

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Increase in Violence Against Sex Workers Denied at Women in Policing Conference

Ugly Mugs Ireland is extremely disappointed that a speaker at the International Association of Women in Policing (IAWP) Conference, currently taking place in Dublin , was yesterday permitted to use the prestigious event as a platform to try to discredit important Ugly Mugs data on violence against sex workers in Ireland.

Ugly Mugs (UM) Ireland, a sex worker safety scheme, has published statistical data and reports that show, comparing the two years pre and the two years post the adoption of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 in Ireland, sex workers' crime reports to UM increased by 91% and violent crime reports specifically increased by 92%.

Lucy Smyth of Ugly Mugs says this increase in violence against sex workers should be being taken seriously by the Gardaí. But, instead, the Garda and IAWP Conference permitted speaker Ruth Breslin of the Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP) at University College Dublin to use their conference as an opportunity to try to completely discredit Ugly Mugs data.

Ruth Breslin said the idea that violence had increased was a "a massive red herring" primarily being put forward by Ugly Mugs which she described as "A woman, a single woman who gathers a certain amount of data that no one else has oversight over." Ms Breslin continued to say that the data is "really questionable and not subject to scrutiny" and that her organisation's data (which says violence hasn't increased) is subject to scrutiny. Various other smears towards Ugly Mugs were also made by Ms Breslin.

Ugly Mugs strongly refutes Ms Breslin's attempt to deny increases in violence against sex workers by using her privilege to try to discredit Ugly Mugs data.

Lucy Smyth clarifies that "Under data sharing agreements and with the consent of our members, Ugly Mugs has provided the Gardaí with large volumes of our data over many

years. The Gardaí therefore well know that our data is genuine as they have analysed much of it themselves many times.” Lucy says the Gardaí allowing this data on serious violence against sex workers, which they know is real, to be rubbished at a conference they are running is deeply disturbing.

Ugly Mugs has also previously requested that the Department of Justice review its data, or better still commission a full academic review of the data, though thus far the Department has declined to show any interest in doing so.

Ugly Mugs wants to make very clear that the data at hand relates to very serious crime and Ugly Mugs remains willing to have it reviewed by the Department of Justice or commissioned academics or the Gardaí.

Ugly Mugs says they don’t fully understand why the Irish authorities want to ignore this increase in violence against sex workers. But this situation is not acceptable. Ugly Mugs Ireland would ask the Gardaí and the IAWP to immediately disassociate themselves from the comments made by Ruth Breslin at their conference on 9 March 2022 in order to prevent further damage.

Lucy Smyth says “Sex workers in Ireland are experiencing horrific levels of abuse and violence. The Government, the Gardaí in particular, needs to stop ignoring this reality. Instead of facilitating anti sex work campaigners trying to discredit Ugly Mugs data at their events, they should be addressing the very serious levels of violence sex workers are experiencing”. She goes on to say that “it is a very sad situation if events about women in policing are going to be places where punching down on marginalised women (in this case sex workers) is considered acceptable. The IAWP and women police could instead constructively engage with the sex work community and help us do something about the serious violence sex workers are facing.

ENDS

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Ugly Mugs is a volunteer-run not-for-profit technology initiative that runs a safety scheme for sex workers in Ireland. Please see <https://uglymugs.ie/> for further details

Open Access Peer Reviewed Article on Ugly Mugs Data

Campbell, R., Smith, L., Leacy, B., Ryan, M. and Stoica, B. (2020) Not Collateral Damage: Trends in Violence and Hate Crimes Experienced by Sex Workers in the Republic of Ireland. Irish Journal of Sociology.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0791603520939794>