



## A Manifesto for Safety in the Sex Industry

International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers

17 December 2014

2nd edition

### **The International Union of Sex Workers:**

For our human, civil and labour rights. For our inclusion and decriminalisation.  
For freedom to choose and respect for those choices, including the absolute right to say no.  
For the full protection of the law.

**For everyone in the sex industry.**

The red umbrella is the symbol of the international sex workers' rights movement.  
Red for our strength and our pride, it represents both the literal shelter from the rain needed when working on the street, and a symbolic protection from the prejudice, discrimination and abuse still endured by sex workers everywhere – which we resist, together.

17 December is **International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers**<sup>i</sup>, marked annually since 2003 by sex workers around the world<sup>ii</sup> as a time for action against the violence, social exclusion and discrimination that we endure.

In the run up to the 2015 election, the IUSW is writing to parliamentarians and PPCs with information about nine steps to tackle violence against people in the sex industry.

**This is not about being for or against sex work itself.**

It is about ensuring that *all* people have full and equal protection of the law as well as freedom from violence and discrimination.

- 1. respect our consent**
- 2. address causes, not symptoms**
- 3. tackle discrimination and stigma**
- 4. adopt the “Merseyside model” to successfully target predators**
- 5. support “National Ugly Mugs”**
- 6. include sex workers and sex worker organisations**
- 7. base policy and practice on evidence and in reality**
- 8. be aware of public opinion**
- 9. promote decriminalisation**

**1. respect our consent**

All too often, it is argued that a woman's consent is less valid if she sells sex<sup>iii</sup> and those who hold this view lobby for laws that overrule our consent by making it illegal to pay for sex<sup>iv</sup>. Not only does this ignore the existence of male and trans sex workers, it perpetuates a patriarchal double standard, an inversion of the trope “you can't rape a hooker”. We will only successfully challenge rape culture when all women's consent is treated with respect. It is not acceptable to view a woman's consent to sex as less worthy of that respect because she has sex for money: the word for someone who, for any reason, views a woman's consent as something they are entitled to dismiss, deny or devalue is not “feminist”. Please, whatever your views on prostitution, recognise that our consent counts.

**What you can do:**

- support the fundamental principle that a woman's consent to sex is her own to give
- believe women in the sex industry when we talk about our experience of sexual violence

**2. address causes, not symptoms**

Prostitution is having sex for money, and neither having sex nor getting paid is inherently degrading, abusive, exploitative or harmful. There are people in prostitution who are coerced or drug dependent or have otherwise limited choices – but the problem is coercion, drug dependency, social exclusion, limited options, lack of rights, *not* having sex for money *itself*. It is vulnerability that creates victims, not prostitution itself and there are no simplistic legislative pronouncements to remedy complex social problems. But by confusing prostitution with a whole host of other problems, those problems are permitted to flourish.

Those of us who turn to sex work because of limited options need *more options*; our circumstances are not improved by loss of income, police aggression and arrest of ourselves, our colleagues or our clients. A living wage, effective welfare system, affordable housing and childcare and adequate support systems – particularly for vulnerable groups like children in care and asylum seekers - are ways to address “push factors” like poverty, drug use and lack of options. Taking action against clients not only drives HIV<sup>v</sup> and

correlates with increased violence<sup>vi</sup> but does nothing to expand economic options or assist those in need.

### What you can do:

- promote policies to create a labour market that fairly balances the needs of staff and employers
- act to tackle the gender pay gap, so that women - particularly those working part time or with caring responsibilities - have more options for flexible, well-paid work
- support the provision of affordable, flexible childcare
- support effective and adequately resourced support projects lead by service-user need and evidence-based practice rather than by staff opinion

### 3. tackle discrimination and stigma

The vast majority of police officers behave appropriately and fairly. However, a significant minority are abusive to a range of marginalised groups, whether on grounds of racism, homophobia or other prejudice. The World Bank describes how "Stigma and discrimination [against sex workers] are perpetuated by the criminalisation ...Criminalisation enables police to perpetrate abuse and humiliation, demand free sexual services, and extort fines from sex workers with impunity."<sup>vii</sup>

Data from studies across several cities shows approximately a quarter of sex workers have experienced violence from the police, who can abuse a criminalised population with impunity.<sup>viii</sup> In one survey of over 200 trans sex workers in Turkey, *more than half* had experienced violence from the police.<sup>ix</sup>

Transparency International report that criminalisation of sex work enables corrupt police to extort money from people in the sex industry<sup>x</sup> and the Independent Police Complaints Commission record numerous incidences of sexual violence by police officers, including cases where allegations were dismissed due to the victims being sex workers.<sup>xi</sup> One IUSW activist has worked in a brothel where officers used to coerce sexual services as the price for leaving the premises undisturbed. Cases such as those highlighted by *Police Spies Out Of Lives* show that the police, as individuals or an institution, cannot be relied upon to demonstrate sexual continence or operational probity with regard to vulnerable women.<sup>xii</sup>

These common experiences result in profound distrust of the police among the sex working community. The National Ugly Mugs reporting scheme (see point 5, below) found that, of 1200 serious incidents, only a quarter of sex worker victims were willing to formally report to police<sup>xiii</sup>. Without NUM as a means of passing data to the police, these violent criminals can operate with no risk of arrest.

Criminalisation turns the police as an institution into a source of abuse and prosecution rather than protection, allowing predators to target sex workers with impunity. Despite this, many organisations that lobby for increased criminalisation of the sex industry also present themselves as providing services to people who sell sex. Institutions that seek our criminalisation, view our consent as legally less valid than that of other women and promote an ideological view of our experience rather than believing us when we talk about sexual violence *cannot* offer safe spaces or effective support to vulnerable women.<sup>xiv</sup>

We want everybody in the sex industry to have access to services that will help them - this means holistic provision lead by service-user need, not by the belief system or agenda of service deliverers or politicised commissioning. This is borne out by academic analysis: "Respecting a woman's decision to sex work, however diminished her ability to choose for herself might be, is crucial in demonstrating a non-judgemental attitude towards vulnerable women."<sup>xv</sup>

### What you can do:

- ask your local police to adopt the “Merseyside model” (see point 4)
- ensure local services are led by service-user need rather than staff opinion and informed by evidence rather than ideology

#### 4. adopt the “Merseyside model” to successfully target predators

In Liverpool, a specialist service supports victims of violence through the process of the criminal justice system and works with the police who explicitly prioritise violence rather than illegal working by victims (for example, soliciting or working together indoors). In acknowledgement of the fact that people in the sex industry are often victimised *because we are sex workers* rather than as individuals, the police use a “hate crime” model that has proved a highly successful way to structure investigations. This approach has resulted in 90% conviction rate for violent cases and shows that, with the political will, *we can successfully tackle violence against people in the sex industry.*<sup>xvi</sup>

### What you can do:

- publicise this effective strategy to target violence against sex workers
- ask your local police force to adopt this approach
- ensure a local project offers non-judgemental support to sex workers who are victims of crime

#### 5. support “National Ugly Mugs”

While sex work is criminalised, it is dangerous for us to contact the police to report crimes against us. “Ugly Mugs” schemes were developed by sex workers in Australia in 1986<sup>xvii</sup>, circulating information within the sex worker community about offenders who would present as if they were clients and then rob, rape or otherwise attack women, acting without risk of arrest due to their victims’ fear of the police. Localised schemes have operated in the UK since 1989 and a national scheme now collates all reports and, with the permission of the victim of the crime, passes information to the police.<sup>xviii</sup>

The National Ugly Mugs project is operated by the UK Network of Sex Work Projects, an umbrella body for about 50 local organisations that offer health and support services to sex workers across the UK.<sup>xix</sup> NUM’s effectiveness and trustworthiness is demonstrated by the fact that over 2,300 individual sex workers have signed up to receive reports enabling them to identify potential predators (for example, details of modus operandi and partial phone numbers; the scheme also allows members to see if a phone number from which they have been contacted is on a database of perpetrators). Through the 350 local projects that are organisational members, NUM estimates its reach is approximately 10,000 individual sex workers.

### What you can do:

- publicise this life-saving work
- make a donation, however small, to National Ugly Mugs (which for months at a time has relied on donations from people in the sex industry to continue its work)<sup>xviii</sup>
- ask your Chief Constable and Police & Crime Commissioner to support and engage with NUM
- meet with NUM staff to find out more about their work<sup>xx</sup>

#### 6. include sex workers and sex worker organisations

The sex industry is a “dog whistle” issue for many VAW organisations, who believe that prostitution is a form of violence and lobby for legally-enshrined disregard of our right to consent. None of the individuals or organisations which campaign for increased criminalisation represent people currently working in the sex industry and we know of no such campaigning organisations that offer frontline services to a broad range of sex

workers. Campaigners for criminalisation of our livelihood *do not speak for people in the sex industry* and seem to prefer their discussions of this issue to take place undisturbed by contributions from current sex workers as they respond negatively when we challenge their entitlement to legislate on what should happen in our bodies and our bank accounts. The flurry of justification as to why our voices should be ignored generally takes the form of personal attacks on individuals<sup>xxi</sup> and misrepresenting what we say<sup>xxii</sup> rather provision of any evidence that contradicts our statements about the sex industry.

In the UK, sex worker organisations include the English Collective of Prostitutes, International Union of Sex Workers, Scot-PEP, Sex Worker Open University and xtalk<sup>xxiii</sup>; most frontline services that work with a broad range of sex workers are members of the UKNSWP<sup>xxiv</sup>. At a European level, Sex Work Europe brings together approximately 60 organisations, most sex worker lead, and the NSWP numbers several hundred members from across the globe.<sup>xxv</sup>

It is only when those most affected, we who experience the day to day reality of the sex industry, are included that it will be possible to create policies that reflect that reality – and policies that solve problems are based in reality and on evidence; policies that promote equality are based on respect for human rights and women's bodily autonomy and the inclusion of marginalised groups.

### **What you can do:**

- give your constituents who are sex workers a way to contact you safely by enabling them to do so anonymously and confidentially
- familiarise yourself with the work and publications of organisations lead by sex workers

## **7. base policy and practice on evidence and in reality**

As parliamentarians, you are aware that media coverage of an issue is often lead by drama and sensationalism rather than balanced, nuanced and factual detail. Despite this, many peoples' opinions and beliefs about the sex industry are based principally on media coverage and fictional portrayals. Due to stigma and criminalisation, few sex workers are "out" about their occupation to their friends and family, let alone wider acquaintance. The IUSW hopes to see more light than heat in the debates on this issue by campaigning for policy based on evidence and in reality, rather than on ideology, assumptions, stereotypes or dramatic individual cases.

### **What you can do:**

- familiarise yourself with the ethically produced, peer-reviewed academic evidence base relating to the UK sex industry. For example, read
  - Hilary Kinnell on policing and violence<sup>vii</sup>,
  - Graham Scambler on stigma and HIV<sup>xxvi</sup>,
  - Teela Sanders on men who pay for sex<sup>xxvii</sup>,
  - Lin Lean Lim or Julia O'Connell Davidson on trafficking and demand for sex<sup>xxviii</sup>
  - Nic Mai on migrants and trafficking or Platt & Grenfell on migrants and health<sup>xxix</sup>
  - Helen Ward and Sophie Day on a three-decade study of sex workers in west London.<sup>xxx</sup>
  - Tracey Sagar or O'Neill & Campbell or Harding & Hamilton on street sex work<sup>xxxi</sup>
  - Jay Levy, Pro-Sentret, or Monica Idestrom (Sweden's National AIDS Committee Officer) on the consequences of criminalising clients<sup>xxxii</sup>
  - Gillian Abel or Susan Coppedge on decriminalisation in New Zealand<sup>xxxiii</sup>
- In dealings with campaigners on these issues, ask them about the evidence base for their opinions (see immediately following for information on assessing data quality and for some examples of misrepresentation of evidence)
- With all research, consider whether

- has it been produced ethically (and perhaps been scrutinised by a university or NHS Ethics Committee)? <sup>xxxiv</sup> (for example, one publication from an organisation lobbying for criminalisation of clients has been condemned for lying to research subjects so they were not able to give informed consent <sup>xxxv</sup>)
- is the methodology transparent? What is the sample size and the recruitment process? Can it be considered typical of the entire subject population?
- if you are reading a publication by a campaigning organisation, do they quote academic sources or political ones? peer-reviewed journal articles or material from newspapers and magazines?
- do they quote research which provides original data, or from secondary, tertiary or yet further removed sources which refer to original research? <sup>xxxvi</sup>
- where material is quoted, is it accurately represented? For example, Demand Change, the campaign for criminalisation run by Object and Eaves (which also operates under the names Poppy Project, Lilith, Scarlet Centre and others) claims "75% of women in prostitution became involved when they were children" <sup>xxxvii</sup> but supports this assertion with a paper that states clearly it concerns "forty-six women, all of whom had become involved in prostitution before they were 18" thus *by definition excluding* women who entered prostitution as adults. <sup>xxxviii</sup>

Incidentally, the expert whose work is distorted to serve an ideological agenda she does not share concludes "While young people are denied legitimate means to resist destitution, or to achieve economic and domestic autonomy, prostitution will continue to appear as a rational economic choice." (see our point 2, "address causes, not symptoms".)

- do the authors generalise from a sub-section or particular group to the population as a whole? do the authors present themselves transparently – for example declaring conflicts of interest or affiliation to an organisation that lobbies for policy change on this issue?

## 8. be aware of public opinion

Although many clamorous voices loudly promote their personal belief that "prostitution is violence against women," <sup>xxxix</sup> <sup>xl</sup> <sup>xli</sup> these views do not reflect public opinion. Academically stringent surveys are rare, but responses to newspaper and television polls consistently show 70-85% in favour of recognising that sex workers have a right to exist and to work together without being criminalised. An IPSOS Mori survey found mixed attitudes to prostitution in general but 59% agreeing that "prostitution is a perfectly reasonable choice that women should be free to make". <sup>xlii</sup> A survey of readers of *The Independent* revealed that 73% believed prostitution should not be illegal and 64% thought brothels should not be criminalised; 80% thought decriminalisation of brothels would increase safety. <sup>xliii</sup> 72% of ITV's *This Morning* audience voted for complete decriminalisation of prostitution <sup>xliiv</sup> and 71% told *The Big Questions* (BBC1) that prostitution should be accepted. Most recently, a Daily Mirror article on criminalisation of clients asked "Should buying sex be a crime?" and 85% responded "no". <sup>xliv</sup>

### What you can do:

- ask organisations which lobby for policy change on the sex industry if they consult with current sex workers or the general public and any limitations of such data

## 9. promote decriminalisation

UK law on prostitution, as in many countries, is complicated, ineffective in targeting exploitation or abuse and in breach of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 7, 20, 21 and 23).

Although it is legal for an individual to sell sex, indoors, almost every way of doing so in contact with a third party creates a risk of prosecution; on street, women fear the police due to criminalisation of both sex workers and our clients. UK law further ensures that victims

of trafficking in the sex industry are entirely surrounded by people who risk arrest if they contact the authorities to report concerns that someone they know is being exploited.

The law prevents us from working together, deters us from calling the police (so we do not have full protection of the law and predators go unpunished) and decreases our access to needed services for fear of stigma, discrimination or arrest. Criminalisation is widely acknowledged as a driver for HIV<sup>xlvi xlvi xlvi xlvi xlvi</sup> and of violence<sup>li</sup>: a review of 800 studies found widespread violence towards sex workers including “homicide; physical and sexual violence, from law enforcement... unlawful arrest and detention [and] discrimination in accessing health services.”<sup>liii</sup>

Globally, hundreds of organisations, comprising hundreds of thousands of individual sex workers, say that decriminalisation is essential to enable people who sell sex - whether by choice, circumstance or coercion - to live and work more safely, to effectively tackle exploitation and abuse and to permit individuals to more easily exit prostitution if and when we choose to do so.<sup>liii</sup>

Decriminalisation of consensual adult sexual behaviour does not create some kind of “Wild West” free for all: it does not remove legislation against public order offences, noise, nuisance, crimes of violence, rape, extortion or coercion. Neither does it condone or promote prostitution – any more than decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1967 was an indication of state encouragement of sex between men. Neither does decriminalisation impose a disproportionate and distorting legislative burden like legalised regimes. These consistently fail, whether in – for example - Nevada, Germany or the Netherlands: legalisation inevitably creates two tier systems with individuals who are unable or unwilling to comply (e.g., women who wish to work independently, rather than be indentured to a Nevada brothel) still criminal and more vulnerable.

Decriminalisation promotes effective and humane working practices within the industry, enabling individuals who sell sex to avail themselves of the protection of the law and occupational Health & Safety.<sup>liv</sup> Two cases from New Zealand illustrate the protection given by decriminalisation. In one, a brothel-based sex worker won a sexual harassment case against the brothel owner, being awarded damages against the man, who no longer owns the premises in which she worked.<sup>lv</sup> In another case, a client was successfully prosecuted for removing a condom during sex.<sup>lvi</sup>

This contrasts with criminalised regimes – as in the UK, US, under the “Swedish model” and in many other countries. In the US, rape of a sex worker has been dismissed by a judge as “theft of services”.<sup>lvii</sup> Sex workers in Sweden have reported rape and other abuse by police, as well as from “support services” which explicitly exclude those who do not comply with the staff agenda that they seek to leave prostitution.<sup>xxviii</sup> In one tragic case, a Swedish sex worker, “Petite Jasmine”, was deemed an unfit mother due to her choice of profession<sup>lviii</sup> and her participation in campaigns which contravened the Swedish state's view that she and her colleagues were always and only victims.<sup>lix</sup> She lost custody of their children to their father, despite his record of violence. Unless she gave up all contact with her children, Jasmine was forced to deal with her abuser who, during a custodial visit, stabbed her to death. *Jasmine's death, like so much violence sex workers endure, is a direct result of discrimination, social attitudes and criminalisation.*

**A community's worth is measured  
by the way it treats the most vulnerable. It is time for the UK to  
treat people who sell sex and adult entertainment services  
with respect and to prioritise our rights and safety.**

## About the IUSW

The International Union of Sex Workers, founded by a migrant sex worker in 1999, is a grassroots organisation that brings together people from all sectors of the sex industry in order to give voice to current, active sex workers. We have no funding and all work is by volunteers.

We are an inclusive organisation, open to everyone in the sex industry and adult entertainment – a very diverse group. The way someone makes a living is less important than whether they respect diversity of experience and support human, civil and labour rights for all within the sex industry.

Our network also includes allies who recognise that everyone in the sex industry is entitled to equal human rights and freedom from discrimination and supporters of evidence-based policy.

More important than our differences are the things we share: everyone in the sex industry lives with stigma. We all experience social exclusion. We all face vulnerability. Many of us are criminalised. So, working in solidarity, we resist attempts to divide us.

We campaign for sex workers' inclusion in decisions which affect our lives and livelihoods and for policy and practice that protects the rights and safety of everyone in the sex industry, that, in order to effectively tackle abuse and exploitation, is based on evidence and in reality, rather than ideology, assumptions, stereotypes or individual cases.

**Our principles and practice are born from our experience,  
the experience of real people within the sex industry.**



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If you are unable to locate copies of any of these documents, please contact the IUSW.

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