

Men urge Scottish Government to criminalise paying for sex to combat violence against women

On Wednesday 20 October 2021, leading male campaigners against violence against women will call on the Scottish Government to introduce legislation to deter men from paying for sex. The men calling for Government action, including a former senior police detective and the founder of a service for male victims of sexual exploitation, will be speaking at an event titled 'Men who pay for sex: how to challenge demand for prostitution' (1). The anti-violence advocates will challenge the Scottish Government for continuing to allow men to pay for sex with impunity, despite Nicola Sturgeon's government officially recognising prostitution as a form of violence against women. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Representative for combatting human trafficking will also highlight the role of demand in fuelling trafficking for sexual exploitation.

4% of men in Scotland report having paid for sex in the past five years, according to latest figures (2). 'Equally Safe', the Scottish Government's national strategy to tackle violence against women, recognises prostitution as a form of violence against women (3). However, paying for sex is currently legal in Scotland, unlike in countries such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland, France, Israel, Ireland and Northern Ireland – where paying for sex is a criminal offence but women exploited through prostitution are decriminalised.

- Men who are most likely to have paid for sex are single men aged 25-34, in professional or managerial occupations and those who report high numbers of sexual partners – according to the most recent UK-wide National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (4).
- A study by the University of Leicester in 2018 asked over 1200 sex buyers, 'Would you change your behaviour if a law was introduced that made it a crime to pay for sex?' Over half of the respondents said they would 'definitely', 'probably' or 'possibly' change their behaviour (5).
- Sweden was the first country to criminalise paying for sex but decriminalise selling sex – recognising prostitution as violence against women. Surveys conducted in 1996 and 2008 found that the proportion of men who reported paying for sex dropped from 12.7% to 7.6% (6). The most recent research on prevalence rates found that 7.5% of men had paid for sex. Just 0.8% of these men had paid for sex in the previous 12 months - the smallest proportion recorded in two decades and the lowest level in Europe (7).

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2021-22, published last month, includes a commitment to "undertake to develop a model for Scotland which effectively tackles and challenges men's demand for prostitution." (8)

Julian Heng, a health worker who founded a support service in Scotland for men who are sexually exploited, said:

"The core harm created by prostitution is the repeated submission to perform unwanted sex. Prostitution is caused by demand, fed by economic inequality and takes advantage of all forms of discrimination."

Valiant Richey, Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), said:

"If we are serious about ending trafficking, we must address its root cause - that is the demand that incentivizes it. Addressing demand is critical in both protecting victims from harm and disrupting the business model of trafficking."

Alan Caton OBE, a former Detective Superintendent of Suffolk Constabulary who led the police force's response to the murders of five women by a sex buyer in Ipswich in 2006, said:

"There is currently a minority of men in Scotland who feel entitled to sexually exploit vulnerable women by paying them for sex. My experiences in Ipswich taught me that society must never turn a blind eye to the abuses these men are committing. Men who pay for sex cause immense harms to the women they exploit, while their demand also drives a brutal sex trafficking trade.

"Prostitution is violence against women. Yet the law in Scotland currently gives men license to pay for sex. That cannot be right. It is crucial that the law sends out the unequivocal message that paying for sex is never acceptable, and that law enforcement agencies have the powers to hold perpetrators to account. At the same time, women exploited through prostitution must be decriminalised and given the support they need to leave sexual exploitation.

"To combat violence against women, we need future generations of boys to grow up in a society where they do not have a right to sexually exploit others – and where they learn that sexual consent cannot be purchased."

ENDS

Notes to editors

1) 'Men who pay for sex: how to challenge demand for prostitution' is an online event organised by A Model For Scotland*. The event is taking place at 12:00-13:00 on Wednesday 20 October 2021. The speakers are:

- Diane Martin CBE (Chair), Survivor of prostitution and sex trafficking & a Vice Chair of the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council
- Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
- Heather Williams, National Coordinator of the Women's Support Project
- Julian Heng, Founder of Open Road
- Alan Caton OBE, former Detective Superintendent of Suffolk Constabulary

*A Model for Scotland is a survivor-led alliance calling for a progressive legal model in Scotland to combat commercial sexual exploitation: www.amodelforscotland.org

Its members include the Encompass Network, Scottish Community Safety Network, Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA) and the Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

2) Source: *Natsal-3: Key findings from Scotland*, January 2015.
<https://www.natsal.ac.uk/natsal-survey/natsal-3>

3) Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/>

4) One in ten British men say they have paid for sex, University College London, 2014. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2014/nov/one-ten-british-men-say-they-have-paid-sex>

5) Beyond the Gaze: Briefing on Customers who Buy Sex Online, University of Leicester, 2018.

6) Waltman, M. (2011), Sweden's prohibition of purchase of sex: The law's reasons, impact, and potential, *Women's Studies International Forum* 34: 449-474.

7) Study on the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings, European Commission, European Union, 2016.

8) A fairer, greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22, The Scottish Government, September 2021, p.102: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22/documents/>