

CLAIM #9: 95% of women in street prostitution are problematic drug users.

FACT #9: This figure is unreliable as a national statistic. It comes from a 2004 study of 71 women, contacted through an outreach project in Bristol (Jeal & Salisbury, 2004), who were particularly vulnerable (2/3 were homeless). Sex workers who don't use drugs have little contact with such projects and are unlikely to be surveyed. There are no reliable recent national figures of drug use among sex workers and therefore no evidence that the rate of drug use is higher than among journalists, doctors, bankers or celebrity chefs.

CLAIM #10: Over half of women involved in prostitution in the UK have been raped and/or sexually assaulted – the vast majority of these assaults perpetrated by sex buyers.

FACT #10: This figure may be true. It comes from a survey of women working on the street who are more often the targets of violence (Connelly, 2014). Sex workers experience high levels of rape and other violence. But to use this to claim that prostitution is violence and to justify the criminalisation of clients is disingenuous. It ignores evidence that criminalisation forces sex workers to work in isolation at greater risk of attack (The Scotsman, 2008). A 2014 survey found that where arrests of sex workers and clients were high, only 5% of sex workers who were victims of a crime reported it. This compared to 46% of victims in areas where police adopted a harm reduction approach (UKNSWP, 2012-15).

Women Against Rape report that 1 in 4 women have been raped but only 6.5% of reported rapes result in conviction. One survey found that only 60% of sex workers who had been attacked reported to the police. The most common reason was “poor opinion of the legal system” and “police were not as interested in their complaints” (Jeal & Salisbury, 2004). Police time and resources should be focussed on investigating actual violence not the policing of consenting sex.

CLAIM #11 Prostitution is about exploitation, violence and abuse.

FACT #11: Prostitution is about money! The majority of people who decide to sell sex do so in order to escape poverty or “achieve a better standard of living for themselves”. 74% of off-street sex workers “cited the need to pay household expenses and support their children” (Home Office, 2004). Evidence shows that cuts in benefits are causing prostitution to rise.(The Star, 19 March 2014 and The Star, 2 November 2016). One study of young people said they went into prostitution to ‘feed themselves or keep a roof over their heads’. Prostitution was seen as a ‘viable alternative to no or low income’ (Melrose, 2000).

FACT AND FICTION

Debunking common myths on prostitution

Decriminalisation works, criminalisation of clients increases stigma and discrimination, most sex workers aren't trafficked or on drugs ... see the evidence.

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CLAIM #1: 80% of women in prostitution are controlled by traffickers.

FACT #1: This is a lie. Less than 6% of migrant sex workers are trafficked. “Many migrants prefer working in the sex industry rather than the “unrewarding and sometimes exploitative conditions they meet in non-sexual jobs” (Mai, 2009).

CLAIM #2: The average age of entry into prostitution is 13 years old.

FACT #2: This is a lie. It comes from information provided by groups that work with “abused and exploited children” (Atlantic, 5 September 2014).

CLAIM #3: 75% of women in prostitution in the UK started being paid for sex acts before they were 18 years old.

FACT #3: This statistic is misleading. It comes from small samples of street-based women (e.g. Benson & Matthews, 1995) and is not representative of the sex industry as a whole. In one often cited study, the participants were chosen because they were all under 18 when they entered prostitution (Melrose, 2002).

CLAIM #4: The Swedish law that criminalised clients whilst decriminalising street workers is a successful model; there is a decrease in prostitution and trafficking.

FACT #4a: There is no evidence that trafficking, rape and other violence has decreased in Sweden. However, research shows that sex workers face increased stigma and are more vulnerable to violence (Jakobsson & Levy, 2014).

FACT #4b: There is no reliable evidence that the Swedish law has resulted in a reduction in prostitution (Levy, 2011). One often quoted report found a decrease in men saying they buy sexual services from 14% (1996) to 8% (2008), but how can this be trusted when buying sex was not criminal in 1996 so there were fewer reasons for men to lie? The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare found it was “difficult to discern any clear trend” up or down (2007). Evidence of an increase in Thai massage parlours in Stockholm is ignored (RPS Rapport, 2012).

CLAIM #5: Decriminalisation does not work.

FACT #5: This is not true. New Zealand decriminalised in 2003 with verifiable improvements in sex workers’ health and safety. The law removed prostitution from the criminal law, allowed people to work together collectively, and distinguished between violence and consenting sex. It reinforced offences against compelling anyone into prostitution, stating a specific right for sex workers to

refuse any client. A comprehensive five-year government review found: no increase in prostitution, no increase in trafficking; drug users treated as patients not criminals; sex workers were more able to report violence and leave prostitution if they choose (Ministry of Justice, 2008). Decriminalisation has received vocal support from World Health Organisation, Amnesty International, UNAIDS, Human Rights Watch, Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women and 100s of other organisations worldwide. Legalisation (like in Germany, Nevada and the Netherlands) is NOT decriminalisation. It is state-run prostitution which sets up a two-tier system where the most vulnerable workers remain illegal. It is opposed by most sex workers.

CLAIM #6: 68% of women in prostitution experience PTSD.

FACT #6: This figure is absurd and unsubstantiated. Researcher Melissa Farley and this research were reprimanded by Canadian Supreme Court Judge Himmel because Farley “failed to qualify her opinion regarding the causal relationship between post-traumatic stress disorder and prostitution, namely, that it could be caused by events unrelated to prostitution” (Bedford vs Canada, 2010). Other research has found that “the most significant mental health problems relate to stigma and criminalisation” (Ward & Day, 2006).

CLAIM #7: Once in prostitution, 9 out of 10 women report wanting to exit but feel unable to do so.

FACT #7: Another absurd statistic from the discredited Ms Farley. Even if it were true, it could as easily be claimed that once in factory, office, agricultural and domestic work: “9 out of 10 women report wanting to exit but feel unable to do so.” Financial alternatives and resources for women, not abolition of prostitution would better address this.

CLAIM #8: 70% of sex workers spent time in care.

FACT #8: This statistic is misleading. It is based on studies of young people who were more likely to have had a background of “troubled family relations or the care system” than adults “involved in sex work who had not previously been in contact with the criminal justice system or service providers” (UKNSWP, 2012). The neglect of children in care means they are also more likely to be convicted of a crime, go to prison and be homeless (Prison Reform Trust, 2015 and Crisis, 2017). Young people leave care with little economic or other support. Is it surprising if some end up in sex work to support themselves?