reflect the total number of people coming to *Stígamót* who have experienced prostitution. People rarely talk about their experiences of prostitution in the first session, when the registration sheet is filled out. If people have experienced prostitution, they usually bring that up later or after a few sessions (Stígamót's Annual Reports, 2001–2018).

An interview was conducted with Anna Þóra Kristinsdóttir, a psychologist and one of the group leaders of the Swan group (Kristinsdóttir 2019). According to Kristinsdóttir, those who have sought assistance due to prostitution are mostly women of all ages or from 18 to 40 or 50 years of age. Usually they have been subjected to sexual or other forms of violence as children and young people, and suffer from low self-esteem. The Swan group consists mostly of women who have stopped engaging in prostitution but also women who want to exit prostitution. Most of the women have an Icelandic background. Very few men have sought assistance from *Stígamót* because they have sold sex. According to information gathered by Kristinsdóttir, of the 41 individuals who sought *Stígamót*'s services between 2013 and 2016 as a result of their experiences of prostitution, 44% had been subjected to incest and 68% to rape.

According to Kristinsdóttir's observations in the Swan group, the reasons why women begin to engage in prostitution are varied. Some are pressured or forced into it by their boyfriends or someone close to them. Some have engaged in prostitution to finance their drug use. According to Kristinsdóttir, when people have previously been subjected to sexual violence, it can negatively impact their self-image and can result in low self-esteem in relation to their capacities. Against this background, prostitution can at first seem like an easy way to make quick money and sometimes women can feel like it is the only thing they know how to do to earn money. In this sense, prostitution becomes a consequence of the sexual violence they have previously been subjected to. Some say that they have previously been subjected to sexual violence and so why not at least get paid for it. Some also talk about having experienced some form of empowerment in prostitution to begin with. According to Kristinsdóttir, these experiences of empowerment can also be a form of consequence of sexual violence. Being subjected to sexual violence is experienced as loss of control and therefore

obtaining control becomes of great importance. With time, however, engaging in prostitution increasingly starts to affect their well-being in a negative way.

According to Kristinsdóttir's observations, when women engage in prostitution, they mostly do so on their own, while sometimes they might be in touch with one or two friends in a similar situation. They mostly seem to get in touch with buyers online, through social media or dating websites, or through someone they know. *einkamál.is* has been the main dating website referred to in this regard but that might be changing with the increased use of social media. They often try to cultivate steady buyers instead of continuously finding new ones. Some have had special facilities where they meet the men while others do so in their home. The buyers of sex are men, young and old, and single and family men (Kristinsdóttir 2019).

According to Kristinsdóttir, discussions in the Swan group centre around women's experiences of the consequences of prostitution and other forms of sexual violence which can include sadness/depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, social isolation, shame, physical pain, difficulties in relationships and emotional numbness. According to Kristinsdóttir, people engaging in prostitution often live a double life due to the shame and do not want friends or family members to know about it. This can lead to isolation and their social network becoming very small. In the Swan group, the emphasis is on increasing self-esteem and well-being and decreasing the social isolation. According to Kristinsdóttir, it can be a great relief for women to meet each other. One woman reportedly said: "Finally, I get to meet other women like me – I thought I was alone". They often feel that they can't talk to anyone about their experiences and that they are alone in the world. For different reasons, it can be difficult to exit prostitution. In some cases, women suffer from low self-esteem and believe that this is the only thing they know how to do. Some might be struggling with financial debt. In other cases, women have become socially isolated over time, and the buyers have become their main social contacts (Kristinsdóttir 2019).

One of the main challenges in this area, according to Kristinsdóttir, is the lack of emergency funding for people trying to exit prostitution. *Stígamót* has a fund called *Kristínarsjóður* which is used to support women in emergencies, but those funds are limited and not always available. Another challenge is the lack of public awareness about the harmful consequences of prostitution. According to Kristinsdóttir, prostitution should be understood as a public health issue due to its mental, emotional and physical consequences. The most important thing is to reduce the shame and stigma associated with people in prostitution. Another challenge is that very few such cases are reported to the police and the police very seldom use proactive investigations in such cases. Also, court proceedings in these cases are closed and so the law does not function as a deterrent for buyers through public shaming. According to Kristinsdóttir, people's experiences or opinions about the law are seldom a topic of discussion in the Swan group, since the main focus is on dealing with the consequences. However, the legislation is generally viewed favourably by people seeking assistance at *Stígamót*, as it supports women to transfer the shame onto the buyers (Kristinsdóttir 2019).

For two years, between 2011 and 2013, Stígamót established and ran Kristin's House, a shelter for women who have been trafficked, been in prostitution, or sexually abused and want a way out. In total, 26 women stayed in Kristin's House during that period, as well as 12 children: 15 Icelandic women and 11 non-Icelandic women. According to Stígamót's annual report (2013), there are several reasons for why Kristin's House closed. Firstly, the House was largely staffed by trained volunteers with the staff at Stígamót on standby 24/7 and called out regularly. The women struggled with a complex set of problems where prostitution and trafficking became secondary problems. Many of the women were struggling with mental health issues, substance abuse and poverty. In cases where the women had children, the children had either been taken away from them or staff at Kristin's House had to make reports to the Child Protection Authorities. In three cases, children had to be removed from their mothers at least for a while. The non-Icelandic women were still being controlled by those who had sent them to Iceland and the Icelandic women were unable to sever their ties with well-known criminals and criminal gangs in Iceland (Stígamót's Annual Report 2013).

#### 4.5.2 *Bjarkarhlíð*

*Bjarkarhlíð*, a family justice centre for survivors of violence, offers counselling, support and information for people 18 years and older who have survived violence. *Bjarkarhlíð* offers coordinated free services under one roof, which includes individual counselling, legal advice, consultations with social workers and services for survivors of human trafficking. *Bjarkarhlíð* is based on a collaboration between Reykjavík City, Reykjavík Metropolitan Police, *Stígamót*, *Drekaflóð*, The Women's Shelter, Women's Counselling, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Justice and the Human Rights Centre of Iceland. *Bjarkarhlíð* is a relatively new centre and was formerly established on 1 February 2017 ("Bjarkarhlíð" n.d.). An interview was conducted with Ragna Björg Guðbrandsdóttir, a social worker and project manager at *Bjarkarhlíð* (Guðbrandsdóttir 2019). She has previously worked at the Children's House, *Stígamót* and *Redet* in Copenhagen. According to Guðbrandsdóttir, the ideology underpinning *Bjarkarhlíð's* approach to prostitution is to view it as a consequence and form of sexual violence. This approach is informed by both the legislation and its feminist grassroots.

According to Guðbrandsdóttir, around 20% of people who seek the services of *Bjarkarhlíð* do so because of having been subjected to sexual violence and then a small number of these people have experiences of prostitution. In some cases, people are referred to *Bjarkarhlíð* from psychiatric wards, health care centres, the police, and drug use treatment centres. *Bjarkarhlíð* does not register cases of prostitution, as it seldom comes up in the first counselling sessions. But according to Guðbrandsdóttir, there have been around 15 cases per year, or around 30 in total, since *Bjarkarhlíð* was established. These concern largely women and include older women and younger women, disabled women, women who have had serious substance use problems, and single mothers. A few men have talked about their experiences of prostitution in order to finance their drug use. According to Guðbrandsdóttir, prostitution seems mostly to take place via the internet and on social media: Tinder, Snapchat, einkamal.is, Facebook groups. Those who have sought the services of *Bjarkarhlíð* are either no longer engaging in prostitution or want to exit prostitution. Depending on a person's situation, they are

also introduced to *Stígamót* and/or the Women's Shelter, and are offered legal counselling and/or help to talk to the police.

People seek the services of *Bjarkarhlíð* because they have been subjected to violence in some form(s). According to Guðbrandsdóttir, people's experiences of prostitution come up in the counselling sessions as a consequence of having been subjected to sexual violence and because they need the money. In some cases, women are introduced to prostitution when the men they are interacting with on dating websites or on social media offer them money for sex. According to Guðbrandsdóttir, people's boundaries are weaker, and their threshold is lower, if people are in financial difficulties and have a history of violence and people try to convince themselves that they can handle it. In some cases, women have shown great loyalty towards their buyers. They regard themselves as active participants in the transactions, since they offer sexual services and receive money. They can have a complex psychological relationship with their buyers. It can take time for them to conclude that they have been subjected to violence. Based on accounts from people seeking services at *Bjarkarhlíð*, there is a great demand for prostitution in Iceland.

One of the main challenges, according to Guðbrandsdóttir, is a lack of emergency funds to support people who are trying to exit prostitution. Another challenge is the criminal justice system. The police are understaffed and underfunded and largely unable to conduct proactive investigations. In addition, court proceedings are closed; the names of those convicted for buying sex are not disclosed; and the penalty is usually an ISK 100,000 fine, which amounts to buying sex three times. Therefore, the deterrent effect is weak. According to Guðbrandsdóttir, more research is needed in this field to assess the impact of the legislation on people engaging in prostitution. There are no indications that the legislation prevents women from seeking assistance. Reluctance to seek assistance is instead related to feelings of shame.

#### 4.5.3 *The Red Cross*

The Red Cross in Iceland runs *Konukot* and *Frú Ragnheiður* in Reykjavík and *Ungfrú Ragnheiður* in Akureyri. These projects are based on the ideology of harm reduction when working with people who have a problem with drug use ("Skaðaminnkun" n.d.). The Red Cross refers to the definition used by Harm Reduction International in this context, which reads as follows:

"Harm reduction refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimise negative health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws. Harm reduction is grounded in justice and human rights – it focuses on positive change and on working with people without judgement, coercion, discrimination, or requiring that they stop using drugs as a precondition of support." ("What is harm reduction?" n.d.)

*Frú Ragnheiður* is a van that drives around the Reykjavík metropolitan area six nights a week and offers services to the most vulnerable social groups such as homeless people and people who use intravenous drugs. In the van there are nursing staff from whom individuals who inject intravenous drugs can receive medical care and general advice

regarding health care. *Frú Ragnheiður* also offers clean needles, disposal of needles, and other things necessary to reduce the likelihood of infections along with condoms and advice in relation to harm reduction (“*Frú Ragnheiður*” n.d.). *Konukot* is an emergency shelter for homeless women and is intended to support them with basic needs such as shelter, hygiene and food. *Konukot* is open from 5–10 PM, where up to 12 women can sleep. The staff assists visitors to contact doctors, treatment facilities, and psychiatric wards if needed. Social workers from the City of Reykjavík visit the shelter once a week to offer assistance to those who want to accept it. In collaboration with *Frú Ragnheiður*, *Konukot* also offers pre-packaged safer injection kits, condoms and harm reduction advice in relation to the use of needles, and blood-transmitted diseases like HIV and hepatitis C (“*Konukot*” n.d.).

An interview was conducted with Svala Jóhannesdóttir, a Project Manager of *Frú Ragnheiður* and former Managing Director of *Konukot* (Jóhannesdóttir 2019). According to Jóhannesdóttir, it is well known that people, especially women and young men, who use drugs intravenously, often sell sex to finance their drug use. In 2018, there were around 450 individuals who sought services from *Frú Ragnheiður* and total visits was around 3,600. Around 70–75% of these were men.<sup>27</sup> According to Jóhannesdóttir, the clientele of *Frú Ragnheiður* consists largely of people with an Icelandic background but their services are only offered to people 18 years and older. She says that service providers in this field repeatedly hear the same causal relationship when it comes to sex work: In a micro context, it is common that people have experienced some form of trauma as a children or young adults such as sexual violence, abuse or neglect; and in a macro context, people have often experienced poverty. The latest research in this field indicates that trauma is often an important contributing factor to why people develop an addiction to drugs. Due to the psychological pain, people can start to use substances to self-medicate in order to survive the consequences of the trauma (Jóhannesdóttir 2019).

Free condoms are available both in the *Frú Ragnheiður* van and at *Konukot*. However, according to Jóhannesdóttir, people can be reluctant to accept free condoms as condoms seem to immediately imply prostitution in this context and people can get very uncomfortable and defensive. The staff at *Frú Ragnheiður* are therefore very careful when offering condoms in the van and focus on harm reduction advice and respectful language. At *Konukot* there is a basket of condoms where it is possible to take some without anyone noticing and the basket is filled regularly. According to Jóhannesdóttir, it is important to establish trust with people before asking them about their experiences of selling sex. There is profound shame around selling sex and fear of judgement and the social stigma surrounding it. Jóhannesdóttir uses the tools of narrative therapy and motivational interviewing in her work with clients who seek out supportive conversations. If she gets a chance and once trust has been established, she asks people how they finance their drug use. Some then say that they engage in prostitution. Jóhannesdóttir often opens up the discussion about word use, saying that she notices their use of words like “whore”, “selling myself” or “prostitution” and explains that some

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<sup>27</sup> The annual report for 2018 has not been published as yet.

people like to use other words like “sex work” or “sex for compensation”. This can be a revelation for some people. For some people, selling sex is experienced as a lot of work and should be acknowledged as such. It is also important that people are enabled to choose the words they use in this context, words that are respectful and empowering for them. According to Jóhannesdóttir, people often use negative words about themselves, both when they refer to their drug use and when they refer to selling sex, but that staff providing harm reduction services have noticed that people who use their services start, after some time, to speak about themselves in a kinder way.

According to Jóhannesdóttir, people among their clientele who sell sex are women of all ages. The oldest woman she remembers was 51 years old, and men up to their 40s. These are first and foremost people with a pronounced trauma background. Sometimes they exchange sex for a place to stay although she knows of some examples of women and young men living with older men and receiving shelter, food and possibly money and substances. Usually, however, it is a straight up business transaction where clients buy their services and they get paid in cash or with substances. People usually find clients by placing advertisements on the internet or through Facebook. People have also talked about using the dating website einkamal.is but that seems to be used less now. Most people aim to have only a few clients whom they feel they can trust and therefore try to develop their own clientele. According to Jóhannesdóttir, the buyers seem to be all kinds of men who are not necessarily connected to the drug world: young men, old men, and men who have partners and children.

According to Jóhannesdóttir, people sometimes talk about being fearful when they are meeting clients for the first time. They usually do so on their own and do not talk about it to others due to fears of being judged. A few years ago, Jóhannesdóttir tried to facilitate group conversations about evidence-based harm reduction practice for sex workers at *Konukot* but these have discontinued due to the lack of trust between the women. Therefore, staff give individual harm reduction guidance in this context to those who want it. The aim is to give them tools to try to minimize the violence against them and to empower them in these often difficult situations. For example, women are encouraged to work in pairs when they meet customers and to set up a safety plan if something goes wrong. They are encouraged to see the situation as selling a service which costs a certain amount as opposed to selling themselves and to get the payment before performing the service. They are also encouraged to tell others about bad clients and inform the Red Cross about such clients. According to Jóhannesdóttir, harm reduction guidance in this context is one of the things that people appreciate the most about the Red Cross services. In cases where people stop using drugs, they tend to keep in touch after they finish treatment, and based on Jóhannesdóttir’s experience, they then also stop selling sex.

In Jóhannesdóttir’s experience, the legislation criminalizing buyers of sexual services has no bearing on the daily lives of people who use these harm reduction services offered by the Red Cross. The main legal challenges people face are, however, the way in which the police implement the Narcotics Act. People with serious drug use problems need substances daily for physical and psychological reasons. When the police confiscate their personal dose, they become desperate to finance another dose,

which often results in theft and sex work, which can create harmful situations for themselves and for society. Also, people using drugs are less likely to call the police for assistance as they are afraid that the police will also confiscate their drugs. Many have also had a bad experience seeking assistance at the emergency ward in hospitals, because they have sometimes experienced stigma and judgement. In cases of rape, people will often not want to go the rape crisis centre because it is located next to the emergency ward and they are also afraid of not being believed. Jóhannesdóttir emphasises that if the aim is to assist people to stop using drugs, then it is important to offer them professional treatment facilities (detoxification, treatment, rehabilitation) where they work with their life story, the trauma, their social network and their family. Also, according to Jóhannesdóttir, if we were to decriminalise personal drug use and increase access to substitute treatments with a harm reduction focus, sex work among this group of people would decrease considerably (Jóhannesdóttir 2019).

#### 4.5.4 *Other service providers*

There are apparently no other institutions or organizations that work specifically with (young) people in prostitution. However, interviews were also conducted with other service providers who might come into contact with people selling sex.

According to representatives of the Ministry of Welfare, there are no policy documents or guidelines in relation to prostitution, although action plans on trafficking have included a focus on decreasing the demand for prostitution (Broddadóttir and Lilliendahl 2019). Similarly, while the Welfare Department of Reykjavík City has policies on how to respond to trafficking, no special policies exist on prostitution and the issue seldom comes up. Standard service provision then applies which includes financial support, counselling and support in relation to children, strengthening the client's social network, housing, and rehabilitation in order to help people to get back into the formal job market. In some cases, people are offered disability benefits. However, immigrants who do not have permanent residency often do not want to accept financial support from the municipalities because that can impact their applications for citizenship and permanent residency (Kemp and Ólafsdóttir 2019).

According to the Director of the Icelandic Human Rights Centre, around 20 women have sought assistance through the legal counselling services due to prostitution and or sex trafficking since 2004, but the line between the two is often unclear. These have largely been women between the ages of 25 and 40 who do not have an Icelandic background. The reason why they come is usually not because of prostitution/trafficking but rather because they are being threatened in some way by their Icelandic male partners who have abused and/or sold them into prostitution. The men have then threatened to have them deported, threatened to take away their children, or threatened to make their story public. Their stated reason for seeking legal counselling has not been prostitution/trafficking unless it is connected with something else; something that they are in great fear of losing such as their right to stay in Iceland or their children (Steinarsdóttir 2019).

Based on an interview with the Director of the Women's Shelter, there have been women who have talked about having engaged in prostitution but that is usually the last thing they talk about with the Shelter staff and this information is not registered (Guðmundsdóttir 2019). In some cases, there is also a strong suspicion that the women have been under immense pressure from their partners to do certain things related to sex, such as having other men participate in the sex or have sex with other men while their partners watch, but there is no mention of money exchanging hands. There have also been examples of men selling access to them or selling photos of them and thus there is financial gain. And then there are examples of women who have been homeless and get to live with a friend who then expects to be compensated with sex. The women, however, do not refer to this as prostitution. Based on a contract with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Women's Shelter acts as an emergency shelter for women where there is a suspicion of trafficking. Last year, there were 4 women who stayed in the shelter based on the contract, but ultimately none of them were defined as a victim of trafficking, although there was a strong suspicion that one of them was possibly entering such a situation. In all cases, their country of origin was outside the EU (Guðmundsdóttir 2019).

According to the Director of Education at the National Queer Association of Iceland (NQA), the NQA does not have a policy on people engaging in sex work, or having sex for compensation, although it is known that there are LGBTQ+ people in Iceland who sell sex (Másdóttir 2019). Másdóttir emphasised the importance of service providers being aware that people who are selling sex are a diverse group and those who do so out of necessity are often particularly vulnerable for various reasons which can be related to their identification as LGBTQ+ people. The NQA provides free counselling services to LGBTQ+ people. According to the counsellors, the topic of selling sex seemingly only rarely comes up during such counselling sessions (Másdóttir 2019). According to an interview with Todd Kulczyk, an English-speaking counsellor who offers psychosocial services, he has had a couple of clients who have identified as sex workers (Kulczyk 2019). He also works with LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, some of whom have mentioned selling sex in Iceland, but it is a very different situation for them, as they are only given very limited benefits from the authorities on which it is hard to survive. There have also been situations where their asylum applications have been denied and where they have had to find a way to make quick money to travel to another country before being deported back to their home country. According to Kulczyk (2019), there is the feeling that there is no space for people to talk about their experiences of selling sex. They do not know if they can trust the people in their community and do not know if it is safe to tell their story and to whom (Kulczyk 2019). According to another counsellor who works with young trans people, the topic has rarely come up.

The National Centre of Addiction Medicine (SÁÁ) is an NGO that operates a detoxification clinic and four inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation centres as well as a centre for family services and a social centre in Iceland. According to the Chief Medical Director of SÁÁ, the issue of prostitution sometimes comes up in both private counselling sessions and group sessions but usually only after trust has been

established and people feel secure enough (Rúnarsdóttir 2019). An interview was also conducted with a counsellor and a psychologist who work with young people in the SÁÁ outpatient rehabilitation centre (Jónsdóttir and Magnúsdóttir 2019). They said that young women between the ages of 17–19 do not use the term prostitution (*vændi*) in this context but rather talk about favours: He does me favours and I do him favours. Then they are often talking about “boyfriends” or dealers who are often older men who provide them with drugs, and they have sex with them in return. They often portray these relationships as equal ones and as them being in control of the situation. According to Jónsdóttir and Magnúsdóttir (2019), this can also be understood as a survival technique and their views on these relationships often change when they get older. Although there are indications that young men also sell sex, or have sex for favours, they rarely talk about it. According to Jónsdóttir and Magnúsdóttir (2019), there are indications that this could be because the buyers are men while the young men usually have a heterosexual identity. This can add an extra layer of complexity and shame for these young men. When these cases come up, counsellors often encourage people to seek specialised services such as with social workers, psychologists or *Bjarkarhlíð* (Rúnarsdóttir 2019; Jónsdóttir and Magnúsdóttir 2019).

Based on interviews with two nurses at the department of Dermatology and Sexually Transmitted Diseases at the National University Hospital of Iceland, there have been a few people over the years who have mentioned being in prostitution, mostly women (Guðmundsdóttir and Mogensen 2019). Their main concern is when they get the feeling that people talk about engaging in prostitution but do not wish to do so. There have been a couple of cases where they have gotten the impression that individuals have mental disabilities and seem to be unable to control demanding buyers who call them repeatedly, or when there is a suspicion of forced prostitution or trafficking. This has led to ethical dilemmas as health care staff are bound by confidentiality. Procedures for health care staff are currently lacking in these situations (Guðmundsdóttir and Mogensen 2019).

#### 4.5.5 *Summary – Social Initiatives*

As already noted, there are no specialised services for young people who have experienced selling sex in Iceland. The services available to young people are services which are generally available to people who are 18 years or older. Prostitution has been a focal point of *Stígamót*'s work since 2001 and they are the only service provider that registers and publishes in-house statistics on their clients' experiences of prostitution. For a long time, *Stígamót* has offered counselling services to people who have engaged in prostitution but since 2011 they have also established the Swan group, a self-help group for women who have experienced prostitution. *Bjarkarhlíð* has only been running for two years but they offer coordinated services for people who have been subjected to violence, including prostitution. These service providers view prostitution as a form and consequence of sexual violence. However, the programmes run by the Red Cross, which provide services for people who use drugs intravenously, use a harm reduction approach. Their predominant concern is people's survival and safety in their ceaseless effort to obtain drugs without requiring that they

stop using. Here, the discourse of sex work is used in their efforts to enable people to separate themselves from what they do and to foster self-care and self-respect. Service providers at the National Centre of Addiction Medicine are also familiar with the issue of prostitution or exchanging sex for favours, as it comes up in the work with their clients. Then people are sometimes referred to specialised counselling such as social workers, psychologists or to *Bjarkarhlíð*. According to other service providers, prostitution seldom comes up in their work and there are no particular response strategies for such cases other than referrals to counselling and/or general welfare services. The knowledge base used by these service providers is primarily informed by their field of education, their work-based experience and their ideological outlook while some also referred to domestic and international research.

#### 4.6 Legal Measures

In 2009, Iceland enacted the “Swedish” legislation on prostitution. Article 206 of the Sexual Offences chapter of the Penal Code no. 19/1940 on prostitution is now as follows:

“Any person who pays, or promises payment or any other type of consideration, for prostitution shall be fined or imprisoned for up to 1 year.

Any person who pays, or promises payment or any other type of consideration, for prostitution on the part of a child under the age of 18 shall be fined or imprisoned for up to 2 years.

Any person who bases his or her employment or livelihood on prostitution on the part of others shall be imprisoned for up to 4 years.

The same punishment shall apply to deceiving, encouraging or assisting a child under the age of 18 to engage in prostitution. The same punishment shall also apply to taking steps to have any person move from or to Iceland in order to derive his or her support from prostitution.

Any person who employs deception, encouragement or mediation in order to encourage other persons to have sexual intercourse or other sexual relations in return for payment or to derive income from prostitution practised by others, e.g. by renting out premises or by other means shall be imprisoned for up to 4 years, or fined or imprisoned for up to 1 year if there are extenuating circumstances.

Any person who, in a public advertisement, offers, arranges or seeks sexual intercourse with another person in return for payment shall be fined or imprisoned for up to 6 months.”

According to crime statistics collected annually by the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, the following number of cases were registered under Article 206:

**Table 4: Number of cases per year registered under Article 206 of the Penal Code**

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
37	13	24	175	13	7	5	9

Source: National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, 2010–2018.

According to the annual crime statistics published by the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police (2012–2017), the number of registered cases varies considerably between years as such investigations are largely based on proactive measures on behalf of the police and, therefore, how much time the police allocate, or are able to allocate, to these cases. In addition, according to the Chief superintendent of the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police Central Investigative Unit, the penalties for the crime of buying sex are relatively low which affects how the police prioritise these cases. Furthermore, people who sell sex usually do not report buyers to the police (Valsson 2019). Spikes in registered cases are largely related to bigger cases where the police have proactively intercepted communications which subsequently led to convictions of several prostitution buyers (Reykjavík Metropolitan Police 2010; Þorsteinsdóttir 2018; Valsson 2019). In such cases, the police often receive tipoffs from hotel staff or, in the case of Airbnb apartments, neighbours who report men’s frequent comings and goings (Valsson 2019).

According to statistics compiled by the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police for this research, 171 cases were registered under Article 206, paragraph 1, between 2010 and 2018. In 165 of these cases, information about the gender, age and citizenship of victims and suspects was registered as follows:

**Table 5: Citizenship and gender of victims and suspects**

Citizenship/Gender	Victims		Suspects
	Men	Women	Men
Latvian	--	27	--
Icelandic	7	11	159
Other	1	3	6
Total	8	41	165

Source: National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, 2010–2018.

**Table 6: Average age of victims and suspects**

	Victims	Suspects
Average age	29 years	43 years
Men’s average age	19 years	43 years
Women’s average age	31 years	--

Source: National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, 2010–2018.

These numbers show that the majority of victims in these cases are Latvian women or 66% and the majority of suspects are Icelandic men or 96%. The average age of female victims is 31 years but the average age of male victims is much lower or 19 years. The average age of suspects is, however, considerably higher or 43 years.

According to the police, those selling sex are treated as witnesses in the case and the police approach them together with a social worker. Before *Bjarkarhlíð* was established, the police would advise victims to contact the Women’s Shelter or drive them to the Shelter. Today, the police take victims’ testimonies at *Bjarkarhlíð* where victims are also offered psychosocial counselling services and therefore never have to

enter a police station. Generally, victims do not seek further support at this stage as they primarily see prostitution as a way to earn money. This applies to both Icelandic and non-Icelandic victims (Valsson 2019).

According to annual statistics from the Director of Public Prosecutions (2011, 2012, 2017), the cases proceeded as follows:

**Table 7: Final decisions in cases registered under Article 206 of the Penal Code**

Year	Total	Charges filed	Convictions
2010	20	14	12
2011	5	4	3
2012	68	33	33
2013	74	45	45
2014	4	2	2
2015	1	0	0
2016	0	0	0

It is important to note that annual statistics from the criminal justice system are reported separately by the police on the one hand and by the State Prosecutor's Office on the other. It is therefore not possible to follow the processing of the cases from the investigative stage to the prosecution stage.

Of the 172 cases registered by the State Prosecution Office between 2010 and 2016, charges were filed in 98 cases, or in 57% of the cases. Of those 98 cases, 93 ended with a conviction, or 95%. Information about which paragraphs cases were registered under is only available for 2012–2014. For those years, most cases were registered under paragraph 1 of Article 206, which pertains to the buying of sexual services from a person who is 18 years or older. One case was registered under paragraph 2, which pertains to buying sex from a child under the age of 18, where charges were filed. Four cases were registered under paragraph 3, which pertains to a third party who bases his or her employment on the prostitution of others. However, no charges were filed. No cases were registered under the other paragraphs of Article 206 (Director of Public Prosecutions 2017).<sup>28</sup>

As will be discussed in more detail below, information about cases of prostitution is not readily available. In her Master's thesis in law, Þorsteinsdóttir (2018) reviewed all published verdicts in cases pertaining to Article 206, paragraph 1, of the Penal Code. Published district court verdicts were 12 in total but only 5 pertained exclusively to Article 206 and none of the Supreme Court verdicts. Þorsteinsdóttir (2018), however, also obtained access to 40 district court verdicts from 2013 and 2014 which have not been published. These verdicts are short and standardised and only contain a minimalistic description of the facts of the case. The majority of these transactions took

<sup>28</sup> In 2012, all cases were registered under paragraph 1 (charges filed in 33 cases); in 2013, 72 cases were registered under paragraph 1 (charges filed in 45 cases) and two cases under paragraph 3 (no charges filed); in 2014, one case was registered under paragraph 1 (charges were filed), one under paragraph 2 (charges were filed) and two under paragraph 3 (no charges filed) (Director of Public Prosecutions, 2017).

place in apartments in down-town Reykjavík. In the majority of cases, the accused were tried in absentia and the penalty was on average ISK 90,000. The buyers were between the ages of 18 and 67 but the average age is around 40 years and they generally have Icelandic names, apart from a few, but they had residency in Iceland.

#### 4.6.1 *Judicial practice*

Information about cases of prostitution is not readily available as verdicts are usually not published and court proceedings in such cases are usually closed. According to the Rules of the Judicial Administration no. 3/2018, district court verdicts are to be published on the website of the District Courts of Iceland unless they fall under one of a number of criteria for verdicts that should not be published. One of the exemption criteria applies to criminal cases where the penalty is a fine which is less than the cost to appeal. As of 1 January 2019, the cost to appeal is ISK 1,038,272 (“Auglýsing um breytingu á áfrýjunarfjárhæð” 2018). Based on a review of verdicts from 2015, fines for buying sex are usually around ISK 100,000 (Þorsteinsdóttir 2018), and are, therefore, significantly lower than the cost to appeal and therefore verdicts are not published.

While according to Article 79 of the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, the main rule in Icelandic law is that court hearings are to be conducted in public, judges have largely decided to conduct closed court hearings in cases of prostitution based on exemptions under Article 10 of the Law on Criminal Procedure, no. 88/2008. According to Article 10, a judge can decide, if necessary, to close the court hearings based on one or more of a set of criteria; either of his or her own volition or upon request from the prosecution, the accused or the victim/complainant. In the explanatory notes accompanying the Bill, it was emphasised that since this is an exemption to the main rule of open court hearings, a judge must make an assessment in each case and be prepared to specifically argue for why she or he thinks there is reason to conduct the court hearings behind closed doors. The example used in the explanatory notes is sexual offence cases where the victim is a child and conducting the proceedings behind closed doors is therefore considered to be in the best interests of the child (Parliamentary document 252, 2007–2008).

Court decisions to conduct closed hearings in cases of prostitution have been challenged twice. In the first case, Halla Gunnarsdóttir, who titled herself a citizen, journalist and the spokeswoman for the Feminist Association of Iceland, challenged the Reykjavík District Court decision to hold closed hearings in a case where several men were accused of buying sex under paragraph 1 of Article 206. The judge’s decision was made on the basis of the following sections in paragraph 1, Article 10 of the Law on Criminal Procedure 88/2008: a) to protect the accused, the complainant, their family, witnesses or others whom the case concerns; and d) in the interests of morals. The Reykjavík District Court, however, ruled in its own favour with the brief argument that these exemptions do apply since the case is about “sensitive issues concerning the accused and the girl he is accused of having bought sexual services from”. Gunnarsdóttir appealed the decision to the Supreme Court (which also served as an appeals court at the time). The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal and found that a

person challenging a judge's decision must have a legal interest in the case; and that Gunnarsdóttir was apparently only interested in the case as a regular citizen. In a dissenting vote, one Supreme Court judge, however, found that although a regular citizen does not have a legal interest in the case, Gunnarsdóttir could have such interest. Firstly, Gunnarsdóttir could have a legal interest in the case as a journalist, as they have a duty to inform the public about the processing of court cases, and as a spokeswoman for the Feminist Association, as the case pertains to social interests in which the Feminist Association has been actively involved (Supreme Court Case no. 355/2010).

Again, in 2014, a decision to conduct closed court hearings in a case of prostitution was challenged. Ingimar Karl Helgason, a journalist, challenged a court decision but the Reykjavík District Court dismissed the case, referring to the previous Supreme Court verdict in case no. 355/2010, stating that journalists are not considered to have a legal interest in criminal cases. Helgason appealed the court's decision to the Supreme Court (which then also functioned as an appeals court). This time, however, the Supreme Court ruled that the Reykjavík District Court should hear the case on its merits (Supreme Court verdict no. 777/2014). On 18 November 2014, the Reykjavík District Court ruled in the case and found that the court hearings should be closed. The court argued that the buying of sexual services falls under the Sexual Offences chapter of the Penal Code and that court hearings in sexual offences cases are usually closed, in particular to protect the victim from the public debate that such cases can trigger (Þorsteinsdóttir 2018). The decision was not appealed.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Courts are sending a contradictory message. On the one hand, the buying of sexual services is considered a minor offence where the penalty is usually around ISK 100,000. The fine for buying sex is similar to that of driving over 101 km per hour where the speed limit is 60 km per hour ("Sektarreiknir", n.d.). Verdicts in these cases are not published online therefore. On the other hand, the courts seem to view the buying of sexual services as a serious offence and sees no reason to treat it differently from other sexual offences such as rape and child sexual abuse and have decided that these court hearings are to be closed. Arguably, the outcome of these different decisions both serve to protect the anonymity of those who buy sex. As already noted, many of the service providers interviewed for this study find that judicial practice in these cases undermines the aim of the law to deter people to buy sex. Or as Chief Superintendent Valsson (2019) said, as result of this judicial practice, Iceland has in fact not fully implemented the Swedish legal approach.

#### 4.6.2 *Impact on (young) people in prostitution*

There is no research on how the legal environment impacts (young) people in prostitution in Iceland. However, in the interviews conducted, service providers gave some examples of how the legislative environment might be impacting (young) people selling sex.

According to *Stígamót*, the legal environment does not feature prominently as a point of discussion in the Swan group. In the Swan group, the main focus is on working through the consequences of having been involved in prostitution. However, the

legislation criminalising the buying of sex has helped women to feel that they matter, that they are listened to and are being supported. This has also assisted them to work through the shame, which is one of the main consequences of prostitution (Kristinsdóttir 2019). Similarly, the Project Manager of *Bjarkarhlíð* said that there was no evidence that the legislation on prostitution was an obstacle to women in seeking assistance; their reluctance to seek assistance is apparently more about shame (Guðbrandsdóttir 2019).

The penalty for buying sex is a maximum of one year in prison which means that the statute of limitations in such cases is two years (Article 81 of the Penal Code, no. 19/1940). In a recent TV interview with an anonymous woman who had been involved in prostitution for just over 5 years and had met dozens if not hundreds of buyers, she describes how the statute of limitations is too short in these cases. She had been subjected to sexual violence as a child and started engaging in prostitution later in life due to poverty – she has a disability and is a single mother. She sought assistance from *Stígamót* and *Bjarkarhlíð* in an effort to get out of prostitution, but it took her a long time to realise the consequences. She talks about how she is now ready to report the men, some of whom are well known and appear regularly on TV, but the statute of limitations has run out. She says that: “It can take more than two years to get over serious and repeated violence. People need more time to realise.” She also says: “It’s really disappointing not being able to transfer the shame, and just let them know, them and others, that this is not okay.” (Yaghi 2019).

There are indications that some women who have been involved in prostitution fear that this might work against them in relation to immigration and custody law. According to the Director of the Icelandic Human Rights Centre, women with a foreign background and Icelandic partners have sought legal assistance at the Centre due to fears of being deported or losing custody of their children due to them having sold sex (Steinarsdóttir 2019). In such cases, these fears have stemmed from threats made by their partners or husbands, who have told them that this might happen if they try to leave them. In such cases, Steinarsdóttir (2019) explained that being involved in prostitution is not grounds for deportation under the Foreign Nationals Act, no. 80/2016; and according to the Children Act, no. 76/2003, the way in which a parent earns a living is not a concern for the courts, since the issue of custody is evaluated on the basis of the child’s best interests. However, Steinarsdóttir (2019) expressed concern about how this might actually work in practice – if the fact that the mother had been involved in prostitution might be interpreted in a way which would work against her in the courts.

According to the Project Manager of *Frú Ragnheiður*, the law making it illegal to buy sex have no impact on people who finance their drug use by selling sex. The Narcotics Act, no 65/1974 is, however, more relevant in this context. According to the Narcotics Act, the possession of narcotics is illegal and narcotics are to be confiscated by the police. This means that people who finance their drug use by selling sex generally do not turn to the police for assistance, even if they are subjected to serious violence, since they risk having the police confiscate their drugs. If people with serious drug problems were able to get drugs from the health authorities to a greater extent, then the financial motivation for selling sex would diminish considerably (Jóhannesdóttir 2019). In

addition to its detoxification and rehabilitation centres, the National Centre of Addiction Medicine also runs a harm reduction programme where people with a long-term, serious opioid addiction receive a mixture of methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone for medical and treatment purposes on an on-going basis along with psychosocial rehabilitation (“Viðhaldsmeðferð”, n.d.). However, the majority of people with serious drug problems in Iceland are addicted to amphetamines for which there is no comparable medical treatment option (Rúnarsdóttir 2019).

According to the police, Airbnb apartments and hotels are being used for prostitution, largely by women from abroad, and they have reason to believe that at least in some cases it is organized prostitution and/or trafficking (National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police 2015, 2017, 2019). The police have been working together with the Violence Prevention Council of the City of Reykjavík to raise awareness among the citizens of Reykjavík about prostitution and trafficking (Sæmundsdóttir 2018b; Hauksson 2019). One part of this project has been the introduction of the Swedish project RealStars (“Fundur nr. 16” 2018), which is an independent non-profit organisation which “strives to achieve a better world free from sex trafficking” (“About Realstars”, n.d.). In relation to the RealStars project, hotels have been encouraged to put up stickers with the message that prostitution is not tolerated (Guðbrandsdóttir 2017; Valsson 2019). Along the lines of the RealStars project, an action plan is currently under development between the police and the hotels on how hotel staff can make reports to the police if there is a suspicion of prostitution. However, prostitution is more frequently found in Airbnb apartments and smaller guest houses than in hotels, especially the big hotels, since the staff are quick to spot that there is “something going on” (Valsson 2019). Through the media, the police and representatives of the Violence Prevention Council have also encouraged those who rent out Airbnb apartments to pay attention to who they are renting their apartments to, keeping in mind the possibility that their apartment might be used for prostitution (Arnardóttir 2018; Pálsdóttir 2018). The police have also been deliberating on whether they should contact all owners of Airbnb apartments and point out their responsibilities to them under the law, as it is illegal to derive income from prostitution practised by others, e.g. by renting out premises (Valsson 2019). An approach that is geared towards preventing prostitution and trafficking by targeting those who own housing used for prostitution foreseeably impacts (young) people in prostitution who wish to rent out such apartments.

Under Article 4 of the Law on Restaurants, Accommodations and Entertainment Staging no. 85/2007, it is not permitted to offer any kind of nude show or in other ways profit from the nudity of employees or others in commercial places. This legislation, enacted in 2010, made it impossible for strip clubs to operate overtly in Iceland, but a few “champagne clubs” have remained. Stories about private nude dancing and prostitution in connection with these clubs have surfaced regularly and journalists have uncovered such instances (e.g. Valgeirsson and Alexandersson 2018; Ómarsdóttir and Drengsson 2019). Between 2011 and 2015, the police investigated the following cases in relation to the champagne clubs: 33 cases were investigated under the Penal Code, and 28 cases under other special laws for minor offences. Twelve of these cases

concerned Article 204 of the Penal Code, eleven of which pertained to the buying of sexual services and one pertaining to the encouragement of others to have sexual relations in return for payment or deriving income from the prostitution of others (Parliamentary document 736, 2015–2016). It is the District Magistrate's Office which issues licences to restaurants and clubs and has the power to revoke licences if laws are broken. According to the police, however, the process of revoking a licence is cumbersome and requires that the police show that there is reasonable suspicion that the owner is responsible for conducting illegal activities. In a recent case, the owner responded by sacking several employees, claiming that they had broken the rules (Valsson 2019). On the face of it, the way in which this legal environment gets played out can have detrimental impact on the employment and livelihood of (young) women selling sex in this context. However, in cases where police suspicions are correct – where there is exploitative, organized prostitution and/or trafficking – these (young) women are also being impacted by other factors.

According to Article 58 of the Foreign Nationals Act, no. 80/2016, a foreign national may be granted a permanent residence permit if he/she has resided in Iceland continuously for the previous four years on the basis of a residence permit that may be grounds for a permanent residence permit. Part b of the conditions for granting a permanent residence permit requires that:

“the foreign national demonstrates that his/her means of support have been secure during his/her stay, and that he/she has been and will be able to support him/herself in Iceland in a lawful manner [...]; payments in the form of social assistance from the State or local authority are not deemed to be secure means of support under this provision.”

According to representatives of the Welfare Department of Reykjavík City, this means that foreign nationals often do not want to receive financial assistance as this can impact their applications for residence permits and citizenship. In this context, they mentioned an example case where children had been left alone at home for weeks at a time. With police assistance, they looked into the travels of the custodial mother and saw that she was three weeks in Norway, three weeks in Stockholm, then Amsterdam and Copenhagen. The mother's explanation was simply that she was travelling while the Welfare Department suspected prostitution. They had come across a few such examples involving women of foreign nationality (Kemp and Ólafsdóttir 2019).

According to the Foreign Nationals Act, no. 80/2016, asylum seekers are only allowed to work if they fulfil certain criteria. According to the Directorate of Immigration, “[t]he conditions that mainly prevent the permit being issued are if an applicant has not provably stated his identity (has not submitted a valid passport or another acknowledged (accepted) identification), or he/she has a case in procedure under the Dublin Regulation.” (“Rights and services for asylum seekers” n.d.). Based on an interview with one of the counsellors working for the National Queer Association, there are examples of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers who have engaged in sex work in Iceland as they were unable to live from the small amount of funds provided to them by the authorities. There are also examples of asylum seekers whose applications have been

denied and they sell sex in order to afford to leave the country to avoid deportation (Kulczyk 2019).

To summarise: These anecdotal examples indicate how the legal environment can impact (young) people in prostitution. For some, the Foreign Nationals Act no. 80/2016 might be functioning as a push factor into prostitution, given that receiving social assistance is detrimental to their residence permit applications. Similarly, for asylum seekers, prostitution might be the only option to obtain cash, whether it is to provide for themselves or to leave the country in order to avoid deportation. The Narcotics Act no. 65/1974, along with the lack of a medical treatment option for those with a serious addiction to amphetamines, can function as a push factor when it comes to people engaging in prostitution. Prostitution functions as one of few ways to earn quick money to buy drugs which are otherwise unavailable. The preventative approach currently being taken by the Violence Prevention Council of the City of Reykjavík and the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police centres on raising awareness among those who might be providing housing for people engaging in prostitution since, under the Penal Code, it is illegal to derive income from prostitution practised by others, e.g. by renting out premises. From the perspective of those selling prostitution, this can negatively impact their possibilities to earn an income, which might lead to more risk-taking and less security. However, it can also make Iceland an undesirable destination for organized sexual exploitation and trafficking. Similarly, if the police try to get the operating licences of “champagne clubs” revoked due to a suspicion of organised prostitution based on the Restaurants, Accommodations and Entertainment Staging Act, no. 85/2007, it can lead to decreased job and income security for those who work there. Again, however, this can also make Iceland an undesirable destination for organized sexual exploitation and trafficking. There are indications that the legislation banning the buying of sexual services in the Penal Code has had a positive effect on women with previous experiences of prostitution as they feel supported and recognised by the legislation. Since it can take time for people to work through their experiences of prostitution, the statute of limitations can, however, be an obstacle to those who want to seek justice. In the context of custody cases, under the Children Act no. 76/2003, the question was raised whether having been, or being, in prostitution might impact a parent’s de facto possibilities to retain custody of children and whether that could be held as a threat over a woman in an abusive relationship.

#### 4.7 Conclusion – Iceland

The state of knowledge on the experiences of (young) women and men of prostitution in Iceland is characterised by a lack of research. The one and only research study on young people and prostitution is almost twenty years old, but since then the legal and technological environment has changed considerably as along with services provided for people who sell or have sold sex. Based on a cursory review of news items on the topic over the past three years, it is possible to discern at least two different narratives or discourses. Firstly, there are news items reporting an increase in young foreign

women coming to Iceland to sell sex based on an increase in the number of advertisements on international escort service websites. These reports are often based on interviews with members of the police force who are concerned that, in at least some of these cases, there is reason to believe that organised prostitution is involved where a third party is profiting, or that some of these young women are being trafficked. The police apparently base this on the pattern of their travel and on individual police investigations. However, according to the police, the women claim to be independent sex workers and refuse police assistance. Secondly, news reporting on prostitution by people, or largely women, living in Iceland tend to be related to sexual violence, drugs, poverty and other vulnerabilities although there are a few exceptions. These reports are often based on interviews with service providers. What women who have experienced selling sex say in interviews tends to differ depending on whether they are currently selling sex or are women who no longer sell sex. Those who no longer sell sex tend to look at prostitution as a form of abuse while those who are currently selling sex regard it as a way to earn money. According to the news reports and interviews with service providers, young foreign women tend to use international escort websites to advertise their services while women living in Iceland tend to use Icelandic dating websites and social media. Prostitution among (young) men is rarely mentioned. According to news reports, service providers, and the police, there is considerable demand for prostitution in Iceland and the buyers are largely Icelandic men of all ages, socio-economic and marital statuses, although they tend to be older rather than younger. It is important to emphasise, however, that the news reports reviewed in this study are primarily presented through the lens of service providers and usually only include minimal journalistic analysis, although there are important exceptions such as the episode on prostitution by *Kveikur*, the investigative news programme.

While there are and have been policies and action plans in relation to sex trafficking, there are no such documents on prostitution. Available services targeting people with experiences of prostitution are for those 18 years and older and there are no special services for young people. At *Stígamót*, services include individual counselling and participation in self-help groups where the focus is on working through the consequences of prostitution and other forms of sexual violence. Similarly, at *Bjarkarhlíð*, the services include counselling to work through experiences of violence as well as coordinated referral services such as legal assistance and or contacts with welfare services or the police. The Red Cross offers services to people who use drugs intravenously based on a harm reduction approach. People who talk about their experiences selling sex receive harm reduction guidance and supportive counselling based on the guidelines of narrative therapy and motivational interviewing. The approach used by these service providers differs depending on to the primary target group of their services. Those who primarily target violence understand prostitution as a form of interpersonal and structural violence and as a consequence of sexual violence and abuse. People are empowered to reject their experiences of shame and the stigma and transfer them to those who buy sex. Those who work with people who finance their intravenous drug use by selling sex emphasise the work aspect in an effort to foster

people's agency, dignity and self-care in order to counteract multiple and complex layers of social stigma and marginalisation.

In 2007, the selling of sex was decriminalised and in 2009 the buying of sex was criminalised. According to the police, the number of police investigations registered under Article 206 of the Penal Code vary considerably between years as they are largely based on proactive investigative actions. Therefore, the efforts put into such investigations are based on how much time the police allocate, or can allocate, to these cases. Given that the maximum penalty for buying sex is relatively low, or one year, the police currently does not prioritize these cases. However, the penalty for deriving income from the prostitution of others is higher or a maximum of four years. In recent years, very few such investigations have been conducted. In addition, there is considerable tension between the intention of the legislature and judicial practice. One of the main aims of the law is to decrease the demand for prostitution. However, with closed court proceedings, relatively low fines, and unpublished verdicts, there is reason to believe that the legislation has had only a limited deterrent effect. In a sense, current judicial practice can be said to undermine the will of the legislator. More research is needed to determine how the legal environment is impacting (young) people engaging in prostitution, but there are indications that several other laws can come into play, including laws on narcotics, immigration, entertainment, and children.

#### 4.8 References – Iceland

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- Constitution of the Republic of Iceland
- Foreign Nationals Act, no. 80/2016
- Law on Criminal Procedure, no. 88/2008
- Law on Restaurants, Accommodations and Entertainment Staging, no. 85/2007.
- Penal Code no. 19/1940

#### 4.8.2 *Supreme court cases*

- Supreme Court Case no. 224/2010
- Supreme Court Case no. 105/2010
- Supreme Court Case no. 355/2010
- Supreme Court Case no. 355/2010
- Supreme Court Case no. 777/2014



## 5. Norway: Young women and men: vulnerability and commercial sex

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### 5.1 Introduction – Norway

The aim of this country report from Norway is to map existing policies on prostitution, in the form of legislation and social welfare measures, and identify existing knowledge and understandings on commercial sex, particularly commercial sex taking place on digital arenas involving young people. Taken together, these factors present a picture of young adults' commercial sexual activities. With young people or young adults, we mean here people who are aged between 18 and 25, but we will include also some material on minors exploited in commercial sexual activities, and older adults engaged in prostitution.

This report is intended to update the descriptions of the state of knowledge, current legislation, and social welfare services provided in the report entitled "Prostitution in the Nordic countries" from 2008 (Holmström and Skilbrei 2008). The difference between these reports is that while the 2008 report dealt with prostitution generally, this report deals more specifically with the commercial sexual activities of young adults, in particular on digital platforms.

In the following, we describe the sources we refer to and how we have analysed their contribution to knowledge in this area, before describing our findings in terms of the state of knowledge, current legislation, and the existing targeted social welfare services. While our review is descriptive, the country report ends with a discussion of the overall picture that emerges from these findings and society's capacity to act with regard to the phenomenon and meet the needs of the people involved.

### 5.2 Methodology

As mentioned above, the aim of this project has been to get an overview of how society approaches the commercial sexual activities of young adults through legal and social welfare measures, and of the state of knowledge on the phenomenon of young adults' involvement in commercial sexual activities in Norway. The issue of terminology is a

tricky one within research on commercial sex. The legal term that applies for the kinds of situations we are interested in, in this study is “prostitution”. This is a term with a long history and it has in periods been used to designate acts and women as immoral and abnormal (Rydström 2018). Having one’s activity termed prostitution may be perceived as problematic and stigmatizing. According to several interview studies among young people (Hegna and Pedersen 2002; Smette 2004; Larsen and Pedersen 2005) affected youth and youth generally do not use the term “prostitution” or “selling sex”, and it is stated that terms such as “exchange” of sexual acts resonated better with young people’s understanding (Misje and Matre 2002).

Individuals who engage in commercial sexual activities apply different terms to what they do. There is therefore no easy answer to what term to apply. Commercial sexual activities that are manifest through physical contact with a buyer and the person or a third party is by law prostitution. We have therefore decided to retain this term. When speaking about commercial sexual activities in minors, we have chosen to apply the term “sexual exploitation”, which is the term applied for such activities by the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) for example. But when writing about adults who engage in prostitution, we have chosen to apply terms such as “sellers”, “people who sell sex” etc., thus avoiding the term “prostitute” as this is considered a derogatory term by many.

To achieve the aims of this study, we have referred to a number of sources. Since very little information exists, we have been pragmatic in our approach. This means that we have looked for all kinds of sources of information that could shed light on the phenomenon, legal strategies and social welfare services.

The sources of knowledge for this report are academic research and reports from civil society actors, academic research and media reporting, existing legislation and other official documents produced by Norwegian government agencies at the national and municipal levels. We have looked for sources that directly relate to the commercial sexual activities of young adults, but also for supplementary material about the sexual exploitation of minors and the sale of sex by other adults. In addition, we have undertaken empirical work to supplement current knowledge in the form of qualitative interviews with practitioners who, in various capacities, provide services to persons who are involved in commercial sex or participate in preventive measures, as well as our own observations.

Firstly, we mapped current knowledge on the phenomenon of prostitution generally, and the commercial sexual activities of young adults on digital platforms in particular. This included reports from public sector and civil society institutions as well as academic research. Our efforts to find literature specific to adolescents and young adults selling and/or exchanging sexual favors where the internet is involved have not yielded much information. We have therefore included reports that somehow inform the topic. Some are specific to the internet, some to children and adolescents, and some to men and transgender persons.

The various reports were found through searches in both Norwegian and English on search engines including Google, Google Scholar and Oria. Search words used

included “transactional”, “monetary”, “sex”, “prostitution”, “internet”, “online”, “youth”, and “commercial”, in both languages. We also identified publications from the lists of relevant literature that some organizations, both NGOs and GOs, have on their websites. Initially we included only literature up to ten years old, but we saw it as necessary to include some older reports as well.

Not much has been published in terms of academic research on the phenomenon of prostitution generally, nor on the specific group of young adults engaged in commercial sexual activities on digital platforms. We have therefore also mapped research about attitudes towards prostitution in the general population and the involvement of minors in prostitution.

A second source of knowledge for this report is how the issue of the commercial sexual activities of young adults and digital platforms are covered in the news media. We identified relevant news coverage by using the Norwegian media database Atekst/Retriever. Atekst is Scandinavia’s largest digital news archive, and includes Norwegian print and online news from local, regional, and national outlets. Our initial understanding of the media coverage of young people selling sex online was that rather limited focus is given to it. We therefore found it useful to use a broader approach. We did several searches, some broader, i.e. revolving around prostitution in general, and some targeting more specific topics, i.e. sugar dating. Our initial understanding of the amount of coverage was confirmed by the various searches.

The small pool of data also contributed to our choice of a long timeframe, so as to be able to include as many relevant articles as possible. The timeframe was set to ten years (2009–2019). This also means that the entire timeframe comes after the criminalization of buyers of sex in Norway, which in all likelihood will have factored into how the media reported on prostitution. The broader searches were e.g. “prostitusjon AND unge AND internett”, which yielded approximately 180 articles. The narrower searches included specific websites or terms like “sugar dating”, which yielded 204 articles. All of the searches included articles that had been circulated between different news outlets, therefore the number of unique articles is probably significantly smaller. Different styles and types of articles make up the data, including regular news stories, op-eds, feature stories and other forms of reporting you typically find in a newspaper.

The newspapers selected were primarily national Norwegian outlets, but some larger regional newspapers were also included. For online news, the database does not have any preexisting categories for national, regional, and local news. This means that the inclusion of online news also included some local news outlets. These online local news outlets were filtered out in the following step. Excluding local news narrows down the data pool, but it also has analytical implications, since national and local news can differ in their approaches to how they report, what they report, and their overall understandings of newsworthiness (Franklin 1998; Jewkes 2011).

Our third source of knowledge was empirical material gathered to supplement the other sources of information and to close some of the many knowledge gaps. We conducted five interviews with seven key individuals from different organizations, including non-government and government organizations (NGOs and GOs), and one private sector organization. The interviewees were chosen for their experience and

knowledge in the field, with some working with adult prostitution and others with children or adolescents. The aim of the interviews was both to map current services offered by key institutions and to learn from their experiences with outreach on online platforms and with young people who sell sex. The interviews were particularly valuable as a source of information about developments in the market as little recent research exists in Norway on the topic.

We also mapped existing policies. This included legislation and official documents that relate to prostitution in a broad sense. These have been identified from previous research (Skilbrei and Holmström 2013; Jahnsen and Skilbrei 2017a), internet searches and searches on the websites of government agencies such as the Government of Norway and the Norwegian Parliament. How health and welfare-oriented policies are practiced has been mapped by identifying targeted social welfare services that exist for people with experience of selling sex generally, and for young adults engaged in online trade in sexual services specifically. Most of these are the same as those described in the country report from Norway in the 2008 *Prostitution in the Nordic Countries* report, but by reading annual reports, action plans and websites, as well as through observations and interviews, we have explored whether these services have undergone important changes since 2008.

In addition, we observed one full-day educational seminar targeting the support system in Oslo. The seminar was a collaboration between Pro Sentret and RTVS Øst (Regional resource center for violence, traumatic stress, and suicide prevention, Eastern region).

At one of the institutions that offers targeted services for people who sell sex, we got a practical run-through of how they do their outreach work online. They collaborate with other social welfare service providers in order to prevent too much of an overlap in services and target populations. One example was that this particular organization did not do outreach work aimed at gay men, since another service provider had more specialized knowledge about that group. The outreach work that several of the service providers conducted consisted of contacting people advertising online. Some were contacted via a phone call, others by messages via for example the messaging app WhatsApp. This particular service provider divided the work internally by language, meaning for example that one employee contacted Spanish speaking people, and another contacted Russian speaking people. They adjusted how they framed their message when contacting different people. One example was the outreach work aimed at Norwegian women. The service provider said they had had some difficulties in reaching this group, as they often did not see themselves as being in need of the kind of services they provided.

They use this method in their outreach work to get in contact with people advertising online, to inform those contacted about what they offer and invite them to use their facilities. As part of a larger report, they collected data on advertisements on different platforms. We were given access to this data to get an overview of the different expressions used on different platforms.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> One example of different expressions is the user interfaces used. The main website used to advertise sexual services in Norway, Realescort.eu, has an open site, which does not require a profile. Another popular site, PlanetRomeo requires

## 5.3 Findings

### 5.3.1 *Current state of knowledge*

As mentioned above, there is not much current knowledge on prostitution generally, and even less on commercial sexual activities involving young adults on digital platforms. This is true for reports written by public and private service providers as well as research. The few contributions that exist have a very limited empirical basis, for example by first and foremost being based on second-hand information about the phenomenon or based on one or just a few individual narratives. As commercial sexual activities are being operated on digital platforms to a much greater extent than previously, the earliest contributions may have very limited applicability. This is particularly true when looking at the current research. There was more attention focused on the commercial sexual activities of minors and young people 15–20 years ago than now, but that research created knowledge about recruitment patterns and expressions of commercial sexual activities that were probably very different from those in operation today. We will return to service providers' fears over this below.

There is not much relevant knowledge on the extent of the commercial sexual activities of adolescents or young adults in Norway. There is no population-based study among adults that provides information about how common it is to have experienced selling sexual services. There have been attempts to count and estimate how many people are involved in visible prostitution arenas per year, but these studies mainly offer knowledge about how many people are reached by outreach services. If we look at estimates for the size of the prostitution market as a whole, the latest figures are found in an evaluation of the 2009 Sex Purchase Act (Rasmussen, Strøm, Sverdrup and Hansen 2014). In this it is estimated that between 2,143 and 2,821 people sell sex per year. This is based on a headcount done by service providers in the biggest cities as part of their outreach work in street prostitution and an estimate of sellers in indoors venues based on the number on online advertisements. Transactions taking place via diverse social media and outside of the biggest cities is not part of this estimate, something that probably entails a great underestimation of minors' and adult men's involvement.

These figures, as well as earlier estimates made, does not purport to say something specifically about young adults in the prostitution market. There is, however, attempts made at mapping involvement of minors in commercial sex. A now quite old study, from 2002, investigated the prevalence of the sale of sexual favours among youth under the age of 18 in the capital of Oslo. They found that among around 12,000 young people who took part in a survey in Oslo, 2.1% of boys and 0.6% of girls reported having given sexual favours for payment (Pedersen and Hegna 2002). The average age of having

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potential buyers to create a user. Most of the websites let the customers pick based on different characteristics such as physical appearance and filter the advertisements based on proximity. Realescort.eu recently added a banner with "no sex". We were told by one of the service providers that this was after requests from the advertisers. Several of the service providers had been in contact with these escort websites, and several of the welfare services had their own advertisements or banners promoting their services.

such an experience was 13.5 for boys and 14.1 for girls. This particular survey did not give additional information about what kinds of experiences these were, but as commercial sex is something that in Norwegian society is mostly associated with female sellers, these findings attracted great attention in public debate.

This has not been followed up in the new, broader surveys designed to estimate how common it is among youth to have exchanged sex for favours. But a survey among young people in Oslo (Bakken 2018) found that 3.5% of the respondents had performed sexual services in exchange for goods. The numbers are a bit higher among boys than girls, 3.9 and 3.1 percent respectively, which supports Hegna and Pedersen's findings from 2002. There is some relevant knowledge on the use of the internet in a study of sexual violations online. Suseg, Grødem, Valsset and Mossige (2008) conducted a survey of young people in their senior year of upper secondary school, aged 18–19. They found that 0.7% of girls and 1.2% of boys had had sex at an offline meeting in exchange for money or gifts. This resonates with earlier studies, showing that more young boys than girls have been involved in transactional sex (Hegna and Pedersen 2002). The researchers also comment on whether the internet as an arena impacts on the extent of young people's involvement in commercial sex, and they conclude that there are no indications in their data that the anonymity that the internet provides leads to an increase in young people selling sexual services.

What does exist is qualitative research designed to produce knowledge about the organization and content of commercial sex. Many of these studies have been about minors, and we include these as they may also offer information about processes and characteristics that are also important for young adults. Fears about the presence of minors in prostitution milieus has generated attempts to map its existence using more qualitative means. While this research is old and is focussed on people under the age of 18, they typically focus on digital platforms in a way that is relevant to this country report. In 2004, a report was compiled based on 21 interviews with young people under the age of 18 and professionals who work with them from Trondheim, Norway's third largest city, following political pressure to examine whether there was in fact "any child and youth prostitution in the municipality" (Grytbakk and Borgestrand 2004: 11). They recruited young people for interviews through social welfare services, and this meant that they met young people who were marginalized. They found that six of the girls spoke of having experience of selling sex, and both the young people and the professionals reported knowing that such activities were going on. The interviewees described the internet as an important and easily accessible arena. The project team established their own profile posing as a minor girl. There is reason to believe that the internet as an arena has become even more important since 2004.

Ingrid Smette (2004) did a qualitative study on the sexual exploitation of adolescents. She undertook focus group interviews with 49 young people in upper secondary school. Smette (2004) found that the young people interviewed in her study problematize understandings of them as unable to consent. Smette argues that the young people themselves do not agree that understandings of age and different positions of power are something that affects the child's responsibility for their actions in relation to an adult. The young people instead draw a line between different terms

like abuse and exploitation when talking about actions that involve physical force and actions that the minor in some way or another gave consent to or participated in. Smette also found that the young people perceived the consequences of their actions on the internet as less severe than in real life. The young people also expect “everyone” to know that it is risky to meet someone that you have met on the internet in real life. They therefore also see young people as largely culpable if they are subjected to any violations or abuse during such a meeting. Girls are perceived as more vulnerable than boys, and their understanding of “prostitution” builds on a presumption of a conscious choice, which does not fit with an understanding of exploitation. Prostitution is also heavily linked to something only women do, but they have no common definition of what actions constitute prostitution.

In more recent years, reports from service providers have been more responsive to developments, taking the form of reports and guidelines about identification and follow-up, such as the reports *Mistanke og magefølelse* (Warpe 2017), *Å se i mørket* (Vågen 2015) and *Sex som kapital* (Bjørndahl 2017). The latter report looks at young people between 13 and 19 years of age, stating that trading sexual favours is not the norm, but that certain groups are more at risk of becoming involved in doing so, and that trading sex happens in different forms and in different arenas, often in some sort of grey area between infatuation, exploration on one’s sexuality, exploration of boundaries, pressure, survival, prostitution, and as a way of dealing with a difficult situation.

We have found very little information about young adults’ use of digital platforms for engaging in commercial sexual activities. But there is one report from 2008 on young people’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation on the internet (Suseg, Grødem, Valset and Mossige 2008). Civil society actors have also produced two reports on the internet, both from 2017, describing arenas and the people using them, users included (Kock 2017; Treacy 2019). They both describe which websites, apps, and other platforms are in use, and the people using them. Kock’s (2017) report can be divided into three parts: (1) counting and summarizing advertisements on the website *realescort.eu*; (2) summarizing interviews with women at the Pro Sentret that uses the internet to get in contact with customers; and (3) responses from telephone interviews with people advertising sexual services on *realescort.eu*. The report is based on interviews with 32 people selling sex indoors who use the internet to establish contact with customers. The report does not say anything about age regarding online advertisers. For the interviews however, the age group was between 25 and 56. Among the people reached through outreach, the age range was 20–60. Among Eastern Europeans, many advertise that they are in their early 20s (Treacy 2019). Both reports state that judging age and other identifiable information on the advertisements is difficult, and they are under the impression that many list false information, both for advertisement and security reasons.

Treacy’s (2019) objectives were to: (1) “map and increase our knowledge of the different internet arenas where sexual services are sold and exchanged”; and (2) “through this increased knowledge improve the services we provide for people who sell or exchange sexual services online”. Kock’s and Treacy’s data derives from a mapping of 42 different online arenas, interviews with key individuals with experience selling or

exchanging sexual services for compensation online, interviews with social workers at Nadheim, and outreach on the internet. Nadheim is a social service provider run by the non-profit organization the Church City Mission in Oslo, which does outreach work with, among other groups, people advertising on escort websites. During the timeframe of the report from 2007, they came into contact with 408 people.

Realescort.eu is the most popular website according to both Kock (2017) and Treacy (2019), although the sites Escorte-date.eu, PlanetRomeo, and RentMen are also frequently used. The site Realescort.eu hosts mostly advertisers targeting male customers, with mainly women or trans-women advertising. The few male sellers target men, couples or women (Kock 2017). Estimating how many individual advertisers there are on Realescort.eu is problematized by both reports. Treacy (2019) points to how some sellers have different advertisements to cater to different potential customers, while others might share one advertisement. The latter is particularly common among Russian women, who work through an agency. According to Kock (2017), the Oslo Police estimated that 100–150 people sell sex via realescort.eu in Oslo per day. Pro Sentret counted 393 unique advertisements in their timeframe of one month.

Both reports, especially the report from Nadheim, give a detailed description of arenas other than realescort.eu, although both state that escort websites are the main arena. They both found indications that dating websites and applications are used, particularly Tindr and Grindr. Some sugar dating websites are used, the most commonly found constellation being older male/younger female. Even though platforms like dating apps/websites, chats and online communities are used to sell and exchange sexual services for compensation, the majority of people using them do not have an explicit intention of selling/exchanging sexual services (Treacy 2019).

Online commercial sexual activities are very diverse, ranging from establishing a platform for contact for meetings, to the whole activity taking place online, for example via webcams (Sanders et al. 2018). Sanders et al. (2018: 31) find that dating and hook-up platforms has become more common, and also more accepted in the UK. They further argue that the development means that markets for commercial sex has diversified, and that this holds both new opportunities for people to earn money, and new vulnerabilities and dangers. Interviewees claimed that such a diversification is also taking place in Norway, and that that challenges service providers.

When using platforms other than escort websites, it is common to use specific emojis or key words or sexually explicit photos to indicate their intention. Several of Treacy's (2019) interviewees stated that they did not like using these platforms and would prefer clear-cut deals. It was also viewed as an ineffective way of earning money and viewed as riskier, e.g. more requests to have sex without condoms. The most common sugar dating website in Norway is sugardaters.com.

We asked our interviewees about sugar dating. They reported that this is not particularly important in a Norwegian setting, and one service provider we interviewed described it as "a fad". Service providers interviewed for this country report are hesitant to understand "sugar dating" as something else than prostitution, but experience that this and other phenomenon entails that more of their clients are unsure whether what they are involved in is prostitution or not. That sugar dating is

somehow different from prostitution is a notion several of our interviewees reject. As one of them said: "These more unclear forms [talking of for example sugar dating] have been called a softer form of prostitution, but we believe that it's the opposite; it is making prostitution more intimate". Another interviewee also made this point: "Grey zones makes things more uncertain and unsafe".

Women are the largest visible gender group using online platforms, but men and transgender women are more visible than previously observed in other arenas such as the streets and massage parlours according to Treacy (2019). Treacy find that sex sellers also highlight different problems associated with using the internet as a platform. Some experience difficulties maintaining personal privacy online. This is reliant on personal knowledge of how the internet, smartphones and apps work. They also report a strong pressure of constantly "being at work" or accessible. Some experience difficulties connected to identifiable images and videos on the internet, which can impact negatively on their future choices or options. The internet provides easy access to information, but they also find that it can reduce information sharing amongst people selling/exchanging sex. This is a result of people not coming in direct contact with others in similar situations. This also affects the support services' ability to come into contact with their target group.

A report from Pro Sentret (Bjørndahl 2009) mapped existing knowledge among service providers and others about young people's prostitution and concluded that little knowledge exists. The report is based on interviews with key informants from different sections of the support system in Oslo, and to supplement these, they conducted group interviews with adolescents. Adolescents here are defined as between 13 and 19 years of age, that is in lower and upper secondary school. They report that there is little to indicate that trading sexual favours for compensation is normal amongst young people in Oslo. Adolescents do not have a "sexual culture out of control", but certain groups are more at risk. The adolescents themselves do not view their actions as prostitution. Exchanging sexual favours for compensation happens in different forms and in different arenas and is often characterized as a grey area between infatuation, exploration of one's own sexuality, exploration of boundaries, pressure, survival, prostitution, and as a means of dealing with a difficult situation. Their interviews showed that such exchanges are between adolescents themselves, and between adolescents and adults. The exchange is not confined to monetary gains, but includes gifts, things, clothes, a place to sleep, travels, trips, and experiences. Some also exchange sexual favours for contact with an adult, a sense of belonging, or access to different groups or milieus. The report finds that many of the informants thought that most of contacts are established online. Platforms the interviewees mentioned were different chat and dating apps, social media, online gaming, and more traditional advertisements. Interviewees among service providers also highlighted that while they had expected all or most prostitution would take place online, they see that established prostitution arenas continue to be important. They also emphasized that they see a continuity from more traditional venues in how online exchanges are organized, and they encouraged us not to be blinded by new terms such as "sugar dating", or new forms of establishing contact: that many aspects of the market for commercial sex continue to be the same.

Bjørndahl (2017) also states that the support system's approach to the field is riddled with heteronormative attitudes and stereotypical gender roles. Male vulnerability is often associated with drugs, poor mental health, violence, and crime. Bjørndahl (2017) sees the support system's knowledge and understanding of young people's sexual habits as characterized by presumptions, one-time events, media reports, and an "alienation" related to the digitalization of young people's lives and sexual exploration.

A last category of reports revolves around men/boys and/or transgender persons, and includes two reports in our material stating that the area is very much understudied (Bjørndahl 2010; Haaland 2011). There is limited knowledge of male prostitution in Norway. Bjørndahl (2010) seeks to shed light on men's, boys', and transgender persons' experiences of selling sexual favours. The report references data from Hegna and Pedersen's survey from 2002 as the most recent quantitative numbers. At that time, 1% of men had sold sexual favours. There is additional information from Trondheim and NOVA – they rely on numbers from Hegna and Pedersen (2002), the Municipality of Trondheim (2006) and Mossige and Abrahamsen (2010). The number of boys under the age of 18 who answered that they had experience with prostitution varies from 2.1% to 5.4%, but the commonality in these studies is that the numbers are higher for boys than girls. One of Bjørndahl's (2010) main findings is that there is much we do not know about the male prostitution market. They also report on some tendencies, including the fact that a young age and youthful look is sought after in one part the market, that the internet is the main arena for establishing contact, that many men experience pressure to perform sexual favours without condoms, and that the majority of men and boys have more sporadic and shorter prostitution careers.

As part of the Baltic Sea Regional Study on Adolescents' Sexuality, Mossige and Abrahamsen (2007) presented the Norwegian findings. They were based on a survey among students in their third year in upper secondary school (4,911 participants in total). In the survey, they were asked to report on what types of sexual favours for payment they would agree to doing in the future, and what they would accept their friends doing. The results showed a higher percentage of boys potentially willing to perform sexual favours for payment, more than five times higher than girls. They were also asked if they had any experience with selling sex for payment. Here, 1% answered positively. Again, boys scored higher relative to age: between 2.8% and 5.4% answered positively to having experience of selling sexual favours for payment.

The Municipality of Trondheim has published several reports on the topic, in 2005, 2009 and 2015. The report from 2005 summarizes a survey of secondary school students from 13 to 17 years of age, in which 3.5% answered that they had performed sexual favours for payment. Over twice as many boys as girls answered positively, and three times as many boys as girls responded that they had sold sexual favours over ten times. The report from 2015 was based on qualitative interviews to supplement the numbers from a 2013 survey that showed that among lower and upper secondary school students, 5% of boys and 1.6% of girls answered that they had performed sexual favours for payment. Their main findings were that the most thoroughly documented cases of boys selling sexual favours were through online dating websites. They contend that there is not a trend of boys selling sexual favours in Trondheim, but that it is

difficult to quantify how many may have had experiences of performing sexual favours for payment online. The boys with these experiences also showed signs of poorer mental health and had a higher consumption of illegal drugs. Motives ranged from economic and sexual exploration to thrill-seeking or a need for care. They describe themselves as active and in control of their situation, in contrast to the support system, which often describes them as victims.

Both research (Larsen and Pedersen 2005) and professionals interviewed for this country report state that young people receive offers online and in public space, and both by strangers and people they know. This may happen in situations where their aim is to be in contacts with other young people, but where adults seek them out. Interviewed service providers believe young people are not that active on the more professional webpages with ads for explicit prostitution, but that they act on offers in social media or experiment with meeting up with people they meet online. The same interviewee meant that this is not fundamentally different from how young persons used to become involved in commercial before the internet. S/he argues that the same process is involved, such as being tempted by receiving offers by strangers in public spaces and finding excitement in taking risks. These are motivations for trying out exchanging sex for money.

Another group of young people focused on is unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Warpe (2017) published a report that describes what knowledge different actors and organizations within the support system in Oslo have about unaccompanied minor asylum seekers' experience of exchanging or selling of sexual favours for compensation, in connection with survival sex and human trafficking as well as prostitution. The report states that the sale or exchange of sexual services for compensation is a difficult topic to talk about for the employees in the support system. They are unsure of how to do so, and who is responsible for actually talking with the young people. They categorize these young people as especially vulnerable, and report that there are concerns that they sell or exchange sexual favours for compensation during the migration process and after arriving in Norway.

Pro Sentret's (2019) annual report from the year 2018 states that they had 667 individuals who used their services. Nearly all were over the age of 18, with 507 people between 26 and 55 years of age. They do point out however that they are often told that their users had their first experiences with the sale or exchange of sexual services for compensation before the age of 18. The individuals using Pro Sentret's facilities are a diverse group. People of all genders use Pro Sentret. The majority of people selling or exchanging sex are female, though men and transgender people are also frequent Pro Sentret users. In 2018, 78% were foreign nationals, while 22% were Norwegian. Norway was the largest single nation, closely followed by Thailand, which again was followed by Romania, Nigeria, and Bulgaria.

In street prostitution, Pro Sentret has noted a change in recent years. After the introduction of the criminalization of buyers in 2009, they report a 50% drop in the street market. In 2015, the number of Nigerian women selling sexual services in the outdoor market was drastically reduced due to an increase in ID checks, stricter border controls, and the intensification of the deportation of illegal migrants.

Regarding the indoor market, most of the contacts are established via various online platforms. Using a variety of methods, they made 2,433 inquiries, gaining contact with groups not previously reached.

Following their reports from 2017 on children's and young people's experiences of exchanging sexual favours for compensation, Pro Sentret noted an increased interest from people and organizations working with young people in Norway. Since then, they have held lectures for schools, non-profit organizations, institutions and other interested parties. They also held ten educational full-day seminars and three seminars targeting the support system.

In 2017, Pro Sentret increased their focus on male prostitution (Pro Sentret 2017). The men they met with ranged from 17 to 44 years of age, although the majority were under 30. They did not quantify how many men they were in contact with, but did say that they were a diverse group. Some were Norwegian nationals, either born here or settled here as refugees. Others were in Norway on a tourist visa and/or through the Schengen Agreement, while some were illegal residents.

Their motivation was reported as related to money – some to buy expensive clothes, get a driving license, for education or travel. For others, their motivations for selling or exchanging sexual favours for compensation included having a place to live and sleep, getting food, and other necessities. Some also sent money to family abroad. They reported hearing some stories about getting sexual experience, meeting someone to have sex with, or being sexually aroused and exploring one's own sexuality. Their customers were primarily male.

### 5.3.2 *Current policies*

A national policy document on prostitution has never been made in Norway, but several municipalities make them. The Municipality of Oslo has issued several Action Plans against prostitution since the first one in 1992, the Municipality of Bergen issued Action Plans in the period 2005–2012. Also, other cities have in periods issued Action Plans. While adults are the main focus in Action Plans from various Municipalities, minors and young adults are mentioned specifically sporadically. An example is in the Action Plan for the years 2008–2010 (Municipality of Oslo 2008) where prevention among youth is among the states strategies to combat prostitution (p. 3), as well as a plan to attain an overview of arenas where young people sell sexual services (p. 10). The action listed to prevent prostitution among youth is the courses Pro Sentret give to students in their third year of upper secondary school.

While there is no overarching policy document on prostitution or commercial sex in Norway, the topic is covered under the umbrella of other fields, most prominently human trafficking. But if we look to how prostitution is debated in politics and media, this has for the last two decades revolved around how Norway could and should regulate prostitution in the Criminal Code (Skilbrei 2012).

As of 1 January 2009, the purchase of sex from people over the age of 18 is prohibited by the Norwegian Penal Code (2005).<sup>30</sup> The wording of the relevant section of the Penal Code (in its unofficial English translation) is as follows:

“Section 316. Purchase of sexual services from adults

A penalty of a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or both shall be applied to any person who

- a) obtains for himself/herself or another person sexual activity or a sexual act by providing or agreeing on payment,
- b) obtains sexual activity or a sexual act on the basis of such payment being agreed on or provided by another person, or
- c) in the manner described in a) or b) makes a person perform acts corresponding to sexual activity on himself/herself.”

If the sexual activity or act occurred in a particularly offensive manner, and the conduct does not fall within the scope of stricter provisions, the penalty is imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year.

From the wording in this section’s part c), it is clear that versions of commercial online sexual activities are included in the prohibition. Buying sex from minors under the age of 18 has been criminalised since 2000 by the Penal Code Section 309. Buying sex from minors is punishable by a fine or maximum of 2 years’ imprisonment. Gross violations are punishable by 3 years’ imprisonment.

It is completely legal to sell sexual services, something which has been the case since 2000. To organise someone else’s prostitution, even when no exploitation or profit is involved, constitutes pimping/procurement, and is prohibited by Section 315 of the Penal Code on “controlling and facilitating prostitution”:

“A penalty of a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six years shall be applied to any person who

- a) promotes the prostitution of others, or
- b) rents out premises and is aware that the premises will be used for prostitution, or is grossly negligent in that respect.

Any person who in a public notice unequivocally offers, arranges or seeks prostitution shall be subject to a fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.”

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<sup>30</sup> The English language text is an unofficial translation of the Norwegian text that the Norwegian Government itself uses. The complete translated version of the Norwegian Penal Code can be accessed here: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2005-05-20-28>

In this section “prostitution” means a person receiving payment for engaging in sexual activity or a sexual act with another person, or for performing acts corresponding to sexual activity on himself/herself.

The background to the introduction of these provisions and their legislative history has been well researched (Jahnsen 2008, Skilbrei 2012; Jahnsen and Skilbrei 2017a). As these provisions are directed at parties other than the sellers, we will not go into detail about these here.

The implementation of these provisions and the implementation of the Aliens Act vis-à-vis people who sell sex has also been the subject of research, and this has covered specifically how several of these provisions are implemented in a way that affects people who sell sex negatively (Jahnsen and Skilbrei 2017b). This research also demonstrates that in debates and the implementation of these provisions, the most visible forms of prostitution are prioritized, and this means that commercial sexual activities taking place on digital platforms may pass under the radar of the police.

Knowledge about health and welfare services available to people who sell sex is important, as this for many is key both to being protected against harms while selling sex and to exit (Skilbrei and Holmström 2013). Contact with social workers is for many much more important than what criminal policy applies.

People who sell sex have the same access to welfare and health services as other people with the same residency status as themselves. In addition, since around 1970s there have been targeted social services that typically offer welfare and health services related to prostitution, such as handing out of condoms and testing for STIs, in addition to services that people who sell sex are found to need, such as legal aid, counselling, a place to stay, etc. What is considered appropriate assistance has varied considerably over time. When service providers encountered mostly Norwegian women with drug addictions, the services were directed towards drug-related health services, hygiene facilities and nutrition, whereas when service providers from about 2000 onwards started to encounter many women from outside of the Schengen area, services became oriented towards help with the immigration authorities, language classes and asserting the rights of victims of human trafficking. Services are offered by municipal organisations in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, and organisations run by civil society, in particular the Church City Mission, which runs outreach and inhouse services in Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim.

Services are offered broadly with an emphasis on outreach work related to street prostitution and some sectors of indoors prostitution, in particular Thai massage parlours. Interviews confirmed that existing organisations work mainly with women who sell sex, to some extent with transgender people and generally even less with men.

There are also other organisations that work with the issue. The Norwegian sex workers’ rights organisation (PION) is involved in efforts to safeguard the reproductive health of sex sellers and offers services to sellers, especially legal aid. The organisation *Sex og Samfunn* is involved in preventive efforts, as it provides information in schools together with Pro Sentret, to discourage prostitution, and health services (particularly STI checks) for clients, but also counselling services for clients and their families.

In interviews with service providers, it was particularly important to map and learn from their experiences working with young people and with digital arenas. There are no special services available for people under the age of 18 who sell sex. Young people over the age of 18 have access to the same services as other adults, and services are organised most clearly based on gender and nationality, not age. There have previously existed some services targeted at young people. In the years 2006–2014 the Municipality of Trondheim also organized a special service offering counselling for youth involved in prostitution, UNGPRO and Pro Sentret issued a report on their outreach project Ungfelt which lasted half of 2001 (Misje and Matre 2002). These existed as focus areas within a limited time span. It demanded many resources to be present as much as way needed to build trust and be able to identify young people who engage in commercial sex, and the conclusion in the Ungfelt report was that Pro Sentret's resources were better spend engaging in preventive work with young people, rather than outreach (Misje and Matre 2002).

An aspect of reaching young people involved in commercial sex, is to be able to communicate with them. As mentioned above, the issue of terminology is key in this respect, and previous research in Norway and elsewhere has pointed to the need to find terminology that resonates with how young people themselves think and talk about the acts they engage in. Public and private social welfare service providers in Norway apply different terms, and this is often up to the individual social worker. In interviews service providers addressed the issue of terminology, and while they were concerned with using terms that made their communication with young people as good as possible, several also mentioned problems involved in undermining the fact that the acts they engaged in was prostitution. A central topic in interviews was the grey zone character of the commercial sexual activities of young people, and they spoke of this as something that could make the experience more difficult to cope with. Most terms have problems associated with it. As there is considerable stigma attached to be involved in prostitution, there is reason to not be associated with the term. But lack of identification with the term may also express lack of identification with the act. One interviewee who work for a service provider notes that also adult sex-sellers that seek out their services are put off by terms such as "prostitutes", and one of the reasons for this, he believes, is that they do not identify with the commercial sexual acts they engage in.

The fact that contacts are increasingly taking place online, challenges service providers, especially those who set out to reach young people. One interviewee described this frustration like this: "We try to be available on the platforms where young people participates. Snap, Insta, WhatsApp, Gaysir, Grindr; but there is a new app every week that we don't know about". At the same time several of the interviewees reminded us that there still is prostitution going on in off line arenas. While it is true that digital platforms have transformed markets for commercial sex, it does not mean that prostitution is also not taking place in more "traditional" ways. Some of our interviewees find that there is a lack of focus on and increasing taboo surrounding sale of sex in drug scenes.

Young people involved in commercial sex does not only come into contact with targeted health and welfare services. Most contacts are with general health practitioners and general welfare officers, and their sensitivity towards the issue of

commercial sex is therefore important. It has been stated that social service providers are hesitant to bring up the topic of prostitution with young people (Norli 2001). To remedy this, Janikke Solstad Vedeler, Karin Sasaoka and Svein Mossige developed a guide to professionals working with young people in 2006. In this, they give advice on how to best talk to young people about experiences with selling sex.

In a Norwegian context, social services consistently point to an obligation to report to the authorities if they come into contact with someone under the age of 18 (see e.g. Vågen 2015: 10). Interviewed service providers state that minors who engage in commercial sex is a matter for child welfare services, and that they have an obligation to report to them if they come across minors. One of the interviewees note that this may have the detrimental effect that minors hesitate to speak about their experiences. One service provider explains:

“We try to offer guidance. It would be a shame if the ones young people open up to immediately issue a report to the child welfare services. Maybe one could write the report together instead, let them use their own words? And it is important that the report is followed up on. It is not as if they are well off as long as they don't sell sex”.

That commercial sex is taking place on new online arenas also impacts how the police works. The police have in the last years actively sought out sex sellers operating online. This is something that unsettles the market and something that particularly have affected migrants (Jahnsen and Skilbrei 2017). The police have also worked towards closing down online platforms as such sites may facilitate prostitution, something which is illegal according to Section 315 of the Penal Code. Interviewees mentioned the policing of prostitution markets as something which may shift these in unintended and problematic ways. While the existence of sites openly advertising prostitution is in breach of law, this also makes the market and people operating there more available to service providers. That commercial sex instead moves to mainstream social media makes sellers more vulnerable, one of the interviewees contends, as that both moves the transactions into a grey zone and makes sellers more difficult to reach with offers of assistance.

### 5.3.3 *Media coverage*

As mentioned above, little systematic knowledge exists about the involvement of young people in commercial sex and about digital arenas. Police, service providers and others therefore may be affected by how these phenomena are presented in media. News coverage thus becomes an important source of information about topics that the general public often does not have first-hand knowledge of. This emphasizes the need to understand what and how the media reports these issues, especially when they are regularly criticized for glamorizing (Greer and Reiner 2012), but also misrepresenting major social issues related to crime and deviance (Greer 2007). This means that we have chosen to also perform a review of existing media representations of the commercial sexual activities of young people and of digital arenas.

A study from 2008 found that the Norwegian media coverage of prostitution leading up to the criminalization of buyers focused on prostitution as a growing social

problem, arguing among other things, that the prostitution market had exploded, and that prostitution enabled human trafficking (Jahnsen 2008). This study was conducted over 10 years ago, and focused on the debate leading up to the criminalization legislation. Since then, there has been exponential growth in digital and online communication, and now more than ever the indoor market of the sex trade consists of virtual places where buyers and sellers can establish contact. How is this development being portrayed in the Norwegian media coverage? In this study, we sought to map how young adults, and in some cases adolescents, are framed in the media concerning the selling and trading of sexual services online. What topics are being covered and in what manner, and what topics are being ignored?

Knudsen (2014) argues that the common focus of media framing theory is concerns *how* a topic is presented rather than what is presented. In short, different framings can influence how people process the information. Relating to the topic of transactional sex, media framing theory can be used to highlight the manner in which the media in Norway present the topic by looking at how the “media discuss, reflect upon, or choose a certain angle to tell a news story” (Knudsen 2014). The assumption that media framing theory builds on is that the media can influence how the public views important social issues, but not which issues the public views as important (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). Goffman suggested in his seminal work “Frame Analysis: An essay on the Organization of Experience” from 1974, that “social frameworks” are the outcome of processes of interaction, interpretation and contextualization. These frameworks give us meaning, determine what is relevant and irrelevant when considering certain actors, issues or events, and suggest appropriate behaviour (Vliegthart and Zoonen 2011). Based on Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) definition, we use framing analysis as an inductive approach to “reveal the array of possible frames”. Framing theory is generally a constructivist approach that looks at how issues or events are presented (Sasson 2010). Goffman (1974) argues that the same event can be reported and described in very different ways, deepening on our “schemata”, which provide us with some initial expectation of what we are going to see. Using Entman’s (1993) concept, framing can: (1) define problems, (2) diagnose causes, (3) make moral judgements, and (4) suggest remedies. Along with an analysis of news values, a common conceptualization of newsworthiness that was popularized by Galtung and Ruge already in 1965, we present what we observe as the main trends in the Norwegian media’s coverage of transactional sex related to the internet and/or young people.

We have roughly divided the media coverage into three categories. The first is warning against new trends, the second is enjoying the job, and the third is protecting our children. A caveat to the study’s focus on young people is that the Norwegian media’s definition of “unge”, youngster that is, does not necessarily match this study’s definition. When searching for “unge”, this usually yields media coverage of young people under the age of 18 in particular. There does not seem to be any existing category in the media for young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who are selling or exchanging sexual favors for compensation. They seem to fall into the category of adults of all ages. However, some coverage revolving around students selling sex online is present.

### Warning against new trends

A large quantity of the collected data revolves around the internet as a marketplace. Some are articles that report on prostitution in one way or another, where the internet is mentioned but is not a factor in itself. These cases take a more instrumental view of the internet and do not question or highlight the internet's role, but merely cite it as a place where prostitution takes place. However, a more common way of presenting the internet is as the new main arena for selling sexual services, and this is presented in a more concerned manner. These cases have a more pronounced sensationalist angle, reporting on the usage of the internet as an alarming phenomenon. Some cases feature people using the internet and how it has corrupted their life. Concerned actors are interviewed, such as the police and welfare service providers. One particular trend that has received increasing amounts of coverage is sugar dating.

While the service providers interviewed for this report address the issue of sugar dating, this was not an important theme in the identified media coverage of young people's involvement in commercial sex. We identified only two articles in 2016. In 2017, however, there were 124 articles. This coincides with the NRK1 documentary *Innafor*, which dedicated an episode to what they termed "grey area prostitution online" entitled *Kjøp meg* (Buy me), and the Danish four-part documentary *Gina Jaqueline – livet som sugerbaby* (Gina Jaqueline – life as a sugar baby), which also aired on NRK1. *Innafor*, in particular, sparked several critical op-eds. Several news outlets also reported that interest in sugar dating went up dramatically following the episode. This is one example of new types of prostitution presented in the media.

One article from NRK in 2019 was entitled "*Pernille*" (23) *har valgt sugardating som livsstil: – Du mister sjela di litt* ("Pernille" (23) has chosen sugar dating as a lifestyle: – You lose your soul a bit). Common themes in the news articles about sugar dating are that it is something that draws young women in with the promise of a luxurious lifestyle, but quickly turns into something bad and hard to get out of. This particular article interviews a psychologist, who is quoted as saying that sugar dating can be addictive and can lead to psychological problems.

The tone in these cases might be seen as protecting or warning against the perils of prostitution, as they highlight the potential damage it can do to young women. In Entman's (1993) framing conceptualization, this is seen as defining the problem before one can identify the causes of the problem. The stories about sugar dating define the problem as a new type of prostitution and as luring new people into prostitution. There are also moral judgements throughout the news stories. Some present sugar dating as a choice, as with the story about "Pernille", implying that she chose this addictive lifestyle to get quick money. One sugar daddy is interviewed, saying he does not get why young women would want to do this. The remedy for the individuals involved in sugar dating is implicit in the stories – stop before it is too late. At a societal level on the other hand, the solution is not that clear. Many present it as an unavoidable trend, caused by the internet and mobile apps in particular.

In terms of news values, these cases seem to focus primarily on risk, simplification, and individualism, in addition to the apparent value that is "sex". An overlying news value is sex, which is part of all of the categories we have found. News does not have to

be simple to make the news, but Bell (1991) argue that simple cases are often preferred, to not strain the reader more than necessary. This can be achieved by presenting the story in black and white, binary terms (Jewkes 2011; Chibnall 1977) without any moral ambiguities. This is a clear trend in the news articles we found in this category. The moral of the story is quite clear – prostitution is bad and can harm women. This leads to another common news value, namely individualism. Many of the stories feature someone who can represent the group as a whole, someone who can embody the phenomenon. A case is easier to understand if it is related to a person rather than a system or a process (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Golding and Elliott 1979; Montgomery 2007), but individualism has some other connotations as well. Firstly, it makes the story more readily identifiable with. Reading a story about a person who has a back story, someone the reader can see themselves in, or at least feel empathy or disgust for, brings the reader closer to the case. Secondly, individualism also presents the problem or phenomenon as the individual's problem; it personalizes risk (Jewkes 2011). This can have an impact in placing the guilt or blame, but also the credit, on the individuals themselves. Both individualism and simplification are closely connected to risk. Risk, or perhaps fear, is now characterized as part of our modern life (Furedi 1997). When connected to a simple story with an emphasis on the individual's responsibility, risk is presented as a potential vulnerability that we should take personal responsibility to avoid. This is described by Jewkes (2011) as the beginnings of a crime scare or a moral panic, due to presenting the risk and spread of a problem as a trend. This smoldering concern of a trend spreading is clearly a pattern in our material. The many op-eds highlight the upsurge and increased popularity of sugar dating in a concerned tone. The concern is that suddenly a lot of women who would not normally find themselves in prostitution will start using the sugar dating websites after seeing a glamorized picture of the lifestyle.

### Enjoying the job

In contrast to the previous category, this is perhaps the most tabloid variety. These cases have an even more pronounced sexual angle. There seems to be a general consensus that sex is one of the more prominently featured news values (Greer 2003). The case of Amalie who sells sex is one of the cases that has been circulated in several news media, including local newspapers around the country and the online newspaper *Nettavisen*. The same article is amended slightly to fit in different outlets.

Several of these stories interview one youngish Norwegian woman, saying that she is doing it voluntarily, even enjoying her job. One example is an article in the national newspaper *Dagbladet*, published in 2011 with the title *Many customers are good in bed*. These articles focus on her motivation. When talking to an anonymous student selling sex, the motivation is often money, but other reasons can be found as well. The common element here, in contrast to news stories about sugar dating, is that they enjoy what they do, and not how dangerous or addictive selling sexual favors are. As with the previous category, these cases are presented in a simplistic and individualized manner. There is not much in the way of complex issues to grasp, and the stories border on being titillating. The cases most often presented involve a young woman, telling the larger

story through her personal story. Again, they personify and make the case relatable, and as Montgomery (2007) argues, people have a different way of dramatizing a conflict or phenomenon that a system simply cannot do.

The stories in this category lack the focus on risk that the previous category emphasizes. They have more of a novel approach, and are framed as a typical “human interest” story. The story also lacks the moral component that the risk-oriented cases have. These are focused on thrills, and play out some sort of trope about an insatiable female sexual drive. Pictures are a large part of framing these stories. The pictures in this category consist mainly of sexualized imagery such as high heels and stockings, short dresses, or faceless people touching legs or laying a hand on someone’s leg. Framing a phenomenon as “human interest” rather than as “a trend that should raise concerns” has some implications for how readers will interpret it – prostitution in this light is a choice, without moral judgements attached.

### Protect the children

Figure 1: The Price to Pay

# Lørdag



## Prisen å betale

Kampen om å være populær har hardnet til  
I noen miljøer jobber jenter for å få henge med russeren allerede fra ungdomsskolen.  
Seksuelle tjenester kan være en del av inngangsbilletten.

Note: Translation of the title is *The price to pay*, and the intro following says “The struggle to be popular has got tougher. In some milieus, girls work to get to hang out with the seniors right from junior high school. Sexual favours can be part of the entry ticket.”

Source: Aftenposten Lørdag, 14 May 2016

When they talk about young people, the media are most often referring to young people under the age of 18. The problematic aspects are even more pronounced here, and we cannot find the same allure as in cases of, for example, students selling sexual favours.

Following Pro Sentret's report *Sex som kapital* (Sex as capital), we saw several news articles like *RAPPORT: Akseptert å «betale» med sex i enkelte ungdomsmiljøer* [REPORT: Acceptable to "pay" with sex in some youth milieus), although this had already been reported on by several media outlets. The picture caption reads "The price to pay" and was featured as the cover of the Saturday section of *Aftenposten* in 2016. The case was widely publicized in follow-up stories and amended for and republished in several regional and local newspapers.

Cases like this one emphasize how this is a part of a negative trend. These cases do not usually focus on the internet as a large part of what they define as the problem, but mentions it as a place where contact is established or as an arena in which young people interact socially a lot. Many of the cases revolve around the popular celebrations at the end of the last year of upper secondary school, a phenomenon termed "russetid" in Norway. The problem defined is that younger girls trade sexual services in order to get to hang out with the popular older boys. The newspaper *Aftenposten* ran several articles on this topic, one example being a story with the title *Prisen for å henge med russeren* (The price of hanging out with the senior boys), and the one featured above. *Aftenposten* wrote that the illustrations in the story were based on pictures that circulated online. Concerning the framing of these stories, they portray these cases as an alarming trend, i.e. the problem, with several problematic aspects, which could be seen as symptomatic. As with the first category, they portray this as a growing problem. In addition, these cases are also framed using the news values "children" and "proximity". Cases about children often make the headlines with a lower threshold (Jenkins 1992). Put together with "proximity", they highlight that "our children" are at risk, evoking strong and deeply rooted emotions. Proximity can be both cultural and particular, and has been shown to have some problematic ethnocentric aspects (Jewkes 2011). In addition, children are the epitome of innocence. They are not at fault for actions that would be subject to moral judgement in adults. It is in cases involving younger people, in upper secondary school and younger, that words like "trade" emerge more frequently, sometimes saying that they, the young people, do not understand that what they are doing is prostitution.

#### 5.4 Conclusion – Norway

As mentioned a number of times, there is not much information about the topic of this report in Norway, and we have therefore instead referred to reports, research and news media on broader phenomena in order to shed light on developments and gaps in the knowledge. Our approach has thus been pragmatic, in the sense that we have assessed the relevance of literature in a broad sense and have used various sources to explore

whether these can add to our understanding of the commercial sexual activities of young adults. There is also not a comprehensive approach to prostitution in Norway, the field is rather managed by various laws and institutions that implements quite different agendas. While the sex purchase act was introduced to prevent and diminish prostitution, application of other laws seems to implement very different agendas.

We see that what has been initiated in terms of knowledge production in social welfare services and research often follows from public concern over particular developments. As we saw from the media analysis, there are some representations that are particularly important, and these were also taken up by interviewees. There is reason to believe that the purpose of initiating such knowledge production is sometimes more to support a political agenda than to create a bottom-up knowledge base for developing new perspectives and policies. Service providers problematize whether available knowledge and services offered fits the market, and they describe problems when trying to target young people.

There is not enough knowledge on the use of digital platforms in Norway to say anything substantial about whether, and in that case, how, digital platforms lower the threshold for entering into prostitution or have changed the content and understanding of exchanges of sex for compensation. There is little academic research on prostitution in Norway, be it the commercial sexual activities of young adults or generally. There are, however, important contributions to knowledge made by private and public organisations that do knowledge production together with delivering welfare services. But they are also often building on secondary sources, and only a few young people have been interviewed for these. This means that there is a danger that problem definitions that follow more from media coverage and popular understandings are circulated as service providers and others are interviewed time and time again about what they *believe* is the extent and nature of young people's engagement in commercial sex.

## 5.5 References – Norway

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## 6. Sweden: Young people selling sex: knowledge base, social initiatives and legal measures

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### 6.1 Introduction

For several decades, Sweden has played a central role in the international policy debate on how to best target prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes. (Holmström and Skilbrei 2017). As the first country in the world, Sweden criminalized the purchase of sexual services in 1999. The aim of the prohibition was to combat prostitution; in the short-term, by actively policing it and in the long run by changing attitudes towards the purchase of sexual services. The aim was also to reduce human trafficking for sexual purposes (ibid:83). Since then, several countries have followed the Swedish example, implementing different kinds of legislation targeting the purchase of sexual services.<sup>31</sup> In Sweden, the introduction of the Chapter 6 Section 11 of Sweden's Penal Code (colloquially known as the Sex Purchase Law) was preceded by a long and lively political debate. Gender and power were key topics in the debates leading up to the legislation, but earlier debates had also emphasised how prostitution could be understood in relation to social problems, social inequality and a commercialization of human relations (ibid). Thus, the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services is based on an understanding of prostitution as inherently harmful, considering both vulnerable persons who are involved in prostitution, and because prostitution is assumed to exacerbate and create vulnerabilities (Brunovskis and Skilbrei 2018).

In the last ten years, there has been a strong focus on legal measures targeting human trafficking and organized crime in Sweden's prostitution policy. To a large extent, social interventions have been directed at offering support to victims of human trafficking. Less attention has been given to other groups within the area of selling and

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<sup>31</sup> Finland introduced a partial ban in 2006, criminalizing the purchase of sex from victims of procuring or human trafficking for sexual purposes. Norway and Iceland criminalized the purchase of sexual services in 2009. Canada implemented the Swedish prostitution policy model in 2013, Northern Ireland followed in 2015 and France introduced a ban on buying sexual services in 2016.

buying sexual services. The Swedish police target sex buyers, and social workers in prostitution units located in the municipalities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö offer support to a broad group of people who sell and buy sexual services. However, except for victims of trafficking, Sweden's prostitution policy does not have a specific focus on vulnerable groups such as young people, LGBTQ people or people living with disabilities. On the other hand, there is a growing body of Swedish research on specifically vulnerable groups in relation to commercial sex. One group in particular has gained attention: young people who have experiences of selling sex.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this chapter is to present and analyse the current knowledge about young people selling sex in Sweden. It focuses on knowledge about the extent and contexts of young people selling sex in Sweden. The chapter also presents and discusses information about social initiatives and legal measures targeting young people who sell sex in Sweden. Terminology within this research field is difficult, since the applied terms are often associated with specific political positions. Previous research has shown that the word prostitution is a term that young people do not identify with. In this chapter, we use primarily the terminology most frequently presented in Swedish research on young people: *selling sexual services* and *sex for compensation*. In addition, we use the terminology that is used in the interviews with professionals working in the field.

## 6.2 Method

This country report is based on a review of literature focusing on young people selling sex in Sweden. The review can be described as a scoping study, aimed at mapping key concepts, main sources and types of evidence available within this specific area of research (Arksey and Mally 2005). A variety of sources have been used, involving both Swedish and international databases. In order to make the searches as specific as possible, a building block strategy was used. Several blocks of search terms related to the area of young people selling sex in Sweden were constructed. Block searches with Swedish keywords were done in Libris, Swepub and Libsearch<sup>32</sup>, and block searches with English keywords were done in Libsearch, Swepub and Psychinfo<sup>33</sup>.

The literature identified by these block searches has been organized thematically in categories<sup>34</sup>, which has guided the presentation of the material. Sexual exploitation is a concept commonly used in the Swedish context in the area of commercial sex and was thus considered relevant to include. No time limit for publication year was used. Although publications dated before 2004 were rare, they

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<sup>32</sup> (Ung\* OR tonåring\* OR barn) AND (sälja sex OR sexuella tjänster OR prostitution OR barnprostitution OR sexuell exploatering OR människohandel OR sexförsäljning OR byttesex).

<sup>33</sup> (adolescen\* OR juvenil\* OR teenage\* OR youth\* OR young\* OR girl\* OR boy\* OR child\*) AND ("selling sex" OR "sex work\*" OR "commercialized sex" OR "commercialised sex" OR prostitution OR "sexual exploitation" OR "survival sex" OR "transactional sex") (Sweden OR Swedish).

<sup>34</sup> 1. Scope, 2. Vulnerability & mental illness, 3. Behavior and attitudes, 4. LGBTQ, 5. Professionals' perspective, 6. Legislation and policy, 7. Digitalization, 8. Human trafficking, 9. Sexual abuse.

were included when relevant. In addition to the block searches, the reference lists of articles identified in the searches were reviewed in order to track down additional references and to find grey literature not listed in the selected databases. Included material was also identified by means of our own knowledge about what has been produced within the field and through searches via Google Scholar. Thus, the review includes peer-reviewed articles and doctoral theses (20), grey literature such as reports and studies by authorities and NGOs, and method materials and action plans implemented by Swedish authorities (55). As a complement to the literature review, empirical material based on four qualitative interviews has been included in the description and analysis. Three social workers working specifically with young people selling sex and one police officer working in a unit targeting the purchase of sex, procuring and human trafficking were interviewed for the study<sup>35</sup>. The interviews followed the interview protocol used in all Nordic studies and were organized and analysed thematically, in relation to the literature review.<sup>36</sup>

### 6.3 Knowledge base

In the following section, we present and discuss the knowledge base concerning young people selling sex in Sweden. This presentation is based on results from previous research and from enquiries and their reports by authorities and various types of organizations. It is organized around three themes: *young people's experiences of selling sex in (1) numbers; (2) conditions; and (3) vulnerabilities*.

#### 6.3.1 *Young people's experiences of selling sex in numbers*

A number of studies that have included questions related to young people's experiences of selling sex in Sweden have been conducted in the last 15 years (Svedin and Priebe 2004; 2007; Tikkanen et. al 2011; Fredlund et. al. 2013; Lindroth 2013; Svedin et al. 2015; Fredlund et al. 2017; Fredlund et al. 2018). In addition, government agencies, municipalities and non-government organizations (NGOs) have published a number of reports scoping the field (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008; Ahlgren et al. 2009; RFSL Youth 2015; Public Health Agency of Sweden 2017; RFSL Youth 2018; Public Health Agency of Sweden 2019). Results from these studies and grey literature reports is presented and discussed in the next section.

Through their extensive research, a research team at Linköping University has contributed significantly to the knowledge base concerning young people selling sex in Sweden. Over the last fifteen years, this research team has carried out three population-based surveys, with a representative sample of students in their third year

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<sup>35</sup> An interview request was also sent to a fourth social worker in a specialized unit targeting people selling sex, and two police officers who work in units relevant to this project. These three requests did not result in any interviews.

of upper secondary school (18 years old)<sup>37</sup> (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015)<sup>38</sup>. In addition, the Public Health Authority initiated UngKABog, a study focusing on young people and sexual health, which was partly based on a representative sample<sup>39</sup> of young people in Sweden aged between 16 and 28, and partly a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed via communities on the internet to young people aged 15–24 (Tikkanen et al. 2011)<sup>40</sup>. In 2015, a follow-up study (UngKAB15) was conducted based on a stratified randomized sample of young people aged 16–29 and using the same questionnaire<sup>41</sup> (Public Health Agency of Sweden 2017). Another larger survey was conducted in 2009 by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society on health and living conditions among young people between 16 and 25 years of age (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2009)<sup>42</sup>. The questionnaire in the school studies carried out by Linköping University included several different questions about the circumstances relating to the experience of selling sex. UngKAB had one question about experiences of selling sex and no follow-up questions. The questionnaire by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society had two questions on the topic: one about experiences and one concerning attitudes.

The three school studies (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015) show similar results regarding the extent of young people having experience of selling sex in Sweden. In the latest school study, 0.9% (1.2% of males and 0.6% of females) of young people aged 18 reported having experiences of selling sex (Svedin et al. 2015). Compared to the previous school studies, there is a marginal decrease in the number of respondents reporting having had this experience (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et al. 2013). However, the decrease is not significant, which means that the extent of young people selling sex was almost the same in 2004 as it was in 2014, according to the referenced studies (Svedin et al. 2015). The results from the study by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (2009) correspond to the results from the school studies: 1.7% reported that they had received compensation for sex<sup>43</sup>. In a newly published study on sexual and reproductive health in Sweden, the figures are slightly higher for the age group 16–29 years<sup>44</sup> (Public Health Agency of Sweden 2019).

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<sup>37</sup> The first study was a part of the Baltic Sea Regional Study on Adolescents' Sexuality conducted in 2003 (Priebe 2008).

<sup>38</sup> In total there were 4,339 responses in the school study in 2004, 5,792 responses in the school study in 2009 and 5,750 responses in the school study in 2014. The questionnaire has been roughly the same in the three studies but has gradually been modified. The studies included 65 main questions in 2004, 88 questions in 2009 and 116 questions in 2014 and covered different areas regarding young people's sexuality (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund 2019). Some of the changes between the studies are that in the third questionnaire, sections were added that focus on motives for selling sex, symptoms of trauma and sex as self-harm (Svedin et al. 2015; Fredlund 2019). In the first study the question concerning gender only had two answer alternatives (boy or girl) (Svedin and Priebe 2004). In the second and third studies, a third alternative in the question concerning gender was formulated as 'this classification does not fit me' (Svedin and Priebe 2009; Fredlund 2019). A shortened and web-based version of the questionnaire from the first school study with a self-selected sample was used in a study by the Municipality of Gothenburg (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008).

<sup>39</sup> 15,278 filled in the questionnaire, a response rate of 24%.

<sup>40</sup> The study was conducted by the Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg.

<sup>41</sup> 7,755 filled in the questionnaire, a response rate of 26%. Lindroth (2013) used the questionnaire from UngKabog in a study focusing on sexual health and risk among detained youth in Sweden.

<sup>42</sup> 2,951 filled in the questionnaire.

<sup>43</sup> Similar figures were also found in a report from Jönköping county where 1.9% (16 individuals) had received compensation for sexual services (0.7% of females and 2.9% of males) (Ahlgren et al. 2009).

<sup>44</sup> 2.8% of females and 1.8% of males.

Abelsson and Hulusjö's report (2008) however, presents different results. In their study 9.1% (11.4% of males and 7.4% of females) of the respondents report having had experience of selling sex. The authors interpret the difference in numbers between the school studies and their study as due to a greater age range in their own study and that their material was based on a self-selected sample (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008). Another study shows that it was more common that detained youth reported having both given and received compensation for sex (9%) (Lindroth 2013; Lindroth et al. 2013).

In UngKAB09, 4.6% of the female respondents and 3.6% of the male respondents reported that they had had experiences of selling sex sometime during their lifetime (Tikkanen et al. 2011). No differences were observed regarding the extent of young people selling sex between UngKAB09 and UngKAB15. The results in UngKAB09 and UngKAB15 thus differ from the results of the school studies (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Svensson et al. 2013). The difference can be interpreted in relation to the fact that the age range is greater, that the question was formulated differently and also included "compensation"<sup>45</sup> or "payment"<sup>46</sup> for sex in addition to "getting paid" for sex. In addition, the sample was different. While the school studies were conducted with a representative sample of upper secondary school students, UngKAB09 was partly based on a self-selected and web-based sample (Tikkanen et al. 2011; Hammarström et al. 2015).

The majority of the Swedish studies on this topic show a gender difference. More young men than young women report that they have sold sex. This is the case in all three school studies as well as in the study from Gothenburg (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008; Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). Similar results have been found in studies from other Nordic countries (Mossige 2001; Helweg-Larsen 2002; Pedersen and Hegna 2003). On the other hand, some of the studies show the opposite, that more young women than men report have had experiences of selling sex (Tikkanen et al. 2011; Public Health Agency of Sweden 2017; 2019). The gender difference can be understood in different ways. The method for data collection, sample size and age range of the participants might affect this difference, as well as attitudes and norms regarding gender and selling sex. This might affect both how young people interpret their own behaviour and the questions in the questionnaire, as well as the researcher's interpretation of the same (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008). This topic is discussed further in our concluding discussion.

In a number of different research studies and reports conducted in Sweden, young LGBTQ people report having sold sex to a greater extent than heterosexual and cisgender young people (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008; Svedin and Priebe 2007, 2009; Tikkanen et al. 2011; RFSL Youth 2015; the Public Health Agency of Sweden 2019). In the school study from 2004, differences were shown in relation to sexual identity. More boys who defined themselves as homo- or bisexual and girls who defined themselves as bisexual reported having had the experience of selling sex than young people who defined themselves as heterosexual (Svedin and Priebe 2007). A significant difference in experiences of selling sex was also found in the school study

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<sup>45</sup> *Kompensation* in Swedish.

<sup>46</sup> *Ersättning* in Swedish.

from 2009<sup>47</sup> (Svedin and Priebe 2009). These results are supported by other studies (Tikkanen et al. 2011) and reports (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2009). A report by RFSL Youth<sup>48</sup> shows a higher prevalence of experiences of selling sex among homosexual young men and bisexual young women, but lower among homosexual young women compared to heterosexual young people (RFSL Youth 2015). In the school study from 2014, no results in relation to sexual identity have been presented yet, but it was more common to have sold sex among those who selected "the division does not fit" when it comes to gender identity (3.8% compared to 0.9%) (Svedin et al. 2015). This is supported by other studies which show that young trans persons<sup>49</sup> more often report having experiences of selling sex than cisgender young people (Svedin and Priebe 2009; Larsdotter et al. 2011; Fredlund 2019).

Some of the studies include questions about young people's attitudes to selling or receiving payment for sex. In the study by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (2009) 10.9% said that they could imagine receiving payment for sex and in Ahlgren et al. (2009), 15.1% agreed with this statement. In both studies men had more positive attitudes to this than women. In the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society's (2009) survey, a difference in attitudes in relation to sexual orientation was also found, where LGBTQ young people expressed a more positive attitude to compensational sex than heterosexual cisgender young people did<sup>50</sup>. In the school studies that target this topic, the young people who had experiences of selling sex expressed much more positive attitudes to themselves selling sex again, and to others doing so (Svedin and Priebe 2004; Svedin and Priebe 2009). Even though the research results show that young people in institutional care report having both given and received compensation for sex to a rather high degree (Lindroth 2013; Lindroth et al. 2013), experiences of selling sex were seldom reported in a qualitative interview study with 20 young people in institutional care (Lindroth and Löfgren-Mårtensson 2013). However, the respondents more often talked about having friends who had experiences of selling sex. The boys in the study generally had a more positive attitude both to selling and buying sex, compared to the girls. The respondents also had a tendency to see sex as a commodity, and to experience that there is a grey area between non-commercial sex and selling or buying sex (Lindroth and Löfgren-Mårtensson 2013; Löfgren-Mårtensson et al. 2013).

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<sup>47</sup> 26.7% of the young people who defined themselves as homosexual, 8.3% of the young people who defined themselves as bisexual and 4.7% of the ones who selected unsure when it comes to sexual identity reported having had the experience of selling sex (compared to 0.9% of those who identified as heterosexual).

<sup>48</sup> RFSL stands for the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights. RFSL Youth is their youth organization.

<sup>49</sup> What trans persons have in common is that their gender identity and/or gender expression does/do not correspond to their legal gender, which is the one they got when they were born. The term trans includes people who want to correct their body and change legal sex (transsexual), people who are not boy or girl (for example, gender queer, non-binary, intergender), people who use clothing and other attributes that are usually considered as typical of a gender other than their legal gender at birth (crossdressers, transvestites) and people who do not want, or are unable or do not think it is important to define themselves in terms of gender. To read more, see [www.transformering.se](http://www.transformering.se)

<sup>50</sup> Similar differences regarding gender, gender identity and sexual identity were found in attitudes to purchasing sex (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2009).

### Summarizing comments

When assessing estimates and numbers concerning hidden phenomena and sensitive topics such as young people's experiences of selling sex, a contextual and methodological discussion is vital. The studies differ in several aspects: age range, sample size, the representativeness of the sample, the construction of the questions and the context for data collection, and such differences must be considered when discussing and comparing the results. The three school studies are the only studies with a representative sample, which makes the results from these more reliable than the results from the other referenced studies and reports. These results have also been published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g. Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). On the other hand, the context for the data collection must be taken into consideration when interpreting these results. They were all conducted in a school setting, which means that 18-year-olds who, for various reasons, do not attend school at all or who were not in school on the day of the survey, are missed out. In 2014, 8% of adolescents aged 18 did not attend school and only 60% participated in the school study, which makes the study not fully representative of Swedish young people (Fredlund 2019). One of the researchers involved in the latest school study points to the risk for underestimation when collecting data in schools on experiences of selling sex, since selling sex can be associated with feeling unhappy at school and dropping out of school is more commonly reported among adolescents who sell sex (Fredlund 2019). On the other hand, researchers using a self-selected sample might risk overestimation, since people who have experiences of selling sex might be more inclined to participate in studies on the topic (Tikkanen et al. 2011). Thus, studies based on a self-selected sample risk bias due to willingness to answer a questionnaire on a topic that is relevant to the potential respondents. The setting for completing the questionnaire also differs between the studies. Responding to a survey in a classroom with all classmates present, or alone in front of a computer, may affect the interpretation of and answers given to the questions. There is also variation regarding age, in terms of both how old the young people were when they answered the questionnaire, and the time range covered in the question about experience of selling sex. This may have had an impact on how respondents answered the questions<sup>51</sup>. In addition, the response rates in the studies vary between 20–60% which means that the numbers should be interpreted with caution (see e.g. Tikkanen et al. 2011; Svedin et al. 2015).

The formulation of the questions and the wordings are other important aspects influencing the results. Different words lead to different associations, and participants find different words relevant for conceptualizing the examined phenomena. Previous research has shown that the word prostitution is a term that young people do not identify with (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008; Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2010; Priebe 2008). None of the studies used the word prostitution. The most common overall term used for the phenomenon in the studies is "compensational sex"<sup>52</sup>. In the school studies, the term "to sell a sexual service"<sup>53</sup> is used. In UngKAB, it is

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<sup>51</sup> e.g. "Have you ever sold sex?" or "Have you sold sex in the last 12 months?".

<sup>52</sup> *Sex mot ersättning*.

<sup>53</sup> *Sälja sexuella tjänster*.

conceptualized as “compensation/payment for a sexual service”<sup>54</sup>, and in the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society survey it is described as “received payment for sex”<sup>55</sup> (Svedin and Priebe 2009; Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2009; Tikkanen et al. 2011). Thus, different wordings used in the different studies may have implications for what kind of payments the respondents refer to. How the questions about selling sex are framed and asked in the survey, and the number of questions targeting experiences of selling sex, are other important methodological questions. The three school studies and UngKAB have an overall focus on young people’s sexuality (sexual health, behaviour and attitudes). In the study from the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (2009), questions were asked in relation to different forms of sexual exposure online. In other words, questions concerning selling sex may be interpreted differently, depending on whether they are framed in a questionnaire setting of sexual health or exposure online.

Thus, how young people’s experiences of selling sex are conceptually and methodologically approached in the scholarly or professional context, has a major impact on the knowledge that is being produced and mediated on this topic. Consequently, data concerning how many young people have experienced selling sex in Sweden should be presented and interpreted with great caution.

### 6.3.2 *Conditions*

Young people’s experiences of selling sex are more complex than just numbers, and different circumstances affect young people’s experiences of selling sex. The three school studies, and the studies based on the same questionnaire, include several questions regarding contexts when selling sex, and there are also results from a few qualitative studies specifically focusing on contexts (e.g. Svedin et al. 2015; Jonsson 2015). In the following section, knowledge about the context within which young people experience selling sex is presented and discussed.

#### **Age, contact arena and sexual activities**

Previous research shows an average age for the first experience of selling sex as between the ages of 14.9 and 16.7 years (Svedin and Priebe 2004, 2009; Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008; Svedin et al. 2015). The school study from 2004 showed an average age for the first occasion being 15.9 years, and in the school studies from 2009 and 2014, the average age was 15.4 (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). The majority of the respondents who had experienced selling sex reported that they had sold sex on less than five occasions<sup>56</sup> (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et

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<sup>54</sup> *Ersättning/betalning för en sexuell tjänst.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ersättning för sex.*

<sup>56</sup> However, some differences in reported prevalence were found between the three studies. In 2004, it was more common to have sold sex on just one occasion or more than five. In 2009, it was more common to have done it either one time or between two and five times. In the study from 2014, it was most common for young men to have sold sex once, and for young women to have done it between two and five times.

al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). This can be understood in relation to age on first occasion, and age when completing the questionnaire. For most of the 18-year-olds who completed the questionnaire, selling sex was not reported as something the respondents did frequently. The sexual activities that the young people reported they had received payments for differ between the studies, while respondents reported somewhat similar forms of payment. In the 2004 study, the most common sexual activity reported was getting paid for intercourse among boys, and masturbating in front of the buyer among girls (Svedin and Priebe 2007). In the school study from 2009, the most common activity was vaginal intercourse or oral sex (Fredlund et al. 2013) and in 2014, the most common activity was vaginal intercourse for men and oral sex for women (Svedin et al. 2015). It was more common in 2009 and 2014, compared to 2004, to have the experience of being filmed or photographed in sexual situations for payment (Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). The most common form of compensation was money in all three school studies, which is also supported by other studies (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008; Ahlgren et al. 2009). It was more common in 2009 compared to 2004 to receive food or accommodation as payment. In 2014, money was most common among young women, but among young men "other" was more common than money as payment. In the open answer options, "other" covered payments such as candy, beverages, taxi home or massage (Svedin et al. 2015). The most frequent contact arenas seem to have changed over the years. In 2004, the most common way to get in contact with buyers was through friends (Svedin and Priebe 2007). In 2009 and 2014, the internet was the most frequently used arena for contact with buyers (Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). This result is also supported by other studies (RFSL Youth 2015; Fredlund 2019). However, even if the internet was still the most common arena for establishing contact in 2014, it had decreased slightly in importance from 2009 to 2014. In the 2014 study, one third stated that the contact was established "in another way" than the suggested options. It was also more common in the 2014 study that the young people had sold activities and received forms of payment that were not listed among the suggested options. This may indicate changes concerning what services are being sold, ways of contact and forms of payment (Svedin et al. 2015). The results in the different school studies indicate that there is no increase in the number of young people selling sex, but that the arenas for contact between buyer and seller have changed. In other words, the internet has not attracted more young people selling sex, but it has become a more frequently used contact arena between buyer and seller over the last 15 years (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et al. 2013; Jonsson 2015; Svedin et al. 2015).

In an interview study with 15 young women having had experiences of selling sex before the age of 18 (Jonsson et al. 2014), the internet was the contact arena where all respondents got in contact with their buyers. Contact was mainly initiated through communities, websites directed at young people and dating or sex websites. Advertising on websites that were specific to sex sales was unusual for the respondents/interviewees (Jonsson et al. 2014). This result is supported by results from other Swedish studies on compensational sex online, which indicate that young people under the age of 18 seldom explicitly advertise sex acts (Johansson and Turesson 2006;

Olsson 2007; Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008; Jonsson 2015). Some of the interviewees pointed out that the internet made it easier for them to find the buyers they wanted to get in touch with. They also stressed that establishing contact on the internet felt safer and allowed them to protect themselves from dishonest buyers (Jonsson et al. 2014; Jonsson and Svedin 2012). In Olsson (2010), both buyers and sellers described the benefits of the internet as the arena for contact as its accessibility, that you could be anonymous, and that you as a seller could choose your clients (Olsson 2010). In Jonsson et al.'s study (2015b) based on the same material as presented above, the internet and mobile phones were described as mostly positive and as a natural part of the young women's lives. But for some, the internet was perceived as problematic and strongly associated with selling sex. For these women, the usage of the internet changed during periods when they felt mentally ill. During such periods, they spent more time online and visited more sex websites and other websites that they experienced as destructive for them. During these periods they also sold more sex.

### Contact with the buyer and the sexual encounter

Some of the studies also focus on the buyer and the circumstances around the sexual encounter. In the school study from 2009, it was most common among both young men and women to report having sold sex to the opposite sex and to someone who was quite close in age (15–25 years old). Among the young women, 85.7% reported having sold sex to a man and among the young men, 48% had sold sex to a woman<sup>57</sup> (Svedin and Priebe 2009; Fredlund et al. 2013). In the school study from 2014, 16.1% of the young men reported having sold sex to a man, 64.5% to a woman and 6.5% to both a man and a woman on the same occasion. All the young women had sold sex to a man and 11.1% had also sold sex to a woman. It was still most common for the young men to sell sex to someone between 15–25 years of age, for the young women it was most common that the buyer was between 26 and 45 years of age (Svedin et al. 2015). This differs to some extent from the results in Abellsson and Hulusjö's (2008) study where 88% of the young women reported having sold sex to men and 12.1% to both men and women, while 59.4% of the young men sold sex to men, 31.3% to women, and 9.4% to both men and women. This study, unlike the school studies, shows that it was most common for both young men and women to sell sex to men, even if one third of the young men sold sex to women (Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008). The fact that the age of the buyer for young women seems to have increased over time may be interpreted in relation to the concept of sugar dating – a rather new phenomenon that has not yet been studied in a Swedish context. Sugar dating can be described as when an older affluent person (sugar daddy/mama) dates a young person (sugar baby). Besides the sugar daddy covering all expenses, there are often luxurious gifts involved in exchange for company and, according to some, sex (Nayar 2017; Hallengren 2019). Sugar dating is mentioned by the interviewed professionals as a form of compensational sex with an older man (sugar daddy) buying sex from a young person (sugar baby). The experience of one of the

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<sup>57</sup> 36% of the young men had sold sex to a man and 8% to both men and women.

interviewed social workers is that the majority of the young people she meets who are under 18 and sell sex advertise on sugar dating sites (Interview 3).

Age is an important aspect in the results from qualitative studies as well. In the interview study with young women having had the experience of selling sex, age emerged as an important aspect of contact with buyers (Jonsson et al. 2014). The respondents said that they wrote in ads and on profiles that they were over 18, but in their direct communications with the buyer they explicitly or implicitly stated that they were younger. The women in Jonsson et al.'s study stressed that buyers were looking for young women, preferably underaged girls. According to the respondents in this study, buyers were specifically looking for girls under the age of 15. The young women in the interview study also got in contact with buyers in other ways than ads online: via mobile phone, clubs, food stores or at school. The buyers were described by the respondents as heterogeneous regarding age and occupation. In many cases, they were unknown to the young women before the encounter, but in other cases the buyer was a teacher, a therapist or a foster father. Another recurring theme in the young women's stories was how the agreements made in advance were often violated by the buyer during the actual encounter (Jonsson et al. 2014). An interview study with young LGBTQ people who sell sex shows how different security strategies are used in relation to the buyer during sexual encounters. Aspects such as ensuring that you can easily get home, clarifying the buyer's criminal liability, and relying on gut feelings were considered important. Other strategies were to opt out if customers appeared dangerous and to be well prepared for a meeting or to bring a weapon in order to defend oneself if needed (Larsdotter et al. 2011).

### **Motives for engaging in transactional sex**

Reasons or motives for young people engaging in compensational sex are a central theme for understanding the phenomenon. The latest school study included a question regarding motives for selling sex. Other interview studies also provide knowledge concerning motives for engaging in compensational sex. In the school study from 2014, a question concerning reasons for selling sex was included in the questionnaire. This topic was not covered in the previous studies. Respondents could fill in more than one reason. The most common motives for the young men were that they liked having sex (51.6%), that it was fun/exciting (45.2%) or that they needed money (25.8%). Among young women, the most common motives were that they needed money (50%) or that they felt bad mentally and wanted to suppress anxiety (44.4%). At the same time, around one third of the young women also stated that it was fun/exciting or that they liked sex. 15.6% (all male) of all the young people who sold sex gave "fun/exciting" as the only motive for selling sex (Svedin et al. 2015). Based on the material in the third major school survey, Fredlund et al. (2018) categorized the young people into three groups based on the motives they had for selling sex. 1. Emotional motives, such as wanting closeness, affirmation, feeling bad/reducing anxiety or persuaded by the buyer. Emotional motives for selling sex were significantly associated with sexual abuse, using sex as self-harm, or having a non-heterosexual orientation. 2. Material, but not emotional motives. For this group, the compensation was important (money or drugs).

The buyer was often older than 25 years and the contact was usually established via the internet. 3. Enjoyment or no motive to sell sex, such as being fun or exciting, influenced by peers or influenced by alcohol or drugs. 50% of the young people in this group had sold sex once and 80% of the young people who reported this motive were heterosexual young men and the buyer was often someone who was under 25 years of age. The researcher's conclusion is that young people's motives for selling sex are heterogeneous and that the need for help and support can also differ between the different groups (Fredlund et al. 2018). This is supported by the results from a study on young LGBTQ people with experience of selling sex, where a number of different motives arise for why they sell or at some time have sold sex. For some it is a deliberate choice, for others it is connected with low self-esteem and "the right question at the right time", and for others it is a playful suggestion that turns serious (Larsdotter et al. 2011).

In the study based on qualitative interviews with 15 young women who had experienced selling sex before the age of 18, several of the participants stressed that previous traumatic experiences made them start to sell sex. In this study, all 15 young women had sold sex more than 10 times, and ten had sold sex on more than 30 occasions (Jonsson et al. 2015b). Some of the young women expressed feelings of loneliness and being excluded from social contexts and selling sex gave them acknowledgement, appreciation and a way to cope with feelings of isolation. Others believed that selling sex was a way of feeling physical closeness, while others described it as a way to feel in control in a life situation that otherwise felt out of control (Jonsson et al. 2015b). The respondents presented both negative and positive reasons for them to stop selling sex. Some chose to quit after encountering a very violent customer or after surviving a suicide attempt. For others, supportive contacts with close friends or professionals eventually made them trust other people (Jonsson et al. 2014). In a survey of LGBTQ young people, the importance of respectful support when you stop selling sex was highlighted. But others pointed out economic factors as important, and no matter how good the support is, it does not make any difference in relation to financial vulnerability. For them, factors such as an inclusive social security net was more important than individual therapeutic support to be able to stop selling sex (RFSL Youth 2015). This is backed up by the interviewed social workers, who highlighted the importance of social and financial support as just as important factors as therapeutic support (Interview 1, 4).

### **Safe sex, sexual risk and pleasure**

People who sell sex and young people are highlighted as special target groups in the Swedish national strategy against HIV/AIDS and some other infectious diseases (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2017). Young people who sell sex might also be included in several other target groups in the strategy, since it also includes trans people, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs intravenously, and people who come from high-endemic countries (ibid.). There is variation among young people who sell sex both in terms of knowledge about safe sex and how it is practised. In an interview study with young LGBTQ people who sell sex, some of the young people stated that they

lack knowledge of STDs<sup>58</sup>, while others have well-developed strategies for practising safe sex when selling sex (Larsdotter et al. 2011). The study shows that the reasons for not practising safe sex can be about economy, excitement or low self-esteem and difficulties with setting boundaries (ibid). In RFSL Youth's (2015) survey the young people with experience of selling sex used condoms to a lesser extent than those who did not have that experience (RFSL Youth 2015). The same study shows that it was more common among those who sold sex to have tested for STDs in the last 12 months. At the same time, 23.4% of the young people who had sold sex had never been tested for STDs. Many stated that they wanted more knowledge about STDs and safe sex (RFSL Youth 2015). Based on the material in UngKABog, there seems to be a link between selling sex and an increased risk of chlamydia for young women. However, such a link was not found among the male respondents in this study (Hammarström et al. 2015).

Several studies scoping experiences of selling sex have found a connection between the experience of selling sex and other aspects concerning sexuality. It was more common among young people with experiences of selling sex to have had an early sexual debut, more sexual partners and sexual experiences, more frequent use of pornography and more experiences of both sexual abuse and being sexually abusive (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008; Tikkanen et al. 2011). Some studies have also shown that young people who have sold sex have also purchased sex to a higher degree than young people who have not sold sex (Svedin and Priebe 2007; RFSL Youth 2015). The focus in most studies is on sexual risk and coercive sex, and the consequences and connections with other sexual activities that could be considered risky such as sex as self-harm (Svedin and Priebe 2004, 2007, Svedin et al. 2015; Jonsson 2015; Fredlund 2019). This theme will be elaborated on in the next section. Yet another aspect of sexuality and sex for compensation is sexual pleasure and desire. Some studies have shown that for a rather large number of young people, their motives for selling sex are associated with sexual desire and excitement (Larsdotter et al. 2011; Svedin et al. 2015; Fredlund 2019). Other studies have shown that the bodily reactions to sexual stimuli when selling sex can be perceived as negative and problematic. If experiences of selling sex in general are perceived as negative, it can be difficult to understand why the body reacts with feelings of sexual pleasure on these occasions. Such experiences can cause feelings of guilt and shame (Jonsson and Svedin 2012; Jonsson and Engvall 2014).

### Summarizing comments

There are several aspects that are prominent regarding contexts and circumstances when examining young people's experiences of selling sex. According to the studies presented, most young people sell sex on less than five occasions. In order to understand what these reported experiences mean, they need to be related to data about motives, consequences and vulnerabilities. This theme is elaborated on in the next section. In the school studies, it was rather rare that the young people had sold sex on more than five occasions, while in Jonsson et al.'s (2015b) qualitative study with a small sample, all of the young women

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<sup>58</sup> STD stands for sexually transmitted diseases.

had sold sex more than ten times, and two-thirds more than 30 times. The perception and experience might differ a lot depending on whether you have done something once or 30 times. As one of the interviewed social workers put it: "the experience of selling sex can be rather positive if you have done it on only a few occasions and have not yet met any violent customers or had any bad experiences". In her opinion, these bad experiences will come sooner or later if the young person continues to sell sex (Interview 3). The need for support might also differ, as well as whether the young person identifies what he or she does as "selling sex" or not. Since most of this group of young people have sold sex less than five times, the question is if it is appropriate to talk about "stopping selling sex" when you have only done it once or twice.

Overall, the use of the internet as a contact arena has increased in the last 15 years, even if it has decreased in importance to some extent between the two most recent school studies (Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). The internet, smartphones or mobile devices are a natural part of many people's lives in Sweden today. The majority of young people use the internet more than three hours a day and are online almost all day. 97% of young people aged 13–18 had their own smartphone in 2017 (Swedish Media Council 2017). In keeping with this development, the internet has grown in importance as a contact arena for compensational sex. Recent studies show that it is mainly online communities and mobile apps that are being used as contact arenas for compensational sex (RFSL Youth 2015). This is supported by one of the social workers interviewed for this study. She stressed a risk of not reaching young people who are in need of their support, since her unit primarily does online outreach work on escort sites and not on apps and communities specifically directed at young people (Interview 1). When studying young people's experiences, a central question is whether using the internet or not is an adequate question to ask. Young people in Sweden today can be seen as digital natives, as they are born in a generation where the internet is a natural and integral part of their lives (Dunkels 2007; Priebe 2008; Swedish Media Council 2017).

Few studies have included questions concerning the buyers. Yet the studies that have shown somewhat contradictory results. The majority of the young women report that they have sold sex to men. However, there are great differences in how the male respondents report the gender of the buyers. In the school studies, the male respondents report that they have sold sex to women to a higher degree than to men. In another study covering a wider age range, the male respondents reported the opposite; that they had sold sex to men to a higher degree than to women. The results must be viewed in relation to their methodologies, in particular with regard to the context for the data collection. Even so, the results challenge the dominant perspective of the buyers being men and the sellers being women, and also indicate that more research on sex buyers is needed.

For the majority of young people who have reported that they have experiences of selling sex, it is something they have done a few times, and something they associate with mixed motives and experiences. However, for some of the young people who have responded that they have sold sex, it is something they have done a great number of times, and something that they associate with negative motives and experiences. In the next section, young people's experiences of selling sex in relation to vulnerabilities is discussed further.

### 6.3.3 *Compensational sex and vulnerability*

The majority of the previous studies have studied young people's experiences of selling sex in relation to socioeconomic factors or vulnerabilities. This topic has been researched the most in the school studies, but also to some extent in other studies and reports. In terms of socioeconomic factors, aspects such as the family's economy or parents' educational level, parents being unemployed or not living together, the young person living on their own or in foster/institutional care and an immigrant background have been studied in relation to experiences of selling sex. In terms of vulnerability, aspects such as mental health, experiences of sexual or physical abuse and exposing others to the same have been studied. Previous research has also focused on drug and alcohol use and antisocial behaviour in relation to experiences of selling sex. In the following, we present the result covering these topics, followed by a brief discussion on the findings.

#### **Socioeconomic factors**

All three school studies have covered assumed correlations between the experience of selling sex and various socioeconomic factors such as parents' educational level, if the parents are unemployed, living conditions, relationships with parents and if the young person (or his/her parents) has migrated to Sweden (Svedin and Priebe 2004, 2009; Svedin et al. 2015). The results vary between the three studies and we present the results here where a connection between the experience of selling sex and socioeconomic factors has been shown.

In all three school studies, the young people who had experience of selling sex more often lived alone, were placed in foster/institutional care or lived with only one of their parents (Svedin and Priebe 2004, 2009; Svedin et al. 2015). This is supported by findings showing that young people in institutional care more often have the experience of selling sex (Lindroth 2013). In the school studies from 2004 and 2014, it was also more common among the young people who sold sex to report that they or their parents had migrated to Sweden (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). In the school study from 2014, it was more common among the young people who sold sex to experience that their family had financial difficulties compared to those who did not sell sex (Svedin et al. 2015). Some studies have looked more into detail regarding gender or contact arenas based on the material from 2009 and found some differences in relation to whether one or both of the parents were unemployed (Jonsson et al. 2015a; Fredlund et al. 2013). In UngKAB09, a relationship was found between experiences of selling sex and lacking paid employment or some other occupation. It was also more common among the young people who had experiences of selling sex to report a high consumption of alcohol, cannabis or other drugs compared to the young people who did not sell sex (Tikkanen et al. 2011). This is supported by other studies which also indicate that young people who sell sex consume more alcohol and drugs than young people who do not sell sex (Svedin and Priebe 2004; Jonsson et al. 2015; Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008). Some studies also indicate that young people with

experiences of selling sex report more acts that could be classified as antisocial behaviour<sup>59</sup> (Jonsson et al. 2015; Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008).

In an interview study with professionals who encounter young people who sell sex, one group of adolescents was mentioned as especially vulnerable: those who are on the run or homeless and who use their “sexual capital” to get shelter and food as a way of surviving (Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008). This is called “survival sex” and aspects such as violence and drug or alcohol addiction contribute to making the life situation for these young people extremely vulnerable (ibid.). There have been several reports from the police and others concerning sexual exploitation among young immigrants arriving without their parents to Sweden, termed unaccompanied minors (Fredlund 2019; County Administrative Board of Stockholm 2018; Swedish Police Authority 2014, 2016, 2017). Young men from North Africa (e.g. Morocco) are pointed out in particular as at high risk of being sexually exploited or exploited in criminal activities (Swedish Police Authority 2018). This is a topic that was brought up in the interviews for this country report as well. The social workers interviewed for this study stress that they find young, unaccompanied minors as a group of great concern, but that the actual individuals they have encountered are very few (Interview 1, 3, 4). The third school study contains questions about human trafficking for sexual purposes, but no relationship between having experiences of selling sex and being a victim of human trafficking for sexual purposes was found (Svedin et al. 2015). The risk groups mentioned above are not represented in the school studies, since they do not attend school (on the run), have not yet started school (newly arrived immigrants), or in many cases are completely outside the Swedish system (young migrants without documents) (Fredlund 2019; Swedish Police Authority 2018).

In the school studies from 2009 and 2014, differences were found between young people who sold and did not sell sex regarding their relationship with their parents<sup>60</sup> (Fredlund et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). The young people who had the experience of selling sex stated a lower level of care and higher level of overprotection from their parents<sup>61</sup>. The young people who sold sex stated that they had fewer people they could trust and that they had more relationship difficulties with their mother, their grandparents or friends of the same sex compared to young people who did not sell sex (Fredlund et al. 2013). The questions regarding relationship with parents were formulated differently in the school study from 2004, but the results were similar (Svedin and Priebe 2004). Problematic relationships with parents and feeling alone and excluded from friendship relations are also themes present in Jonsson et al.’s (2015b) interview study with young women who have experience of selling sex. This view is also expressed by professionals who encounter young people selling or exchanging sexual services, that they are often lonely or have poor relationships with adults. Feelings of “conditional belonging” are highlighted as common and problematic among young people selling sex (Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008).

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<sup>59</sup> The following aspects were included in antisocial behavior: if the young person spent the night away from home without his/her parents’ knowledge, threatened, harassed or bullied someone, had been in a violent confrontation with a teacher, been in a fight, behaved badly or injured someone else, or struck or injured an animal.

<sup>60</sup> Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) Measuring Care and Overprotection in Childhood (Wilhelm and Parker 1990).

<sup>61</sup> All differences were not significant and also differed in terms of the gender of the young person and between mothers and fathers. For a more detailed analysis of this, see Fredlund et al. (2013).

### Mental health problems

In all three school studies, a connection was found between the experience of selling sex and a poorer mental health (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Svedin and Priebe 2009; Svedin et al. 2015). The questions included regarding mental health differed between the three studies, and these studies also included questions about trauma, self-harm and sex as self-harm (Fredlund et al. 2017; Fredlund 2019). The school study from 2009 shows that young people who had experiences of selling sex in general stated poorer mental health and that they had wanted to harm themselves to a significantly higher degree. There were also considerably more of the young people who sold sex who had in fact harmed themselves in some way (Svensson et al. 2013). Further analysis of the same material shows that young people who have experience of selling sex online had lower self-esteem and a lower sense of coherence (Jonsson et al. 2015a). Several studies have shown that the health and living conditions of young LGBTQ is inferior to that of heterosexual cisgender young people (for a research overview, see Forte 2018). In the studies where mental health was analysed in relation to gender identity or sexual identity among young people selling sex, LGBTQ young people scored lower (Fredlund 2019; Svedin and Priebe 2009; Jonsson and Svedin 2012). Heteronormativity, a lack of respect from others and being called into question and poorly treated are factors that contribute to poor mental health and sexual vulnerability among LGBTQ young people (Larsdotter et al. 2011). The connection between experiences of selling sex and a low sense of well-being have also been found in qualitative studies. In the interview study with 15 young women with experience of selling sex mentioned above, all stated a low sense of well-being and several of them experienced anxiety. Some argued that the psychological and physical pain they felt during paid sexual encounters made them feel alive and present, while others felt that they disappeared or entered a state where they were not present during the sexual encounters. Some of the young women in the study also described selling sex as a form of self-harm, which they equated with cutting or burning themselves (Jonsson et al. 2015b). A connection between poor self-esteem and the experience of selling sex was also found in Abelsson and Hulusjö (2008) Larsdotter et al. (2011) and in Tikkanen et al. (2011).

Fredlund et al. (2017) used the material in the school study from 2014 and looked into the existence of sex as self-harm among young people. In the third study conducted in 2014, there was an added section in the questionnaire about sex as self-injury (SASI)<sup>62</sup>. Sex as self-injury is not yet accepted as a concept in the scholarly context, but has been highlighted in Sweden in recent years (Fredlund 2019). The result of this study showed that among young people who used sex as self-injury, 11.3% had experience of selling sex, compared with 0.7% of those who did not use SASI. There was a clear link between using SASI and other types of direct or indirect self-injury such as non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), drug use, eating disorders and suicide attempts. Furthermore, there was a strong connection between SASI and selling sex, sexual

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<sup>62</sup> SASI is defined in the study as: "when a person has a pattern of seeking sexual situations involving mental or physical harm to themselves. The behavior causes significant distress or impairment in school, work or other important areas". In the questionnaire, the question was formulated as: "Have you ever used sex to purposely hurt yourself?"

abuse, physical abuse, dissociation, NSSI and having sought medical advice for eating disorders or depression. Overall, the study shows that of all young people, the 2.2% who use SASI are a very vulnerable group, and in conclusion, Fredlund et al. stress the importance of conceptualizing the behaviour so that it can be addressed by healthcare providers (Fredlund et al. 2017). Fredlund is currently studying the motives and manifestations of sex as self-injury (forthcoming Fredlund). The sample for this study is self-selected and recruited from various support groups for vulnerable women and young people (such as at Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters) and consists of 199 individuals aged 15-64. 82.9% had started to use SASI during adolescence, when they were between 12 and 19-years old (Fredlund 2019)<sup>63</sup>.

### Physical and sexual abuse

Experiences of physical and sexual abuse among young people selling sex are highlighted in several studies. Based on the material in the three school studies, the young people who had experiences of selling sex had been more exposed to sexual abuse than other young people (Svedin and Priebe 2007; Jonsson et al. 2015a; Svedin et al. 2015). In the school study from 2009, 78.4% had been subjected to sexual abuse and 51% to penetrating sexual abuse. In the same study, the results also showed that all forms of physical or emotional abuse were more common among the young people who sold sex (Svensson et al. 2013; Jonsson et al. 2015a). In the study from 2014, 72.2% of the women who sold sex had been subjected to penetrating sexual abuse (Svedin et al. 2015). From the presented results in the studies from 2009 and 2014, it is not possible to know if the sexual assaults preceded the sex sale or if the abuse occurred in connection with the sex sale (Svensson et al. 2013; Svedin et al. 2015). The school study from 2004 lacks information from a number of young people about when the abuse had occurred, but in cases where the answers were found, the abuse had preceded sex sales in 69% of the cases (Svedin and Priebe 2007). In an interview study with young women selling sex, most of them had experiences of sexual abuse or other trauma prior to selling sex (Jonsson and Svedin 2012). The difference in how severe the consequences of the abuse were, was understood in relation to body image and depending on whether the girl had sexually debuted prior to the abuse or not (ibid). When it comes to the young women who had experiences of being sexually abused, the sale of sex is interpreted as a way of moving from one stigmatizing experience (sexual abuse) to another "self-controlled" form of stigmatization (selling sex) (Jonsson et al. 2015b). Based on the material from the third school study, the motives for selling sex were put in relation to experiences of sexual abuse. It was more common among the young people who sold sex for emotional reasons to have experiences of sexual abuse (82.4%). The young people who stated that they sold sex for motives connected to pleasure and excitement had less experience of sexual abuse than the previous group (47.4%), but still much higher than young people not selling sex (Fredlund 2019). The experience of sexual abuse is also highlighted by the social workers interviewed. Their experience is that it is not the abuse in itself that causes the young person the greatest distress, but

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<sup>63</sup> The article is not published yet, but the main findings are presented in Fredlund's (2019) doctoral thesis.

rather that they have not talked to anybody about it, or that it was handled in an inadequate way afterwards. Starting to sell sex was seen by the social workers as one way among many for their clients to try to deal with their experiences of abuse by themselves (Interview 3, 4).

In some studies, the prevalence of young people receiving payment in relation to sexual assault has been studied. In Svedin and Priebe (2004), 28.6% of the young people who sold sex had received payment on some occasion in connection with a sexual assault on them. In Abellsson and Hulusjö (2008), the corresponding figure is 29% among the young women and 15.4% among the young men. Jonsson and Svedin (2012) interviewed young women with experiences of selling sex. In common for all the young women in the study was that the sex sales they found most difficult were those that included physical violence (especially trauma to the head), a gang bang (when the girl thought she was going to meet one person, but several showed up), sex involving urine and faeces, and filmed/photographed encounters. Several of the young women had experienced violence from their buyers that required medical attention. They had also sought medical advice due to pregnancy and for abortions, STDs, or urinary and anal problems. However, it is important to distinguish the experiences of violence that the young women in this study have, where there was no rules and no agreement before the meeting with the buyer, from compensational sex with agreed violent elements (Jonsson and Svedin 2012). In Larsdotter et al. (2011), it was rather common both to offer, and that the buyer requested, BDSM services, which is a completely different setting than the situations described above. In those cases, what was offered was often described in detail in the advertisement and an agreement was set before the encounter (Larsdotter et al. 2011). In RFSL Youths (2015) study, 44.2% of the cisgender girls stated that they had been forced to have compensational sex. Based on the free text comments, it seems that the respondents have interpreted the question differently, as in forced by circumstances or forced by another person (RFSL Youth 2015).

The school study from 2004 showed that it was more common among the young people who sold sex to have exposed others to sexual abuse than those who did not sell sex (Svedin and Priebe 2007). Similar results were found in Abellsson and Hulusjö (2008), where the young people who sold sex had answered yes to a greater extent to all response options about exposing others to various sexual acts against their will. This is also confirmed in RFSL Youth (2015) and especially among young people with trans experience who had sold sex, of which 10.3% had forced someone else to have sex (0.9% of all participants in the study had forced someone to have sex). In a study that investigated risk factors among young men with sexually coercive behaviour, it was more common to have the experience of selling sex among the adolescents who reported any sexually coercive behaviour in their lifetime compared to the control group (12.9% versus 1%) (Kjellgren et al. 2010). In the 2004 school study, it also emerged that the young people who were frequent users<sup>64</sup> of pornography had both sold and bought sex more often than the young people who consumed less or no pornography (Svedin et al. 2011).

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<sup>64</sup> Frequent users were considered those who watched pornography daily and they accounted for 10.5% of all boys in the study who watched pornography.

### **Vulnerable target groups identified in the field, but not in the literature**

A number of interviews have been conducted as a complement to the literature review. The interviewed social workers give a similar picture of young people's experiences and vulnerabilities as presented above. However, additional target groups to those mentioned in previous research were also pointed out by the social workers and the police. In the interview with a social worker in Stockholm who does outreach work with the police, it was clear that apart from her main target group, which is minors, she also encounters a lot of young adults who are temporarily in Sweden to sell sex. Their country of origin differs, but the two largest groups she meets come from Romania and Nigeria. Her perception is that it is not uncommon for a procurer or a trafficker to be involved in these cases, and that there are strong financial incentives for women from Romania to continue to sell sex and that women from Nigeria live under threats of severe violence. These conditions prevent them from leaving the situation (Interview 3). One of the other social workers also does outreach work and points out the differences in life situation and vulnerability if the person is a resident in Sweden or is in the country on a temporary visit. She experiences difficulties in offering these people adequate support (Interview 1). Both the interviewed police officer and two of the social workers pointed out the vulnerable situation for non-residents selling sex in Sweden. Women from Nigeria are perceived as especially vulnerable. The professionals' experience is that these women have had a very difficult journey coming to Sweden, and due to their lack of knowledge in reading and writing must have had help organizing their journey to Sweden. One social worker also pointed out the threat of severe violence from Nigerian criminal networks and the slave-like conditions under which they are forced to sell sex. Unlike people from other EU countries (like Romania), the women from Nigeria lack the right to reside in Sweden and risk being deported under to the Aliens Act<sup>65</sup> (Interviews 1, 2, 3). One social worker also has the experience of meeting cis women and trans women from Latin America. Her perception is that it is less common that there is a procurer or trafficker involved in these cases. For the trans women from Latin America, she believes that selling sex is instead a consequence of stigmatization in their country of origin and selling sex becomes a way to finance their hormones and surgeries (Interview 3).

### **Summarizing comments**

To some extent, the school studies and UngKAB have studied young people's experiences of selling sex in relation to structural factors. However, the majority of the studies focus mainly on individual aspects. When interpreting the results from the studies, it is thus important to consider their applied research perspectives; an individual focus in research will point to individual factors concerning the studied phenomena. With an individual focus, young people's experiences of selling sex are interpreted as being based on individual problems, while structural factors are not taken into consideration. Closely connected to an individual focus on social problems are interventions focusing on individual responsibility and individual change. With such

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<sup>65</sup> To read more about the specific conditions for Nigerian women, see Swedish Police Authority (2010, 2018) for example.

an approach, structural factors such as socio-economic conditions and social inequality are downplayed. The interviews with social workers show that their professional experiences in outreach work and counselling include more and somewhat different experiences concerning the selling of sex among young people than are covered in the research literature. Life circumstances, motives for selling sex, the possibility to stop doing so, and the level of vulnerability differ a lot between different target groups, according to the social workers. This means that the need for support and what type of support is adequate and needed varies among the people they encounter in their work. In the following section, social initiatives targeting young people selling sex in Sweden are described and discussed.

## 6.4 Social initiatives

Selling sex has been considered a social problem for a long time in Sweden, and both government and non-government organizations offer social support to the target group. In many cases, the social initiatives in Sweden target both compensational sex and human trafficking, and the following presentation includes both. To a great extent, the social initiatives in Sweden are based on the Swedish political ambition to reduce and combat prostitution and human trafficking. In the following section, current research and reports concerning social initiatives and professional support for young people selling sex in Sweden are described. This section also includes a description of social initiatives in Sweden based on the literature review and the qualitative interviews with social workers.

### 6.4.1 *Needs for support among young people selling sex*

A little over a quarter of the young people in the school study from 2009 had at least once sought help because they had sold sex (Svensson et al. 2013). There was also a significantly higher proportion of the young people who sold sex who had sought help for various psychological problems compared to the young people who did not sell sex. About 35% turned to peers (partners, friends or siblings) to get help and about 33% to professionals (e.g. psychologists). The young people who sold sex were generally more dissatisfied with the help they had received, and this was the case especially for the young women who sold sex (ibid.). Abellsson and Hulusjö's study shows similar results, and in addition, just under 30% of the young people who sold sex would not talk to anybody about their problems (Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008). In Jonsson's interview study with young women selling sex, the participants found it hard to talk about both their experiences of selling sex and of sexual abuse. They struggled to find a suitable term and were hesitant about what to tell. Jonsson interpreted this as them being unsure about how their stories would be received, since both sexual abuse and selling sex are sensitive topics to talk about and carry stigmatization (Jonsson 2015). The young women expressed that it was difficult to talk about their experiences and poor mental health to someone face to face. The internet was an alternative for many of the young

women, and they talked to adults as well as peers via forums, blogs or on support websites (Jonsson and Svedin 2012). This is supported by RFSL's study of young LGBTQ people, who also expressed a wish for internet-based support, such as online chat (RFSL Youth 2018). The focus in this study was on young LGBTQ people's needs for support in relation to compensational sex. The purpose of the study was to serve as a basis for developing a support activity within Pegasus Advice and Support<sup>66</sup>. The study shows that while the majority of respondents expressed high confidence in the youth clinic, confidence in the school health services, social services and the police was low. On the question of what type of support the young people would like, most responded that they wanted counselling concerning wellbeing and health, support/information about legal matters and their rights and support in contact with the healthcare system. Feeling that one's identity is respected, having to decide whether others should be contacted and knowing what to tell without others being contacted were factors that were highlighted as important in their contact with RFSL Youth. Few participants in the study knew where to turn to get support and knowledge about transactional sex, which is worrying in relation to 51% of the participants in the study having had the experience of selling sex (RFSL Youth 2018). Another study from RFSL Youth (2015) also included questions about the experience of, and need for support in relation to experiences of, selling sex. 7.1% had received support and 16.6% wanted support. There was a difference in relation to whether the young person had been subjected to sexual coercion (with or without payment); among this group a larger proportion wanted support. The young people with trans experience were those who expressed the biggest wish for support. It was common among the young LGBTQ persons in the study to avoid seeking help due to shame or fear of being judged (RFSL Youth 2015).

#### 6.4.2 *Professionals' experience and knowledge*

Previous research shows that professionals are experiencing difficulties in addressing the issue of transactional sex in encounters with young people, as the young people prefer to talk about other things (Priebe 2008). In Priebe's study, the participating professionals experienced that the best way to help young people selling sex is through inter/multi-professional networks and through gathering all the social initiatives into one place (ibid.). Most professionals have only met a few young people who sell sex or are sexually exploited. At the local level, there is usually no basis for developing methods that specifically target young people selling sex and even less so for evaluating these methods in a systematic way (ibid.). In a survey of the work of social services on risk-taking and sexuality among young people, the majority of the professionals felt that they had no knowledge at all or little knowledge about the purchase or sale of sex and about sex as self-injury. 86% had not received any education related to the subject of risk-taking and sexuality among young people, and 92% felt that there was a need for education or skills development on the subject (Grander 2014). This experienced

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<sup>66</sup> Pegasus Råd och Stöd.

lack of knowledge among professionals has not been left unnoticed: a number of method materials targeting professionals have been produced in Sweden. For instance, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, in collaboration with The Children's Welfare Foundation<sup>67</sup>, has developed material for a method aimed at raising awareness of children who are sexually exploited in various ways. The material contains advice on what professionals should be aware of and what risk factors to look out for. The material also addresses the importance of daring to ask questions and includes various examples of questions that professionals can ask children in situations where they are concerned about the possibility of sexual exploitation (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2009). Similar advice was given in a knowledge review concerning help and support for young people selling sex from Stockholm City (Jonsson and Engvall 2014). This material is a knowledge review presenting case stories and topics for professionals to discuss and reflect on. Stories from young people form the basis of the knowledge review and the main message is that children and young people want somebody to ask specific questions about sex. The authors emphasized that how young people are treated when they begin telling their stories is crucial to them daring to continue telling. Contact with an adult, often in a professional role, plays a crucial role in stopping selling sex according to this material (Jonsson and Engvall 2014). A number of guidelines and method materials have also been produced by national, regional and local authorities such as the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, the County Administrative Board of Stockholm County, and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, which will be discussed in the next section.

In an interview study targeting professionals' experiences of encountering young people who sell sex, it became clear that "prostitution" is not a term used among young people. How young people term what they do has implications for how they answer questions regarding their experiences. This is the case when the term prostitution is used as well as when questions are formulated in a way that portrays the young person as the initiator of the transaction (Abelsson and Hulusjö 2008). Similar attitudes were found in a focus group study conducted by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (2010). The participants in the focus groups were 41 boys and girls between 13 and 19 years of age. The term "prostitution" appeared to be unfamiliar to them and associated with stigmatizing ideas about "prostitutes" with specific attributes (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2010). Similar concerns are highlighted in a knowledge compilation about the sexual exploitation of children. The term "child prostitution" is associated with it being a regular activity with a large number of customers, which is usually not the case with children and young people (Priebe 2008).

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<sup>67</sup> Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset.

### 6.4.3 *Social initiatives for young people selling sex in Sweden*

In 1996, the first World Congress against commercial sexual exploitation of children took place in Stockholm. The nation states that attended the World Congress signed a joint declaration and pledged to establish national action plans to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children<sup>68</sup> (Priebe 2008). The Swedish Government presented its first national action plan in 1998, and it was followed up and updated in 2001 and 2007 (Priebe 2008). In 2008, the Swedish Government also presented its first national action plan specifically aimed at combating prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes<sup>69</sup>. By launching this action plan, the Swedish Government has presented its official position, framing human trafficking as intrinsically linked with prostitution (Lindholm 2015); an official position that has not changed in Sweden's second action plan, presented in 2018 (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2018). Since 1998, the National Board of Health and Welfare has been tasked by the Government with continuously monitoring the development of prostitution in Sweden. They have written several reports on the topic, and also produced educational materials for professionals, aimed at adults, children and young people who have compensational sex (National Board of Health and Welfare 2004, 2007, 2011, 2015). In parallel with the National Board of Health and Welfare's task, the County Administrative Board of Stockholm have been tasked with a national responsibility for coordinating efforts combatting prostitution and human trafficking (for all purposes). In 2018, this national task was moved from the County Administrative Board of Stockholm to the recently started Swedish Gender Equality Agency (JÄMY 2019). A number of reports have been produced within the Agency with a focus on human trafficking in children and adults, in the form of overviews, manuals and guides for professionals (see e.g. Johansson 2017; JÄMY 2018; County Administrative Board of Stockholm 2018). The National Method Support Team (NMT) was established within the framework of this coordination task. The NMT consists of authorities working against prostitution and human trafficking and acts as a strategic and operational resource to develop and streamline coordination between the authorities and NGOs. Within the framework of the NMT, a special support process has been created which the authorities are supposed to follow. A help line is being operated as well as a return programme (in collaboration with the UN agency the International Organization for Migration) as part of this support process, and there are seven county coordinators against human trafficking with the same regional divides as the police, and covering all of Sweden. The county coordinators work with all victims of human trafficking regardless of age or purpose. The NMT also offers support and training to municipalities, government agencies/authorities and NGOs concerning work with human trafficking (JÄMY 2019; NMT Sweden 2019).

There are three specialized units within social services in Sweden that provide counselling, support and practical help for people who sell sex, harm themselves with

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<sup>68</sup> In the national action plans, a child is someone who is under the age of 18.

<sup>69</sup> The Swedish Government and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency use the term prostitution.

sex, or are victims of human trafficking<sup>70</sup>. They also do outreach work in physical and digital environments where compensational sex take place. They are situated in the three largest cities and the services are available to residents in all three municipalities. *Mikamottagningen* in Stockholm has an age limit of 18 years old, *Evonhuset* in Malmö has an age limit of 15 and *Mikamottagningen* in Gothenburg does not have any age limit at all. People under 18 who have sex for compensation in Stockholm are referred to *Stödcentrum*<sup>71</sup>, and those under 15 in Malmö are referred to *Plattform Malmö*<sup>72</sup>. All three units emphasize on their websites that everyone is welcome, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity. *Mikamottagningen* in Gothenburg and *Evonhuset* also state on their websites that they have an LGBTQ certificate/diploma. There is a medical clinic for people who sell sex called Mika Health attached to *Mikamottagningen* in Stockholm. *Mikamottagningen* in Gothenburg and *Evonhuset* have close collaborations with medical clinics specializing in people who have experienced selling sex in each city<sup>73</sup>. The three units are solely supportive, and thus have no investigative or decision-making responsibilities (Stockholm City 2019a; Gothenburg City 2019; Malmö City 2019; Interviews 1,3,4). In cases when the units encounter someone under 18 who sell sex, social services are often involved from the start, and if not, they report to the part of social services that has an official responsibility concerning children under 18 who sell sex (Interviews 1, 3, 4). Previous research and evaluations of the three units have discussed whether they have a harm-reduction or zero-tolerance approach, and the risk of creating high thresholds to seeking help with a zero-tolerance approach (Åkerman and Svedin 2011). In the interviews conducted with two of the social workers from these units, they strongly emphasized how they try to lower the threshold as much as possible and that they always have an individual focus and frame the counselling based on the individual's needs (Interviews 1 and 4). One of the interviewed social workers points out that it is impossible to not have any thresholds at all, since they are a part of social services. According to this informant, being part of social services will always send out specific signals to potential clients and constrain their work/approach.

One social worker in Stockholm has a special assignment to target young people selling sex<sup>74</sup>. This social worker works closely with the police and accompanies them on their visits aiming to provide support for people selling sex. This differs if the person selling sex is a minor or an adult. If they identify minors advertising online, the main purpose of their visit is to put an end to the activity (even if there is no buyer present at the time). If the seller is over 18, the person is considered a witness and the social worker accompanies the police both to inform the person selling sex of their rights and possibilities for support and to offer support to the buyer. With adults, the

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<sup>70</sup> In one of the cities, people who buy sex are also part of the target group (*Evonhuset*) and the other two cities have separate specialized units for people buying sex (KAST).

<sup>71</sup> *Stödcentrum* is a support clinic for victims of crimes.

<sup>72</sup> *Plattform Malmö* is a part of social services providing support for young people in Malmö.

<sup>73</sup> *Mikamottagningen* in Gothenburg collaborates with *Pilen* and *Evonhuset* cooperates with *Ambulatoriet* and *Kvinnokliniken*.

<sup>74</sup> Located at an emergency unit in social services targeting young people under the age of 20.

social worker also talks about safety with the person selling sex, and about how to protect oneself when selling sex (Interview 3). This is similar to the model used in Malmö in their outreach work, where the focus is on safety (both physical and sexual) (Interview 1). Collaborative efforts between the police and social services are organized differently at different places in the country, which will be discussed in more detail in the section about legal measures.

The interviewed social workers found that the most important foundation for being able to provide good support to the target group is their professional freedom. Their professional freedom allows them to shape the support to the individual's needs without any pressure. It is also possible for them to collaborate with several different service providers depending on the individual's needs (such as psychiatry, financial support, social activities and employment activities) (Interviews 1, 3, 4). Two of the social workers pointed out some difficulties in their work. Even though there is a national action plan against prostitution and human trafficking, there is no organized effort within social services to provide support for people selling sex or victims of human trafficking (as is the case for domestic violence and honour-related crimes). The consequences, according to the social workers, are difficulties in providing housing in shelters, that the violence that has been perpetrated against someone selling sex does not count if it is not domestic violence, and that the money you earn counts as income when you seek financial assistance from social services (Interviews 3 and 4).

Other professionals who provide support for young people in a broader sense might come into contact with young people with experiences of selling sex. There are approximately 250 youth clinics in Sweden that provide health care and support for young people aged 13–25 (FSUM 2018). UMO is a youth clinic online for all young people in Sweden aged 13–25. On their website, there is information related to sex, health and relationships, and links to all youth clinics in Sweden (UMO 2019). There are some NGOs that provide different kinds of support to young people who have experience of compensational sex. Pegasus Advice and Support<sup>75</sup> is the only support initiative that is primarily aimed at young LGBTQ people who have experience of compensational sex. Pegasus is a three-year project funded from *Arvsfonden*<sup>76</sup>. The overall aim of the project is to improve the physical and mental health of LGBTQ people aged 15–25 who have experience of compensational sex. The aim is also to decrease discrimination of young LGBTQ people who sell sex (RFSL Youth 2015). 1000 Opportunities<sup>77</sup> is a foundation that operates several different activities with the overall aim of achieving a society of equality and free from violence. They have a specialized support clinic for young people selling sex and provide online chat for the same target group (1000 Opportunities 2019). *Röda parapyet*<sup>78</sup> is a website for people who have experience of compensational sex. It is operated by RFSL Stockholm and contains information about compensational sex, safe sex and support (Röda Parapyet 2019).

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<sup>75</sup> Pegasus Råd och Stöd is part of RFSL Youth.

<sup>76</sup> A state fund that receives money primarily from estates where there is no will and no heir. Associations and other non-profit organizations can apply for project support from this fund.

<sup>77</sup> <https://1000omjigheter.se/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://rodaparapyet.org/>

There are several NGOs who provide housing in shelters for women who sell sex or who are victims of human trafficking. In addition to the shelters, *Noomi* in Malmö also does outreach work and *Talita* in Stockholm provides a rehabilitation program (Noomi 2019; Talita 2019; The Salvation Army Sweden 2019; UKV 2019). The platform Civil Sweden Against Human Trafficking has established a network for NGOs and actors that provide support for people exposed to human trafficking and human trafficking-like exploitation. The platform provides a supplementary national support programme (NSP). In 2018, they received grants from the Swedish Government to run and develop the programme (Civil Sweden Against Human Trafficking 2019).

#### 6.4.4 *Summarizing comments*

Social support for people selling sex is rather well developed in Sweden. Despite this, it is centralized to the largest cities in the country, and the age limits differ between the three units, which means that the possibility for young people to get adequate support differs depending on where they live in the country. Previous research also shows that professionals not working primarily with this area lack knowledge and skills in how to handle it. Yet another challenge in providing adequate and equal support to young people selling sex that was stressed by the interviewees is that the rights to receive support differ based on the client's residence status in Sweden. Two of the respondents also stressed that there are no explicit guidelines for how to provide support for people selling sex or victims of human trafficking, as is the case for domestic violence and honour-related crimes. This has consequences for what type of support can be offered. Another topic of discussion is the relationship between government organizations (GOs) and non-government organizations (NGOs). The role of NGOs can be seen as a complement to the role of GOs, and they provide support that cannot be obtained from the state or the municipalities. Some of the NGOs get their funding from the Swedish Government. However, while GOs have policies requiring neutrality in relation to religion and political values, the majority of the NGOs are driven by political and/or religious ideals.

## 6.5 **Legal measures**

This last section is based on a brief overview of the relevant legislation in Sweden, followed by a discussion on its implementation and operational work based on previous research and the interviews with the social workers and a police officer.

### 6.5.1 *Legal framework and statistics*

The legal age of consent in Sweden is 15 years of age. It is a crime to purchase sexual services from an individual of any age, with a maximum sentence of one year of imprisonment (Swedish Penal Code, Chapter 6, Section 11). Children are seen as especially vulnerable and in need of protection, which is the reason for a special

legislation regarding adolescents between 15 and 18 years of age. It is a crime to purchase a sexual act from an individual under the age of 18, with a maximum sentence of two years of imprisonment (Swedish Penal Code, Chapter 6, Section 9). If the child is under the age of 15, it is considered rape of a child (Swedish Penal Code, Chapter 6, Section 4). Other legislation that may be relevant in relation to compensational sex is procuring (Swedish Penal Code, Chapter 6, Section 12) and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes (Swedish Penal Code, Chapter 4, Section 1a).

It is difficult to find any statistics of reported crimes regarding the purchase of a sexual service where the person selling sex is a young adult. An adult selling sex is considered a witness and not a plaintiff and there are no statistics kept on the age of the person selling sex (Swedish Police Authority 2018). The numbers of reported crimes concerning the purchase of a sexual act from a child was 134 in 2015, 191 in 2016, and 92 in 2017. There were 54 criminal offences recorded in 2017. The number of reported crimes concerning trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes with children was 11 in 2015, 15 in 2016, and 23 in 2017 (Swedish Police Authority 2018). The Swedish Migration Agency reported most of the crimes concerning human trafficking. A total of 15 out of 23 reported offences were committed in a country other than Sweden such as Albania, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Nigeria and were therefore difficult to investigate. Of the 8 cases that were committed in Sweden, 7 were closed down and 1 was ongoing when the report from the police was published. In 2017, no persons were prosecuted for trafficking for sexual purposes with children under the age of 18 (Swedish Police Authority 2018). Since the legislation on trafficking in human beings was introduced in 2002, all cases recorded by the police of children who were victims of trafficking for sexual purposes in Sweden have been girls. The majority of them were between the ages of 16 and 17 and in some cases younger than 15 years old (Swedish Police Authority 2018).

### 6.5.2 *Implementation*

Some studies have looked into the implementation of the legislation, and more specifically how women selling sex are treated and taken care of during a police investigation. In a study exploring how adolescents who have been sexually exploited responded to police officers' questions, 24 interviews performed by 24 different police officers were coded and analysed. The results show that more than 50% of the questions posed by the police were open-ended or suggestive prompts. The adolescents could be seen to avoid disclosing information by using evasive responses, particularly when questions were posed about crime-specific details, their involvement in the sex trade, and their relationships with the persons involved in the crime. One explanation for the adolescents' evasive responses may be the police officers' use of social pressure, invitations and directives (Lindholm et al. 2014). Kuosmanen and Starke (2015) have analysed four legal cases in which girls or young women with intellectual disabilities had been exposed to prostitution-related crimes (mainly procuring). The study shows various challenges in communicating with the girls during the investigation and the difficulties in maintaining the interrogations in ways that are

understandable to the girls and that lead to adequate testimony. Their conclusion was that it is of great importance that professionals in the legal system have the knowledge and skills needed to be able to communicate and interact with people with intellectual disabilities, for example in interview situations (Kuosmanen and Starke 2015).

Previous research has pointed out how the Aliens Act affects people selling sex in Sweden, in terms of deportation and in how it applies to them (Skilbrei and Holmström 2013; Holmström 2015; Vuolajärvi 2018). As discussed above, this was supported by one of the social workers, who is worried about how the border police use the Aliens Act to target migrants and non-residents selling sex in Sweden. Her experience is that the deportation of people selling sex from Sweden makes it more difficult to provide support and, in some cases, also leads to deportation of the person back to the person who is trafficking or procuring them (Interview 3).

In their annual report in 2018, the police express concern about the risk that unaccompanied minors will fall victim to human trafficking for sexual and other purposes. This applies in particular to children who have absconded from institutional care, have been refused their applications for a residence permit or who have not been registered by any authority. The police highlight one group as especially vulnerable as potential victims of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Children from North Africa, especially Morocco, who are homeless, moving around in Europe and who have a minimal chance of obtaining a residence permit in Sweden. A special team located within the border police in the Stockholm region work with crime prevention in relation to this specific group<sup>79</sup>. By doing outreach work, they aim to identify early on unaccompanied minors being drawn into criminal activities and who could become victims of trafficking (Swedish Police Authority 2018). All three social workers were aware of a growing concern for unaccompanied minors selling sex. So far, their experience of actually encountering this target group has been limited, and they expressed uncertainty about the reasons for this. Either this group is more difficult to reach than other young people selling sex, or this concern is bigger in public debate than it is in lived experiences. They all pointed out that they were aware of the concern and had the resources and the necessary collaborations to be able to support this group if they were to encounter them (Interviews 1, 3, 4).

### 6.5.3 *Operational work*

The police operational work targeting the purchase of sexual services, purchase of sexual acts from children, procuring and human trafficking is not uniform across the country. In most regions, work related to the Sex Purchase Law, procuring and human trafficking is situated at three different organizational levels<sup>80</sup> (Swedish Police Authority 2018). However, in the specific region where the interviewed police officer is located, the three different offences are situated in the same police unit. The interviewed police officer sees the purchase of sex, procuring and human trafficking

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<sup>79</sup> We have tried to get an interview with a police officer from this team, but without success.

<sup>80</sup> In five of the regions, it is handled by different units, and in two combined in the same unit (Swedish Police Authority 2018).

as a chain of offences, and believes that the most effective way to detect procuring and human trafficking is to target the purchase of sex. This means that they have interrogations with people selling sex from the start when they identify an advertisement online. They divide people selling sex into mobile advertisers and local advertisers, and the interviewed police officer's perception is that they often advertise on different sites online. The mobile advertisers are in the region for a short time period and are often from Romania or Nigeria (and some other countries). When it comes to the mobile advertisers, the police assume that they have had some kind of help in organizing their sex sales and put more effort into mapping and surveillance to find out who is involved in it. The interviewed police officer's experience is that it is very common that they detect procuring or human trafficking among the mobile advertisers (Interview 2).

The local advertisers are residents of the region and the police do outreach work in collaboration with social services<sup>81</sup> to reach these individuals. The aim of this work for the police is to investigate if the person is selling sex on their own or if there is someone else involved in organizing it. Depending on the answer, they continue to offer support via social services (to stop selling sex). If they find out through their outreach work that the one selling sex is underaged, they refer the person to Barnahus<sup>82</sup>. They do this kind of outreach work on explicitly escort websites and sugar dating websites. In this region, this outreach work (seeking out individuals selling sex without any buyer present) is done with minors and adults alike, while in another region this method is only used with minors (Interview 2). The interviewed social worker who does outreach work with the police works in another region where this type of outreach work primarily targets those who are selling sex where they suspect that the person is underaged. When it comes to adults, the social worker accompanies the police when they target people buying sex and then provide information and offer support both to the person selling and the person buying sex (Interview 3).

#### 6.5.4 *Summarizing comments*

Previous studies show that young people how have experiences of selling sex have difficulties finding adequate support. On the one hand, professionals who do not work specifically with this issue experience that they have a lack of knowledge about how to provide support; on the other hand, there are a number of educational and method materials available. How to conceptualize experiences of selling sex appears to be of key concern when establishing a relationship of trust between a professional and a young person seeking support. It seems that great care and caution is required in determining how to conceptualize these types of experiences, and how to approach a young person who begins talking about such experiences in a professional manner. On the other hand, there seem to be somewhat indistinct boundaries between social work and police efforts

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<sup>81</sup> County coordinator against human trafficking.

<sup>82</sup> Barnahus (Children's house) is a unit specially adapted to care for children who are victims of a crime. It brings together police, prosecutors, social workers, doctors and counsellors under the same roof (see for example Stockholm City 2019b).

in relation to their collaborative outreach work. In some cases, the police's main task is to focus on the person buying sex, while in others the outreach work is the first step in investigating whether there is a procurer or trafficker involved, and in still other cases the main task of the police seems to be the same as the social workers: to try to get the person selling sex to stop doing so. This approach to people who sell sex can be considered quite controversial, since individuals selling sex have not committed any crime. Collaborative work by the police and social workers targeting minors selling sex can be understood in relation to the stricter legislation regarding minors, which is aimed to protect young people. However, using the same method on (young) adults selling sex creates challenges for establishing a relationship of trust with a young person who is selling sex. Previous research has shown how some people selling sex have experiences of being treated and seen as criminals, and additionally, that they experience that they have no choice in collaborating with the police (Vuolajärvi 2018).

## 6.6 Conclusion – Sweden

This review of the current state of knowledge about young people selling sex in Sweden shows a comprehensive, but somewhat fragmented, picture of the phenomenon. Scoping young people's sexual experiences is challenging, and even more so because it entails focusing on stigmatized activities connected to criminality. Studies that have included questions about such experiences show that around 1% of a representative sample of Swedish 18-year-olds report having sold sex at some point in their lives. Studies based on self-selected samples of 16-29-year olds in Sweden show higher figures: between 4% and 9% report that they have sold sex. These studies differ in terms of their samples and data collection methods, and this explains the great difference in the results: between 1% and 9% of Swedish young people in the age range 16–28 years report that they have experienced selling sex. The figures concerning the extent of young people selling sex in Sweden thus should be interpreted with caution, bearing in mind the risk of both under- and over-estimation.

Most studies indicate a gender difference: more young men report that they have sold sex than young women. Other Nordic studies show similar results (Pedersen and Hegna 2003; Mossige 2001; Helweg-Larsen 2002). Despite these results, there are currently few studies that have focused on male adolescents selling sex and there seems to be a gender bias in research studying adolescents selling sex (Fredlund 2019). Several reports point to the fact that polarized images of the female prostitute and the male sex buyer make young men's experiences of selling sex invisible (see for example Abellsson and Hulusjö 2008; Larsdotter et al. 2011). In addition, the results from a number of different research studies and reports conducted in Sweden show that young LGBTQ people report having sold sex to a greater extent than heterosexual and cisgender young people. Against this backdrop, Larsdotter. et al. stress the importance of considering multifaceted experiences regardless of gender identity or sexual identity, where individual circumstances such as self-esteem, economic situation, the arena for selling sex, drug use, attitude to sex, ability to set boundaries, social circumstances and

access to support and help are factors that affect the situation for people who have had experience of having sex for compensation (Larsdotter et al. 2011).

When it comes to frequency, most young people who have reported that they have experience of selling sex report having sold sex less than five times. Internet communities and mobile apps are being used as the main contact arenas for compensational sex. The review shows that young people's motives for selling sex are heterogeneous. In the school studies, the most common motives for the male respondents were that they liked having sex, that it was fun/exciting or that they needed money. Among the female respondents, the most common motives were that they needed money or that they felt bad mentally and wanted to suppress anxiety. On the other hand, one third of the female respondents also stated that it was fun/exciting or that they liked sex.

The review shows that socioeconomic factors have an impact in relation to young people's experiences of selling sex. Family economy, migrant background, parents' education and employment situation, and housing situation stand out as influential factors, as do drug and alcohol consumption patterns, being in institutional care and family relationship problems. In addition, social workers expressed a specific concern for young homeless people, even though this group is not explicitly mentioned in the literature. The majority of the quantitative studies show a connection between reporting the experience of selling sex and reporting a lower level of mental health. The connection between experiences of selling sex and a low sense of well-being have also been found in qualitative studies, and informants have described selling sex as a form of self-injury. Experiences of physical and sexual abuse among young people selling sex are highlighted in several studies. The results from these studies show that young people who report that they have had the experience of selling sex have been more often exposed to sexual abuse than other young people. The interviews with the social workers and the police support the results from the literature review concerning young people's experiences and vulnerabilities in relation to selling sex. But, in addition, the social workers and the police also encounter young adults who are temporarily in Sweden to sell sex. Both the police and the social workers interviewed emphasize the vulnerable situation for this group. Migrants are mentioned to a very limited degree in the literature.

There are three specialized units within social services that provide counselling, support and practical help for people who have compensational sex, hurt themselves with sex or are victims of human trafficking. All three are located in urban areas in Sweden. These units are run by the municipalities and have different age limits (Stockholm 18, Malmö 15 and Gothenburg no age limit). People under the set age limit are referred to other organizations. In the municipality of Stockholm, one social worker specifically targets young people under 18 through outreach work together with the police. There are several NGOs in Sweden that offer support to people who are sexually exploited and suspected victims of human trafficking for sexual purposes. Two NGOs offer specific support to young people who sell sex. Previous research shows that there is a lack of knowledge about how to approach the issue among professionals not working primarily with this issue. Yet another challenge to professionals in providing adequate and equal support for young people selling sex is that client's rights to receive

support differ depending on their residence status in Sweden. The legal framework thus constrains practitioners' possibilities to offer adequate support.

The legal measures aimed at targeting the purchase of sex affect young people selling sex in different ways. Since the legal framework mainly addresses the purchase of sexual services, human trafficking and procuring, there is no specific focus on young people who sell sex. There is a dividing line at the age of 18, and the legislation and social services' responsibilities differ if the young person selling sex is under 18. For young people over the age of 18, there are no legal measures specifically focusing on this group designed to protect them. As highlighted by the interviewed social workers, other legal measures such as the Aliens Act might affect young people selling sex in a negative way and increase their vulnerability.

The perspectives applied to the knowledge field, in both research and professional work, focus largely on young people's individual situations, difficulties and vulnerabilities. Less attention is paid to contextual and structural factors and conditions. This approach raises several questions in relation to interventions and how to reach out to offer adequate support. But it also raises key questions about prevention and how to address structural factors. The literature review and the interviews with professionals indicate a lack of knowledge about how structural factors impact young people's situations. Knowledge about socioeconomic background, gender, age, disability and citizenship is thus urgently needed in order to prevent the sexual exploitation of young people in Sweden.

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# Sammanfattning

För drygt tio år sedan initierade Nordiska ministerrådet forskningsprojektet *Prostitution i Norden* i syfte att kartlägga och kontextualisera välfärdsinsatser, lagstiftning och kunskapsproduktion gällande prostitution (Holmström och Skilbrei 2008). Projektet *Young people, vulnerabilities and prostitution/sex for compensation in the Nordic countries* kan ses som en uppföljning av *Prostitution i Norden*. Denna uppföljningsstudie fokuserar specifikt på kunskap om unga människors erfarenheter av sex mot ersättning i Norden. Även denna studie har finansierats av Nordiska ministerrådet. Syftet med studien har varit att sammanställa, analysera och problematisera kunskap om unga personer som har erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning i Norden. Ett första delsyfte har varit att presentera befintlig kunskap om unga människors erfarenheter av sex mot ersättning, men också att kritiskt diskutera de metoder som tillämpats i kunskapsproduktion. Ett andra delsyfte har varit att beskriva och analysera sociala insatser i relation till unga människor som har sex mot ersättning. Ett tredje delsyfte har varit att beskriva och analysera tillämpning av lagstiftning som kan vara relevant för unga personer som har sex mot ersättning i Norden.

Det finns en rad olika definitioner som begreppsliggör unga människors erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning. Tidigare forskning visar att unga människor som har erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning sällan definierar dessa erfarenheter som "prostitution". I denna rapport tillämpar varje individuell forskare de begrepp som är relevanta för dem, utifrån deras specifika nationella kontext, den litteratur som de refererar till och de informanter som de varit i kontakt med. Detta innebär att de begrepp som tillämpas i rapporten varierar. Tidigare forskning visar att en större andel unga HBTQ-personer rapporterar erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning än unga som inte definierar sig som HBTQ. All befintlig kunskap om unga personer som har sex mot ersättning i Norden, oberoende av kön och sexuell identitet, har sålunda inkluderats i studien. Omfattning och typ av kunskap om unga som har sex mot ersättning i Norden skiljer sig åt i de olika nordiska länderna. De nationella rapporter som har presenterats i denna forskningsrapport baseras sålunda på olika typer av material; en del rapporter bygger i huvudsak på tidigare forskning och så kallad grå litteratur, medan andra i huvudsak baseras på empiriskt material insamlat genom intervjuer med professionella som arbetar inom fältet.

De fem nationella rapporterna visar sammantaget att forskning om unga som har sex mot ersättning i de nordiska länderna är relativt begränsad. Få sociala insatser erbjuds specifikt till unga som har sex mot ersättning. I tidigare forskning, i grå litteratur och i intervjuerna beskrivs unga som har sex mot ersättning som ett förekommande, men ganska marginellt fenomen. Tidigare forskning visar att unga som har erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning i större utsträckning uppger att de har erfarenhet av drog- och alkoholkonsumtion, av olika former av utnyttjande, självskadebeteende, och psykisk ohälsa än människor som inte uppger att de har erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning. Samtidigt framkommer i tidigare forskning att erfarenheter av att ha sex mot ersättning

med avseende på motiv och frekvens varierar. Forskning visar också skillnaderna i erfarenheter av sex mot ersättning med avseende på kön och sexuell identitet: en större andel unga män än unga kvinnor och en större andel unga HBTQ-personer än unga heterosexuella och unga cispersoner uppger att de har erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning. Tidigare forskning, grå litteratur och intervjuer med professionella beskriver sammantaget unga som har sex mot ersättning som en särskilt sårbar och utsatt grupp. Vid en första anblick presenteras sålunda en relativt enhetlig bild av unga som har sex mot ersättning i Norden som en sårbar och utsatt grupp. Samtidigt framkommer uppgifter i litteraturen och i intervjuerna som i viss utsträckning utmanar denna bild. Tidigare forskning visar att majoriteten av de som har erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning har gjort denna erfarenhet färre än fem gånger. Förutom att ange behov av pengar och oro/ångest som motiv till att ha sex mot ersättning uppger respondenter i tidigare studier även att de hade sex mot ersättning för att de upplevde det som spännande och för att de gillade sex. Professionella som möter unga personer som har sex mot ersättning resonerar även kring andra aspekter som berör frågan, exempelvis vilken inverkan den digitala utvecklingen har och hur mediala bilder av sexförsäljning påverkar unga människor. Vidare beskriver de hur de i sitt praktiska arbete möter en grupp unga som har sex mot ersättning som inte är representerad i litteraturen: unga migranter. I samtliga nationella rapporter betonar professionella på fältet betydelsen av begreppsanvändning. Hur unga människors erfarenheter av sex mot ersättning begreppsliggörs av exempelvis socialarbetare har betydelse för deras möjligheter att nå unga människor som är i behov av hjälp, och för att kunna erbjuda adekvat stöd. Flera av de professionella som har intervjuats framhåller att användningen av begreppet "prostitution" försvårar möjligheten att etablera en relation med personer som är i behov av stöd, och att det även kan bidra till ökad stigmatisering. I intervjuerna framkommer att professionella som arbetar på fältet efterlyser mer kunskap och riktlinjer för att kunna förstå och bemöta unga som har erfarenhet av sex mot ersättning på ett bra sätt. De nordiska länderna har olika lagstiftning som berör försäljning och köp av sexuella tjänster. Köp av sexuell tjänst av minderårig är emellertid kriminaliserat i alla nordiska länder. Även andra lagar påverkar unga människor som har sex mot ersättning, men vilka lagar som är aktuella och hur de är implementerade beror i stor utsträckning på om de som har sex mot ersättning är över eller under 18 år. I tidigare forskning, grå litteratur och i intervjuerna tillämpas i stor utsträckning ett individuellt perspektiv, med betoning på sårbarhet och utsatthet i relation till erfarenheter av sex mot ersättning. Strukturella förhållanden beskrivs och analyseras i betydligt mindre utsträckning. Ett individuellt perspektiv på frågan kan innebära att professionella får ett stort ansvar att ingripa och kanske även förebygga att unga människor har sex mot ersättning. I intervjuerna för informanterna också resonemang kring risken att bli moraliserande och kanske till och med förtryckande i mötet med unga som har sex mot ersättning. Denna typ av resonemang är även angelägen i relation till kunskapsproduktion om unga som har sex mot ersättning i Norden. Studien visar att det saknas fördjupade analyser gällande strukturella faktorerers betydelse. För att kunna förebygga unga människors utsatthet föreligger sålunda behov av mer kunskap och forskning om strukturella faktorerers betydelse för unga människors erfarenheter av sex mot ersättning.

# Appendix: Protocol for interviews with practitioners

## Knowledge base

*Knowledge and professional competence.* For example;

- What do you know about the scope of young people having sex for payment/transactional sex?
- What do you know about contact arenas and how such sexual contacts are initiated?
- According to your understanding, what is the background (causes) for young people exchanging sex for money or other compensation?
- How do you assess your own competence within this field? (professional training)

## Initiatives, interventions, measures

*Experiences.* For example;

- What are your experiences working with/meeting young people having sex for compensation/exchanging sex for payment?
- How do you approach these types of cases?
- To what extent do you target this phenomenon specifically in your professional work?
- How do you work with these cases?
- To what extent is this phenomenon prioritized in your organization (possibilities and obstacles to work with this question)
- According to you, are sufficient funds allocated to this question in your organisation?

*Collaborations.* For example;

- To what extent does your organisation collaborate with other organisations or services in cases with young people having compensational sex?
- Could you please describe these types of collaborations- positive/negative experiences?
- What are the obstacles or possibilities collaborating with other organisations in cases with young people having sex for compensation?

## Legal framework

*Legal measures.* For example:

- What legal measures are relevant for your work with young people having compensational sex/sex for compensation?
- Could you please describe how these measures are relevant for your work?
- How do these legal measures work in practice (possibilities and obstacles for implementation) – how do you use legal measures in your practical work?
- According to your experience, what are the effects of legal measures targeting young people having sex for compensation, in your context?



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### **Young People, Vulnerabilities and Prostitution/Sex for Compensation in the Nordic Countries**

What do we know about the extent of young people's experiences of sex for compensation in the Nordic countries? Are such experiences addressed by social initiatives and how do legal measures affect them? This report is based on country studies focusing on knowledge about sex for compensation among young people in the Nordic countries. The five country studies show how research on the extent of, and the motivations and conditions for, young people selling sex in the Nordic countries is rather scarce and that there are few social initiatives that target young people specifically. The interviews with service providers and the literature reviewed point to individual vulnerabilities related to young people's experiences of compensational sex. In order to develop preventive measures more knowledge on structural factors related to experiences of compensational sex is needed.

