

Gender-Based Domination Promotes Prostitution and Sex Trafficking

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Prostitution is male violence against women, a tool used by men worldwide to oppress women and children. Promoting the legalization of prostitution fosters the idea that men have the right to buy women to satisfy men's sexual needs. Legalization therefore thwarts efforts to promote gender equality and excludes sexually exploited women and children from laws that protect human rights. Gender equality can only be achieved when men are no longer allowed to buy and sell women and children.

Gender inequality is inherent in the promotion and normalisation of prostitution. Enshrined within state legislation, men's right to buy women is a direct contradiction to a society based on gender equality.

Promoting the idea that some women must be available for sale to satisfy men's sexual needs is to create a group of women who are excluded from the protection afforded under national and international human rights law.

Monica O'Connor and Grainne Healy, "Social/Gender Equality Consequences of Trafficking and Prostitution," *The Links Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: A Briefing Handbook*. CATW-EWL 2006. Reproduced by permission.

Prostitution and trafficking promotes sexism and racism as men are encouraged to see women from poorer foreign countries as less, as "other" and as legitimate targets for exploitation.

The Dangers of Legitimation

It is not acceptable for states that call themselves democratic to legalise men's sexual exploitation of women. By legalising brothels and other prostitution related activities, these states are saying that it is right that women, and in some cases children, can and will be put up for sale, bought and consumed like any other commodity.

Legitimising prostitution will thwart efforts towards reciprocal, equal, just and empowering relationships between women and men and will retard the development of humane communities. More boys and men will be socialized to maltreat women as normal practice, thus progressively also dehumanising men. More girls and women will be drawn into prostitution, violated, and the individual and collective rights of women will be eroded.

The Swedish Government has long given priority to combating prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes. This objective is an important part of Sweden's goal for equality between women and men, at the national level as well as internationally. Gender equality will remain unattainable as long as men buy, sell and exploit women and children by prostituting them.

Where feminists seek to transform sexuality in the interests of keeping women and children safe and ending women's inequality, the libertarians seek to promote and legitimise the traditional sexuality of dominance and submission. They eroticise practices that rely on power imbalance, such as sadomasochism, butch and femme, and so-called erotica that display women's humiliation and degradation. They see themselves as

being in the so-called prosex tradition. Prosex turns out to mean prosexual dominance and submission.

The Consequences of Trafficking and Prostitution

Respect for women's bodies, and this respect's significance for our understanding of what it means to be a woman or a man and which rights that ensue, are totally dependent on if women are to be available for purchase.

We cannot dissociate prostitution from other forms of male violence against women and girls; nor from the systematic subordination by males of females in all countries around the world. In a patriarchy, male violence against women is one of the most powerful tools used to keep women and girls in a state of oppression and slavery.

Sexual exploitation preys on women and children made vulnerable by poverty and economic development policies and practices, refugee and displaced persons and on women in the migrating process. Sexual exploitation eroticises women's inequality and is a vehicle for racism and "first world" domination, disproportionately victimizing minority and "third world" women.

Currently the Internet is being used by men to promote and engage in the sexual exploitation of women. . . Men describe, often in graphic detail, their experience of using women and children. The women are completely objectified and evaluated on everything from skin colour to presence of scars and firmness of flesh. The men buying women and posting the information on the Internet see and perceive the events only from their self-interested perspective. Their awareness of racism, colonization, global economic inequalities and of course sexism is limited to how those forces affect them. A country's economic or political crisis and the accompanying poverty are advantages, which produce cheap labour for men. Often men describe how desperate the women are and how little men have to pay.