

## **Commission on a gender equal economy: Examples of transformative policies and practices**

---

**Name:** Dr Kathryn Hodges

**Contact details:** kathrynesmehodges@gmail.com

**Are you responding on behalf of an Organisation or as an individual?** both

**Name of Organisation (if applicable):** Independent consultant and researcher/  
Women@theWell

**Position in Organisation (if applicable):** consultant and researcher/ Chair of Board of Trustees

The way women's experiences are considered as 'needs' in policy and legislation has to be addressed. Attention has to be paid to the intersecting experiences that result from multiple oppressions. The study by Hodges (2018, see also Hodges and Burch, 2019) highlighted the discourse and policy implications of the current legal settlement relating to women's involved in prostitution. Echoing the work of the APPG (2014), Matthews et al (2014), Coy (2016b), and Nordic Model Information Network (Nordic Model Information Network et al., 2016). The experiences of women involved in prostitution should be seen as needs that must be supported by helping services, rather than as active choices that are criminalised or stigmatised.

The final report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group assessing the current legal settlement on prostitution in England and Wales, established that the failure to have in place "a clear and consistent political strategy has resulted in legislation which simultaneously condones and condemns prostitution...ambivalence is translated into inconsistent and unbalanced enforcement, which often targets the victims of coercion rather than the perpetrators" (APPG, 2014, p.8). It is arguable that current policy is silencing women, with the burden of criminal responsibility laying primarily with women who frequently are at risk of violence and death, with significant numbers reporting that they were coerced into involvement (APPG, 2014). In addition the legislation, in its current guise, is protecting those who exploit women and girls (APPG, 2014; Bindel, 2017).

An abolitionist model of legislation, decriminalising those involved in prostitution whilst criminalising pimps and buyers who exploit them, would shift this burden of responsibility enabling women to be seen as victims of violent crimes and exploitation rather than as criminals. The change in legislation to an abolitionist model in Sweden, followed the parliamentarians agreement that prostitution was incongruent with a gender equal society and was thus considered as violence against women (Ekberg, 2004). Whilst there have been a number of countries which have been adopting this model, it is the recent changes in French legislation to enact an abolitionist approach that appears a coherent response to the experiences reported by women in this study.

The French legislation made provisions to support women involved in prostitution, attending and responding to their experiences and needs (CAP International, 2017b). Whilst it should be recognised that this legislation is in its infancy, it is notable that it is an inclusive

policy aimed at helping those involved in prostitution find their way through systems and get support from provision that had previously been challenging to access, such as housing, employment and healthcare (CAP International, 2017b). In addition to bringing together state run services and non-governmental organisations by setting up a dedicated budget to support victims and deliver prevention programmes, the legislation also makes provisions for "social worker studies and training...(that) must include a module on the prevention of prostitution and the identification of situations of prostitution, pimping and human trafficking" (CAP International, 2017b, p.6).

Whilst this provision created in the French legislation does not overtly seek to address training of professional caregivers in the details of interaction and methods in which support is facilitated, it does begin to develop an understanding within legislation of the experiences and needs of women involved, or at risk of involvement in prostitution. Reflecting on the change of attitudes and opinions found in Sweden following its change in legislation to an abolitionist approach (Nordic Model Information Network et al., 2016; Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2014), one would expect that a change in policy will develop understanding of professional caregivers to the needs and experiences of women involved in prostitution. That this would not only enable improved practical responses to the care and support of women, but also instil awareness that involvement in prostitution is no longer considered a choice women make, but is act of violence against women enabled by the inequalities of societies structures. It is argued by many survivors, front-line service providers and academics (Space International, 2017; Moran, 2015; CAP International, 2017a; Bindel, 2017; Raymond, 2013; Coy, 2016b; APPG, 2014; CATW, 2017), that changing legislation to an abolitionist model enables the reframing of women in wider policy, helping service provision and allied professionals, and society in general, making silences noticeable, heard and responded to.

We support the abolitionist model, particularly the approach take in the French Legislation (CAP International, 2017b). From my research, summarised below, it is clear that a change in legislation to an abolitionist model is necessary to ensure that women's experiences are considered needs in policy to enable wider understanding of the support responses required. Additionally, it is imperative that the silences are also heard and we hear from women whose voices are not present, either because they don't have the words, no one has asked the right question, because they exploited and/or kept prisoner, or they are dead. It is imperative that we shift the burden of responsibility enabling women to be seen as victims of violent crimes and exploitation rather than as criminals.

My practice and research interests are focused on improving helping services and access to support for women experiencing multiple and complex needs. This recent study focused on the experiences of women involved in prostitution as their experiences are arguably multiple and complex. The summary below indicates the findings of my research and the implications for practice. Much of these implications for practice could be better addressed by a change in legislation to an abolitionist model, where women's experiences are seen as needs for which services should be supporting them with.

## **The Cost of Prostitution**

In an environment with such limited resources to invest in social care it seem eminently sensible that we review the cost of prostitution to society and the individuals involved, and understand what savings can be made through effective use of resources. Also the impact of legislation has a cost and I refer here to the findings of the work of Mouvement du nid and Psytel (2015) who have set out clearly the cost of prostitution, evidencing the necessity to change legislation to an abolitionist model. This is a significant piece of work, but with an existing framework and methodology already set out.

In 2014, the European Commission offered for the Member State of the European Union to increase their “national wealth” by including the turnover from prostitution in the calculation of their GDP. The final paragraph of a Guardian article (2014) on the issues commented,

“...the impact of the changes follows estimates last month from the ONS that in 2009 [illegal drugs and prostitution boosted the economy by £9.7bn](#) – equal to 0.7% of gross domestic product and roughly the same contribution as farming” (Allen, 2014).

In France, “...the INSEE refused to implement the European request and explained that prostitution was not so much a “provision of freely consented services” as an exploitation of people in the most precarious of situations” (Prostcost.org, 2015).

The following quote summarises the key finding of this study and illustrate why prompt action is required;

“Our study reveals the significant human cost (in addition to the cost of direct and indirect social and medical consequences) borne by the victims of the prostititional system. Prostitutes are at least 6 times more exposed to rape than the general population and 7 times more likely to commit suicide The human cost borne by prostitutes is estimated at 252 to 370 million Euro per year. In comparison, the total social expenditures which prostitutes benefit from is estimated at 50 to 65 million Euro per year (including housing, benefits and prevention and support actions) and the total public funds allocated to charitable organisations specifically for the prevention and support of prostitutes amounts to a mere 2.4 million Euro, i.e. 65 Euro per year and per prostitute” (Prostcost.org, 2015).

## Bibliography

- Allen, K., 2014. Accounting for drugs and prostitution to help push UK economy up by £65bn. *The Guardian*. [online] 10 Jun. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jun/10/accounting-drugs-prostitution-uk-economy-gdp-eu-rules>> [Accessed 17 May 2018].
- APPG, 2014. *Shifting the burden: inquiry to assess the operation of the current legal settlement on prostitution in England and Wales*. The Stationary Office.
- Bacchi, C.L., 1999. *Women, policy, and politics: the construction of policy problems*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Becker, J. and Duffy, C., 2002. *Women drug users and drugs service provision: service-level responses to engagement and retention*. London: Home Office.
- Bindel, J., 2017. *The pimping of prostitution*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- CAP International, 2017a. *About – CAP International*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.cap-international.org/about/>> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2017].
- CAP International, 2017b. *The French law of April 13 2016 aimed at strengthening the fight against the prostitutional system and providing support for prostituted persons: Principles, goals, measures and adoption of a historic law*. Available at: <<http://www.cap-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CAP-brochure-MARS2017-EN-WEB3-1.pdf>> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2017].
- CATW, 2017. *Projects and Campaigns*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.catwinternational.org/ProjectsCampaigns/Redefining>> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2017].
- Corston, J., 2007. *The Corston Report*. [online] London: Home Office. Available at: <<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf>> [Accessed 23 Jun. 2017].
- Covington, S., 2008. Women and Addiction: A Trauma-Informed Approach. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, SARC supplement 5, pp.377–85.
- Coy, M. ed., 2016a. 'I am a person too': Women's accounts and images about body and self in prostitution. In: *Prostitution, harm and gender inequality: Theory, research and policy*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Coy, M., 2016b. Joining the dots on sexual exploitation of children and women: A way forward for UK policy responses. *Critical Social Policy*, 36(4), pp.572–591.
- Ekberg, G., 2004. The Swedish Law that Prohibits the Purchase of Sexual Services: Best Practices for Prevention of Prostitution and Trafficking in Human Beings. *Violence Against Women*, 10(10), pp.1187–1218.

Elliott, D.E., Bjelajac, P., Falloot, R.D., Markoff, L.S. and Reed, B.G., 2005. Trauma-informed or trauma-denied: Principles and implementation of trauma-informed services for women. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(4), pp.461–477.

Farley, M., Franzblau, K. and Kennedy, M.A., 2013. Online prostitution and trafficking. *Albany Law Review*, 77(3), pp.139–157.

Godfrey, M. and Callaghan, G., 2000. *Exploring unmet need: the challenge of a user-centred response*. York: York Pub. Services for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Hepburn, M., 1999. *Women and Drug Use. Bolton Document*.

Hester, M. and Westmarland, N., 2004. *Tackling street prostitution : towards a holistic approach*. [Project Report] London: DU. Available at: <<http://dro.dur.ac.uk/2557/>>.

Hodges, K. and Burch, S. (2019) "Multiple and Intersecting Experiences of Women in Prostitution: Improving Access to Helping Services," *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*: V. 4 (3). DOI: 10.23860/dignity.2019.04.02.03. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol4/iss2/3>

Hodges, K., 2018. *An exploration of decision making by women experiencing multiple and complex needs*. Anglia Ruskin University.

Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2014. *Summary: The extent and development of prostitution in Sweden*. Available at: <<http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/stockholm/SiteCollectionDocuments/Sv/manniska-och-samhalle/jamstalldhet/prostitution/SUMMARY-Prostitution-kartlaggning-2014.pdf>> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2017].

Matthews, R., Bindel, J., Young, L. and Easton, H., 2014. *Exiting prostitution a study in female desistance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

McCluskey, U., 2005. *To be met as a person: The dynamics of attachment in professional encounters*. London: Karnac.

Moran, R., 2015. *Paid for: my journey through prostitution*. First American edition ed. New York, N.Y: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Mouvement du Nid and Psytel, n.d. *Prostcost: Estimate of the economic and social cost of prostitution in France (Summary of the study's results)*. Available at: <<http://www.cap-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Mouvement-du-Nid-prostcost-EN.pdf>> [Accessed 17 May 2018].

Neale, J., 2004. Gender and Illicit Drug Use. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34(6), pp.851–870.

Nordic Model Information Network, Coy, M., Pringle, H. and Bresnahan, M., 2016. *The Swedish Sex Purchase Law: evidence of its impact*. Available at: <<http://www.catwa.org.au/wp->

content/uploads/2016/12/NMIN\_briefing\_on\_Sweden\_July\_16.pdf> [Accessed 16 Sep. 2017].

Prostcost.org, 2015. Prostcost: Estimate of the economic and social cost of prostitution in France. Available at: <<https://prostcost.wordpress.com/en/>> [Accessed 17 May 2018].

Raymond, J.G., 2013. *Not a choice, not a job: exposing the myths about prostitution and the global sex trade*. First edition ed. Washington, D.C: Potomac Books.

Space International, 2017. *Space International: Testimonials*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.spaceintl.org/about/testimonials/>> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2017].