

My name is Esta Steyn, campaign director for Be Slavery Free. I have been campaigning against and for preventing of sexual exploitation for 9 years.

Narrow viewpoints have led to a heated debate around the sex industry. This is not helpful to victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and also not to those willingly providing sexual services.

I am happy that Freedom United is organising this webinar to give more information to their followers and I want to thank them for giving me the chance to share some of my insights. As my time is limited a longer version of my presentation will be shared in the chat and on our website.

The first thing I would like the viewers of the webinar to think about is this: Will the policy that you choose keep those most vulnerable safe against sexual exploitation?

When I started with the research to make a campaign on sexual exploitation, I came across so much horror stories that it de-motivated me completely. I thought that it would be impossible to come to a positive idea for an action based campaign that would motivate people to fight for a world free of sexual exploitation.

I found quite a few stigmatizing and unhelpful perspectives. Like framing men as perpetrators and women as victims. This makes men monsters and the strong ones, and women sad little victims. Dehumanized and incapable of taking care of themselves. Not a helpful frame at all, it also gives men a sort of free pass, if it is simply in their nature to be monsters then they cannot help themselves. And it also makes men feel bad about themselves, it does not make them part of the fight for equal rights and fair treatment of women, it makes them turn away from it, because they are ashamed or feel uncomfortable.

I think that calling prostitution violence against women is not helpful. Although most victims are female, there are a lot of trans people and men being exploited too and excluding them does not seem fair. In the end the campaign we came up with is focused on empowering men to become positive role models and to engage them in a positive way. We organized motorbike ride outs against child trafficking and trained motorbike riders to motivate them to become forces for good. To make them realise how important they are in the lives of children around them and that they are the best prevention for their own kids. Also encouraging them to address stigmatizing or unrespectable behaviour towards women and to motivate other men to be responsible for their actions.

Question 1: What was the impact of legalisation of the sex industry in the Netherlands?

Before 2000 buying and selling of sexual services was already legal in the Netherlands, brothels and pimping were prohibited.

The reason the exploitation of prostitution was legalised, is because it was clear that condoning prostitution had not worked. It created routes for investing dirty money, to let illegal immigrants work, and to block supervision of the tax department, police and frontline professionals. It was thought that legalising the exploitation of the sex industry would solve this.

It has been a complete failure. The only thing that was accomplished is that in the legal sex industry almost no minors are to be found. All the other supposed outcomes did not come true at all, this was already made public in research done by the Dutch police in 2007. Despite this, a lot of people including the Dutch public still think that the legalisation is a success. I think that there are several reasons why people would think that.

These are some of those points:

1. By cancelling the ban on the exploitation of prostitution, illegal businesses, built with criminal money and run by criminals, were now suddenly legal. It was one of the biggest money laundering operations the Dutch government ever did. The new law did not change these criminals into good ethical businessman.
2. No new licenses for legal sex businesses were handed out, only the criminal businesses that were already there got a license. It's as if they did not want their new law to succeed.
3. The criminal businesses were not too happy with all the regulations the Dutch government wanted them to comply with. So over two thirds of the sex businesses have stopped. They have not disappeared, but they have become illegal.
4. Making the exploitation of prostitution legal has put a blanket of snow over the sex industry in the Netherlands. What once was illegal suddenly became legal. The sex industry is now assumed to be well regulated and safe, a good place to work. It also condones the exploitation of another as an object, by law you are allowed to exploit another as an object.

5. Providing sexual services was now seen as normal job by our unemployment office. They wanted to force a people who had previously provided sexual services, to do this again. The reasoning being that if working in the sex industry was a normal job, then why not go back to working in the sex industry. If they would not do this, they would lose their welfare. One woman took this to court and a judge said that no one could be forced to take a job in the sex industry. Thereby stating it to be not a normal job.
6. Providing sexual services risks your physical and spiritual integrity, therefor not making it a normal job. The risks are high for:
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Dissociating to be able to do this
  - Drug- and alcohol abuse
  - Physical violence
  - Stigmatisation
  - Risks of becoming trafficked/ exploited/ forced.
7. Now I am not saying that there are no people that willingly provide sexual services. The amount of people that want to do this willingly are not nearly enough though to fulfil the demand for those who want to buy sexual services.
8. Apart from there not being enough people who want to provide sexual services, the legalization of the sex industry increased the demand enormously. That meant that trafficking has taking a rise to fill this demand.
9. The Amsterdam municipality then thought: Well maybe if we do it ourselves, set up our own brothel that is run by prostitutes themselves, maybe then we can clean the sex industry up. They soon discovered they could not keep the traffickers out. This experiment was seriously critiqued and they closed. They are now open under new management.
10. The police do not have enough budget and staff to do more than control and check the legal businesses. They do not have the resources to check the illegal sex industry and as I just shared the illegal sex industry has grown. In the Netherlands we have at least 3000 people a year who are likely being sexually exploited, 1600 are children.

11. Our government removed human trafficking from their top 5 priorities and replaced it with smuggling, as they are far more concerned about illegal and undocumented immigrants than they are worried about human trafficking.
12. It has made life so much easier for human traffickers. They simply have to choose people over 18 and the courts will have a hell of a time proving that this person was exploited. It is so extremely difficult to prove that a person was exploited. It's usually not black and white at all. A victim will often feel that they are not a victim because they said yes to their trafficker and willingly worked for them. A good friend of mine who was exploited in the sex industry for 5 years, who never got a penny of the money she earned, still felt that she was not exploited. She loved her trafficker and willingly did this work for him. It took her 15 years, before she could admit to herself that she was exploited.
13. Our policy is based on giving the police access to victims for prosecution purposes, not to protect victims at all. Attorneys will advise victims of human trafficking to apply for asylum instead of declaring themselves to be victims of human trafficking. Our policy is that inhuman.

For me, my research into sexual exploitation has changed my perspective on how I see the sex industry completely. Trauma and the fight to survive has a huge impact on how survivors perceive their situation and if you are fighting to survive, you cannot see yourself as a victim. That is too painful and not helpful if you need to keep your head above water and survive.

And let me just say, the survivors I have met are extremely powerful, smart, funny and wonderful people. They have taught me so much. They showed me what my narrow mind frame was. My narrow mind frame stopped me from seeing them fully as people. I was not aware of that and needed to be sensitised and trained to see how I was not seeing them fully as people.

The constant framing of survivors as only being sad little broken girls irks me to no end. A survivor of sexual exploitation has been to hell and back and he or she has a strength to them that is their own. No trafficker gave them that strength by forcing them in such a horrible situation. They are forces to be reckoned with and they should be the ones helping us decide what our policies are and shaping our minds on this. So, I'm happy that

survivors are also a part in this webinar, as they are in the projects on sexual exploitation I am working on!

Question 2: Why do you think decriminalisation of sex work may not be most effective way to prevent trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation?

I think that decriminalisation of prostitutes should be the standard in every country. Decriminalisation the entire sex industry will give free reign to pimps and traffickers. It makes it extremely hard for law enforcement to prosecute cases. They have to prove that the exploited people were forced. If pimping is illegal it becomes that much easier to protect those at risk of sexual exploitation or those being sexually exploited.

So I am not for decriminalization of the entire sex industry. I have to say that any law that has been put in place so far has been unable to stop and prevent sexual exploitation. The sex industry is rife with criminals who want to make as much money as possible. And besides form criminals having a huge influence in the sex industry, the general public does not see people providing sexual services as people that need to be respected, and the impact of that is huge when it comes to stopping sexual exploitation and keeping those providing sexual services safe in general.

Some of those things are:

1. The sexualization and pornification of our society has made it more normalized to use someone as a product.
2. The view that a 'loose women' or a 'slut' is not seen as a worthy individual that deserves respect.
3. Some people still belief that LGBTQ people are worth less and don't deserve as much respect.
4. Patriarchy still has a huge negative influence and women in general are seen as less and men as more. The macho view that men 'have a right to get sex, whenever they want it', justifies them into using someone, even when they suspect that someone is coerced research shows that 33% of buyers of sexual services will continue with the act.

This is something that needs to be changed first and that is what I think would be the thing to focus on. The ideas behind why you choose a policy will influence the execution of that policy. For instance, the Swedish model is based on the notion that gender equality is really important and millions

are being spent on gender equality programs for schools, government officials and this had had a huge effect. Before the implementation of the Swedish model, laws providing sexual services was seen very differently than it is seen now. It has had a huge impact of the empowerment of women. Women are seen as more equal than before, in large part because of the gender equality programs. And specifically youths now disapprove paying for sexual services.

Whichever policy the UK chooses, it should reflect a view on humans that is helpful to survivors and those providing sexual services voluntarily.

While keeping in mind that the vast majority of people providing sexual services did not start doing this voluntarily or are not doing this voluntarily now.

To me, the rights of the victims and protecting those most at risk should be the most important thing in whatever policy you come up with. To put it really extreme: Is the policy that you choose keeping those most at risk safe?