

Sex workers are at increased risk of violence, sexual and emotional ill-health relative to the rest of the population, and reduced access to health care [5,6,8], harms that are linked to sex work criminalisation. [9,10] In the UK, female sex workers working indoors are 2.6 times more likely to experience recent client violence if they have ever been arrested or in prison, irrespective of work location, migration status and drug use.[4] Internationally, sex workers with experience of police enforcement are up to 4-5 times more likely to acquire HIV/STI, accept more money for, be pressured into or engage in unprotected sex with clients. [11,12] Criminalisation, including of sex workers' clients, exacerbates these health risks by: disrupting access to care, work environments and safety strategies; disproportionately targeting street-based, ethnic minority and transgender sex workers; and reinforcing structural vulnerabilities (e.g. insecure housing). [33,34] Emerging international data indicate that decriminalisation can significantly improve safety, care access, physical and emotional health. [10,17,31] There is, however, a lack of such evidence specific to the UK, where most aspects of sex work are criminalised (e.g. soliciting, kerb crawling, working with others) and where local variations in enforcement offer an opportunity to evaluate the potential impact of removing these penalties. In East London, for example, police enforcement against sex workers and their clients varies considerably between the boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets.

We will evaluate the impact of removing police enforcement on female, male and transgender sex workers' health (violence, HIV, STIs, emotional ill-health), and access to health and social care, in East London – a question that has not been researched in the UK and to a limited extent elsewhere. Rather than traditional experimental designs, which require randomisation of an intervention and appropriate comparison areas [19], and which do not account for context [18] and complexity, we will use an innovative, theory-driven evaluation design. [21] We will: estimate the impact of removing police enforcement on our outcomes, via mathematical modelling (C); measure the effects of varied enforcement on outcomes via longitudinal, linked behavioural/biological survey data (B), to parameterise the model (C) and capture changes over time (e.g. reduced enforcement due to advocacy by sex worker support services); investigate how enforcement shapes these outcomes, using qualitative methods (A), to develop indicators and a 'theory of change' [21] to guide the evaluation (B/C); and identify contextual factors that influence acceptability, feasibility and implementation of non-enforcement, to inform any scale-up (A). Routine enforcement data across study boroughs (D) will be triangulated with (A/B) to refine measures of (non)enforcement and corroborate changes in policing over time. We will collaborate with sex workers on study design, conduct and dissemination. The findings will inform advocacy for evidence-based policy and any scale up of non-enforcement, in the UK and internationally, as a structural intervention to improve sex workers' health, safety and well-being.