

# Experiences of Strangulation in the Sex Industry

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Institute For  
Addressing  
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## Background

The Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) was established to better understand and help develop approaches to strangulation across all contexts in which it may present.

After initial discussions with an organisation specialising in supporting those in the sex industry in the north of England, we wanted to support in providing information with regard to strangulation. In order to do this, we launched a survey so that we could gauge current experiences of strangulation during the course of interactions whilst sex working in the UK.

## Method

The survey was launched in May 2024 and was open until March 2025. We sought feedback on the wording of the survey questions both before it was launched and in the process of its promotion. We made changes to wording where we could, and where we felt as though it still aligned with our aims and position with regards to sex work/ the sex industry. We see this as being different to experiences of sexual violence which, of course, sex workers can be and are also subjected to. Recruitment was mainly achieved through services who shared the survey with their service-users. One service printed off copies of the survey and engaged with clients to complete the survey on paper. Otherwise, all other completed surveys were received online.

A copy of the survey questions can be found in Appendix 1.

## Terminology

Importantly, the focus of this survey was to better understand experiences relating to the use of strangulation during sex in sex work, not during sexual violence. We acknowledge terminology relating to sex work/ the sex industry varies across the sector. We chose to use the term 'sex industry', predominantly, to hopefully reflect the experiences of the majority of individuals. We also use the term 'sex work' to acknowledge those who see their engagement in the industry as work. Our intention has never been to discredit the experiences of any individual related to this area, but we acknowledge the terminology we have used won't be applicable to all. The findings of this survey should therefore be considered in this context.

## Findings

### Participants

Although the survey was open for around 10 months, we received 18 responses. There are therefore limitations to this study, however there is still value in presenting the responses of those who complete the survey to share key learning and acknowledge their experiences.

The small number of participants may have been expected due to the respondent group with whom we were hoping to engage. A limitation of this survey was that we were not able to adequately compensate respondents for their time in completing the survey. Remuneration may have supported recruitment. Alternatively, it may have been the case that sex workers/ those in the sex industry are already understood to be an 'over-researched' group and this was just another survey they were being asked to complete (for free).

Of the 18 respondents, 17 shared that they were female and 1 reported being non-binary. Gender identity categories were provided for respondents to select from, with an 'Other' category which could be used if required.

The ages of respondents were as follows:

- 18-24 (n=2)
- 25-34 (n=3)
- 35-44 (n=7)
- 45-54 (n=6)

There was some variation in respondent ethnicity, but the majority reported being White (n=14). Two respondents were mixed ethnicity, one was Asian, and one responded as 'Other'.

## Findings

### Participants

All respondents had been in the sex industry for at least 6 months, with most common duration in the industry being reported as 'Between 5-10 years' (n=7). One respondent was in the 'Between 6 months-1 year' category, 5 reported working for 'Between 1-5 years' and 5 reported being in the industry for 'More than 10 years'.

Involvement in the sex industry was reported across 9 categories, as follows [note: respondents could select multiple categories]:

- Brothels, parlours, saunas (n=3)
- Escort – independent (n=5)
- Escort – agency (n=1)
- Stripping (n=2)
- On-street prostitution/ sex work (n=5)
- Sex parties (n=1)
- BDSM, kink, fetish (e.g., bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism) (n=3)
- Online content creation (including photos/webcamming e.g. via Only Fans) (n=6)
- Other (n=5)

### Experiences of Strangulation

The majority of respondents (n=17) reported not or never offering strangulation as a service as part of their work. The one respondent who said they did offer strangulation as a service also reported BDSM, kink, fetish, and online content creation as the categories of work they engaged in.

Two respondents reported having been strangled by a client/customer/punter *with* their consent in their work. These numbers increased, however, when asking respondents whether they had been strangled *without* their consent, with 9 respondents reporting that they had. Four respondents reported that they had been strangled by someone else in the sex industry (e.g., a pimp).

Other presentations of strangulation were also evident through survey responses, with 3 respondents reporting having strangled themselves after having been asked to by a client/customer/punter. Additionally, 3 respondents reported having strangled a client/customer/punter after them having asked/consented to be strangled.

#### Summary

Offer strangulation as a service:

- Yes (n=1)
- No (n=17)

Strangled with consent:

- Yes (n=2)
- No (n=16)

Strangled without consent:

- Yes (n=9)
- No (n=7)
- Not sure (n=1)

Strangled by someone else in the industry:

- Yes (n=4)
- No (n=8)

Strangled themselves, after request:

- Yes (n=3)
- No (n=15)

Strangled a client/customer/punter:

- Yes (n=3)
- No (n=15)

### Impacts of Strangulation

When asked about physical injuries from strangulation, 9 respondents reported experiencing, for example, bruising, swelling, or a sore throat (these examples were provided in the question – see Appendix 1 for question and answer wording). However, none of these 9 respondents sought medical attention for their physical injuries (1 reported that they weren't sure whether they sought medical attention or not).

Of those who had been strangled as part of their work in the sex industry, the majority didn't disclose/report what had happened to anyone. Of those who did disclose/report, the following sources of support were all selected once [note: respondents could select more than one answer option]:

- Police
- Sex worker organisation/ support service
- Another specialist service (e.g. sexual violence support)
- Another service/organisation
- A friend/colleague

## Findings

### Knowledge of the Law

There were three questions at the end of the survey asking about respondents' knowledge of the law on strangulation in England and Wales, introduced in 2022 (see <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/section/70> for details on the legislation). Information was provided in the introduction to the survey with regard to the legislation. Only 3/18 respondents were aware of this legislation prior to having engaged with the survey.

Respondents were then asked whether, now knowing the law on strangulation, they would be more likely to report non-consensual strangulation to the police. Out of 17 respondents who answered this question, 7 said they would be more likely to report, knowing this information, and 6 were unsure.

The final question asked respondents to consider whether the legislation affected how they might work in the future, in terms of the services they offer or agree to. Out of 18 respondents, the majority (11/18) said that it wouldn't affect how they work. This may be, however, because they don't currently offer/ agree to strangulation so having the legislation in place wouldn't change their position on this as a service. The remaining respondents said either "Maybe" (3/18), "Not sure" (1/18), or that the question was "Not applicable" because they weren't in England or Wales\* (3/18).

\*The questions particularly at the end of this survey were focused on the legislation in England and Wales. We do acknowledge, however, that there is also strangulation legislation in Northern Ireland.

### Other Comments

Respondents had an opportunity at the end of the survey to provide any additional comments they thought relevant. Five responses were provided and these are included, verbatim, below.

*"i am struggling to see how we cn consent to being stragled. i honestly am. i think it is so dangerous and more clint are aking for breathe play when they dont have a clue what this os or how it can be done safely. this is so problematic. some women may advertise this but i am worried that it is becoming expected of us." (R1)*

*"I am an ex sex worker and i worked the streets for around 6 years and was strangled and raped." (R2)*

*"The price clients are prepared to pay for BDSM activities in general have dropped a lot since I first became involved in the sex industry because of competition. Very few women offered to receive dangerous BDSM acts when I started and you were paid more for them." (R3)*

*"Never done it myself - might be considered a 'kink' but I feel it could sometimes be psychologically damaging for those partaking depending on their mental health and whether the request is coming from a darker place." (R4)*

*"Personally I would not allow a client or other member of the industry to engage in strangulation/choking with me unless they were well-trusted and informed about RACK [risk-aware consensual kink]." (R5)*

## Findings

### Other Comments

These comments represent a common dichotomy when it comes to talking about strangulation during sex. On the one hand, strangulation is seen as a BDSM/‘kink’ activity (R4) and therefore perhaps quite specialist and requiring a specific assessment of risk (the ‘RACK’ as mentioned by R5). On the other hand, strangulation during sex has become a more mainstream request and perhaps even “expected” (R1). In the context of sex work, R3 articulates how this impacts on practice in that normalisation of behaviours means they are no longer services that can be priced differently to ‘non-BDSM’ acts. The safety of these behaviours has also been noted by respondents, with R1 and R5 both alluding this as a practice that can be done safely and/or in ways that mitigate the risk.

IFAS’s position on strangulation is that there is no safe way to do it. Because of this, our aim is to share information with anyone who might engage with strangulation to properly articulate the risks associated with the practice, and to equip them with the knowledge and confidence that this does not have to be an expected part of sex. Consent to any sexual behaviour must be informed, and strangulation during sex is no different. This is the case even if the sex is being paid for.

## Conclusion

Whilst we acknowledge there are limitations to these survey findings, namely the small number of respondents, we believe this provides a helpful starting point to explore the experiences of strangulation in the sex industry. Whilst this is not something all sex workers will necessarily engage with, the increasing expectations around this behaviour during sex in society as a whole appear to be having an impact on the expectations within the sex industry. The way in which non-consensual strangulation is being used against sex workers as part of their work is also unacceptable and requires understanding and support.

Given the limitations of this study, future research should consider seeking a more representative sample of respondents to better understand the use of strangulation in the sex industry. Further, suitable interventions with regard to providing education and support to sex working communities should be considered. If any organisation or individual currently working with this sector would like to work with us at IFAS to explore this topic further, please do get in contact.

We are incredibly grateful to the sex workers and members of the sex industry who took time to complete the survey and share their experiences.

Information for victims of strangulation can be found here: <https://ifas.org.uk/information-leaflets-for-victims-of-strangulation/>

For general information about strangulation, please read and share our factsheet: [Information for victims of strangulation can be found here: https://ifas.org.uk/information-leaflets-for-victims-of-strangulation/](https://ifas.org.uk/information-leaflets-for-victims-of-strangulation/)

## Appendix 1: Survey Questions

1. Select your gender
  - a. Woman
  - b. Man
  - c. Non-binary
  - d. Trans woman
  - e. Trans man
  - f. Prefer not to say
  - g. Other
2. Select your age
  - a. 18-24
  - b. 25-34
  - c. 35-44
  - d. 45-54
  - e. 55-64
  - f. 65-74
  - g. 75+
  - h. Prefer not to say
3. Select your ethnicity
  - a. Asian (Asian British, South Asian, South East Asian, South Asian, Asian Other)
  - b. Black (Black British, Black African, Black Caribbean, Black Other)
  - c. Middle Eastern (including Arabic, Persian, Iranian)
  - d. White (White British, White Irish, White European, White Other)
  - e. Mixed
  - f. Prefer not to say
  - g. Other
4. How long have you been involved in sex work/ the sex industry? (Please select the answer that most closely reflects your experience, even if - for instance - you've had some time away and then have come back)
  - a. Less than 1 month
  - b. Between 1 - 6 months
  - c. Between 1 - 5 years
  - d. Between 5 - 10 years
  - e. More than 10 years
5. How would you categorise your involvement in sex work/ the sex industry? (Please select all options that apply to you)
  - a. Brothels, parlours, saunas
  - b. Escort - independent
  - c. Escort - agency
  - d. Stripping
  - e. Erotice, erotic dance, erotic massage
  - f. On-street prostitution/ sex work
  - g. Sex parties
  - h. BDSM, kink, fetish (e.g., bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism)
  - i. Sugar arrangements
  - j. Online content creation (including photos/webcamming e.g. via Only Fans)
  - k. Telephone, text based, TV based
  - l. Live voyeurism
  - m. Other
6. Do you offer/ have you ever offered strangulation (sometimes referred to as 'choking' or 'breath play') as a service as part of your work?
  - a. Yes, I currently offer this
  - b. Not currently, but I previously offered this
  - c. I have never offered this
  - d. Not applicable/ not sure

## Appendix 1: Survey Questions

7. Have you ever been strangled by a client/customer/punter (with your consent)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

8. Have you ever been strangled by a client/customer/punter (without your consent)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

9. Have you ever been strangled by someone else in the sex industry e.g. a pimp?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

10. Have you ever strangled yourself after having been asked to by a client/customer/punter?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

11. Have you ever strangled a client/customer/punter (with their consent)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

12. If you have been strangled during your work, did you experience any physical injuries (e.g. bruising, marks on your neck/face, swelling, sore throat)?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

13. (If yes) Did you get any medical support (e.g. from your GP or from A&E) for the physical injuries from being strangled?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

14. If you have been strangled during your work without your consent, did you report/ seek support to/ from anyone? (Please select all options that apply)

- a. Yes, to the police
- b. Yes, to a sex worker organisation/ support service
- c. Yes, to another specialist service (e.g. sexual violence support)
- d. Yes, to another service/organisation
- e. Yes, to a friend/colleague
- f. No, I didn't report to anyone
- g. Not applicable (I haven't been strangled without my consent)

15. Did you know about the new law relating to strangulation? (This came into legislation in England and Wales in June 2022 – see the introduction above for more information)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

16. For those in England and Wales, would you be more likely to report non-consensual strangulation to the police now that there is a law specific to strangulation?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure
- d. Not applicable

17. For those in England and Wales, would/does this new law affect how you might work, in terms of the services you offer or agree to?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. Not sure
- e. Not applicable

18. Please provide any other comments you think may be relevant to help us better understand experiences of strangulation in sex work/ the sex industry.

# Acknowledgements

Funded by the Home Office, the Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) was established in 2022 to raise awareness of strangulation and suffocation. This includes highlighting the associated risks and dangers, and establishing best practice for professionals working with victims, survivors and their families. Although our work primarily focuses on strangulation, we see the parallels between this and suffocation, and are therefore developing our research and understanding of this area.

IFAS would like to acknowledge the hard work and input from the whole team in their contributions to all research outputs; Professor Cath White, Harriet Smailes, Marianne McGowan, Bernie Ryan, and Thaira Mhearban.

Lastly, IFAS acknowledges that behind every statistic is a person who has friends, family, thoughts, feelings, dreams and aspirations. We hope that all readers accessing our report will recognise the individual impact associated with the statistics we present.

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