

STRIPTease RESEARCH & DANCER RESOURCE: HEALTH & SUPPORT SERVICE BRIEFING

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Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council during 2010-2011 “The Regulatory Dance” (Sanders and Hardy, 2011) carried out by the University of Leeds is the largest study to date of the strip club industry in the UK.

This briefing is for staff and volunteers working in health promotion services, sex work support projects, sexual assault referral centres (SARCS), drugs services and the wider health and social care sector. It provides information about the research findings and a follow on project “Regulating Sexual Entertainment Venues” which has produced information resources for dancers in the sector.

We have produced this briefing because there is little evidence based information available about the striptease sector, (referred to as the Sexual Entertainment Venue sector in licensing law in England and Wales). Also during the follow on project we had a number of requests for information from services wanting to learn about findings, particularly any health and support services implications.

THE RESEARCH

We conducted a survey with 197 dancers and carried out 70 in depth interviews with a range of stakeholders. Visits were made to over 20 clubs and a visual methods photography project was carried out. The research adhered to ethical standards and methodological practice recommended by the British Sociological Association.

For the main findings see the Findings and Visual Summary
<http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/regulatory-dance.php>.

WHO THE DANCERS ARE & WORKING PATTERNS

Age: 60% were aged between 22 and 29, with an age range of 18-53 years. 74% started dancing when they were under 25 years old.

Motherhood: Only 13.5% of dancers surveyed had children.

Nationality: British nationals constituted over half the dancers surveyed (60.5%); EU nationals, 28.6% (largest group being Romanians); 9.6% non-EU nationals (mainly Brazilian).

Education: All of the dancers had some education and had finished school with some qualifications. 73% had completed at least further education, while 23% had completed an undergraduate degree. One third of dancers were currently students. Of these 60% were in full time education; 25% in part time education and the remainder taking evening classes.

Working patterns: A minority (40.2%) were solely dancing. All others were in education (14.2%), another form of work (32.6%) or both other forms of work and education (10.6%).

High turn-over: 70.9% had been working for less than 5 years. Many women were temporary workers moving in and out of the industry and not necessarily identifying as dancers, or involved as a long term plan.

Clubs worked & mobility: Respondents had danced in between 1 and 35 clubs. Most women had worked in only 1-2 clubs. Most dancers worked between 3 and 5 shifts a week (62.6%). A small minority, 12.9% worked 6 or more shifts per week and migrants were likely to work more shifts. Over 90.5% stated that they felt able to choose their shifts. Shifts can be 10-12 hours long.

Unionisation: Only 17% of dancers were aware that there was a union that they could join. 28% said they were interested in joining a union, 37% were not, 35% said they might be interested or did not know.

REASONS FOR DANCING & JOB SATISFACTION

Why striptease? The vast majority of dancers had made a decision to do dancing/stripping as a flexible, relatively high earning (although unpredictable), cash-in-hand form of work. Dancing was a popular employment option for some women who were working in low paid, unskilled jobs, but were motivated by the opportunity for future mobility.

Dancers were largely recruited into their first dancing job primarily through friends.

Leaving jobs: The reasons that dancers gave for leaving jobs prior to dancing varied widely. The largest proportion (21.4%) stated that they simply wanted to become a dancer. A further 16.1% said that they were seeking better pay than their previous position. Escaping boring or stressful work also featured highly.

Job satisfaction: Dancers generally reported high levels of job satisfaction. Almost three quarters (74.1%) stated their job satisfaction as between 7 and 10 out of 10. No dancers said that their job satisfaction was 0-2.

ADVANTAGE & DISADVANTAGES OF THE JOB

Dancers identified a number of advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage identified was 'flexibility' (being able to choose shifts-90.5% felt able to choose their shifts, 59.9% all the time and 30.7% most of the time).

Work when you want. Only have to work three days a week, still earn more than in five days a week. I like night work. It's just social. You have a laugh, even when it's crap, it's like going on a night out.

It's not stressful. Good money. If you don't want to work, you don't work.

Other key advantages cited were independence, instant remuneration, earning more than in other roles, keeping fit, and an opportunity to combine fun and work. This resulted in a steady flow of labour supply. Advantages were ranked more highly than disadvantages.

However some of these exact characteristics could be disadvantages as dancing remained precarious in terms of a stable income, high overheads, no employee protection, and a competitive environment. Coupled with fewer customers and expenditure

during the recession, dancing could be a difficult job without guaranteed income. There were also disadvantages for some dancers of keeping the job secret and rude and abusive customers.

So despite the high levels of reported job satisfaction and advantages identified dancers faced a number of problems in the work place, relating to; *customer behaviour, financial exploitation and insecure work.*

Safety & customer behaviour

Sense of safety: Most women (80%) said they felt safe at work and supported by managers when there was a dispute with a customer, but there were significant differences between clubs. Local authorities reported very little nuisance, crime and disorder associated with strip clubs which compared favourably with other night time economy venues. Bad practice was not found to be common but was associated with certain venues rather than across the sector.

Security: The quality of security in clubs was very important to dancers.

Harassment: Yet rude and abusive customers were identified as a problem. Of 133 dancers who responded 51.8% had received verbal harassment or unwanted touching, 9.7% lots of times, 42% a few times, 27% not very much and 17.2% hardly ever.

Rude customers: People who think they don't have to pay. People who touch you, only when they're drunk though.

Rude men: Some men are perverted, they don't respect the rules and just be coarse. We are dancers, not prostitutes.

Booths: Many dancers felt that the way in which private booths were set up in some clubs also endangered them and also allowed standards to be lowered by dancers offering more than is allowed in the dances.

Dancers had a range of personal safety tips learnt through experience which they felt would benefit new dancers (these have been included in the "Dancer Information" resources).

Financial issues for dancers

- **House fees:** Dancers had to pay, house fees ranging from £0-£200, though the average was around £20-30 in the North and around £80 in the South.
- **Commission:** In addition to fees, dancers paid commission. This ranged from 0-66%, though it was usually 30% for each dance.
- **Fines:** 61% had been fined at some point in their dancing career. The highest reported fine was £100 for a missed shift. Whilst there was acceptance that the managers had a business to run, they did not accept fines applied arbitrarily, inflexibly and that were not in agreed codes of conduct. Some clubs were seen as fairer than others, some did not have a fining system.
- **Making no money:** Due to high overheads (house fees, commission, fines, tips, travel to work): 70% reported leaving a shift without making any money.
- **Dancers on shift:** Dancers were critical of clubs who had too many dancers on a shift as with a high dancer to customer ratio it was more difficult to make money.
- **Unfair contribution:** Fees, commission and fines were seen by some as making an unfair and disproportionate contribution to club running costs and in some cases keeping struggling clubs open.

Self Employment & Tenuous Position as Independent Contractors

- **Dancer Agreements, House Rules and Codes of Conduct:** Dancers sign a Dancer Agreement code of conduct which includes the house rules. Dancers accepted that there had to be house rules for the business to run well and to be compliant with licensing conditions. But some rules were perceived as too strict, unreasonable and unfair, for example not being able to have hot food on the premises during long shifts, expectations of working every weekend without exception.
- **Confusion about status of contracts and rights:** In the striptease sector dancers are self employed, indeed many liked the flexibility of

self employment. Yet many dancers themselves were unclear whether Codes of Conducts or Dancer's Agreements, if they had such, constituted contracts and what rights and obligations these entailed. The gap between dancer's official status as self employed and actual statuses in practice was raised by those dancers who felt they were subject to considerable direction in work. Codes of conduct or dancer agreements are valid contracts, which if signed by both parties is a legally binding contract. Yet just because a dancer signs an agreement stating they are not an employee does not prevent an Employment Tribunal looking at how the relationship works in practice between the dancer and the club (licensor).

- **Lack of information about Council rules:** Many dancers felt that they didn't have access to knowledge about what the council imposed rules were and which had been instituted by the club.
- **Lack of negotiating power and fear of dismissal:** Many dancers felt unable to complain about conditions and negotiate conditions for fear of instant "dismissal". Dancers tended to move to other clubs if they were unhappy.
- **Insurance:** Few dancers had work-related insurance. Some vaguely knew that they needed it as self employed contractors, but others had never thought about it and no-one had ever spoken to them about it.
- **Paying tax:** 56.9% (n=62) reported paying tax at some point during their dancing careers. Most had not paid it in every club. Many dancers were reticent to answer this question. Dancers formed a spectrum with some very business aware women who engaged accountants, had insurance cover, took out sickness protection, whilst at the other end of the spectrum some did not pay tax and have any of the work related protections. Some new to the workplace and self employment had limited knowledge about registering and paying for tax and the implications of being self employed.

Improving Working Conditions & Security/Safety

Dancers themselves suggested a number of measures to improve conditions and welfare including;

- Better physical environments (heating, changing rooms, cooking facilities)
- Limit number of dancers per shift
- Either commission *OR* house fee (not both)
- More quality door staff with proactive door staff who patrolled
- The employment of “Housemums”
- Panic alarms in booths
- Clear display of rules for customers and reinforcement of these.

LINKS WITH SEX WORKING & FORCED LABOUR

For projects who offer outreach and support services it is important to understand any links between stripping in regulated clubs and sex work i.e. selling contact sexual services.

No evidence of organised prostitution: There was no evidence of strip clubs having connections to organised prostitution. SEV's are highly regulated by licensing authority conditions. Most licences include conditions that; there must be no sexual services performed on the premises, touching is strictly limited, no solicitation must take place and contact details cannot be exchanged between dancers and customers. Such are included in house rules that dancers and customers must adhere to. Should any of these activities be identified on the premises the licence holder is held responsible and can lose their licence and hence their business. Those individuals applying for licences are scrutinised by licensing committees who have exclusion criteria. Should projects have any contact with this sector and ever have concerns about forced labour or trafficking they should follow their organisational procedures & protocols.

Dirty dancing?: ‘Extra services’ were reported anecdotally by dancers, who generally referred to cases of other dancers who broke the rules by “dirty dancing”. Also dancers referred to others who promised some form of sexual contact to sell themselves and secure a private dance but not deliver on that. Both of these were judged negatively by other dancers as this broke the rules and did not give a clear and consistent message to customers which

could mean other dancers had to then deal with some customer’s expectations. Preventing such rule breaking was the key reason given by Managers for house rules for dancers and customers and the ongoing surveillance of these in clubs.

Escorting: Similarly some dancers referred to a minority of dancers who made contacts in the club who they then met outside the club as escorts or to attend private strip parties. Very few openly said they had ever done this. Licensing conditions and club rules prohibited this.

Involvement with other parts of the sex industry:

Identity: Although there were a minority of politically active dancers who did identify with the sex worker movement, the majority of dancers did not identify as sex workers indeed this was a sensitive matter with many dancers wanting to clearly distinguish themselves from sex workers. Many were aware of the reputation and misconceptions of dancers and resisted this labelling.

In the survey dancers were asked if they had worked in any other area of the sex industry. Further to this, 34% (n= 64) of dancers reported working in another area of the sex industry (including other dance roles such as freelance and agency dancing). The industries the dancers had worked in were as follows: nude photographs (n=15); freelance and agency dancing (often unlicensed) (n=13); private parties where sexual activities may have taken place (n=11); bar or waitress in hostess establishment (n=10); escorting (n=4); adult videos (n=2); maid (n=1); dominatrix (n=1); sex shop (n=1).

Forced Labour: The project found no evidence of forced labour or trafficking.

IMPLICATIONS: SEX WORK OUTREACH SUPPORT PROJECTS & OTHER AGENCIES WANTING TO MAKE THEIR SERVICES MORE ACCESSIBLE

Sex work outreach & support projects

In making decisions about outreach to strip clubs those projects with a remit to offer targeted services to sex workers need to be mindful of issues identified in the research, particularly that it is likely that only a minority of dancers have been, or are currently, involved in the wider sex industry. There may be some resistance from dancers to engagement with projects targeting sex workers.

A project may decide to deliver some appropriate level of service proportionate to resources, service potential user's numbers and needs. A Project may take the view that it is in their remit to ensure they reach all in the sex industry even if only a minority group can be accessed in this setting. The project may have a wider sexual health, primary health, safety promotion or drugs education remit which would be relevant to this group of relatively young women working in the night time economy regardless of their involvement or not in the wider sex industry.

Having carried out research and consultation in a wide range of clubs it is clear that it is important that services of any kind approach striptease dancers as women working in the night time economy. They will have many of the same health and support needs of women in other sectors of the economy but as night time workers there may be some particular issues for example re safety.

The researchers have liaised with Open Doors Sex Work Support Project in London and the Safe project Birmingham who deliver a level of outreach to clubs in the areas they are commissioned to do outreach. The Safe project has successfully been able to forge a partnership with the Licensing Department and key officers as part of this work.

Outreach workers have been able to use the Dancer's Info Resource (see page 6 for information on this bespoke website and Iphone app for dancers in the SEV sector) as a route into accessing dancers, rather than sexual health, as the primary reason, but this has been taken up readily once dancers are aware of the services. Open Doors have found that they have been able to make contact with migrant sex workers, who they had lost contact with due to premise closures, not directly in the clubs but through their friends who are working in clubs.

Projects may consider providing customised local interventions for dancers which provide information and referral relevant to their working experiences. As part of this projects may choose to utilise and promote the "Dancer's Information" Website & Iphone App produced specifically for dancers, a bespoke information resource for dancers (see page 6 of briefing).

Access: Projects need to be open and transparent about the work they do. All good practice standards

for community based outreach should be put in place for outreach in this setting as would be in others and appropriate outreach policies should be adhered to. Projects can cold call at clubs to gain access but will need to introduce themselves to and negotiate with duty managers. Making prior contact with managers and meeting with them to discuss your work is advisable. Some clubs may be more receptive than others and want to collaborate with agencies.

Dancers may be wary of outreach workers for a number of reasons; they may think outreach teams are trying there to "save them", will be judgemental, want something from them, are from certain statutory agencies they are wary of and if they are a sex work support project are labelling dancers as sex workers. So projects need to plan their introductions and how they brand their service.

Projects are likely to increase the ease to which they will gain access if they liaise with the local licensing officers who are responsible for SEV policies and gain their support. Some licensing departments may want to get more actively involved and help with contacts and introductions. Whilst working in partnership projects can still stress their independence from licensing and the confidential practices that boundary their work.

Other Health & Social Care Projects

Many of the considerations outlined above would apply to other services considering promoting their services to dancers in SEV sector.

It is important services are clear they can offer something appropriate to dancers and indeed that dancers form part of their wider target group.

There could be a role for including SEV's in wider health promotion and information campaigns. For example Sexual Assault Referral Services (SARC's) may want to include dancers and other staff at SEV's as workers in the night time economy in their outreach and community engagement strategies to raise awareness about their service provision or other public awareness campaigns. A sexual health promotion or drug and alcohol information service may want to include workers in SEV's in their latest sexual health information campaigns and include such venues in wider club and pub outreach. It is important such agencies communicate the messages; they are doing this to ensure dancers are included as members

of the community or a particular wider group within it (i.e. young women), to make sure they are not left out of such initiatives. It is important to be clear that they are NOT being targeted because they are a “problematic” group but as young women in the night time economy may require specific bespoke information and like any group in the wider community some people will have experiences that they wish to access support for.

“Dancer’s Information” website and application (see below) does include basic info and national online directories and help lines for support service contacts for; sexual health, drugs, sex work, personal safety, SARC’s and sexual violence support services and trade unions.

REGULATION AND SEV’S

The SEV sector is regulated by local authorities under legislation introduced in the Policing & Crime Act 2010. SEV’s must have a license to operate legally and conform to conditions imposed.

Regulators concerns about bad practice in clubs: Bad practice was not found to be common by regulators, but was associated with certain venues, these included issues such as; resistance to resolving issues, allowing touching in the clubs, noise, poor risk management, health and safety, slips and trips on the dance floor, poor backstage areas and poor practice associated with welfare of dancers and club staff.

New directions in licensing: Dancer safety & welfare

The follow on project has found that a number of Local Authority Licensing Departments have responded to the research findings and have begun to add licensing conditions specifically to address dancer welfare such as:

- Physical conditions and facilities: requiring clubs to provide access to adequate changing, washing facilities, requiring modifications to heating and air conditioning systems.
- Requiring clubs to clearly display council rules in a number of places in the club.
- Banning fining as a form of discipline.
- Requiring receipts to be provided for fines, fees, and commission.

- Requiring owners to submit their codes of conduct/dancer agreement, policies on house fees, commission and fining and requiring council permission to amend.
- Requiring that performers who are sick or have a domestic emergency *are not made subject to unfair punitive financial penalties.*
- Tighter regulation on the type of private booths to achieve privacy and security; including fitting panic buttons in booths.
- Requiring clubs to have a policy on dancer’s safety when leaving clubs.

It may be useful to make contact with your local authority licensing department, find out about their local SEV policy and conditions and discuss local dancer safety and welfare.

DANCERS INFORMATION: WEBSITE & APP



We have produced an information website and free Iphone application for dancers in consultation with dancers www.dancersinfo.co.uk To download the app search ‘dancers’ in the App store and Dancer’s Information is listed in the top 10. A password can be set up for privacy. These resources have information for striptease club dancers about;

- Personal safety at work (produced with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust)
- Self employment rights and Trade union membership
- Paying tax (produced with HMRC)
- Top tips from dancers to dancers: available in English, Polish, Romanian, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese.

Please make dancers in clubs in your area aware of the website and Iphone App and make partner agencies in local authority licensing aware of this resource.

FURTHER INFORMATION: A summary video and a visual findings <http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/regulatory-dance.php> For more information contact: Dr Teela Sanders: t.l.m.sanders@leeds.ac.uk