

**Personal account of being involved in prostitution
and the case against legalisation
From Jo, July 2008**

"As an ex-prostitute myself, and as someone who has worked with and also studied prostitution as part of my degree/Ma studies, I've looked at prostitution, and the case for legalisation is not good. The vast majority of women start working as prostitutes before the age of eighteen (in fact, the average age is just fourteen...I was thirteen, and yes, I'm British, and yes, I worked in Coventry, in the late 1980s, and no, not one punter complained or refused due to my age) - legal brothels will not employ a woman who is under eighteen, so this large group of women will be marginalised still further by legalisation. Secondly, the vast majority of women who work as prostitutes have problems with substance addiction - and legal brothels very rarely, if ever, employ a woman who is addicted to drugs. So this group, ie the majority of women who are currently working on the streets, will also be marginalised still further by legalisation.

In effect, legalising brothels forces the majority of street prostitutes into still more dangerous practices, making them fearful of police, forcing them to work in badly-lit and unfrequented areas, and leaving them open to yet more abuse - with no legal recourse, as they are apparently the ones breaking the law. Whilst it's easy to say 'wait until you're eighteen' or 'get off drugs', the reality is that this won't happen, any more than telling under-sixteens to abstain from sex works.

The only 'benefit' of legal brothels is that it appears to offer a legitimate 'choice' into the sex industry for women - usually women from Eastern Europe and Africa, for whom the only way to earn what might be meagre for us, but a substantial wage for them, is yet again on their backs. Rather than challenging this disgraceful lack of employment choice for women, legalising brothels merely encourages it.

My argument against legalisation is not a moral one, it is purely functional. You cannot ensure the safety of women in sex work by making it legal, because by creating rules around it you will automatically marginalise a lot of women who have to work outside of that framework. The only way to ensure the safety of women in prostitution is to ensure men treat them as equals, not just a doll to smack about and come inside. Because trust me, no matter how fancily the trade is dressed up, no matter how legalised and expensive, the violence (whether physical or verbal) and disrespect are always there. Men regard buying a prostitute in the same way as hiring a slave, that they can do with as they please, despite any laws or verbal agreements.

It is that dynamic of prostitution that is so dangerous, and this dynamic will not change unless women are seen as on an equal footing with men, and not just sex objects. Legalising prostitution only compounds the problem and legitimises regarding women as sex objects - 'oh, she was a whore, she was asking for it'. The illegality of prostitution is not the problem, and it's not the reason why so many prostitutes resort to drugs, self harm, and even suicide - it's the endless violence that is. And you WILL be called a whore, b*tch, sl*t etc and treated like dirt, even in a

legal brothel. No amount of health checks and security guards will make the hurt of that, day in and day out, any easier to deal with. Why legitimise it in the first place?"

Jo is a pseudonym

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