

DEMAND CHANGE! CAMPAIGN BRIEFING

Summary:

Demand Change! is a joint campaign between Eaves and OBJECT which has three key aims:

1. To promote an increased understanding of the myths and realities surrounding prostitution
2. To call for prostitution to be seen and widely understood as a form of violence against women
3. To lobby for adoption of the 'Nordic model' which tackles demand for prostitution, decriminalises those selling sexual acts and provides adequate resources to assist people to exit prostitution.

About prostitution

Prostitution is a human rights violation – which, whilst affecting some men and boys – is profoundly gendered and is defined by the United Nations as an act of violence against women¹. Treating women merely as sexual objects through commercial sexual exploitation rather than as individuals contributes to attitudes underpinning gender-based discrimination and violence². For many women poverty, marginalisation and vulnerabilities trigger entry into prostitution for their own survival or for the benefit of others. Consider the following:

- 75% of women in prostitution became involved when they were under the age of eighteen³.
- Up to 70% of women in prostitution spent time in care. 45% report experiencing sexual abuse and 85% physical abuse during their childhoods⁴.
- 74% of women in prostitution identify poverty, the need to pay household expenses and support their children, as primary motivators for being drawn into prostitution.⁵
- More than half of UK women in prostitution have been raped and/or seriously sexually assaulted and at least 75% have been physically assaulted at the hands of both pimps and punters.⁶
- 68% of women in prostitution meet the criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the same range as victims of torture and combat veterans undergoing treatment⁷.
- Women in prostitution in London suffer from a mortality rate that is 12 times higher than the national average⁸.
- 9 out of 10 women surveyed would like to exit prostitution⁹.

Why demand change?

The UK has historically failed to deal with the far-reaching human rights implications of prostitution. Despite the intrinsic harm of prostitution and the vulnerabilities of the women exploited through it, current legislation effectively gives men the right to buy sexual acts and exploit this vulnerability. Logically, there is no viability to supply without demand, and it is undoubtedly the demand for sexual acts from the empowered buyer that fuels sexual exploitation and the proliferation of the sex industry. Yet the UK has multiple international and domestic obligations to tackle demand for prostitution:

- Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- UN Slavery Convention (1926)

¹ As defined in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation 19, Violence against women (Eleventh session, 1992), U.N. Doc. A/47/38 at 1 (1993), reprinted in *Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies*, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 at 243 (2003).

³ Women's Resource Centre http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/s/statistics.pdf

⁴ Home Office (2006). *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy & Summary of Responses to 'Paying the Price'*, London: UK Government.

⁵ Women's Resource Centre, *op cit*.

⁶ Home Office (2004a). *Solutions and Strategies: Drug Problems and Street Sex Markets*. London: UK Government.

⁷ Ramsay, R. et al (1993). 'Psychiatric Morbidity in Survivors of Organized State Violence Including Torture'. In *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 162:55-59.

⁸ Home Office (2004a). *op cit*.

⁹ Farley, M. (2003). 'Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder'. In *Journal of Trauma Practice*, 2:3/4, pp.33-74.

- Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956)
- European Convention of Human Rights (1950)
- International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- UN Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (est. 1975)
- UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1994)
- UN Fourth Conference on Women (Platform for Action) (1995)
- UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol) (1998)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1971) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention (1999)
- European Union Council Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2002).

Current government proposals

For the first time in UK law a welcome attempt is being made to more directly tackle demand. Clause 13 (Part 2) of the Home Office Policing and Crime Bill seeks to shift criminal liability from people exploited through prostitution to those who purchase sexual acts, ensuring that buyers take responsibility for their exploitative actions. This proposal signifies an important step towards gender equality and social justice. However more could be done – as outlined below.

What change is needed

Sexual exploitation will only end if it is understood as a cause and consequence of gender inequality, the demand for it is reduced and those involved in selling sexual acts have real life choices. Several countries throughout the world have successfully introduced legislation that tackles the demand for sexual acts¹⁰. In Sweden, where this legislation has been in force since 1999, the real benefits are clear – there has been a dramatic drop in the number of women in street prostitution¹¹, the country is no longer an attractive destination for traffickers¹², and the number of men purchasing sexual services has fallen significantly¹³. However, Clause 13 of the PCB does not introduce a blanket ban on paying for sexual acts, as per the Nordic model¹⁴. So, whilst it is a very important step in the right direction, ultimately what is required to effectively end the demand for prostitution is to completely outlaw the purchase of sexual acts.

At the same time, measures should be taken to ensure that those who are victims of sexual exploitation are not criminalised. Criminalising those exploited in prostitution fails to address the reasons that led to their involvement in the first instance – such as poverty, drug use or fear and coercion by a third party. Finally, adequate resources should be injected into developing and expanding holistic support services to help those involved in prostitution seeking to exit the industry to do so safely and permanently, overcome the damage caused by it, and enable them to avail of other life opportunities including training, education and employment.

Support the Demand Change! campaign and take vital action to help end sexual exploitation.

For further information please visit:

www.demandchange.org.uk or www.eaves4women.co.uk or www.object.org.uk

Contact details

Eaves: Nisan Kesete, nisan.kesete@eaveshousing.co.uk / 020 7840 7108.

OBJECT: Sandrine Levêque, sandrine@object.org.uk / 07975 897 005

¹⁰ Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, South Korea and Cambodia.

¹¹ Ekberg, Gunilla (2008) Summary of Speech given at a conference organised by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Asia-Pacific (CATW AP), April 25 2008, Manila, the Philippines.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Swedish government, published November 2008 (Swedish language only).

¹⁴ Sweden, Norway and Iceland have all introduced a complete ban on the purchase of sexual acts.