

# Prostitution: fact or fiction?

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

[www.demandchange.org.uk](http://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 were drawn into it as children (Women's Resource Centre, 2008); 70% of women in prostitution spent time in care and 45% were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Home Office, 2006). Once in prostitution, 9 out of 10 women surveyed say they would like to exit but feel unable to do so (Farley *et al*, 2003). It is the men who buy sex acts who are exercising free choice. It is this 'choice' to purchase vulnerable people for sexual use that expands prostitution and fuels trafficking for commercial 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 (Farley *et al*, 2003). **"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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**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 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, often using drugs and alcohol to block out reality.

Legalisation does not make women safer, instead it expands a multi billion pound industry which profits from violence against women and girls.

**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 exploitative 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 legitimate 'businessmen' and consumers.**

Viewing prostitution as 'just a job' ignores the violence, poverty, vulnerabilities and marginalisation which drive women into prostitution in the first instance. It also means an end to services to support women out of prostitution as why would anyone need exit strategies for a 'normal' job?

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**MYTH:**  
Legalising  
prostitution  
stops pimping  
and trafficking

**FACT: Legalisation and complete decriminalisation give a green light to pimps and traffickers making it easier for them to operate with impunity.** In New Zealand, complete decriminalisation has led to the illegal sector expanding to make up 80% of the sex 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).

**MYTH:**  
Selling sex  
acts  
indoors is  
safer and  
offers better  
conditions for  
women in

**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).

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**MYTH:**  
Criminalising  
the purchase  
of sex acts  
drives prosti-  
tution under-

**FACT: Prostitution can never truly exist 'underground' – if punters can find the women, so can those offering services to support them.** Criminalising the purchase of sex acts, whilst at the same time decriminalising those who are exploited in prostitution and offering them support to exit prostitution safely is the only viable way to work towards an end to this exploitative industry. In Sweden, where they have fully criminalised the buying of sex 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 acts  
criminalises  
women in  
prostitution

**FACT: This is completely untrue.** There is broad consensus that those who sell sex 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. Rather, the *Demand Change! Campaign* calls for the buying of sex acts to be fully criminalised to tackle the demand for prostitution which expands the industry by drawing more women and children into prostitution and fueling trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Criminalising the purchase of sex acts makes punters take responsibility for their actions and sends out a clear message that it is not acceptable in the twenty first century for women to be treated as commodities to be bought and sold for sexual use.

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