



National Ugly Mugs

Sex for Rent Case Studies



Mary's Story...

Mary is 52 years old and has been a street sex worker for the last 26 years. She has two children who live with their dad since the relationship broke down. She would love to rebuild a relationship with her children but cannot see a way for that to happen at the moment as they are not on good terms.

Her journey into sex work began when she moved to London in her late 20's after her relationship ended and was introduced to drugs by her new boyfriend. This spiralled into heavy drug use perpetuating a cycle for her of sex work and shoplifting to fund drug use for both of them. This resulted in substantial debt (from fines, rent arrears, drug debts), a 12-week prison sentence and a residential substance use treatment programme for drug offenses. Mary was the named resident for the council house they both lived in and she was evicted while in prison.

After leaving prison Mary made efforts to become sober but when she returned to live with her boyfriend he took her bank card, withdrew money and purchased heroin for them both. She quickly slipped back into her old lifestyle of shoplifting and working as a street sex worker to fund her and her boyfriend's drug dependency. Mary continues to be surrounded by a personal network of substance users, while also being in a relationship with her boyfriend where she is domestically abused regularly. She copes with violence through binge drinking and doing even more drugs.

At the time of speaking to Mary, she had several complex needs and was struggling with her psychological, emotional and mental well being. She had difficulty coping and felt unsettled in her life of drug use, domestic violence and separation from her children. Fortunately, Mary ended things with her boyfriend and reported him to the police through NUM case work after his last violent attack.

As a result of ending her relationship, Mary is homeless and sofa surfing when she can with other people who use drugs, with the understanding that she will provide money for drugs, in exchange for a roof over her head. If she does not bring money or drugs for them, she exchanges sex for rent but is often kicked out anyway and has no choice but to try to shack up with a client or sleep rough. Her personal networks are exploitative, providing temporary and contingent protections from homelessness.

Mary wants to change her circumstances and has talked about this many times, but does not know where to start making plans to leave the sex industry. She feels trapped in a cycle of drug use and insecure, dangerous temporary accommodations, that she cannot see a way out of while surrounded by the same people and the same environment. Mary says her current situation is soul destroying and leaves her choosing between two extremely risky options. She said she will continue to avoid sleeping rough at all costs, even if it means enduring extreme violence, including rape, and robbery from local gangs.

Needs

- Emergency housing provision for people who use drugs—nonexistent. A clear plan with multi agency pathways led by [NUM casework](#) team, taking into account all complex needs (including, housing, health and money)
- NUM casework liaise with local drug and alcohol projects (CGL, We are with you, action on addiction) as a priority for prescribed Methadone script in the interim.
- In patient detox before entering rehab
- Residential rehab / harm reduction service
- Access to safe and stable housing as a priority for rehab aftercare; semi supported own housing, abstinent houses. Appeal decision with council due to complex needs.
- Alternate support network to maintain motivation (12 step meetings and NUM peer support groups)
- Reassurance around criminal action / [victim support](#) advocacy (NUM casework support)
- Court fines payment plan VCS
- Bursaries or emergency funds to financially support an emergency change of environment (SWARM fund, VR fund, Community Care Grant etc)
- Build trusting relationship with Support worker in treatment and NUM vocational case worker, Self Esteem groups facilitated by NUM, Practical and safe ways to stop exchanging sex to meet her immediate needs with NUM Vocational Case Worker
- Mental and physical health support or therapy continuing the journey that she has made in rehab (NUM therapy package, vocational caseworker, [NUM mental health](#) group sessions, Youtube videos for self directed support)
- NUM vocational support, providing enhanced education and employment possibilities
- Continued after care from rehab centre, NUM vocational CW support, DV support worker (IDVA support)
- Look at relocation, moving to a different borough changing social circle by engaging in positive groups, Looking at college courses, Jobs that make her feel positive about herself and the world around her

Biography

- she/her
- 52 years old
- street worker
- homeless
- sofa surfing / sex for rent arrangements
- addiction problems
- recently separated from violent boyfriend
- not NUM member
- mental health challenges
- high risk personal network

Challenges

- Criminal justice system has placed Mary at a disadvantage in the housing market by having a criminal record and the financial urgency to pay court fines rather than housing costs
- Reliance on the bottom end of the private rented sector where conditions are poor and tenancies are insecure due to current circumstances
- Substantial debt (from court fines, rent arrears, outstanding drug debts)
- Rules and formalities of mainstream housing add more barriers, for example hostels imposing a curfew which would prevent Mary from being able to work
- Hostel environment after treatment would increase chance of relapse
- Fear of using mixed sex temporary accommodation after experiencing violence from strangers, clients and her boyfriend [VAWG Report](#)
- No confidence or trust in the local authority to take care of her housing needs, as she was evicted from council tenancy previously
- Low motivation and lacking self worth, as deeply entrenched in a life of drug addiction, rough sleeping and sex work for rent or drugs
- Often feels like she is being exploited and coerced by some offers of support
- Social context to substance use is hard to break

(This modified case study is based on a lived experience; however, personal details have been changed to safeguard 'Mary')



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Alina's Story...

Alina is 24 years old, she moved from Romania to the UK when she was 18 and is fluent in English, Romanian and German. She has the right to work in the UK and is an out-call escort, finding clients through an agency so that she doesn't have to deal with phone calls and 'time wasters'. Alina sends as much money as she can from her earnings home each week to support her family in Romania. It is important to her to maximise any profits she makes from sex work, so she currently lives in Coventry where housing costs are lower and travels to London to work.

Alina has always struggled finding financial stability, she says the problem with sex work and making quick money is that it's really hard to save. It's nearly impossible to budget when you don't know what you will be earning on any given day. Her day-to-day expenses have been further impacted when two of her bank accounts were closed without warning. The first one was online bank Starling, who flagged payments on Vivastreet and closed the account immediately. The second one was Monzo, which was closed about a year ago.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and UK lockdowns, Alina found it hard to survive financially and there were many points where she could not afford food. She was struggling with housing costs so moved into a shared house with two other women, and tried OnlyFans for a short time. This put her in an even worse situation. She has taken her photos down from the site but friends and clients show her images of her that are on sites that she did not authorise.

Her landlord found her online too and suggested a rental arrangement where she is to provide him sex whenever he is in town and send 'sexy photos' in exchange for a reduction in her rent and utility bills. At the time Alina didn't have any savings and wasn't making enough money to find an alternative place to live, so she agreed. Her landlord often arrives at the property drunk and unannounced, expecting sexual favors. She has trouble getting him out of her place as he refuses to leave. She is under constant threat of eviction and homelessness if she does not comply with requests for sexual favors, pictures and access to her at any time he wants.

Alina would ideally like to leave sex work completely and work in mental health care sector, as her mother has struggled with mental well-being and helping others in this way has been a passion of hers. Alina has seen first hand the impact good support interventions can have on someone; however, she is terrified that online content will 'out' her sex work in any mainstream job.

Her main reason for wanting to leave sex work is the lack of financial security. The cost of living has risen and there are more and more sex workers competing for clients, including those who will barter and negotiate lower prices and more risky services. She says that now she has to deal with 'really horrible people who will scare you' just to make enough money to survive. She faces increased pressure from her agency to deliver services that were previously on her 'no list'. She agrees to this so that she doesn't fall out of favour with the agency and they will continue to send her clients even though they are less desirable to her. The cost of travel, agency fees and other costs are reducing her take home pay and she is very worried about her future.

Leaving the industry is not an option for Alina right now as she doesn't feel she has the resources to make such a major life change, which would involve her moving and securing mainstream work.



Needs

- Access to bursaries or funds to support a move away from current landlord (VR fund, Tenancy Deposit Scheme)
- Safe and secure housing with fair rent agreements
- **NUM vocational support** : workshops, coaching and peer support to move towards a career in mental health sector while making changes on ways of working within industry to reduce exploitation
- Development of vocational support plan
- Financial review to explore additional sources of income, including application to universal credit and use of the benefits calculator (Turn2us)
- Training on financial planning, budgeting and saving NUM
- Mental health and well-being support for life changes and trauma from sex work
- Re-establishing financial citizenship, via bank accounts that do not discriminate against active and former sex workers
- Support to have **online content** revived and support to address image-based and **visual violence** online through MindGeek's **Trusted Flagger Scheme**
- Access to peer support network
- Support to report **Exploitation** by landlord

Biography

- she/her
- 24 years old
- out call escort
- Shared accommodation with private landlord
- sex for rent arrangement
- unauthorised online content
- supports family in Romania
- limited personal support network
- financial problems
- aspirations to work in mental health care

Challenges

- Housing and income insecurity and threats of eviction
- Financial plan must include ongoing support for family on Romania
- Fearful that unauthorised content could impact employability outside sex work (NUM casework content removed as trusted flagger)
- Pressure from the agency to deliver services she is not comfortable with providing. Needs support to look for other ways of working – risk of situational violence.
- **Banking discrimination** could continue – this is a constant worry for Alina