

Prostitution: fact or fiction?

Many statements are made about prostitution. This leaflet is designed to give information to help distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. For more information go to

www.demandchange.org.uk

MYTH:
Women
choose to get
involved in
prostitution

FACT: Most women enter prostitution because of lack of choice and many are coerced by pimps or traffickers. 75% of women in prostitution became involved when they were children (Women's Resource Centre, 2008); 70% of women in prostitution spent time in care and 45% report experiencing sexual abuse during their childhoods (Home Office, 2006). Once in prostitution, 9 out of 10 surveyed women would like to exit but feel unable to do so (Farley *et al*, 2003). It is the men who buy sex who are exercising free choice, and it is this 'choice' to purchase vulnerable women and girls that expands prostitution and fuels trafficking for sexual exploitation.

MYTH:
Prostitution
is just sex

FACT: Prostitution is not about sex. It is about exploitation, violence and abuse: More than half of UK women in prostitution have been raped and/or seriously sexually assaulted at the hands of pimps and punters; up to 95% of women in street prostitution are problematic drug users (Home Office 2004); and 68% of women in prostitution meet the criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Ramsay, R. *et al*, 1993). *"I would numb my feelings. I wouldn't even feel like I was in my body... I don't know how else to explain it ...It was rape to me."* (in Farley, 2003:206).

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Prostitution is exploitation - Stop the demand

OBJECT
Women Not
Sex Objects

eaYes
putting women first

MYTH:
Legalisation is better for women in prostitution

FACT: Prostitution is harmful in and of itself: legalisation doesn't remove that harm – it simply makes the harm legal. Legalisation or complete decriminalisation of the industry does not deal with the long term psychological and physical effects of having unwanted and often violent and abusive sex numerous times a day and having to act like you enjoy it. To cope with this, women in prostitution report having to disassociate and 'split off' in their heads - hence why drug and alcohol abuse is so prevalent. Legalisation does not make women safer and it expands an industry in which violence against women is at its most extreme.

MYTH:
Legalisation improves legal protection for women in prostitution

FACT: Women in prostitution need better protection from the law. As do all women. A sympathetic response from police when women report rape or violence should be the norm for *all* women regardless of who they are or what they do. It is not necessary to legalise the sex industry in order to extend such basic rights and services to women in prostitution.

MYTH:
Treating prostitution as ordinary work removes the stigma

FACT: Normalising prostitution makes the abuse, violence and exploitation invisible and turns pimps and punters into businessmen and legitimate consumers. Recognising prostitution as 'just a job' ignores the violence, poverty and marginalisation which drives women into prostitution, and means an end to services to support women out of prostitution - why would you need exit strategies for a 'normal' job?

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

FACT: It doesn't matter where prostitution takes place: the serious risks of harm are ever present. 48% of women in indoor prostitution have experienced violence from buyers (British Medical Journal 2001). In addition to physical violence, women in indoor prostitution report high levels of coercion and control from pimps and brothel owners, including being pressurised or forced not to use condoms, having to see more customers than women on the street, paying inflated charges and fines, and having to have sex with pimps or brothel owners, and/or their friends. The parents of Marnie Frey, a young woman murdered in prostitution, give their view: *"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...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).

MYTH:
Legalising prostitution stops illegal prostitution and trafficking

FACT: Legalisation and complete decriminalisation gives a green light to pimps and traffickers making it easier for them to operate. In New Zealand, complete decriminalisation has led to the illegal sector expanding to make up 80% of the industry (Instone and Margerison, 2007), and according to the Mayor of Amsterdam *"it is impossible to create a safe and controllable zone for women that is not open to abuse by organised crime"* (Bindel and Kelly, 2004).

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MYTH:

Criminalising the purchase of sex drives prostitution underground.

FACT: Prostitution can never truly exist 'underground' – if punters can find the women, so can those offering services to help exit prostitution. Criminalising the purchase of sex whilst at the same time decriminalising those who sell sexual acts and offering support services to people in prostitution is the only viable way to work towards an end to this exploitative industry. In Sweden, where they have criminalised the buying of sexual acts, there has been a significant reduction in trafficking and prostitution with a halt in the recruitment of new women (Baklinski, 2007). Sweden is no longer an attractive market for traffickers and pimps - the law clearly works as a deterrent (Ekberg, 2008).

MYTH:

Criminalising the buying of sex criminalises women in prostitution

FACT: This is completely untrue. There is broad consensus across the women's movement that those who sell sexual acts - the vast majority of whom are women - should NOT be criminalised for the exploitation they face. This means that all criminal records and ASBOs for being involved in prostitution should be wiped. *Demand Change!* calls for the buying of sexual acts to be criminalised in order to tackle the demand for prostitution which expands the industry by drawing more women and children into prostitution and fuelling trafficking for sexual exploitation. Criminalising the purchase of sexual acts makes punters take responsibility for their actions and sends out a clear message that it is not acceptable for women to be treated as commodities to be bought and sold for sexual use.

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