I am making this submission in a personal capacity as a friend of a survivor of prostitution, and also as the mother of a teenage girl who, if she goes on to university, is liable to get the message that 'doing sex work' is a fun and empowering way to pay her fees, as I hear from friends with older daughters at universities across the UK.

Summary

- Recognition of prostitution as violence against women
- The link between prostitution and trafficking
- Focus of legal reforms must be to reduce demand
- Listening to survivors

Recognition of prostitution as violence against women.

1. As an estimated 90 -95% of prostituted people are women and girls and almost 100% of buyers are men, prostitution can only be framed as a symptom (and a reinforcement) of inequality between men and women, and a form of men's sexual violence against women.

2. Prostitution is not a 'job like any other.' In no other occupation would any rate of rape be acceptable, nor any rate of the sexual harassment/ abuse/assault which is common throughout the sex industry, nor any rate of murder as a risk of the job.


3. No 'normal job' puts a person at risk of the following physical injuries: pelvic pain, vaginal/anal tearing, rectal trauma, and/or urinary difficulties, broken bones, bruises, burns, scars, broken teeth/ dental problems, concussions and head trauma resulting in memory loss, dizziness, headaches, and numbness.

4. Nor would we accept, in any 'normal job', these resulting psychological effects: post-traumatic stress disorder, acute anxiety, depression, feelings of helplessness, shame, humiliation, distrust, self-hatred, disbelief, denial, suicidal thoughts, disorientation, confusion, phobias and substance abuse problems or addictions, all of which are common psychological issues among sex industry workers.


5. 'Safety' for those working in prostitution is a myth: the act of paying for access to a woman's body in itself absolves the buyer from any obligation to 'respect' a prostituted woman as a human being and gives him licence to use her as a commodity.

6. Women's human rights to dignity, bodily integrity and safety are violated within prostitution. It would be impossible to offer employees of the sex industry the protections expected under normal employment law.

7. The contempt shown towards women by the men who buy them is not something which should be validated by decriminalisation policies which would sanction these men's attitudes and behaviour towards the prostituted as acceptable and normal.

http://www.collectiveshout.org/in_their_own_words
The link between prostitution and trafficking

8. The global sex trade is the fastest growing form of commerce, worth $32 billion annually. The numbers of women and girls caught within this industry can only rise in the absence of a robust policy to reduce demand.

9. Human trafficking is the fastest growing area of organized crime and the third largest income revenue for organized crime after narcotics and arms sales. Estimates show that around 80% of human trafficking is sex trafficking, and around 50% of those trafficked for sex are underage girls.

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3651545/

10. Every country which has legalised prostitution has seen an increase in trafficking.


11. An increase in sex trafficking is the result of the increased demand created by a decriminalised or legalised sex industry, no matter what form the legislation takes.

12. Democracies have a higher probability of increased human-trafficking inflows than non-democratic countries. There is a 13.4% higher probability of receiving higher inflows in a democratic country than otherwise.


Focus of legal reforms must be to reduce demand

13. The physical and psychological harms of prostitution affect both trafficked women and those who enter the industry by 'choice.' There is no clear line between those who are forced into prostitution through trafficking and those who are forced or coerced by more subtle means, including economic desperation, drug dependency, previous sexual abuse, and grooming. Almost 50% of those in prostitution enter the industry as children. 'Choice' for the vast majority of those in prostitution is in reality a lack of choice or perceived alternative options. Ending demand is important to protect all women and girls from the harms of prostitution, especially those who are most vulnerable to exploitation.


14. Reducing demand by criminalising the men who buy sex sends out a strong message to society that buying a woman is not a socially acceptable act; legislation has an impact on societal beliefs about women’s human rights.

15. The Nordic Model, or Swedish Law, which decriminalises the prostituted but criminalises the buyer, is the only prostitution policy which has been shown to decrease both prostitution and trafficking, as well as the demand that fuels the sex industry.


16. New Zealand, although often presented as the model for decriminalisation which the UK should follow (rather than the legalised industry of Holland and Germany), has also been defined as a destination country for trafficking. There has also been documented concern about internal trafficking and the problem of underage street prostitutes.

http://www.catwa.org.au/?q=new+Zealand

17. There is no evidence that decriminalisation has reduced the number of assaults against prostituted women in New Zealand or other countries which have fully legalised prostitution; the claim that decriminalisation leads to greater safety for the prostituted is unfounded.
18. There have been no murders of prostituted women in Sweden since the Sex Buyers Law was introduced, but several murders since decriminalisation in New Zealand, a country with half the population of Sweden. Since legalisation there have been 55 murders of prostituted women in Germany and 28 in the Netherlands.


19. Serious assaults on prostituted women have also decreased dramatically since the Sex Buyer law was introduced in Sweden, including a 50% decrease in the rate of rapes.


We must listen to survivors

20. The sex industry is a very powerful lobbying group and the fact that they advocate decriminalisation/legalisation of prostitution indicates that this would serve the interests of the sex industry and those who profit from the sale of women and girls' bodies. Clearly, decriminalisation/legalisation enables expansion of the industry. We should not base policy on the demands of those who seek to profit financially from the sex industry.

21. The term 'sex workers' is an umbrella term for pimps, brothel owners and operators as well as prostituted women themselves. It is important to make the distinction between those who profit and those who are used to make profit when we listen to 'sex workers.'

22. For every Sex Worker Collective advocating decriminalisation there is a Survivors Network advocating for the Nordic Model. Although it's important to listen to everyone, more weight should be given to the voices of survivors and exited women who have had more experience of the devastating effects:

"There is also a hugely variable narrative between women in prostitution and women who have exited. Whilst in prostitution your “livelihood” depends on upholding the illusion that you are in it because you enjoy it and can make lots of money at it. This is part of what the men are paying for – service with a smile that makes the men feel guilt free whereas otherwise they often feel ambiguous about prostitution. Moreover while in prostitution, you cannot easily speak negatively of the harms of the industry because obviously this requires you to confront your unhappiness and do something about it but for many women they do not see how to even consider any alternative. It’s a survival strategy and coping mechanism. Once exited, women are much more likely to focus on the negatives of prostitution and to view the whole industry as abusive and exploitative and harmful." (Rachel Moran, 2013, Eaves for Women’s response to Amnesty’s Consultation on its prostitution policy.)

23. The women in prostitution who claim 'empowerment' and 'agency' must also be listened to, but their words cannot be taken at face value, but within the context of, and relative to, the reality of the position they hold within society.


24. My friend worked in prostitution for seven years and those years have impacted on her life since in ways that no 'normal' job could possibly do: flashbacks, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress. She refers to prostitution as 'torture.' Prostitution is not a job we can 'make safe' and as a society we should be doing everything we can to stop an industry which inherently exploits, degrades and damages women and girls.