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# Ending Demand for Prostitution – Busting 10 Myths

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## *What is the ‘End Demand’ approach to prostitution?*

The ‘End Demand’ model, sometimes known as the Nordic Model or Swedish model, is an approach to prostitution where selling sex is not a crime, but buying sex is. The key aspects of this approach are:

- Criminalising paying for sexual acts
- **Ending criminalisation of selling sexual acts**, and other related offences (soliciting, loitering)
- Clearing convictions related to selling sex from individuals’ criminal records
- Providing **targeted support** to help people exit prostitution

## *Why should this model be adopted?*

In Scotland at the moment, both selling sex and buying sex are legal, but women (and men) in prostitution can still be charged for soliciting, which means trying to find clients. **Prostitution is incredibly dangerous** and women routinely face violence, up to and including rape, from pimps and clients, but they may be afraid to go to the police because

- a) they may be afraid of being charged themselves, and
- b) it's only their word against the client or clients' that a crime has taken place.

Making paying for sex a crime, and making sure selling is not, puts power in the hands of the women who are being exploited, not the ones who are exploiting them. It makes taking legal action against abusive clients easier and safer.

The fact that paying for sex is currently legal makes it seem like a normal, acceptable thing to do, when actually it involves exploiting vulnerable people and financially supporting organised crime. Part of the reason for bringing in the ‘End Demand’ model is to change attitudes, sending the message that **men aren't entitled to women's bodies**, and that **no one in poverty should have to sell themselves to survive**.

Not everyone is in favour of this model, though. Pimps and sex buyers have a vested interest in keeping women in exploitation. Others are well-meaning and want the best for women in prostitution, but they believe one or more of the following common myths:

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## **MYTH 1:**

*The ‘End Demand’ model hasn’t worked in any country where it’s been tried.*

In Sweden, the first country to use this model, the number of men using prostitutes fell, and so did human trafficking.<sup>1</sup> They also saw **no murders** of women in prostitution by pimps or clients. Compare that to Germany (where buying sex is legal), where 99 women in prostitution were murdered in the same period!<sup>2</sup>

In Norway, street prostitution was halved, indoor prostitution fell by an estimated 10 - 20

percent,<sup>3</sup> and human trafficking also reduced.<sup>4</sup> Canada also saw a reduction in murders of people in prostitution.<sup>5</sup>

Where the 'End Demand' model has been reported as less successful, it's usually because it isn't being effectively implemented by law enforcement (like in Northern Ireland), or where the exit support is lacking, not joined up, or difficult to access (like in France). That's why it's so important to offer support to women to move on from prostitution at the same time as trying to reduce demand.

## MYTH 2:

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*Traffickers don't care if it's illegal - it won't make any difference.*

No, traffickers don't care - but sex buyers do. Demand drives sex trafficking, and the point of the 'End Demand' model is to ... end demand. **If there are not as many men buying sex, there's less of a market for trafficked women.** That means it's not as worthwhile for traffickers to traffic victims to countries with this model. Sweden has seen the effect of this: there has been a drop in serious and organised crime connected to prostitution, because the 'marketplace' has become less lucrative for traffickers.<sup>6</sup> Countries where prostitution is legal see higher levels of sex trafficking.<sup>7</sup>

## MYTH 3:

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*We should concentrate on going after pimps, traffickers and illegal brothels instead.*

You can't tackle sex trafficking without tackling prostitution. Not every woman in prostitution is trafficked (although most are<sup>8</sup>), but almost all trafficked women in the EU are in the sex trade.<sup>9</sup> Trafficking and prostitution are inextricably linked.

You also can't remove pimps from the sex trade. Even in countries with legal brothels, many of the women working in them still have pimps.<sup>10</sup> Women in prostitution don't usually have the resources to set up in business for themselves,<sup>11</sup> and even if they do, they are open to being targeted and blackmailed by pimps wanting a cut. Legalising prostitution does not remove exploitation from the mix.

Even where prostitution is fully legal, most of the trade stays in the black market. For example, in Queensland it is estimated that 90 percent of brothels are unregistered and illegal,<sup>12</sup> while in Germany, 90 percent of the estimated population in prostitution are not registered, as required by law.<sup>13</sup>

## MYTH 4:

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*Most women in prostitution are consenting adults who have chosen to do it - criminalising it is a violation of their rights.*

The whole point of paying for sex is that the person being paid doesn't want to have sex with the buyer - otherwise there would be no payment. So why have women chosen to do this? Generally, they haven't. **Most women in prostitution are forced to do it** by someone else. Most of the rest feel that they have no choice because of poverty, homelessness or addiction etc. Only a tiny, tiny proportion of women in prostitution have actually chosen this life. Some estimates put it as low as two percent!<sup>14</sup>

**Prostitution overwhelmingly affects the vulnerable** – women who are poor, homeless, immigrants, who have been in care or are in abusive relationships.<sup>15</sup> Most women in prostitution have physical or sexual abuse in their backgrounds, and most of them enter prostitution while they are still minors.<sup>16</sup> This is a trade that exploits the vulnerable; it is almost never a profession that people freely choose.

## **MYTH 5:**

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*Prostitution doesn't do any harm.*

As well as the physical harm caused by violent sex and assaults by pimps and sex buyers, plus the risk of sexually transmitted infections, most women in prostitution also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of what they go through.<sup>17</sup> The effects on a person of being prostituted are **similar to the effects of being tortured**.<sup>18</sup>

## **MYTH 6:**

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*This will chase away the good clients and only leave the bad ones.*

It's a comforting fantasy to think that 'good' clients will notice when a woman is being exploited and will sound the alarm – and that they might be afraid to do that once buying sex is criminalised. In fact, almost all women in prostitution are being exploited, but even when their clients suspect this, they don't report it.<sup>19</sup> Men who buy sex are also more likely than other men to rape and commit other acts of sexual violence.<sup>20</sup>

While some women at the very top end of the prostitution scale (e.g. escorts without pimps) may have the chance to vet their clients before accepting them, this is incredibly rare. **Most women in prostitution have very little choice about who they perform sexual acts for.** Even when clients aren't physically or verbally abusive, being coerced into having sex with a stranger to survive is still traumatising.<sup>21</sup>

## **MYTH 7:**

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*Sex work is work. It should just be safe and regulated like other forms of work.*

Attempts to make prostitution a 'normal' job always fail because pimps and traffickers don't have much interest in becoming legitimate employers. The nature of prostitution means that 'workers' in this industry can't gain the rights of workers in other industries – for example, the right to protection from contact with bodily fluids,<sup>22</sup> and the right not to be sexually harassed.

Even when 'sex workers' have employment rights on paper, they are almost never enforced:

- In Germany, where prostitution is legal but regulated, less than 12 percent of women in prostitution are registered (as required by law) and only **0.02 percent** had an employment contract.<sup>23</sup>
- In New Zealand, decriminalisation created a 'buyer's market' where women and girls were pushed to do more and more extreme things for less money – and had to pay the legal brothels for the privilege.<sup>24</sup>
- In the Netherlands, after prostitution was decriminalised in 2000, the mental wellbeing

of people in prostitution declined across every measure.<sup>25</sup>

- Levels of violence in indoor prostitution are similar to those in street prostitution.<sup>26</sup> Three-quarters of murders of women in prostitution in Germany (2002-2017) were committed in indoor locations.<sup>27</sup>

**There is no way to make 'sex work' safe;** as well as being mentally and physically harmful, it is inextricably linked to violence and exploitation.

## **MYTH 8:**

*If you make it illegal, you will just drive prostitution underground, which is more dangerous.*

Most prostitution is already invisible, in the sense that it is off the street. But buyers still have to be able to find prostitutes. Pimps and traffickers place adverts locally and online – and if buyers can find them, so can the authorities. There is no evidence that criminalising the purchase of sex drives it underground where victims can't be found.<sup>28</sup>

## **MYTH 9:**

*What about men who have difficulty forming relationships? This deprives them of their right to sex.*

**No one has a right to sex.** The rise of the incel movement has encouraged some to think that sex is a product or service that can be fairly distributed, but it is an intimate relationship between two people that should never be coerced. The legitimate desire for intimacy does not justify exploitation and rape.

## **MYTH 10:**

*If women go into prostitution to escape poverty, the Nordic Model [or the 'End Demand' model\*] will drive them back into economic hardship*

Selling sex can trap women in poverty; in the longer term, having been in prostitution can damage a woman's earning potential and life chances.<sup>29</sup> That's why the deletion of prostitution-related convictions and targeted support to exit are so important.

The 'End Demand' model absolutely will not remove all of the problems that drive women into prostitution. For that, we would also need greater sexual equality, an end to misogyny and better access to welfare and financial support. But decriminalising women in prostitution and giving them the resources to rebuild their lives is **something we can do now**, and it's a great place to start.

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