

# PROSTITUTION: FACT OR FICTION?

Many statements are made about prostitution: about its nature; about the women involved and about how governments should address it. This can often lead to people being misinformed about the reality of prostitution. This leaflet highlights eight statements commonly made about prostitution and provides additional information to help you distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction.

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## Women choose to get involved in prostitution

**Most women enter prostitution because of lack of choice and many are coerced by pimps or traffickers: it is the men who buy sex who are exercising free choice.** It is well documented that the vast majority of women in prostitution are poor, homeless, and have already suffered violence and abuse throughout their life. 70% of those involved in street prostitution have a history of Local Authority care. Nearly half report a history of childhood sexual abuse. Up to 70% of women enter prostitution before age 18 and the global average age of entry into prostitution is only 13–14 years old. Tonight in the UK up to 5000 young people will be exploited in prostitution, from all backgrounds and all types of families, many groomed and coerced by pimps (Paying The Price, 2004).

## Prostitution is just sex

**Prostitution is not wanted sex, it is unwanted sex.** Although the women are agreeing to sexual activity in order to survive, provide for their children or fund a drug addiction, this is unwanted sexual activity. Many women are under the control of pimps or traffickers who may use violence to coerce women into prostitution. Women in prostitution report that in order to be able to do it, they need to learn to dissociate ('split off' in their head). Dissociation can cause lasting psychological harm. Women who are not able to 'split off' will use drugs and/or alcohol to achieve the same effect. This is why women will start to use drugs, or their substance use will rapidly escalate, irrespective of why they first became involved in prostitution.

*"I would numb my feelings. I wouldn't even feel like I was in my body. I would actually leave my body and go somewhere else with my thoughts and with my feelings until he got off me and it was over with. I don't know how else to explain it except it felt like rape. It was rape to me."* "Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress", Melissa Farley, 2003. Pg.206

**If it weren't for prostitution, more women and children would be raped**

**There is absolutely no evidence for this claim.** This myth is offensive to men who choose not to abuse and rape women. Does anyone really believe that men are incapable of control, and that they will inevitably rape a woman or child if they can't have sex? In addition, this myth ignores the sexual abuse of women in prostitution. Women in prostitution are disproportionately affected by rape, sexual and physical violence. In the US FBI crime figures show no evidence that prostitution leads to a decrease in rape. In fact rape figures in Nevada, where prostitution is legal, are higher than the national average (FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2004)

**It would be better for women if prostitution was legalised and regulated**

**Prostitution is harmful in and of itself: legalisation doesn't remove that harm — it simply makes the harm legal.** A study of prostitution in five different countries found that 62% of those involved in prostitution reported being raped and 73% had experienced physical violence. The same study found that 92% of those people wanted to leave prostitution immediately if they could. Prostitution is legalised in Amsterdam, yet this has not stopped male clients raping and abusing women in prostitution. CCTV, police patrols and importantly, a sympathetic response from police when women in prostitution report rape or violence should be the norm. It is not necessary to legalise the sex industry in order to extend such basic rights and services to women in prostitution. Public safety measures and adequate police responses to crime should be provided to all women, irrespective of economic activity.

The parents of Marnie Frey, a young woman involved in prostitution in Canada who was murdered by Robert Pickton — a man who brutally murdered numerous other women involved in prostitution — have this to say on the legalisation of prostitution — *“To think the best we can do for these women is giving them a safe place to sell their bodies is a joke. There is no such thing as a “clean safe place” to be abused in. For a man to think he can buy a woman's body is insane, and should show us the attitudes that women have to fight against in society. Marnie did not choose prostitution; her addictions did, and any man who bought her body for their sexual pleasure should go to jail for exploiting her desperation.”*

Lynn & Rick Frey, 2008

**Working indoors is safer and offers better conditions for women in prostitution**

**It doesn't matter where prostitution takes place: unwanted sex is unwanted sex.** In addition to physical violence, women in indoor prostitution report high levels of coercion and control from pimps and brothel owners. This includes being pressurised or forced not to insist that male buyers use condoms, having to see more male buyers than do women on the street, and having to have sex with pimps or brothel owners, and/or their friends.

A report in the British Medical Journal about client violence towards women in prostitution stated that of the 125 women in indoor prostitution contacted, 48% had experienced client violence. The types of violence experienced included: being slapped, punched, or kicked; robbery; attempted robbery; beaten; threatened with weapon; held against will; attempted rape; strangulation; kidnapped; attempted kidnap; forced to give client oral sex; vaginal rape and anal rape. "Violence by clients towards female prostitutes in different work settings: questionnaire survey", Stephanie Church et al in BMJ 2001;322:524-525 (3 March)

**If prostitution were just treated like any other job, this would remove the stigma against the women**

**As soon as you start to view prostitution as work, the harm is made invisible.** Prostitution is intrinsically harmful and traumatic and just calling it a job won't make it harmless. It also does not magically remove the stigma associated with the sex industry. Where legalisation and unionization has occurred, most women in prostitution still choose not to register with a Union. Those being controlled by pimps or traffickers also have no choice to register as a formal employee in this 'industry' or join a recognized Trade Union. If prostitution is seen as a job, then the predominantly male owners running brothels and pimping women become legitimate 'businessmen' overnight. Do we want to legalise the buying and selling of women's bodies and sexuality? This would legally define women as commodities, which can be bought and sold. Recognising prostitution as work also means an end to services to support women out of prostitution. If it is 'just a job' why would either the Government or charitable organisations encourage or support women to get out? Are women really worth nothing more than what a man is willing to pay for them?

In Germany the service union ver.di offered union membership to Germany's estimated 400,000 "sex workers". They would be entitled to health care, legal aid, thirty paid holiday days a year, a five day work week, and Christmas and holiday bonuses. Out of 400,000 "sex workers", only 100 joined the union. That's a tiny percentage of German "sex workers". Women don't want to be prostitutes.

**If prostitution were legalised and regulated, licensed brothel owners would not hire illegal, underage or trafficked women**

**Not so. Pimps, owners of brothels, escort agencies, and 'saunas' want to make money.** They don't care if someone has no papers, is a child, or trafficked. Prostitution is a market based on demand and if there is a demand from men to use women and children sexually for money then this will be met, by whatever means necessary. Pimps, traffickers, procurers and especially punters flock to wherever the prostitution industry is allowed to thrive. In Amsterdam after legalisation child prostitution increased by over 300% (ChildRight). In New South Wales (Australia), brothels were decriminalised in 1995. In 1999, the number of brothels had increased exponentially. The vast majority had no license to operate as there are always pimps who don't want to register their 'business' or pay taxes on their earnings as they can earn more operating outside the law. There are also women in prostitution who don't want to register as they can't afford to pay tax on their earnings, because they are under the control of pimps or traffickers or because of the stigma attached to those in prostitution. 'A Critical Examination of Responses to Prostitution in Four Countries', Bindel and Kelly, 2004.Pg.13

**Legalising or decriminalising prostitution will stop illegal prostitution and trafficking**

**The legalisation of aspects of prostitution in Australia, and its decriminalisation in New Zealand has resulted in an increase in illegal, hidden, child and street prostitution.** Decriminalisation promotes sex trafficking, child and all forms of prostitution as it gives a green light to pimps and traffickers making it easier for them to operate. On the other hand it is reported that there has been a dramatic decrease of trafficking into Sweden since that country criminalised the buying of sexual services.

Jonas Trolle, an inspector with the Stockholm police unit dedicated to combating prostitution: *"We have significantly less prostitution than our neighbouring countries, even if we take into account the fact that some of it happens underground ... We only have between 105 and 130 women — both on the Internet and on the street — active (in prostitution) in Stockholm today. In Oslo, it's 5,000 ... Another relevant aspect of the ban is the reduction of the number of foreign women now being trafficked into Sweden for sex. The Swedish government estimates that in the last few years only 200 to 400 women and girls have been annually trafficked into Sweden for prostitution, while in neighbouring Finland the number is 15,000 to 17,000".* 'Swedish Prostitution Ban An Apparent Enormous Success', Thaddeus M.Baklinski, 2007