

United States

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I'm A Sex Worker & Coronavirus Is Destroying My Business

ANONYMOUS

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOANNA TAN.

On Tuesday, politician Lord Bethell spoke in the House of Lords about the risk of transmitting coronavirus through kissing and other forms of social intercourse, saying: "Kissing is wonderful but potentially dangerous."

As an in-person sex worker, this isn't good for business. The coronavirus outbreak threatens a significant part of my livelihood. From my contacts within the industry, I know that escorts are experiencing a higher rate of cancellations and fewer bookings than usual.

I became an independent escort in October 2019, in a bid to ease the financial strain of being a single parent. My income from my office job was roughly \$32,000, all of which, plus any money I made from freelance writing, was going straight to childcare costs, bills and the taxman. Because I am new to the industry, my income has fluctuated wildly as I adjust my responsibilities.

In the beginning I was making roughly \$2,580 a month, only working the odd evening. Then in January I started working more flexibly for my admin job and made just under \$6,500; in February, I made \$8,592 (not including tips or gifts). I was on track to make the same this month until I had my first cancellation, from an Italian client, which wiped \$646 – almost 10% – off my income. That may not seem like a lot but keep in mind the nature of self-employment. I put away 40% of my income for tax, and then there are the vast expenses: lingerie, lube, condoms, toys, hotels for my 'incall' days (an incall is where clients come to the sex worker, who 'hosts' in their apartment, hotel, etc.; an outcall is where you go to the client), travel costs, nails, laser hair removal. Every booking I lose makes me panic that little bit more.

Like many escorts, a good proportion of my clients are traveling to London for business. Of the rest, the majority of my bookings come from one particular client, who accounts for roughly \$3,875 of my monthly income. While he is based in the UK, he travels often for work. There is obviously a risk of him getting coronavirus while traveling and passing it to me, but there is also the risk of him having less expendable income due to the unstable economy. Ordinarily, it wouldn't be as nerve-wracking, as I get new email inquiries almost daily, but finding new, reliable clients right now is not easy.

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JANE

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A fellow independent in-person sex worker, Jane*, agrees. "I definitely have noticed that I have been getting less inquiries from people I haven't met. I don't know whether they are scared of contracting the virus or because the economy is a little bit shaky from the virus and also Brexit, or whether it's all of those things together," she says. "But I have noticed since the outbreak in Italy, it's become a lot more serious for the UK. Maybe since the end of January I have noticed a drop and last month, in February, I had the most cancellations I have ever had." It is right for clients to be diligent about their health, especially if they are older or have underlying health conditions. But I believe a lot of these cancellations are down to people being advised to avoid touching others.

A colleague of mine, [Letizia Miro](#), has also experienced cancellations: "I had one cancellation from a client who was coming to a big conference in London. Also a Fly-Me-To-You (where the client pays to fly their chosen escort to their country), which was meant to happen at the end of the month to Germany, probably won't happen either." The issue with big bookings like this is that once you lose just one or two, your predicted income can decrease dramatically, and it's hard to get replacement bookings to make up for it.

Jane raises the point that as self-employed sex workers, if we can't go to work, then we don't get paid. If we contract the virus, we will be unable to work for weeks — with no sick pay. And even

if we don't get sick ourselves, if the virus becomes more widespread in the UK, what is already looking like a bleak few months for sex workers may leave us without any income whatsoever.

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"There is an obvious slowdown [of jobs] due to the cancellations of conferences and business meetings. Less movement overall. And less movement means less prospective clients coming to London for business," Letizia says. "Basically, I'm relying on regular clients. I have prepared myself for a very slow April. I feel clients in general might feel put off by the physical proximity."

Like many of us, Jane has been searching for ways to supplement her income should things get more serious. "If London shuts down like China or Italy, no one will be seeing a sex worker, obviously," she tells me. "I'm assuming people will find other ways to make money, whether or not they have side businesses or other forms of sex work they do. [Camming](#), phone chat, I'm assuming people will rely on those streams of income instead of in-person sex work."

Online sex work has boomed in recent years with the rise of sites like OnlyFans. And if in-person workers migrate towards camming, it's hard to see how an already oversaturated market could be as profitable as in-person work for sex workers who do not already have a large online following.

Jane, who used to do camming before becoming an in-person sex worker, also used to work in a brothel and believes that workers there may be facing situations that put their health at significant risk. "As an independent worker ... I have that privilege to ask if clients have been in contact with [the virus] and to say no, at this point. If you are working at a brothel, you don't really have a choice of who you can see and definitely not a choice of if they have traveled to X, Y, and Z recently." With sex workers having to pay a house fee to the brothel owner, regardless

of whether they come into work or not, you can see how the virus is a serious financial — as well as a health — worry. If sex workers run into debt with their manager, they may avoid the brothel and turn to street work for money. Coronavirus is making many people fearful but for sex workers, the lack of security it creates is leaving us extra vulnerable.

**Name has been changed*



CORONAVIRUS AFFECTING ALL BUSINESSES – SEX WORKERS TOO

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