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# PROSTITUTION

## A NEW APPROACH

Terms:

- This report uses “women in prostitution” in recognition of the fact that the majority of those selling sex are women and buying it are men and that we do not consider prostitution as “work”.
- ‘Sex worker’ is understood by some to mean anyone connected to the sex trade – including dominatrixes, pole/lap dancers, telephone sex chat, maids, drivers, managers, pimps. By others, including ourselves, it is understood to mean the person directly involved.
- Decriminalisation is meant by some to include decriminalisation of the entire market, removing all specific laws relating to the sex trade, including buyers, managers, pimps etc. For others, including ourselves, it refers specifically to the women selling sex.
- Legalisation refers to establishing a regulatory regime but is commonly interpreted to mean complete decriminalisation and regulation of the entire sex trade.

### About Streetlight UK

- **Streetlight UK** is a front line support charity, for women at risk of, or involved in the sex trade across Sussex and Surrey. Empowering women involved in the sex trade and at risk of sexual exploitation, including those trafficked into prostitution, to make fresh choices, sustain a new life and discover their intrinsic value and worth as individuals. Combating all forms of violence against women and girls from a human rights stance. We share the interpretation of Article 6

(United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 1979) which positions prostitution as symbolic of women's continued discrimination and inequality. As such Streetlight UK is a supporter of the so-called "Nordic Model", (Nordic Model Now, n.d.)

### **Expertise and track record**

- **Streetlight UK** pioneered the first dedicated frontline support service for women involved in the sex trade across Sussex and Surrey, including a help line and on-call service for Crawley Police and Gatwick Police 'Hotel Watch' scheme, servicing some 30 plus hotels around the airport.
- Offering specialist support to women with multiple related disadvantages of involvement in prostitution, including mental health issues.
- Supports law enforcers, local authority and other statutory and non-statutory bodies with training and awareness on the harms of prostitution including sex trafficking.
- Current Research and functions include:
  - The Sex Scene – Sussex 2016/17
  - The Sex Scene – Surrey 2017/18
  - Online Sexual Trade RH11 (5mile radius) 3 month Pilot (March 2017)
  - Online Sexual Trade RH12 (25mile radius) 6 month Pilot (Jan 2018)
  - Currently developing a 6-8 week exit support programme for HMP Send (Surrey), for inmates previously involved in prostitution.

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### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report gives a brief overview of the current UK law on prostitution in England and Wales, its impact and who benefits. Detailing some of the myths surrounding prostitution and how they are perpetuated as a societal norm. How the Nordic Model, has removed barriers for women in prostitution, curbed demand and changed social attitudes towards prostitution. This report challenges the Home Affairs Select Committee Interim report of 2016 on prostitution, as lacking in evidence regarding those who are opposed to decriminalisation and highlights the compromised position of the former committee Chairman. Further, this report points to the lack of understanding of the harms of prostitution and the need for vital research and funding for support services with specialist expertise. This report's conclusion is that finding solutions to tackle the root causes of prostitution, pursuing an enhanced Nordic Model and introducing a law criminalising those who purchase sex, whilst also decriminalising those who sell sex, will be beneficial to preventing prostitution. Furthermore, that a public awareness campaign is commissioned against buying sex, including the harms of prostitution, modelled on the successful 2006 anti-smoking campaign.

## 2. INTRODUCTION - PROSTITUTION IN ENGLAND AND WALES

### A. Who it Impacts:

- i. **The women and girls involved** – Alan Caton OBE, Independent Chair of Islington and Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Boards said: “Women in prostitution are 12 times more likely to be murdered than the national average” (Caton, 2017). Fiona Broadfoot a prostitution survivor and Activist, Build a Girl Project and SPACE international said at the London South Bank University: *“In a moment I lost my identity aged 15. I shut down, was battered into complete control by my pimp, was criminalised, blamed, shamed and bathed myself in a bottle of detol every night!”* (Broadfoot, 2017). Sarah signed up to an escort agency, had an interview and that night had her first customer, (see Appendix 1 Case Study, Streetlight UK). She said: *‘the first time was the hardest, I didn’t know what to expect or how to feel so I blocked it out with alcohol.’* She spent a total of three and a half years ‘working’ for the agency until she had a nervous breakdown as a result of the ‘work’ she was doing and was admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act. Sarah still suffers with panic attacks and is in a constant paranoid state in case she bumps into someone she knows. The group of predominantly women involved in supplying these ‘services’ suffer extraordinarily, have higher mortality rates, lower or nil educational opportunities, and experience violence, rape and murder, whilst also being criminalised.
- ii. **The sex buyers** – Examples of some words and phrases men used to describe their own feelings after using a woman in prostitution included: “I’m not satisfied in my mind,” “looking for more partner satisfaction,” “regretful and remorseful,” “disappointed – what a waste of money,” “angry at myself,” “morally at odds,” “confused,” “lonely – still,” “psychologically dirty,” “guilt about my relationship with my wife,” “asking myself what has led me to this,” and “50% satisfied.” (Melissa Farley, 2009)
- iii. **Law Enforcement** - Streetlight UK’s frontline experience when working regularly alongside Law enforcers, supports the Governments comments to the Home Affairs Select Committee on Prostitution, (Home Office, 2016) *“that there is considerable variation in the policing approach to prostitution throughout the country, not all of which is consistent with national guidelines.”* It is our view that Law Enforcers are not sufficiently resourced or trained to deal effectively with prostitution and its associated criminal activity.

- iv. **Communities** - The root causes of prostitution and the criminal activity associated with it that affect communities are not adequately known and therefore addressed. Streetlight UK supports the comments of the Government (Home Office, 2016) for the urgent need of research to give an informed evidence base, to fully understand the impact and changing nature of prostitution in England and Wales.

#### B. Who Benefits:

- i. It's clear from Streetlight UK's research in Sussex and Surrey, that the benefit from the sex trade is to pimps, brothel owners and sex buyers, not those selling sex.
- ii. Sex buyers are free to carry on without taking responsibility for the consequences or repercussions for individual women, their families and society as a whole.
- iii. The criminal group managing the sex trade, remains largely unchallenged as the weight of the law doesn't address, or encourage a reduction in the demand, from sex buyers, who are predominantly men.
- iv. Many Online Platforms and Providers such as 'Adult Works' benefit financially in an exponential way, (Streetlight UK , 2017)
- v. Current UK Economic Growth figures, also include revenue from prostitution, (UK Office of National Statistics, AdultWork,Import.io, 2014) reinforcing the acceptability of 'sex work' and distorting the GDP figures of the UK, (Spiegelhalter, 2014).

### 3. MYTHS OF PROSTITUTION

#### A. The Myths:

- i. Many users wrongly believe that the women they buy, enjoy the sex of the transaction, and believe that most prostituted women actively and happily choose to earn money through the sex trade. (Bindel, 2017)
- ii. This reinforces a societal mind-set which says the women in prostitution somehow deserve their fate when violence, rape and even murder occurs – this being seen as part of the risk of the 'job', as evidenced in the way media outlets portrayed the Ipswich trial, (Mair, 2006).

- iii. It is a myth to say that prostitution is necessary, harmless and inevitable as propagated by the 'sex workers' rights movement. Just as it was to say that smoking in pubs, restaurants, on public transport and venues such as theatres, airplanes, did not pose serious health risks in 2006.
- iv. Decriminalisation empowers the pimps, brothel owners and sex buyers by making them legal and does not benefit the women involved – which the widely recognised and disastrous legalised regime in the Netherlands demonstrates, (Bindel, 2013). Sabrina Valisce, a prostitution survivor experienced prostitution under three legislative models in the South Pacific. A former volunteer for the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective, who left when it became clear that decriminalisation was unable to fix sex trade problems, (Valisce, 2017)
- v. The myth that men would 'need' to rape if they did not have access to prostituted women. There is no evidence supporting the theory that prostitution prevents rape, (Melissa Farley, 2009).

#### B. Perpetuating the Myths:

- i. Both decriminalisation and legalisation do not result in either a reduction or an end to the sex trade. They simply perpetuate the myth that supply and demand are inevitable and therefore fail to address the growing evidence that neither improve the situation for women selling sex, as evidenced even in Germany, which has earned a reputation of being 'the brothel of Europe'. (Reed, 2014)
- ii. Sex buyers are not held to account – the law does not address those at the heart of the demand for sex, which is predominantly men. When asked what would deter men in London from buying sex, 77% said a greater criminal penalty, (Melissa Farley, 2009).
- iii. The Pro-prostitution lobby which includes pimps, brothel owners and other 3<sup>rd</sup> parties, dominates the media and the funding of academic research. Most specifically money designated for HIV/AIDS prevention, which has seen huge amounts of funding channelled into 'safe sex', harm reduction programmes for punters. In other words assisting sex buyers to continue paying for sex – rather than realising prostitution itself is the main health and social issue. (Bindel, 2017).
- iv. Government funding is currently directed more towards human trafficking victims, of which sex-trafficked victims number approx. 1000 individuals,

(National Crime Agency, 2017) and not toward support services such as Streetlight UK who work predominantly with those involved in prostitution – some 72,800 individuals, (Brooks-Gordon, et al., 2015).

#### 4. WHY CRIMINALISE THE PURCHASE OF SEX

##### A. UK Home Affairs Select Committee

- i. The July 2016 Interim report on Prostitution, published it is likely to make recommendations to favour the decriminalisation of the sex trade, which Streetlight UK does not believe is supported by enough evidence from those opposing decriminalisation and is fundamentally compromised by the Chairman.
- ii. Chairman Keith Vaz MP – 3 months after the publication of the interim report was exposed by a tabloid newspaper as a sex buyer – uncovering a clear conflict of interests and lack of impartiality, (Hope, 2016).
- iii. The report said committee members were unlikely to recommend introducing a law to criminalise those who pay for sex, disregarding the growing evidence in support of following the ‘Nordic Model’ which an increasing number of other countries have adopted, most recently the SNP in May 2017. (McIntyre, 2017)

##### B. The Nordic Model Facts:

- i. Since the introduction of the change in the law in 1999 in Sweden, to criminalise the purchase of sex – there has been a sea change in public opinion, where 80% of the population now view prostitution as an act of violence against women and girls and support the law, (Caton, 2017).
- ii. This has removed barriers for the women in prostitution who are now able to approach law enforcement without fear.
- iii. It has curbed the demand – by placing the weight of the law on the user not the supplier. Whereas under decriminalisation of Germany’s “Mega Brothels”, demand has only increased across Germany, (Caton, 2017).
- iv. There is no evidence 18yrs later of increased violence towards women as a result of criminalising sex buyers as stated by the Deputy Chief Prosecutor, International Public Prosecution Office Stockholm, Sweden, (Thomsen, 2017).

- v. Law enforcers in Sweden were enabled to be effective in finding perpetrators through money monitoring, informers, tip-offs, taxi drivers, restaurants and internet surveillance, (Thomsen, 2017).
- vi. The threat to gender equality through prostitution was addressed in law.

### C. Multi Agency and Partnership Approach

- i. Gatwick Police and Gatwick authority have made a significant impact on changing societal attitudes amongst its staff, towards trafficking and sexual exploitation. Taking a proactive, partnership approach in training and awareness of how to identify potentially vulnerable passengers, both airside and within the terminal.
- ii. This has included a scheme to work with the police and local NGO's such as Streetlight UK on a "Hotel Watch" scheme – working with hotel managers who suspect prostitution/trafficking is taking place within their hotels.
- iii. Gatwick Police has utilised the skill-sets of its officers and local NGO's in their specialist support. This has led to successfully identifying and supporting those exploited sexually and prevented and reduced crime. Furthermore, it has resulted in increased arrests and convictions in Sussex and Surrey of trafficking and prostitution offences.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

### A. A New Approach:

- i. To identify and communicate clearly the harms of prostitution.
- ii. To find solutions to tackle the root cause, which is men's demand for sex. Social attitudes ingrained in our culture will only change when we understand and tackle these.
- iii. To address the mind-set that has fused prostitution "as a choice" with trafficking which is clearly a human rights violation.
- iv. To ensure experts in rape and other forms of sexual violence expose the myths that prostitution prevents rape. (Melissa Farley, 2009)
- v. To follow the examples of other countries such as Ireland, Northern Ireland, France, Norway, Iceland and the SNP in Scotland who have adopted a similar approach to Sweden (the Nordic model) – which at its core recognises

prostitution as a form of violence against women and introduced a law criminalising those who purchase sex, whilst also decriminalising those who sell sex.

- vi. To ensure there are greater criminal penalties for paying for sex, as highlighted in a report by Eaves in England, Scotland and the U.S., More than three-quarters of men interviewees acknowledged that greater criminal penalties would deter them from paying for sex, and yet only 6% had ever been arrested for soliciting prostitution. It is imperative that new and existing legislation be vigorously implemented. (Melissa Farley, 2009)
- vii. To create a public awareness campaign to accompany enforcement of laws against buying sex and might be modelled on the 2006 anti-smoking campaign, (Melissa Farley, 2009).
- viii. To scale up multi-agency approach, i.e. the model created with Gatwick Police and the Gatwick Authority to include other areas; such as other gateways of trafficking and prostitution in England and Wales, including Heathrow, Stanstead and Dover.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Case Study

##### **Sarah West Sussex - May 2017**



Streetlight UK received a self-referral from a woman in Horsham, who was a former escort working across East Grinstead, Crawley and Gatwick with an escort agency. '@Hi my name is Sarah is it possible that I could have one to one support'. Referral came from the Streetlight UK website after being passed on details by Southdown. Sarah would like one to one support as she was an escort in the surrounding areas of Horsham for 3 ½ years. In that time Sarah experienced and witnessed emotional trauma. Sarah is currently being supported by the mental health team at New Park House in Horsham, she had a mental breakdown in 2005 and has been known to the mental health team since then. Sarah has been diagnosed with depression, anxiety and believes that she is becoming OCD. Sarah is not working currently and would like to regain some control and live a 'normal life'.

On receipt of the referral one of Streetlight UK's outreach worker's made contact with Sarah. After listening to why she felt that she needed support they arranged to meet with her in person for a coffee.

Sarah is a beautiful looking woman in her early 30's and is traumatized by her experiences in the adult industry. She spoke quite openly and candidly about her time in the adult industry and informed the outreach worker:

*'I have been getting support from a number of agencies but I don't feel like I am getting what I need as no one understands the pain and trauma I am left with, I am afraid to go out of the house, I am paranoid if I go into town, I can't be in certain situations, I feel scared all of the time.'*

Sarah explained how she got involved in the adult industry and what led to her eventually leaving the escort agency that she was working for at the time.

Sarah grew up in a dysfunctional family home and was a victim of sexual abuse from an early age. In her late teens she started to experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. She met a boy and fell pregnant and gave birth to a boy. Due to the unstableness of her mental health she gave over her parental responsibilities to her own parents and moved out of the family home. She was vulnerable and lonely and met a man with similar mental health problems and at first her relationships appeared to be relatively healthy, until one day she realized that it was not. Her boyfriend left her and as a result her mental health issues were exasperated, she was incredibly lonely with little or no money and as she was scrolling on the internet one day she came across a website advertising for female escorts.

Sarah signed up to the agency, had an interview and that night had her first customer. She said:

*'The first time was the hardest, I didn't know what to expect or how to feel so I blocked it out with alcohol.'*

She spent a total of 3 ½ years 'working' for the agency until one day she had a nervous breakdown as a result of the 'work' she was doing.

In that time she explained that she never had any violent encounters and on the whole the agency itself was ok and treated her ok. She explained it was the drivers' of the cars that gave her the hardest time, as she used to get propositioned by them and felt very frightened. Sarah had a mental breakdown and was admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act.

Although Sarah is no longer in the adult industry, she says that it could be so easy to go back to, especially if she needs money. However she explains that by being in the industry you have to take on another personality in order to desensitize the situation.

Sarah still suffers with panic attacks and is in a constant paranoid state in case she bumps into someone she knows.

Sarah is receiving specialist mental health support and is open to further support from Streetlight UK.

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<sup>i</sup> Sarah is a false name used by Streetlight UK to protect the referrals identity.