

Wendy Lyon
Feminist activist

The proposal to criminalise men who buy sex reduces a complex socio-economic issue to one of simple individual deviancy. In doing so, it ignores the underlying causes of prostitution and trafficking – and more importantly, allows those causes to be ignored by policy-makers. It also feeds into a border security agenda which is not only reactionary in nature but, by limiting migrants' options, contributes to the growth of the sex industry.

The idea behind the "Nordic model" is that women only sell sex because men demand it (male sellers and female buyers are invisible in this framework). Penalise away demand, and supply will also disappear. Missing from this analysis is any explanation

of how sex workers will compensate financially for the loss of their clients. It is as if another income source will magically appear to replace them – a strange suggestion for an ideology which assumes that women only sell sex if they lack other sources of income. The model's supporters do call for

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tution alternatives, but they do not want the law to wait around for those alternatives. Their campaign is for criminalisation now.

Also unexplained is what will become of migrants who couldn't legally take up those alternatives anyway (in Sweden, they are simply deported). In fact, the Irish anti-trafficking lobby has been mute on the subject of immigration control, though its relationship to the sex trade is indisputable: migrants often turn to sex work because other jobs are denied to them, and to traffickers because they cannot cross borders on their own. The silence around this issue gives states a pass to continue their fortress-building. At the same time, rhetoric about the proportion of migrants in the sex industry – aimed at stoking trafficking fears – serves also to tacitly endorse a view of migrant sex workers as undesirables who need to be kept out by border controls.

Irish support for the Nordic model is largely based on misinformation about the law's actual effects. Contrary to advocates' claims, it has not been shown to reduce the amount of prostitution or trafficking. Sweden saw an initial drop in street prostitution, but as its government admitted in a recent UN submission, this is "only a fraction of total prostitution". No research exists into the extent of the indoor trade. Sex trafficking also continues in Sweden unabated; at

least two large rings have been prosecuted in 2012 alone. Contrary claims made by a Swedish police inspector while visiting Ireland last year were contradicted shortly afterward by the head of his own department.

The true consequences of the law are far more serious. The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare reported in 2008 that

sex workers were increasingly turning to pimps to shield their trade from police interference. According to the Pro Centre, which provides health services to Oslo sex workers, there has been a sharp rise in the number presenting with sexually-transmitted infections. The number of clients deterred by the law is not enough to stop prostitution, but it is enough to create a demand/supply imbalance that favours buyers – so sex sellers have less bargaining power and can no longer afford to refuse dangerous clients or practices. The Pro Centre states bluntly that it is the most marginalised sex workers who are suffering under the law.

For those who consider it wrong to pay for sexual services, penalising this behaviour may satisfy a craving for (retributive) justice, while also sending a socially desirable message. From a left perspective, however, this cannot justify placing already-vulnerable people in worsened straits while failing to address, and even reinforcing, the structural factors at the root of the problem. The focus must shift from carceral to socio-economic solutions, including guaranteed income, protection of the rights of all workers (native and migrant, in every sector), and an end to the global wealth disparities that compel migration even as they lead states to narrow the safe and legal options for it.

To read more of Wendy's views visit: feministire.wordpress.com

