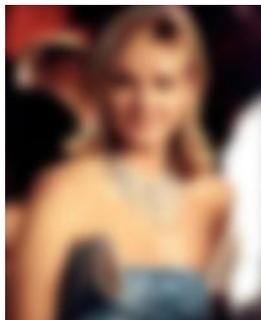


[Twisted sex stories](#) [1]

Written by [Sam Bowman](#) [2] | Wednesday 14 December 2011



The BBC has a report up this morning that claims that [the number of students in sex work has doubled](#) [3]. But the story is paper-thin – the NUS says they’re being misreported, and the BBC gives no useful figures to support the claims in their report.

The article’s headline says “NUS: Students turning to prostitution to fund studies?”. The basis of this claim is not an NUS report or even an NUS press release, but a [comment given by an NUS officer](#) [4] on the BBC’s own story. And the content of the story is weak, to say the least.

To begin with, the story is based on a statistical fudge. It reports the *change*, without any concrete numbers. But relative figures are only useful if you have the original numbers to see where the change has taken place. An increase from two people to four isn’t very significant but, if expressed in terms of the change, it’s the same as an increase from 10,000 to 20,000. And, obviously, if you’re dealing with very small numbers it’s hard to say that a “doubling” of an extra ten or twenty people is statistically significant. That the number of students who know someone working in the sex industry has risen from 3% to 25% in the last ten years doesn’t say very much about the actual numbers doing so, especially given the nebulous status of the term “sex industry”.

Next, the BBC story interviews a woman who “turned to escorting during her A-levels when she found out her education maintenance allowance (EMA) was in danger of being cut.” Note the weasel words there – if Clare was studying for her A-levels and getting an EMA, she would continue to get it until June 2012. So Clare hasn’t actually been getting less money from the government at all, and won’t until June next year.

Far from being forced by poverty into sex work, Clare says “I began looking for jobs, but the hours were unsociable.” I’m sympathetic to Clare – she says that she was misled by a “friend” into escort work, which is grotesque. But for the BBC to appropriate this story to support their flimsy thesis about students being forced into sex work is exploitative to her and deeply misleading to its readership.

There are people resorting to illegal sex work because of poverty. This is very, very bad, especially because the prohibition of a lot of sex work has made it a violent and dangerous type of work. But this BBC article has hijacked this very real problem in order to promote a specious non-story that misleads readers.

[I wrote about more BBC bias the other day.](#) [5]

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