

DECRIMINALISATION OF THE SEX TRADE VS. THE NORDIC MODEL

What you need to know



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NORDIC MODEL NOW!

SECOND EDITION, DECEMBER 2025

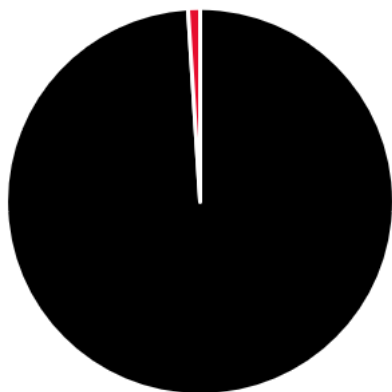
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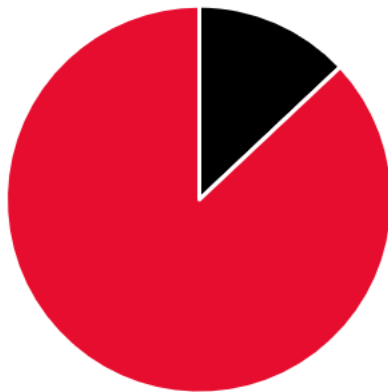
PROSTITUTION IS UNEQUAL

Sex buyers ¹



■ Male ■ Female

Sex sellers ²



■ Male ■ Female

In a study of UK sex buyers:

27% Believed he was entitled to any act he wanted.

47% Believed the woman had no rights.

49% Had bought sex abroad.

In a study of women in prostitution:

70% Had been sexually assaulted as children

75% Had experienced homelessness

89% Wanted to leave but had no other options

What he said:

“Men go to prostitutes so they can do things to them their girlfriends would not put up with.”

“My favourite experience was when she was totally submissive.”

What she said:

“I would go somewhere else with my thoughts until he got off me and it was over. I don’t know how else to explain it except it felt like rape.”

“I was used like a public toilet”

“SEX WORK” A NORMAL JOB? REALLY?



It's fashionable to claim that "sex work is real work" and anyone who dares to suggest otherwise is right-wing, fascist even. If "sex work" is a real job, they say, then full decriminalisation of the sex industry must be the answer.

There was a photo doing the rounds on social media a couple of years ago of a man wearing only a t-shirt on which is the slogan "Sex work is work" and a naked woman on her knees in front of him ostensibly sucking his penis. The man's face is a picture of entitlement and self-righteousness. We do not see the woman's face because it's deep in his groin.

Let's look at that photo a little longer. Look how her head is tilted back and upwards as if in supplication. Feel the stress on her neck, the tension in her body. Now look at his face. His eyes are closed. His awareness is with himself. Not with her.

You remember those stories of men who end up in A&E after inserting their penis into the tube of a vacuum cleaner and you wonder why he needs a woman and not some kind of machine. And then you see the point. He needs a woman so he can be the master. A machine simply wouldn't cut it.

Now let's imagine the photo reversed. A woman is wearing only a t-shirt and a young man has his face deep in her groin, his head tilted slightly upwards as if in supplication, his entire body stressed.

It's not as easy to visualise. It feels awkward. Not just because of the anatomy. But because of the way women's sexuality has been positioned as shameful and dangerous for so many centuries. And how women have been punished and tortured for their sexuality too – in a way unknown to men.

And then we need to ask, would it be a normal job for a young man to have to give 'oral sex' to five, ten, fifteen random women a day? If not, why not? Would YOU want that job? If not, why not?

Can you honestly say that this is no different from serving random strangers coffee?

But then we need to remember that in reality, this is something that men demand on a scale that women don't. If young men are doing this so-called job, the vast majority of their 'customers' are men. Just like the vast majority of women's 'customers' are men.

And that's the rub. This is not really about orgasms, is it? If it were, you could get a machine. A vibrator for women. A fleshlight for men.

Let's look at the photo once more.

Man as master. Woman as servant. Slave.

Is this what we want to legitimise? Is this what our foremothers and forefathers fought so long and hard for? Men as masters. Women as servants. And a rapacious industry built on that. An industry that sucks in and profits from (mostly) young women making men masters.

As if men are not social creatures bound by rules of reciprocity. As if the young women's health, well-being and sexual integrity are of no account.

Full decriminalisation of the sex trade is predicated on the understanding that prostitution is a normal job. It involves removing all laws around prostitution so that it is treated exactly like any other business activity. Buying sex is no different from having a haircut. Running a brothel is just like running a barbershop. Pimps are respectable businessmen.

You don't need to be an economist to know that this will lead to a rapid expansion of the industry. If buying sex is presented as no different from getting a haircut, of course more men will do it. Within months, we will see multi-storey brothels springing up in every city.

Where will that leave working class solidarity? Where will it leave women? On our knees. Men as masters. Women as servants. Or slaves.

Think of the implications for all women. The precedents it would set for all workers. Don't buy the sex industry propaganda. Don't betray the next generation. Let's not create a world where job centres send young women down the brothel.

Prostitution is NOT a normal job.

*Artwork by a young woman
who documented her life in
prostitution at
brothelgirl.tumblr.com. ➡*



WHAT DOES ‘DECRIMINALISATION’ MEAN?

‘Decriminalisation’ (aka ‘decrim’) of the sex trade means the full decriminalisation of **all aspects** of the sex trade, including **pimping** and **brothel keeping**. The sex trade is treated like any other business and there is no public funding for services to help women exit the trade.

Laws against sex trafficking are retained but in practice they are hard to enforce. For example, in New Zealand where this law is in place, the police are not allowed to enter a brothel without a warrant even if they suspect trafficking victims are inside and even though they can enter without a warrant to check a liquor licence. There’s little or no systematic data collection on the exploitation of children in the sex industry. Police are not allowed to ask a person’s age even if they suspect she is a child being sexually exploited. As a result, most sex trafficking goes undetected.



Paradise mega-brothel in Germany

Under full decrim, we could expect to see large brothels in every city and out-of-town industrial park, like this one in Germany. And we could expect to see small brothels opening up in houses and flats in residential areas – with local councils and residents having no say, no matter what problems are caused.

Legalising or decriminalising the sex trade has been found to lead to a rapid expansion³ of the industry – with more men buying sex and more vulnerable women and girls being drawn into the trade.

WHAT DOES THE NORDIC MODEL MEAN?

The Nordic Model understands prostitution to be harmful, both to the individual and to society as a whole, and that it is both a cause and a consequence of the inequality between women and men. The Nordic Model has several elements. Firstly, it repeals laws that target those selling sex and provides them with support services and help to leave the industry if they want to. It ensures there are genuine alternatives for making a living.

Secondly, it strengthens laws against trafficking, pimping, brothel keeping and other activities by third parties who profit off other people's prostitution.

Lastly, prostitution-buying becomes a criminal offence – with the aim of changing social norms and men's behaviour.

Along with all this, there needs to be a public information campaign, education in schools, training for the police, CPS and other front-line staff, long term investment in high-quality services and alternatives for women, and real measures to address poverty and inequality.

This approach was first introduced in Sweden, and has now also been established in Norway, Iceland, Northern Ireland, France, Ireland, and Israel. Each country has framed the law slightly differently and with different degrees of commitment and success.

COMPARISON OF THE TWO APPROACHES

	Decriminalisation	Nordic Model
Selling sex is legal?	✓	✓
Services for those selling sex, incl. routes out & alternatives?	✗	✓
Pimping is legal?	✓	✗
Brothels are legal?	✓	✗
Buying sex is legal?	✓	✗

WHAT HAPPENED IN NEW ZEALAND?

We are told over and over again that New Zealand (NZ) is the proof that full decriminalisation is the best policy. But what really happened there?

New Zealand changed its law in 2003 to decriminalise all aspects of the prostitution industry, when the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) was passed. The intention behind the Act was to improve things for the women involved, and there is little doubt that this was what motivated many of those who voted for it, and there were provisions for the impact of the law and the numbers of women involved to be monitored over time.

Academic research⁴ by Helen Johnson and Tony Pitt into the operation of the PRA has found that the benefits of the approach have been hugely exaggerated and its downsides have been “ignored, denied, and hidden.”

An official study⁵ of the operation of the PRA was undertaken in 2008. This found evidence of a significant black market, and no evidence that women were more likely to report violence. Even though the PRA enshrines women’s right to say no to individual clients and acts, they found that women were still coerced into taking clients and engaging in dangerous or unpleasant practices against their will – often by the brothel operators themselves – and 85% of those interviewed wished they could leave the industry. The report made a number of recommendations that, more than a decade later, have still not been implemented.

Since 2008 there have been no further official reviews of the operation of the PRA, and the NZ Ministry of Justice has said there are no plans for any more.

Johnson and Pitt found that there has been no serious attempt to track the numbers of women involved in the industry. The number reported in the 2008 study (2,332) is still frequently cited, but NZPC (Aotearoa New Zealand Sex Workers’ Collective) reported engaging with 7,416 people involved in prostitution in the first half of 2019 alone – which means that the numbers involved have at least trebled since 2008 and probably risen by significantly more.

The PRA requires regular inspections of brothels. However, Johnson and Pitt found that not a single brothel inspection was carried out in any of the three major cities (Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch) up until 2015 and it's unlikely there have been any since because there is no public funding for this. Only 11 brothel inspections were carried out in the rest of New Zealand in the 10 years prior to 2015, even though more than 1,000 brothel licenses were granted during that time.

The PRA gives women the right to turn down clients and particular acts, but in practice coercion is rife, not least by the pimps and brothel operators, and women generally simply move to another brothel when it becomes intolerable. Johnson and Pitt say "There have only been two prosecutions under the law against coercion into sex acts since 2009, despite repeated reports that it happens in high numbers."

The NZ Government relies almost entirely on NZPC for issues related to prostitution. NZPC has a contract to gather data on complaints, referrals and concerns raised by women in prostitution. Johnson and Pitt found that they have not carried out these and other duties under the contract and the NZ Government does not monitor their performance under it.

NZPC is a lobby group that dominates the conversation about prostitution in New Zealand. They receive more than a million dollars in government funding annually. Even though helping women to exit the industry was one of the aims of the PRA and 85% of those interviewed in the 2008 study said they wanted to leave prostitution, NZPC provides no services to help women exit the industry – and there is no other publicly funded exit provision in New Zealand. And yet, NZPC provides substantial help to brothel operators and to anyone who is considering setting up a brothel.

NZPC denies that there is significant gang involvement in prostitution and that the exploitation of children in prostitution and sex trafficking are real problems – even though the [media](#)⁶ and the [US TIP report](#)⁷ have documented significant and troubling evidence of these things.

A NEW ZEALAND SURVIVOR SPEAKS OUT

Chelsea Geddes suffered many years in the legal brothels in New Zealand, whose fully decriminalised approach to the sex trade is often held up as the most enlightened solution to prostitution. This is what she said about the approach when she was still trapped in that life:

“I’m a prozzie myself and I have never met another one who wants our pimps and johns to be decriminalized, or who wants to be made to pay tax on top of what the pimps already take, and to be given zero social services that help us to exit, rehabilitate ourselves, get an education and a real job for the future and instead to just be told it’s perfectly acceptable for us to stay right where we are. None of us want that, even those of us who are here by ‘choice’ because we need the money. We all want it to be temporary. We would all leave immediately if we could.

Most of us are uninformed about government policies and have never heard of the Nordic Model so we might support decriminalisation but only because we think the alternative is for us to be criminalised and arrested along with our abusers. Everyone who knows about the Nordic Model supports it. I would give my life to bring the Nordic Model to my country, not that it’s much of a life to give.”

Read more of Chelsea’s writing:

<http://nordicmodelnow.org/2018/08/26/no-decriminalisation-of-johns-and-pimps-has-not-improved-our-safety-or-lives>



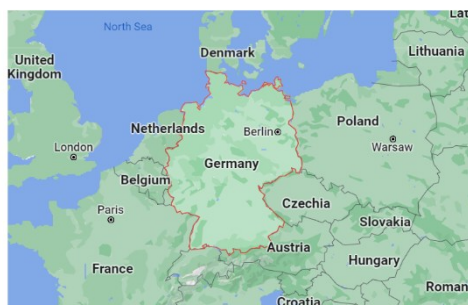
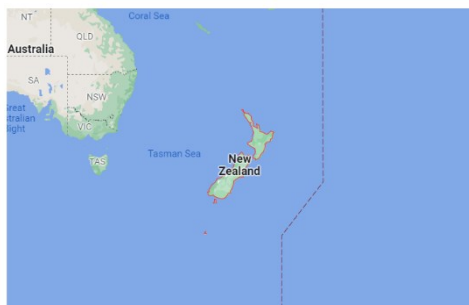
WHY WE MUST LOOK AT GERMANY

Germany has a legalised system of prostitution – which in theory is quite different from the full decriminalisation they have in New Zealand. This is how Frankie Miren, a campaigner for full decriminalisation [describes](#)⁸ the difference:

“Under legalisation, sex work is controlled by the government and is legal only under certain state-specified conditions. Decriminalisation involves the removal of all prostitution-specific laws, although sex workers and sex work businesses must still operate within the laws of the land, as must any businesses.”

That said, there are in fact quite a lot of similarities. In both New Zealand and Germany, there are multi-storey brothels operating in plain sight, pimps and brothel owners are considered respectable business men, and men buying sex is considered completely normal – like going to the pub.

But before we go any further, we need to consider a little geography.



New Zealand is a small country with a population of just over **5 million** and it is uniquely isolated. It has no land borders and apart from some tiny Pacific islands, its nearest neighbour, Australia, is more than two thousand miles away, and otherwise it is surrounded by the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean.

Germany, in contrast, is a large country with a population of approximately **84 million**. It is in the centre of the European Union (EU) and has land borders with **nine** other countries.

Both countries are ‘sex tourist’ destinations, but Germany’s mega-brothels are only a short drive or cheap flight away from Europe’s approximately 300 million male citizens over the age of 14 (compared to approximately 1.8 million in New Zealand).

The EU’s open borders make bringing young women from Europe’s poorer regions to Germany’s mega-brothels easy compared to doing something similar in New Zealand.

So, of course, any negative results of the legislation will be more obvious in Germany than in New Zealand.

In the UK we must ask, are we more like Germany or New Zealand geopolitically? The answer of course is that we are more like Germany – having a large population (of about 67 million), and being close to mainland Europe. This is why we must pay close attention to what has happened there.



Artemis mega-brothel in Berlin

Germany is known as the brothel of Europe because its legalised prostitution system has resulted in a vast sex industry with **more than a million men visiting brothels in the country every day**.

Even the most ardent supporters of legalisation eventually came to recognise that it had been a failure and the Prostitutes Protection Act 2017 (PPA) was passed. Under this, prostitution is still legal but is now subject to significantly tighter regulations. Unfortunately, these are directed almost entirely at the women involved rather than the pimps, brothel keepers and punters. So, it is not surprising that it has failed to improve the situation.

The legislation has led to insurmountable problems including the colossal scale of the industry, the ease with which vulnerable women are exploited within it, and how it is more or less impossible for the police and other authorities to hold exploiters to account when they are operating under the cover of a legal system. All of these factors apply equally to full decriminalisation.

There is every reason, therefore, to believe that if a fully decriminalised system were introduced in the UK (or another European country or US state), it would not be long before we saw similar problems.

Helmut Sporer, a recently retired senior police officer, worked for 30 years investigating and monitoring prostitution and human trafficking in Germany. During his career, he observed a progressive deterioration in both the conditions for the women involved in prostitution and the ability of the authorities to effectively deal with the proliferation of organised crime and abuses within the system – in spite of, or because of, the various changes in the law relating to prostitution over that period. He now believes that the Nordic Model is the only appropriate approach.

Read his reasoning:

<https://nordicmodelnow.org/2021/03/09/german-ex-police-officer-demolishes-common-arguments-against-the-nordic-model>



A GERMAN SURVIVOR SPEAKS OUT

Interviewer: “Do you think the German state has any responsibility in your entrapment in prostitution?”

Sandra Norak: “Yes. Just as I was manipulated by my pimp’s propaganda, I was also manipulated by the official line that prostitution is just a job, a service, and we shouldn’t be prudish, and we have to accept it.

Basically, the German state says exactly the same thing as my pimp did. So, the German state helped him to pimp me. The German legislation helps push young women into prostitution, because by saying prostitution is a normal job, all the harm and violence becomes invisible.”



Sandra Norak was groomed into prostitution in Germany as a teenager and remained trapped in the sex industry for six years.

Read the full interview here:

<http://nordicmodelnow.org/testimonial/sandra-norak>

WHAT HAPPENED IN SWEDEN?

Sweden was the first country to introduce the Nordic Model approach and it has had the time and political will to iron out the implementation problems that are still seen in France and elsewhere. Results⁹ include:

- Significant decreases in the amount of prostitution taking place – during a period it was rapidly increasing in most other European countries.
- No evidence it's gone “underground” as the sex trade lobby claims.
- Sweden is now seen as a hostile destination by international sex traffickers.
- In spite of initial resistance, the law now has widespread public support.

To find out more, we caught up with Lea, a representative of #intedinhora,¹⁰ a Swedish organisation of more than 100 people with experience of prostitution, some of whom are still involved in the industry, who all strongly support the Nordic Model approach.

She said that in Sweden, buying sex costs much more than in European countries where the sex trade is condoned. “This makes the johns furious,” she said. “You can often see them talking in online forums about how the ‘hookers’ here in Sweden are ‘spoiled’ and how they wish it were more like Germany where prices are less than half what they are in Sweden. This means that we don’t need to see as many johns to survive and we can say no when we’re uncomfortable.”

She countered the claim that the Nordic Model pushes prostitution underground:

“The law makes little difference in this regard because they don’t want their wife, girlfriend or employer to find out and anyway most people want to have sex in private. The fact that in some countries the meeting takes place in public areas doesn’t mean that the selling part is safer. Women get killed every year in those small cubicles in the red-light district in Amsterdam. And in Sweden we haven’t yet had one reported

murder of a person in prostitution by a john since the sex buyer law was established in 1999.”

[Ed: There’s been a murder of one woman and one transwoman involved in prostitution, by her ex-partner and a friend respectively, not a punter or pimp.]

#Intedinhora acknowledges that the law is not perfect, but they are adamant that it is infinitely preferable to the alternative. The main problem is that the services are not good enough and they campaign for improvements.

A SWEDISH SURVIVOR SPEAKS OUT

Cajsa, another Swedish sex trade survivor, talked about how, when she was involved in prostitution, it was a huge comfort to know that the Swedish Nordic Model law was on her side. She went on to say:

“The Nordic Model law also protects a lot of people from the sex industry. If prostitution were to become the norm, it would be marketed as such. Small girls would learn that their bodies are products that can be sold and bought and that this is totally normal. Young girls who have problems with money would walk by brothels every day. So, they’d probably start with that instead of having a weekend job and there’d be social and economic problems as a result.

The Nordic Model law makes it harder for people to capitalise on our prostitution – we don’t have as many pimps because it’s illegal.”

Read Cajsa’s speech:

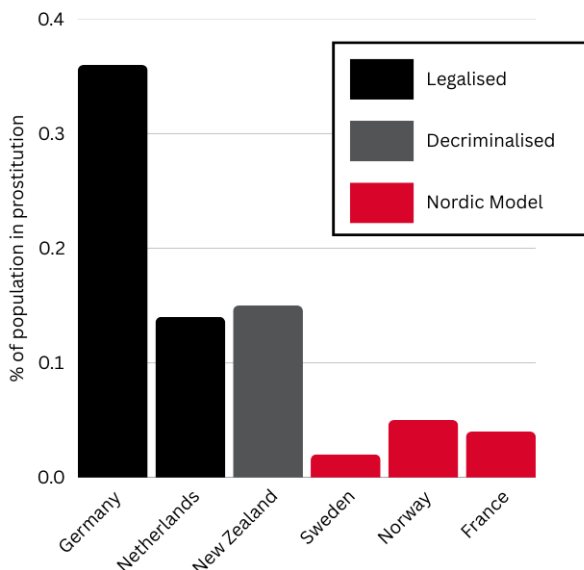
<https://nordicmodelnow.org/2021/03/09/the-nordic-model-vs-full-decriminalisation-what-do-sex-trade-survivors-say>



WHAT DO THE NUMBERS TELL US?

There is little reliable data about the sex industry in any country, regardless of the regime in force. Even under Germany's regulated system, the sex industry is the only German industry for which there are no reliable statistics about the numbers involved. This lack of robust data suggests a lack of political will to fully investigate the reality. Any data on the sex trade must therefore be considered approximations.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we used publicly available data¹¹ to create the following chart that presents the numbers involved in prostitution in six countries as a percentage of the population.



Percentage of the population in prostitution in six countries

This shows that a much smaller proportion of the population is involved in prostitution under the Nordic Model in Sweden, Norway, and France, than under legalisation and full decriminalisation in Germany, the Netherlands and New Zealand. This suggests that the Nordic Model is effective in containing the sex industry – if not in reducing its size, at least in preventing its growth.

HEALTH & SAFETY

One of the arguments for decriminalisation is that it would mean that prostitution would come under Health & Safety regulations. Let's think this through. Here are some safety instructions¹² from the UK Health & Safety Executive (HSE) for workers who are exposed to bodily fluids:

- Avoid contact with blood or body fluids.
- Take all necessary precautions to prevent puncture wounds, cuts and abrasions in the presence of blood and body fluids.
- Protect all breaks in exposed skin by means of waterproof dressings and/or gloves.
- Protect the eyes and mouth by means of a visor or goggles/safety spectacles and a mask when splashing is a possibility.
- Avoid contamination of the person or clothing by use of waterproof/water resistant protective clothing, plastic apron, etc.
- Wear rubber boots or plastic disposable overshoes when the floor or ground is likely to be contaminated.



Dental workers in protective clothing

Before we consider whether it is possible for prostitution to be compatible with these working practices, let's remember its actual nature. Andrea Dworkin, who was herself in prostitution, *describes*¹³ it like this:

“Prostitution is the mouth, the vagina, the rectum, penetrated usually by a penis, sometimes hands, sometimes objects, by one man and then another and then another and then another.”

It is not surprising therefore to find that women in prostitution suffer from frequent abrasions and tears in their vagina, mouth, anus and rectum caused by friction and mechanical trauma. Punters not only ejaculate in women's orifices, but also on their faces and bodies, and some want to urinate (or even defaecate) on her. Some punters may want her to penetrate his anus and rectum

with dildos and similar objects, which can lead to faecal matter being sprayed over a wide area.

How is it possible for this to conform to HSE safe practices? Condoms hardly provide even basic protection, and it's well-known that punters often refuse to wear them or take them off midway.

Is it ethical to expect vulnerable young women to be exposed to serious health risks that all other workers have a legal right to be protected from? And what would the implications be for other workers of normalising such unsafe practices?

Health & Safety guidelines also give employers a responsibility to take measures to minimise workplace psychological risks. Research has found that prostitution has a profoundly negative impact on women's mental health. For example, [one study](#)¹⁴ of 193 women involved in prostitution found a high rate of psychological and mental ill-health and concluded that prostitution is itself a major public health problem. This applies to prostitution *per se* – regardless of the setting or legal framework in which it occurs.

Women who've had first-hand experience in the [legalised brothels](#)¹⁵ in Australia and the [decriminalised brothels](#)¹⁶ in New Zealand testify that the health and psychological risks remain intolerably high.

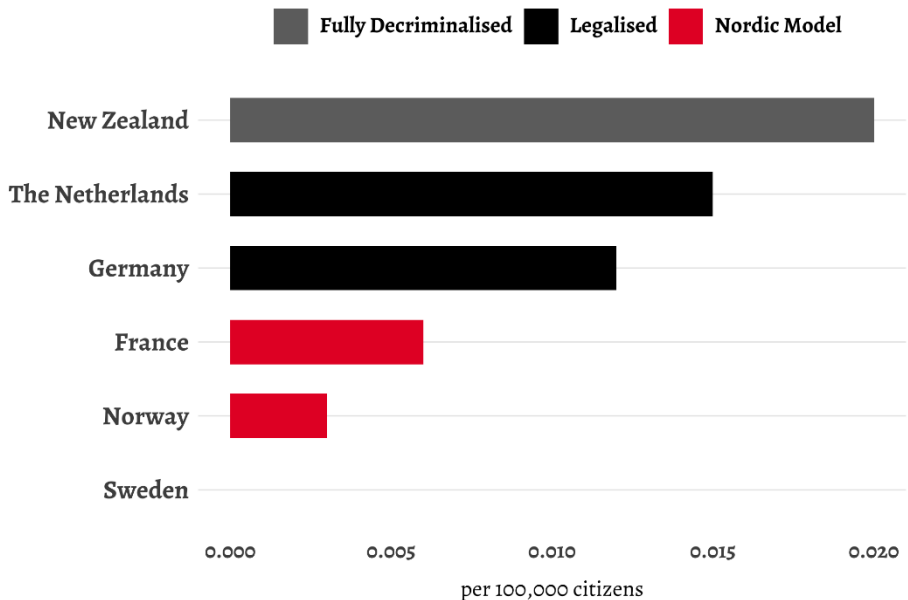
But the risks don't end there. Punter violence is [commonplace](#)¹⁷ and women involved in prostitution [have been found](#)¹⁸ to have the highest risk of murder of any social group and a mortality rate 12 times higher than women in the general population.

We need to think long and hard about whether we want to support full decriminalisation, which legitimises and normalises an industry that is incompatible with standard Health & Safety norms and that causes serious, long-term physical and mental health problems – or whether it is better to support the Nordic Model, which implicitly recognises the harms involved and focuses on prevention and reducing the size of the industry and the numbers involved in it, while providing those caught up in it with a viable transition out.

WHAT DOES THE HOMICIDE DATA TELL US?

Decrim lobbyists claim that the Nordic Model is more dangerous for the women involved. If this were true, we would expect to see higher rates of homicide of women involved in prostitution in countries that have implemented the Nordic Model and lower rates in countries that have legalisation or decriminalisation.

This chart shows the number of prostituted women murdered by pimps and punters, expressed as an average annual rate per 100,000 female citizens during the years the legislative framework was in place.¹⁹

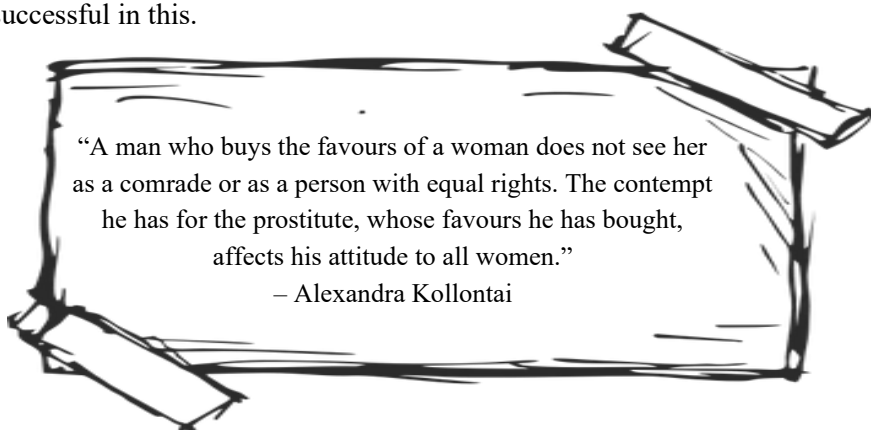


Data source: <http://www.sexindustry-kills.de>; Female citizens

This shows a lower homicide rate in the Nordic Model countries and none at all in Sweden. (There was a murder of a prostituted woman and another of a prostituted transwoman in Sweden during this time. We have not included these murders because they were not directly tied to their prostitution.)

As you can see, the homicide of women involved in prostitution is significantly higher in New Zealand, Germany and the Netherlands than in Sweden, Norway and France.

This suggests that claims that the Nordic Model is more dangerous for the women involved are false. However, we want to be clear that we are not claiming that the Nordic Model is safer for women, because we do not believe that anything can make prostitution safe. Instead, the Nordic Model aims to reduce the amount of prostitution that takes place and the numbers involved. This data suggests that when implemented well, the Nordic Model is successful in this.



RAMPANT RACISM

The sex industry is not only sexist but also profoundly racist. Huschke Mau was, with interruptions, engaged in prostitution in Germany for ten years. She talks about the racism within the prostitution system – how racially discriminated women enter prostitution in disproportionate numbers and how the system itself fetishises ethnicity. She [describes](#)²⁰ mega-brothels in Germany where the women are on different floors according to their ethnicity – Romanian women on one floor, Asian women on the next, African women on the next, and so on. She describes this as an apartheid system and points out that the racist language that punters use against women is visible for all to see on punter forums.

It is standard for the sex trade to charge different rates for women based on their age and ethnicity. This South East Asian brothel advert illustrates this. It categorises the women by ethnic origin. Race is used as a key selling point of the women, who are treated as a product or commodity. Notice that a (white) Russian woman is twice the price of an Asian women.

冷氣開放	
大波北姑	250
CHINA GIRL	250
青春陀地	250
HONG KONG GIRL	250
白淨馬拉	180
MALAY GIRL	180
熱情賓妹	200
PHILIPPINE GIRL	200
狂野鬼妹	500
RUSSIAN GIRL	500

Similar price discrepancies are seen in many other countries. On UK punter review forums where sex buyers mention how much they paid a woman for sex acts, the premium for being white, speaking English fluently and appearing to be educated is almost 100%, so this doesn't only happen in Asia and Germany.

These practices are standard in the sex trade because the sex buyer is king and punters fetishise race, age, and social class. The price differences reflect notions of subjugation and conquest and myths about female sexuality. They wouldn't be accepted or defended based on "autonomy" or choice in any other service industry because they are incompatible with equality legislation and human dignity.

We must ask whether an industry that routinely gets away with the kind of overt and degrading racism that is no longer accepted in mainstream society can ever be safe for women and particularly for women of colour.

A BRITISH SURVIVOR SPEAKS OUT

"I am a 29-year-old white, middle-class female who now works in academia. I worked in the sex industry from the age of 17 to 21. I started in lap dancing clubs and then moved on to both agency based and brothel prostitution.

At the time, I would have said that prostitution was my 'informed choice'. I focused on the benefits (e.g. meeting new people, money, glamour, excitement, not having to work a regular job) and was not aware of the slow, insidious, accumulative effects it was having on me. Nor had I really examined the reason why I had even reached the decision that this was a viable or, seemingly, appealing option for me in the first place. (Hint – I was a victim of

childhood sexual abuse, something that will, without a doubt, make you feel that your body is both worthless and, paradoxically, the only object through which you can gain worth and approval.)

This is what angers me about this ‘sex-work’ debate. People rarely think about why middle-class, well-educated women, enter prostitution to begin with. Childhood sexual abuse does not discriminate against class and it has been shown to have occurred in exponentially disproportionate rates in women working in the sex industry, women from all backgrounds, working at all levels of this industry. This is not a fact that is questioned, however, and, instead, these women are held up as shining examples of the successes of both prostitution and, ironically, female ‘empowerment’. In my opinion, the statistics on women in the ‘sex industry’ who have survived childhood sexual abuse are enough to build policy upon.

This brings me on to the second point which annoys me in relation to this debate, the effects of it. Nobody speaks to these ‘happy hookers’ after they have left prostitution, this is when the effects of it catch up with you. You simply cannot forget years and years of swallowing down your consent, of swallowing down what is, at best, disgust, irritation and boredom during sex and, at worst, anger, humiliation and terror. After you have lived through that, it is fundamentally impossible to have anything near a happy, healthy and ‘normal’ life. By this I mean, a life where you can, at a very basic level, trust and connect to others, men in particular, and, alongside this, feel OK about your own body, humanity and worth. These things, will be constant everyday battles.

Since leaving prostitution I have struggled with chronic depression, flashbacks, anorexia and self-harm. I have not been off psychiatric medication or out of therapy. I have never been able to enjoy sex or be in a loving relationship. The ‘sex-industry’, by which I mean the legally sanctioned rape, humiliation, devaluation and degradation of women, has robbed me of all these things.

I do not believe that by decriminalising this violent and horrific patriarchal institution that we make women safer. Measure by measure, to criminalise this

industry, not only will we make potential sex workers, current sex workers and ex-sex workers safer (physically and, perhaps most importantly, psychologically) but, in addition to this, we make all women safer, safer from the absolute tyranny which is men's blind belief in their entitlement to dehumanise women and to purchase consent, whether that be financially or through one of the multiple other, interconnected, yet equally legitimated means through which women's ability to say no is held to ransom under the patriarchy."



Artwork by a young woman who documented her life in prostitution at brothelgirl.tumblr.com.



IMPACT ON SOCIETY

Prostitution is a profoundly gendered phenomenon. It is overwhelmingly men who do the buying and women and those from historically disadvantaged groups who provide the 'services' or who, more accurately, are paid to endure being used for someone else's sexual gratification. This cements the unequal relations between the sexes – men as fully human, women as subhuman; men as masters, women as servants or objects to be used.

When prostitution is decriminalised, this inequality is enshrined in the law and becomes part of the cultural landscape. This affects everyone. Consider what it means for girls growing up. How would walking past brothels on their way to and from school impact them? How would it make them think about themselves? Their bodies? Their aspirations for the future? And what about boys? How would it affect them? How would it make them view women? How would it make them think about themselves?

Is equality between the sexes possible in such an environment? Is the idea of equality even possible?



A brothel next to a McDonald's in Germany

Prostitution feeds men's individual and collective sense of superiority and entitlement to sexual access to women. All the myriad forms of the sex industry present a picture of a multitude of interchangeable young women who are sexually available and willing or even desperate to fulfil a man's every whim. No one explains that the women do not fancy them, that they are simply desperate to be paid.

Is it any wonder then if men come to see themselves as superior and to see women as a lower order of being? Or that they might come to think that

women owe them sex. This is the logic that the sex industry teaches boys and young men and that now pervades mainstream culture.

Research²¹ has long shown that men believing that they are superior and entitled to sexual access to women is associated with violence against women and girls. We are currently witnessing an epidemic²² of male violence against women and girls and a rise in extreme misogyny among young men, as epitomised by the ‘incel’ movement documented²³ by Laura Bates.

Fully decriminalising the sex industry would implicitly endorse these attitudes. As a society, can we afford to do this? Really?



Artwork by a young woman who documented her life in prostitution at brothelgirl.tumblr.com. Here she captures the flattery and dissembling that is inherent to the prostitution relationship.

In contrast to the nihilistic vision of those who promote the full decriminalisation of the sex industry, the Nordic Model starts from the understanding that prostitution is incompatible with equality between women and men, the poor and the rich, the young and the old, and people of colour and white people.

The Nordic Model is based on the understanding that for most of those involved in prostitution, it was never a truly free choice between a number of viable options. And it understands that prostitution **is** a real choice for those who pay for sex acts. Its aim is not to criminalise men who buy sex but to send

out an unequivocal message that paying for sex acts is not acceptable, in the hope and expectation that this will change their behaviour.

And it sends out the message that women and girls deserve better than being used as men's sexual toys and whipping girls.

Let's dare to fight for a world where women and girls have full human rights in law and in practice. Let's not settle for a world where the brothel is the only option for our most disadvantaged women and girls.

BUT... BUT... WHAT ABOUT?

Those who promote full decrim often make sweeping and damning claims about the Nordic Model – many of which might **sound** superficially convincing, but if you dig a bit deeper, you find they don't stand up to scrutiny. In this section, we debunk some of them. There isn't room to cover them all, so first a word of advice.

Just like the asbestos and tobacco industries, there are **huge** profits to be made in the sex industry – often with very little risk. For example, in a **recent case**,²⁴ a British man was found to have made **£1.6 million a year** from exploiting vulnerable women in his brothels.

Of course, he and all the other pimps and brothel owners want to be seen as legitimate business men and not as seedy criminals who leech off the suffering of the most marginalised women. Of course, they don't want to languish in prison on long sentences. Of course, they're ruthless in fighting for their own interests. So, it's no surprise that they fund lobbying for full decrim and use **dodgy tactics**²⁵ – not unlike those used by the **asbestos** ²⁶ barons – including pushing the use of the 'sex work' terminology, which obscures the harms.

And of course, men who get off on prostitution consider it their god-given 'right' and fight any attempt to curtail their 'freedom.' It's not surprising therefore that many men are eager to repeat the sex trade lobbyists' distortions and sweet talk. And sadly, many women still defer to the men around them and intuit when something disturbs their equilibrium. And so, they too repeat the sex trade lobbyists' propaganda, because they have yet to untangle what's

really in their own interest from the web of misinformation and lies.

In a nutshell, our advice is to be cautious of taking at face value anything those who promote full decrim claim. Think “who benefits”? Think of the complicated vested interests. Then think of teenage girls and what is in **their** best interests. Do they deserve a life as a sexual service station for strangers?

CLAIM 1: “All sex workers want full decrim”

Obviously all “sex workers” don’t speak with one voice. Many support the Nordic Model approach – we’ve quoted quite a few of them in this booklet. Unfortunately, however, the voices of the most privileged tend to be loudest and often present a view that is not representative of the majority of those involved in prostitution.

CLAIM 2: “All sex worker-led organisations support full decrim”.

This is a lie. For example, [#Intedinhora](#)²⁷ in Sweden, [Netzwerk Ella](#)²⁸ in Germany, [Wahine Toa Rising](#)²⁹ in New Zealand, [AMADH](#)³⁰ in Argentina, and Kwanele in South Africa, are just a few of the many organisations led by women who have lived experience of prostitution who campaign tirelessly **against** full decrim and **for** the Nordic Model approach.

CLAIM 3: “Amnesty International, UNAIDS, the WHO, and many other organisations support decrim, so it must be the right approach.”

Amnesty International adopted support for full decrim as a policy in 2016 after a biased and questionable [consultation process](#).³¹ The very first motion, which eventually led to the policy, was written by Douglas Fox, who was then the co-owner of the biggest escort agency in the north of England. In other words, he was a pimp. He [boasted](#)³² about getting his friends in the industry to join Amnesty to help lobby for the adoption of the policy. The [research](#)³³ that Amnesty conducted was biased and of poor quality. Think dodgy practices of the asbestos barons. Many people consider Amnesty’s prostitution policy to be a [shameful embarrassment](#).³⁴

UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation (WHO) also have a policy of lobbying for full decrim. This [was based](#)³⁵ on flawed modelling, more dodgy

research, and advice from Alejandra Gil, a Mexican pimp, who is serving a long prison term for sex trafficking.

Just as various bodies and organisations recommend full decrim, there are many that recommend the Nordic Model, including the [EU Parliament](#),³⁶ the [Council of Europe](#),³⁷ the [European Women's Lobby](#),³⁸ [Equality Now](#),³⁹ [CATW](#),⁴⁰ and the [UN Special Rapporteur on VAWG](#).⁴¹

CLAIM 4: The Nordic Model increases violence for women involved in prostitution.

There is no credible evidence for this claim. A Médecins du Monde study of the situation in France is often quoted as “proving” that the Nordic Model not only doesn’t work but also increases the dangers for women. Initially only an 8-page summary of the 80-page report was translated into English. This makes alarming and misleading claims that are not backed up by the data in the full report. See the [critique by Amicale du Nid](#)⁴² for more information.

Various other studies are often also used to “prove” this claim – such as an [Amnesty study in Norway](#)⁴³ and the [official review in Northern Ireland](#).⁴⁴ Like the Médecins du Monde study, these also make headline claims that are not backed up by the data.

Prostitution is inherently violent. Nothing can change that. That is why we need to focus on prevention, alternatives, and changing men’s behaviour.

CLAIM 5: The Nordic Model interferes with a woman’s right to do whatever she chooses with her body.

Most women are involved in prostitution because of an absence of alternatives rather than as a free and informed choice. For example, the 2008 official research into the outcome of full decrim in New Zealand found that 85% of the women they interviewed wanted to get out of prostitution but didn’t know how to. This is typical of results found in other studies.

We want women to have better options, but if a woman really does want to be involved in prostitution, under the Nordic Model she is free to do so without being a target of the criminal law.

SURVIVORS SPEAK OUT

“I have experience within the sex industry – both ‘choice’ and forced. There are many of us. I have friends I used to ‘work’ with on the streets and in brothels who are still stuck and none of them want full decriminalisation. It would mean the end of exit opportunities.” – Roslyn Hamilton (UK)

“Men would see me as an object they could do anything they liked with; anything they had seen in the latest porn film; anything any way they wanted. They felt it was their God-given right because they had paid for it.” – Ally-Marie Diamond (NZ)

“Pimps don’t want the Nordic Model to gain support because it threatens their \$\$ power by putting power and money back in the hands of prostitutes. So they promote a lot of bullshit propaganda and have colonised liberal feminism’s ‘sex-positive’ attitude by manipulation.” – Chelsea Geddes (NZ)

“I hate the term sex work. It is mental violence to those of us who have the reality of being prostituted inside every cell of our bodies. It is a language that erases male violence and how organised the sex trade is. Alongside the sex work term, are others, such as – empowerment and choice. These are used to create a cloak over the sex trade, making it appear leftist or even feminist. It hides the fact that prostitution is the most vicious form of capitalism that man has ever invented.” – Rebecca Mott (UK)

**NORDIC
MODEL NOW!**

CAMPAIGNING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS



ABOUT NORDIC MODEL NOW! (NMN)

NMN is a secular feminist grassroots women's group campaigning for the abolition of prostitution and related practices, and for the Nordic Model approach to prostitution. We are all unpaid volunteers and about one half of our active members are survivors of prostitution. We receive no institutional or public funding and rely on donations from supporters.



@nordicmodelnow

<https://nordicmodelnow.org>

