Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Why is prostitution a problem? What is CARE doing? How can I respond?

care.org.uk/prostitution
Why is prostitution a problem?

Exploitation within the sex industry affects some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Often it is a person’s lack of choice that forces them to ‘choose’ prostitution. Some get involved in selling sexual services at a young age and many have experienced abuse in childhood or have spent time in local authority care. Studies show that high numbers of women in prostitution have experienced coercion from a partner, pimp or relative and that incidents of violence are much higher than in the rest of society. Drug and alcohol misuse is a problem for some and chaotic lifestyles make it difficult for people to leave prostitution without support.

There is also a link between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. Whilst most people in prostitution have not been trafficked, many women and children are trafficked to provide sexual services amounting to 62% of all trafficking victims in the EU.

We recognise that some people say they are in prostitution by choice. However, when seen as a whole, prostitution clearly contributes to social injustice. As Christians, we believe that God has compassion on those who are most vulnerable and that we have a responsibility to work for a world where people are protected from exploitation and can find hope and restoration.
What needs to change?

1. **Addressing demand**

At its most fundamental level prostitution is driven by the demand of those, mostly men, who pay for sexual services. Tackling the demand for paid sexual services and addressing the market for prostitution is crucial to preventing the exploitation of vulnerable people.

Sweden, Norway, and Iceland have introduced laws to criminalise the purchase of sexual services, which they report to be effective in changing attitudes towards commercial sexual exploitation and reducing levels of prostitution and trafficking. More recently Canada, Northern Ireland and France have adopted this approach in 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively. It has also been endorsed by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.

2. **Support to exit**

There is evidence that many people involved in prostitution would like to stop, but they face significant barriers to doing so. In particular, they need tailored drug treatment, safe and supported housing, mental health support, debt counselling and access to education and training programmes to help them find and sustain employment. Although there are some excellent support programmes, many are underfunded and others do not provide a fully holistic range of support. Greater provision of specialist exit support is badly needed.
What is CARE doing?

Over a number of years, CARE has been calling for legislation on prostitution that offers greater justice for the vulnerable majority, by making it a criminal offence to purchase sexual services. We welcomed the adoption of this approach in Northern Ireland in 2015 and were pleased to act as the principal advisor to Lord Morrow who brought the law to the Northern Ireland Assembly. We continue to engage with politicians in the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments encouraging them to follow this same model. We are also calling on governments across the UK to take a more strategic approach to supporting people to exit prostitution, including funding for more services to provide such support.

‘Loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free … then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear … you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I.’

from Isaiah 58: 6-9 (NIV)
Claire’s story*

Claire grew up in a loving family, but in her late teens found herself in the big city a long way from home, having been greatly misled about the circumstances she was coming to. Soon her money ran out and the pressure to get involved in prostitution began. Claire went from being a happy trusting girl to finding herself standing in a penthouse being looked over by a madam. Claire was involved in the supposed ‘high end’ of prostitution in London but experienced degrading and violent behaviour from ‘clients’ and at one point she was trafficked from the UK to a prostitution ring in another country. Just before she managed to escape from prostitution Claire was so traumatised by her experiences that she had frequent panic attacks and lost the ability to speak, communicating only through written notes.

Sharon’s story*

Both Sharon’s parents were heroin users; her mother was also a manic depressive. Sharon grew up in and out of the care home system. Aged 17, a boyfriend introduced her to drugs and encouraged her into prostitution to fund both of their addictions. Working on the street selling sex, Sharon, now 25, has experienced severe violence, been raped many times and made to perform degrading acts with ‘clients’. Her drug habit and chaotic lifestyle have left her homeless many times and forced to have sex in order to have a roof over her head. Her desperation for drug money means she often has unprotected sex and has contracted several sexually transmitted infections. She has given birth to two children, both adopted as babies.
How can I respond?

**You can stay informed** about what the Government is doing by signing up to our Loose the Chains emails: care.org.uk/loosethechains-signup

**You can write to your MP and your MSPs, AMs or MLAs** or arrange to meet them in person, either alone or with other supporters. Our Loose the Chains emails will highlight specific issues to discuss.

**You can contact your Police and Crime Commissioner** (in England and Wales) to encourage them to make addressing demand for prostitution a key priority in your area.

**You can pray** for survivors and those continuing to experience exploitation, for local organisations providing support for people in and seeking to exit prostitution, and for police and politicians as they work to prevent and reduce the harm of commercial sexual exploitation.

**You can find more** information on this issue at: care.org.uk/prostitution

@loosethechains  /loosethechainsuk

---

More Information

If you would like more information about Commercial Sexual Exploitation, please go to our website or contact the CARE Public Affairs Team on 020 7233 0455 or at ltc@care.org.uk

CARE is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales at 53 Romney Street, London, SW1P 3RF. Company No: 3481417, Charity No: 1066963, Scottish Charity No: SC038911

June 2016
All photos: generic library images. *These are the stories of real people whose names have been changed to protect their privacy.