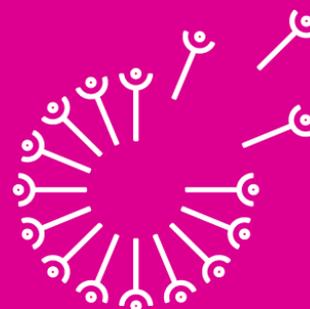


In Opposition of The Nordic Model

Evidence against the Sexual Exploitation Bill 2019-21

Dee & Blue

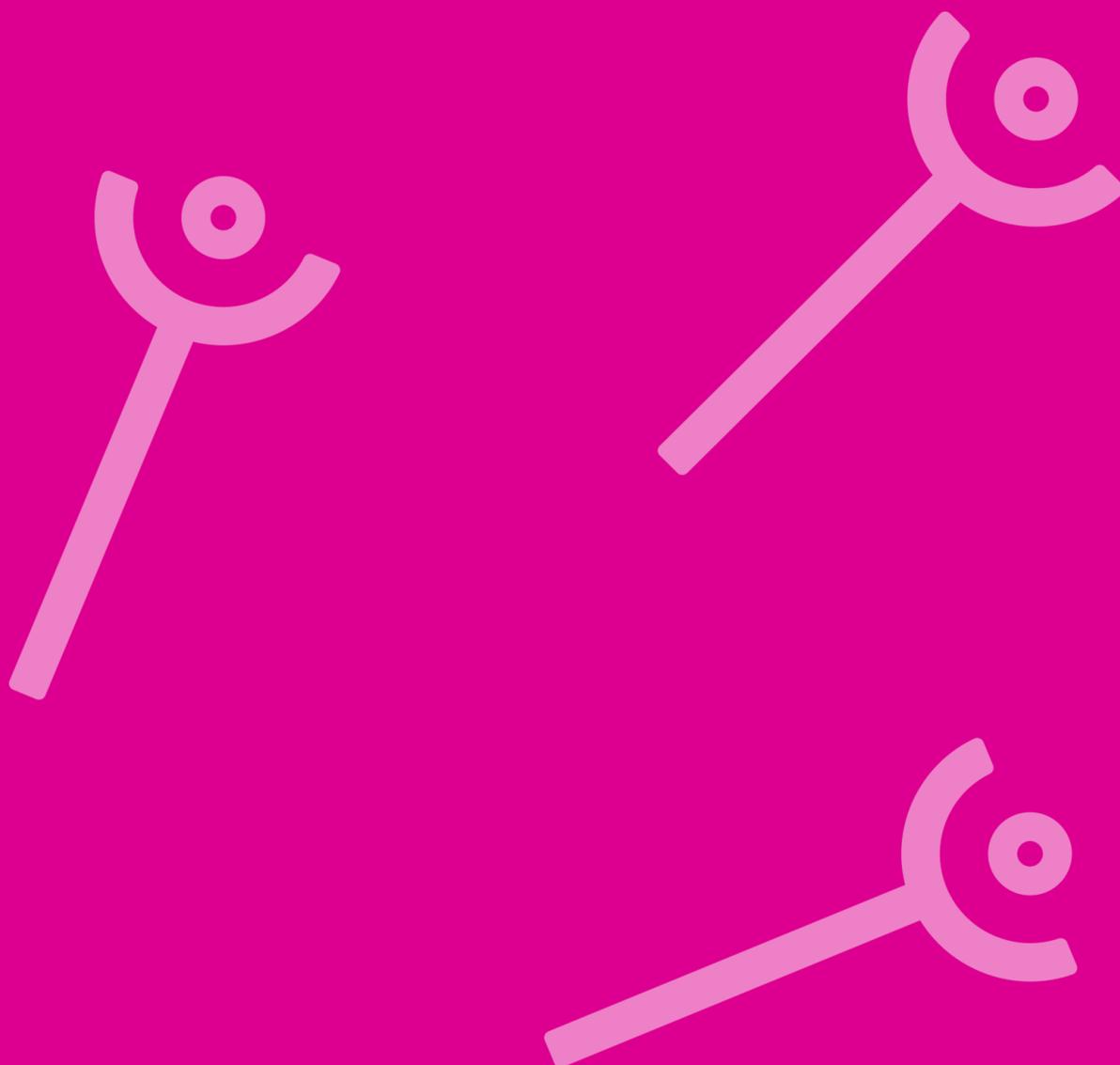
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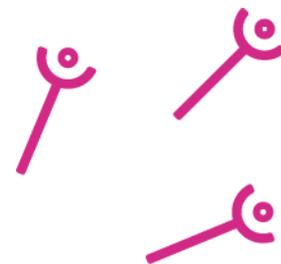


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This position paper was co-created by Fulfilling Lives Lambeth Southwark Lewisham and experts by experience Dee and Blue. We would like to say a huge thank you to Dee and Blue for sharing their experience and guiding the development of this position paper. We hope that decision-makers are guided by their insights.

Dee and Blue are Experts by Experience who have worked alongside Fulfilling Lives Lambeth Southwark Lewisham. Their voice, experience and opinions has been the key driver behind this paper.

All quotes throughout this report are from women with lived experience of sex work.

About Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham

Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is part of the National Fulfilling Lives Programme. This is a £112 million investment over 8 years supporting people who are experiencing multiple disadvantage; the people we work with have a combination and interconnected needs of mental ill-health, are homeless/or at risk of homelessness, substance use and/or contact with the criminal justice system.

We acknowledge that the system doesn't work for everyone – particularly people who experience greater levels of disadvantage. 57% of the people we work with are women who experience high levels of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and violence.

Certitude is the lead agency of the programme, delivering the programme in partnership with Thames Reach and strategic partners; South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and the three boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham.

Our three core aims are:

- **Co-production:** Giving equal value to the voices of both the decision makers and the people we support, so that all opinions are heard and respected equally.
- **Service delivery:** Working alongside people and services learning and testing different interventions to change the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantages for the better – now and in the future.
- **System change:** Making an impact on the way people are supported - by influencing policy and practice, locally and nationally.

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Summary of position

Fulfilling Lives Lambeth Southwark Lewisham oppose the Sexual Exploitation Bill 2019-21 and the introduction of the Nordic Model because we believe that it puts women involved in sex work at greater risk of harm and exploitation.

We believe that the voices of women involved in sex work should be at the heart of policy development and given an equal voice in legislative change.

“Any guys that are real narcissists and abusers - there are men out there who do wicked things to women – I believe The Nordic model will just be a gateway for them to plan and carry out, get their targets more easier.”

Introduction

In the UK, the exchange of sexual services for money is legal, although a number of related activities are crimes. [The Sexual Exploitation Bill 2019-21](#)¹ would criminalise paying for sex and decriminalise selling sex; this is known as The Nordic Model.

The Nordic Model has caused much concern for people involved in sex work and within organisations supporting them. There is evidence that The Nordic Model increases violence towards people involved in sex work, and pushes sex work further underground, making it harder and more dangerous for people involved in the sex industry².

Fulfilling Lives Lambeth Southwark Lewisham work with women experiencing multiple disadvantage, many of who are involved in sex work. Those involved with sex work may do so from different locations, including from the street, in hotels, brothels and crack-houses. In our experience, women will move between different locations and types of sex work but the primary experience of many women we support is street-based. The position outlined in this paper builds on our experience of working with this group of women, and the experiences shared by experts by experience.

We do not believe that all sex work is a form of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) but that women involved in sex work, particularly street-based sex work, are vulnerable to violence, harm, exploitation and abuse. We believe this situation would get worse with the implementation of the Nordic Model.

Current legislation

Currently in England, the sale of sex is legal, but a number of related activities, including soliciting in a public place, kerb crawling, owning or managing a brothel, pimping and pandering, are crimes. We believe that these current laws around sex work do not protect the safety of those involved in sex work. Women involved in sex work experience frequent abuse and exploitation, which they often do not report. There is often a deep mistrust of the police. This is due to previous negative experiences and

¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2813>

² <https://prostitutescollective.net/briefing-no-nordic-model/> ; <https://www.swarmcollective.org/blog/the-swedish-model>

sometimes because women have previous criminal records or may be using illegal drugs.

"The thing is I couldn't report this to the police, When I got raped in a hotel in the city – I had reports and warrants out for me, I couldn't report this guy who had raped me, the fear – I would have ended up in a cell so I just had to leave it."

"The law doesn't keep us safe now at all, we can't go to the police, we aren't protected like that...we put ourselves on the radar if we aren't on the radar already."

"I won't report to the police, they don't care they just care about their statistics, they just look at us as if we are more paperwork for them."

"What will it take for women to get the support we need – a broken face, a broken leg, a death – police don't care about us."

"We need more things like Ugly Mugs³ where you can report through them rather than to the police."

"To keep myself safe, I used to walk with a screwdriver, I used to walk with pepper spray but then I found out its classed as a firearm. That's illegal though. I did try to take those measures but then I got arrested for having offensive weapon, clip knife, little scissors. I used to walk with these things to try to keep safe. So, the women can end up being prosecuted because she's trying to save her own life."

Working alone puts those involved in sex work at higher risk. Although current legislation allows for a Maid or a Housekeeper to assist sex workers and increase safety when working indoors, there is a risk that the police may believe the Maid is sex working or be accused of running a brothel.

"When I had to work on my own I was definitely more at risk. When I was with the girls they'd take registration down of cars and remember it in case we never came back and stuff - I felt much more safe."

"I look back and I think 'oh my god' - the risks that I took because I didn't have a maid. In other places I did have a maid – she'd get 10% of what I earnt. I felt safe then because I had a maid."

"I used to pretend there was someone else there in the flat if I felt a bit unsafe – I could have been murdered so many times on my own."

³ For more information see: <https://uglymugs.org/um/>

The impact of criminalisation of purchasing sex

Criminalising the purchase of sex – the approach taken by the Nordic model – means that buyers of sexual services would be offending and so the practicalities around transactions often become less safe for those involved in sex work. For example, buyers of sexual services may request to meet in more isolated or hidden places and may use false identifying details about themselves; this results in less protection for the person involved in sex work. If a purchaser of sex has the intention of exploiting women involved in sex work, making the purchase of sex illegal will not deter them.

Criminalising the purchase of sex gives more bargaining power to the buyer as they are already committing a criminal act, which could result in those involved in sex work having less agency to choose and making it more difficult for those involved in sex work to stick to their boundaries such as condom use and pay rates. There is evidence that this happens from countries that have adopted the Nordic Model such as France, Sweden and Ireland.

"The ones [people who purchase sex] who want to abuse women will do it anyway."

"I got raped – I had to get out the car and this guy was taking me the wrong way he had all these surgical knives on him, I was kidnapped on a couple of occasions."

"I've had similar experiences – I was in the car and the man stopped to buy cigarettes, something said to me that something wasn't right, I just went under the seat and there was these chains."

"Already there is desperation and violence – what's going to happen [with The Nordic Model] – its going to get worse. There would be more deaths, more unreported crimes."

There is also evidence that "disrupting demand increases competition between sex workers and increases risky behaviours" (Spice, 2007⁴); this is reflected in the experiences shared by women we work with.

Women already take great risks physically, mentally and emotionally to make money whether it is for drugs, to support children or for general living costs. The Nordic Model pushes people further underground and will make women more desperate; in desperation people take more risks, increasing the likelihood of harm. Men purchasing sex exploit this desperation and it exacerbates the power imbalance between those selling and those purchasing sex.

⁴ Spice, W. (2007) 'Management of sex workers and other high-risk groups.' *Occupational Medicine*, 57, pp322-328

"Some of the risks I taken was mad and it's just because I needed the money."

"I think sex working at any level has its risk."

"I never would have thought it would end – it was quite alright in terms of money, but as the addiction deepened – you take more risks – but the more money I made the more I smoked – without being high I couldn't do it. I had to be high to do it."

"Men think they can come and take any girl off the roads – I see girls out there the standards have dropped, they think a tenner is a lot of money and you should be grateful. When women are desperate men have more control."

"Also what I noticed is that punters wouldn't go with girls who looked nice or smelled nice – they would rather go with girls who were desperate and didn't care – they could do whatever you want with them for relatively small amount of money."

There is evidence from countries that have introduced the Nordic Model that it increases the risk those involved in sex work.

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects⁵ report (2017) outlines that:

"Sex workers in France reported...that the introduction of the Nordic model saw 'clients' bargaining power increasing, rates decreasing, and a need for [sex workers] to take more risks, to be more mobile and available, and to adapt to clients' demands....Research in Canada and the UK has shown that criminalising clients undermines sex workers' ability to implement safety measures, and reduces negotiation time for street-based sex workers."

There is also evidence that the Nordic Model can increase social stigma for people involved in sex work, and increased barriers to accessing healthcare, with increased discrimination from healthcare providers (Global Network of Sex Work Projects, 2017).

⁵ Global Network of Sex Work Projects (2017) *Challenging the introduction of the Nordic Model*. Available at: https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/sg_to_challenging_nordic_model_prf03.pdf

Recommendations

Based on the evidence outlined throughout this position paper, we believe that the Nordic Model should not be adopted as it will put those involved in sex work in greater risk of harm and takes away choice and control.

We believe that legislation should take steps to better protect those involved in sex work from abuse and exploitation.

We believe it is essential to listen to those involved in sex work and that law should be based on what they want and need.

We believe that further attention and resource is needed to address the barriers and challenges faced by women experiencing multiple disadvantage and who are involved in street-based sex work, to ensure they have access to appropriate support and services.

We are calling for:

1. Access to trauma, gender and culturally informed service provision

Steps must be taken to ensure that women experiencing multiple disadvantage have access to trauma, gender and culturally informed support. Services must recognise the trauma that women have experienced, respond to the impact trauma can have and that interactions with the system can re-traumatise. Services must understand the gendered experiences of these women and respond accordingly and consider individual's specific experiences depending on their cultural context. Services must develop and embed informed approaches and practice.

2. More support including drug and alcohol treatment

"If you want to help people you need more access to drug treatment"

It is essential to provide support for women around the factors leading them to become involved in sex work, especially drug and alcohol use. Often, women experience barriers to accessing drug and alcohol services such as appointment times, male-dominated environments and the limited availability of detox and

rehab places. Our ambition is to make services easier to access by working alongside people who need, deliver and commission these services.

3. Access to safe routes for reporting incidents

Women often do not feel safe in reporting violence and exploitation to the police and alternatives such as National Ugly Mugs should be promoted and made available and accessible to enable women to report incidences. Safe and alternative routes for reporting are important to ensure women's safety, while holding perpetrators to account.

4. Embedding co-production

Coproduction must be embedded to ensure that the voice of those with lived experience is central in the development of policy, strategy and legislation change. We are determined to create a level playing field so that all opinions

and experiences are respected to shape, design, evaluate and govern services and policy.

Further information

For further information please go to our website (www.fulfillingliveslslondon.org)

For further Fulfilling Lives Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham evidence and learning relating to women's experience of multiple disadvantage see our recently published response to the [Government's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy consultation](#)⁶.

We will soon be launching a report outlining the experiences and challenges faced by women involved in street-based sex work and the barriers faced to accessing services.

⁶ <https://fulfillingliveslslondon.org/violence-against-women-and-girls-vawg-call-for-evidence/>