Written evidence submitted by Mr P Frizelle

I am writing concerning your current ‘Prostitution Inquiry’ and would like to express my views as a citizen regarding how the law should treat prostitution. My hope is that your enquiry and subsequent action will lead to:

- Greater justice for the vulnerable majority, which I believe would be best achieved by making the purchase of sexual services a criminal offence.
- Greater provision of exit services to support people who want to leave prostitution.

I know that there are other views and opinions out there who want to advocate the decriminalisation of all aspects of the sex trade, or in this case of prostitution, but I feel that that would only be damaging to society and, in fact, a step backwards. I believe this to be the case for a number of reasons.

Most importantly, this is because I know that demand for prostitution helps fuel the exploitation of vulnerable people. Even though there are individuals who may choose to enter prostitution, the evidence shows that it is profoundly damaging and exploitative for the majority. For example:

- Research reveals that homelessness, living in care, debt and substance abuse, are all common experiences prior to entering prostitution.¹
- Prostitution is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. Research in 2012 with women in both on- and off-street prostitution in London reported that 61% of the women surveyed had experienced violence from buyers of sexual services.²
- Involvement in prostitution often has seriously detrimental effects on a person’s mental health including depression, anxiety disorders and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.³
- Sexual exploitation is the most common form of exploitation for people trafficked in the UK according to the National Crime Agency (35% of all potential victims in the National Referral Mechanism in 2014).

At present I do not think the law does enough to address demand for prostitution, focussing disproportionately and perhaps unfairly on supply. The current law used to attempt to bring down the demand aims to do so by making the buying of sex from someone who has been coerced illegal (section 14 Policing and Crime Act 2009). However, because it requires proof of coercion as well as proof of an attempt to buy sex (which must be prosecuted within a very tight time frame) this offence has been difficult to enforce. In fact, an All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade Inquiry came to the conclusion that this offence is “an insufficient measure for protecting victims because coercion is too difficult to prove” and “There are inadequate deterrents for ... those driving the demand for the sex trade. This promotes the UK as a lucrative destination for trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation.”⁴ Furthermore, the Crown Prosecution Service acknowledges that there were no prosecutions for this offence at all in 2013-14,⁵ even though the number of trafficking victims identified in sexual exploitation is increasing.

I believe that the burden of criminality should weigh heaviest on the buyers of sex, as there is evidence that points to this being a measure that tends to reduce levels of prostitution. For example,

- Sweden made it a criminal offence to buy sex in 1999 and Norway did so in 2009, with research in these countries being highly positive about its effects. These measures have helped lead to a decrease in the level of prostitution, have deterred men from purchasing sex, and have also acted as a deterrent against.⁶
- A research study with 103 men in London who buy sex found that when asked what would deter them from buying sex 77% said they would be deterred by “greater criminal penalty” compared with 47% who said they would be deterred by being required to attend an educational programme.⁷

We can see from this that it has been a successful move abroad, and would be considered seriously by those here at home.

In fact, support for criminalising the purchase of sex has received support from a broad range of groups. Notably: resolutions passed in 2014 in the European Parliament and the Council of Europe endorsed criminalising buyers of sex as a key way to combat exploitation and improve gender equality⁸; Northern Ireland and Canada have recently made it an offence to buy sex, a similar law is before Parliament in the Republic of Ireland, and the Lithuanian Parliament has also endorsed such a proposal⁹; 75 leading academics, including British scholars, published an open letter supporting the proposed European Parliament resolution to criminalise demand¹⁰; and perhaps most significantly, many women who have now exited prostitution promote this approach¹¹.
Finally, academic evidence has shown that a large percentage of women in prostitution would like to exit if they could but they face significant barriers and there are few specialist programmes to help them here. Both the European Parliament and Council of Europe resolutions referred to above recommend provision of support services to assist people to exit prostitution, which I would like to see happen here.

In conclusion, I urge the Committee to recommend making it a criminal offence to pay for sexual services, to focus not on those exploited who feel trapped in prostitution, but on those who would exploit these situations for themselves. I also urge more effort to be made in providing help for those who do feel trapped and wish to leave prostitution.

Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts.

Your Sincerely,

Mr P Frizelle


5. Answer to a parliamentary question see Hansard 21 July 2014 : Column 916W


11. For example: http://spaceinternational.ie/; http://enddemand.uk/survivors/