I've decided to write because I am very concerned that your inquiry is starting from a place of bias. We urgently need an inquiry into prostitution, but, I fear, not this one. I can tell you now, making any part of my job a criminal offence will make my life frightening and dangerous. This is not what I – nor any of my friends – want.

I began working as an escort 21 years ago, when I was 18. (I've knocked 10 years off my age for advertising). I started work in Amsterdam and worked for escort agencies in Melbourne, Sydney, San Francisco, New Orleans and London.

After about 10 years off, I recently went back to escorting as I'm not able to survive in London with the wages from my “day job”.

As a survivor of abuse in two domestic relationships, it is galling to hear you give credence to the idea that all sex work is “violence against women”. Your understanding of violence is woefully inadequate if you put a consensual transaction between two people in the same bracket as abuse. It undermines everything I went through when I experienced DV. It undermines the last 20 years. Am I mad/ suffering from false-consciousness? I could swear I chose to do this but maybe you know better....

In fact, most of my clients are respectful and kind (if, often, boring and less immaculately groomed than I'd prefer). It is a job that I have chosen to do, in as much as any of us choose to work. I would have made a great trust fund brat but, sadly, it wasn't to be in this life.

It seems very clear to me that you have gleaned your “knowledge” about sex work from the distorted facts peddled by abolitionists. Brothel- and outdoor-workers – those apparent hotbeds of trafficking – tend to be made up of close networks of women. It would be hard to smuggle in great armies of sex slaves and get away with it.

The sort of independent work I do these days is the fastest growing and biggest sector of the industry. On Adultwork, we review clients and they review us. We are verified, by sending in a picture holding up a passport, by the website. It would be hard to get sell the services of a trafficked woman in this way.

I hope you'll make time to look through the thousands of profiles on this site. There's a surprisingly wide range of service-providers! I'm not enticing you to buy, but to have a think about the broad demographic this work encompasses. Students, single mums, migrants... all sorts of women (and other genders) turn to this to make ends meet.

Some women will tell you sex work is “empowering”, that getting paid for sex feels like a balancing of the scales in our patriarchal society. I'm not so sure about this. To be honest, sometimes the job is gross and it's often hard work. But then, so are many other jobs (I've been a cleaner, a waitress, a nanny – all of
which are, sometimes, hard and gross). How many other industries are subject to the condition that workers find their jobs “empowering”? If you insist this, you are a bigot. Your subjective feelings of disgust about the commercialisation of sex are showing.

Having sex for money is just another form of labour, no weirder that tending the sick, cleaning floors, giving a massage or selling your emotions as a therapist. What makes this job different is stigma.

Stigma means I have never told my family what I do. Stigma means I have never told a partner what I do. But these are small concerns.

Stigma is what makes men feel they have the right to use violence against sex workers. It’s what makes the police feel they can harass us. It’s what makes it hard to move into any other industry once you have a record for prostitution.

And stigma is fed by criminalisation. Most of us are obedient enough subjects that we generally believe illegality equals wrongdoing. If you make ANY PART of the sex work transaction illegal, you render it wrong in the eyes of the world. I care not two jots about the effect this will have on clients, but I care very much about how it will affect more vulnerable sex workers.

There are practical concerns too. Use your imagination. If buying sex is illegal, men will be nervous and unwilling to give real names or phone numbers (essential for screening procedures we carry out). Street workers will be forced to work in hidden locations as men will be unwilling to engage anywhere they might be caught.

You know that criminalising the buying of sex will affect us. You must know this.

I can only think then that your end goal is to abolish prostitution. But, hypothetically, how would this make the world better?

I would have to leave London, give up on my career. But, again, I am lucky and my life is relatively stable. This is small. For those on the margins, you would be removing a lifeline of cash.

The thing is though, sex work won’t go away. We will keep on selling. We’ll just be forced to do it in less safe ways, with less screening procedures in place. There will be more casualties.

The law needs an overhaul. I would like to be able to work with a friend for safety, without fearing we could be charged with brothel-keeping. Soliciting should no longer be a criminal offence.

But behind all of this, a seismic change is needed in society. It is stigma that pushes this work into the corners and stigma that feeds and enables the violence many sex workers experience.
You can’t legislate away stigma but the law is a good place to start. Decriminalising my work would send a strong message. Please open your minds and listen to us.

Thanks,
CJ