

English Collective of Prostitutes

Crossroads Women's Centre PO Box 287 London NW6 5QU
Telephone 020 7482 2496 Fax 020 7209 4761 Email ecp@allwomencount.net

www.prostitutescollective.net

FROM THE ENGLISH COLLECTIVE OF PROSTITUTES TO THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, APRIL 2014

1. Introduction to your research/organisation and/or campaign goals and/or main projects.

[The English Collective of Prostitutes](http://www.prostitutescollective.net) (ECP) is a network of women of varying ages and backgrounds who work or have worked both on the street and in premises, campaigning for decriminalisation and safety.

Since 1975, we have been highlighting the ways in which sex workers face greater vulnerability to rape, exploitation and other violence and discrimination and how a criminal record prevents sex workers from leaving prostitution. We press for resources to enable women to get out of prostitution if they want to and to prevent anyone being driven into prostitution by poverty or other violence.

We highlight how anti-trafficking laws, far from protecting victims, have been used primarily to deport immigrant sex workers, and to justify raids and prosecutions of sex workers working consensually.

In 2007, in response to the tragic murders of five young women who worked as sex workers in Ipswich, we initiated the Safety First coalition which includes distinguished members such as the Royal College of Nursing and Women Against Rape.

We won the first ever private prosecution for rape in England and Wales after the authorities refused to prosecute, putting a serial rapist who targeted sex workers, behind bars.

2. Main concerns that affect young women in your remit.

The high level of rape and other violence against sex workers and the lack of state protection. Three quarters of sex workers in London have suffered rape and other violence; sex workers are 12 times more likely to be murdered than other women.¹ Young women under the age of 25 are more likely to be working on the street² where it is 10 times more dangerous to work.³ Of the four sex workers killed in the last few months two were under 40.

Police priorities are skewed – the police more often hound rather than protect sex workers. Raids and arrests of sex workers are increasing⁴ and as a result fewer women feel able to come forward to report rape and other violence to the police. Last December, 250 officers in riot gear with dogs raided sex workers' flats in Soho. Some women were handcuffed and dragged out in their underwear in front of the media.⁵ Two-thirds of the women impacted are young immigrant women under 35. More details and press coverage [here](#) and [here](#). A street worker described the discrimination and degradation she faces at the hands of the police:

"The police wait outside my house to catch me when I leave. It doesn't matter how I'm dressed, who I'm with, where I'm going, they say I'm loitering. When they stop me they jeer at me, and make jokes at my expense, often sexually explicit jokes. When they arrest me I'm strip searched and they sometimes leave the door open so the male officers can see in. All this is to humiliate me."

She successfully fought charges of breaching an Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO) which carry a five year prison sentence.⁶ ASBOs were initially introduced against young people and young sex workers are disproportionately targeted by them.

Sex workers are deterred from reporting rape and other violence for fear of arrest and deportation. Lorraine Morris⁷ who reported an arson attack was prosecuted while her attackers were left free to attack again. Violent men take advantage of this legal vulnerability and target sex workers.

The existing prostitution laws force sex workers to work in isolation and danger. Police crackdowns on street prostitution break up women's safety networks, driving women into isolated areas away from the protection of the community where the risk of attack is far greater. Brothel-keeping law expressly forbids two or more women working together,⁸ driving women to work in isolation at risk of violence. Of the two women murdered in London in the last few months, one⁹ was working on the street and one¹⁰ was working indoors alone. Senior police officers recently acknowledged that "operations to tackle the trade are 'counterproductive' and likely to put the lives of women at risk".¹¹

The level of violence and lack of protection is in the context of an increase in prostitution because of growing poverty, homelessness and debt in the UK. An example of one town is [here](#). Homelessness among young people has increased with many going into sex work to survive.¹²

Increased imprisonment of women for prostitution offences specifically breach of Anti-social Behaviour Orders and brothel-keeping offences. 37,000 children and young people are separated from their mothers by prison every year.

Restrictive migration and refugee and asylum law and policies mean that women wanting to cross international borders are forced into the hands of smugglers.¹³

The issue of trafficking has been used to confuse and divert people. Fabricated or "speculative" figures have been put forward to justify claims that "80% of women in prostitution are controlled by traffickers".¹⁴ These have been comprehensively refuted. While claims of trafficking are used to raid consenting sex workers, genuine victims frequently face deportation when they try to get help.¹⁵ Exploitation, abuse, rape and other violence, including trafficking can be tackled under existing UK laws. But police time and resources are directed towards prosecuting rather than protecting sex workers. Instead of arresting violent men they police consenting sex.¹⁶

4. Current government initiatives/legislative changes which impact your work/ research area.

- Young people under 25 receive a lower rate of benefit.¹⁷
- Austerity policies¹⁸ particularly unemployment, benefit cuts & sanctions,¹⁹ lowering wages, and homelessness are driving more people, particularly young people and mothers,²⁰ into prostitution.
- **The government anti-migrant witch-hunt, including propaganda vans telling immigrants to go home, has resulted in the persecution of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Immigrant sex workers have been disproportionately targeted for violence and hostility including from police.**²¹

5. Future or proposed government initiatives which impact your work/ research topic

- An All-Party Parliamentary Group recently recommended changing the prostitution laws to criminalise clients which would be a disaster for sex workers undermining safety and increasing stigma.
- Government proposals to deny housing benefit to under 25-year olds.²²

6. Questions to be addressed to government by the UN Special Rapporteur

Why is the decriminalisation of prostitution as introduced in 2003 in New Zealand, with verifiable improvements in sex workers' safety, not being considered by the UK government? A government review showed: no rise in prostitution; women able to report violence without fear of arrest; attacks

cleared up more quickly; sex workers more able to leave prostitution as convictions are cleared from their records; drug users treated as patients not criminals.²³

7. Recommendations for policy/legislative development

Reject proposals to criminalise clients which won't stop prostitution or the criminalisation of sex workers but will make it more dangerous and stigmatising.

Serious consideration to be given to changing the New Zealand Prostitution Reform Act which successfully introduced decriminalisation of sex work on the basis of health and safety.

Immediate cessation of welfare cuts and benefit sanctions in recognition that poverty and lack of economic alternatives are driving increasing numbers of women into prostitution to survive.

An end to police raids and crackdowns which drive sex workers further underground and into danger.

Reinstate the Education Maintenance Allowance and student grants so that students are not pushed into prostitution to fund their studies.²⁴

¹ Silence on Violence, report by Andrew Boff, London Assembly member, April 2012. Plus "87% of working women had been subject to some sort of abuse from clients in the last 12 months . . . 73% of these women had been multiple victims" Benson and Matthews. 1995

² The average age of these street prostitutes was 21 years. Benson and Matthews, 1995

³ Hilary Kinnell Prostitutes' Exposure to Rape; Implications for HIV prevention and for legal reform Paper presented to the VII Social Aspects of AIDS Conference June 1993

⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/sex-workers-feeling-threatened-by-crackdown-on-prostitution-near-olympic-site-7609024.html>

⁵ <http://prostitutescollective.net/2014/01/15/the-soho-raids-what-really-happened/>

⁶ <http://prostitutescollective.net/2013/07/26/we-won-not-guilty-of-breaching-an-anti-social-behaviour-order/>

⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/new-laws-put-prostitutes-at-risk-claim-escort-agencies-1852101.html>

⁸ Premises only become a brothel when more than one woman uses premises for the purposes of prostitution, either simultaneously or one at a time (Stevens v Christy [1987] Cr. App. R. 249, DC).

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jan/19/woman-killed-prostitute-police-blame>

¹⁰ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/maria-duque-tunjano-death-robert-richard-3115687>

¹¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jan/19/woman-killed-prostitute-police-blame>

¹² <http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Crisis%20briefing%20-%20youth%20homelessness.pdf>

¹³ (Walthus and Blaak, 2002)

¹⁴ Solicitor General, Vera Baird MP, Woman's Hour, 15 January 2008

¹⁵ <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/woman-forced-into-prostitution-faces-deportation-while-gang-she-help-jail-allowed-to-stay-8888967.html>

¹⁶ <http://prostitutescollective.net/2013/09/09/3171/>

¹⁷ Under 25s get £56.80 personal allowance benefit per week compared to £71.70 for over 25s.

¹⁸ <http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2013/05/01/prostitutes-and-the-recession-how-david-cameron%E2%80%99s-cuts-are-affecting-british-women/>

¹⁹ In seven months between November 2012 and June 2013, ½ million claimants were sanctioned.

²⁰ In 2013-2014, a single parent on benefits saw their income cut by £46.80 a year, compared to £52 for a couple with children.

²¹ <http://prostitutescollective.net/2014/01/26/racism-xenophobia-against-sex-workers-letter-in-observer/>

²² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24369514>

²³ <http://www.justice.govt.nz/policy-and-consultation/legislation/prostitution-law-review-committee/publications/plrc-report/report-of-the-prostitution-law-review-committee-on-the-operation-of-the-prostitution-reform-act-2003>

²⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-16157522>