



Behind Closed Doors

Organised sexual exploitation in England and Wales

An inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade

2018

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May 2018

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade is a cross-party group working to end commercial sexual exploitation.

www.appgprostitution.uk

Acknowledgements

The APPG on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade would like to thank the individuals and organisations that contributed to this inquiry by providing oral evidence and written submissions, participating in interviews, hosting visits by representatives of the inquiry and responding to information requests. The inquiry was supported by UK Feminista - Secretariat of the APPG on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade.

Foreword



Technology is changing every aspect of our lives. But in the world of prostitution, it has directly led to phenomenon of ‘pop up’ brothels; disrupting patterns that have stood for years. In short, the internet is changing the way that sex is sold, leading to fresh models of exploitation.

In light of recent media reports into ‘pop-ups’, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade sought to investigate how off-street prostitution is changing.

In the course of our Inquiry, we took evidence from half of all police forces in England and Wales – accompanying officers on brothel visits, speaking with police leaders, as well as taking evidence from those that sell sex - to build up the most comprehensive contemporary picture of the nature of off-street prostitution in this country.

That evidence makes for stark reading.

Organised crime groups increasingly dominate the sexual exploitation of women through prostitution, regularly moving women around temporary brothel premises, exhorting a high degree of coercion over them as they do.

Pop-up brothels are changing migration patterns with huge numbers of women, particularly from Eastern Europe, being brought in by these groups to service British men who have an expectation of an absolute right to buy sex.

A handful of explicit prostitution procurement websites enable this trade, making sizeable profits, directly benefitting from the

exploitation of others. But rental landlords, online booking companies, and hotel sites all indirectly profit from the practice as exploiters take advantage of poor safeguards to hire new sites for pop-ups.

The result is a trade that is organised, industrialised and highly damaging for those whose consent is purchased. In this report, we offer practical solutions, building on two previous reports that looked at the right legal settlement on prostitution, and on how to implement an effective sex buyer law.

The pattern of commercial sexual exploitation is changing, but the challenge to lawmakers remains the same as it ever was - to take action to reduce the scale and impact of off-street prostitution and end demand for the trafficking of women into and around the United Kingdom.

Because the lesson of this Inquiry is that what goes on ‘Behind Closed Doors’ should concern us all.

Gavin Shuker MP
Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade

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Summary

Organised sexual exploitation

Scale and profile

The sexual exploitation of women by organised crime groups is widespread across the UK. Third party exploiters, including traffickers and brothel owners, dominate the off-street sex trade, exploiting mainly non-UK national women in order to profit from the minority of men who pay for sex.

The typical model of organised sexual exploitation is characterised by its transient and dynamic nature. This can entail brothels operating for a short period of time; a regular and changing ‘supply’ of women into a single brothel; and/or women being moved around different locations to be sexually exploited. The dynamic nature of these practices means the figures available on the prevalence of organised sexual exploitation likely represent a small fraction of the true scale of the problem.

“From what we can evidence there nearly always appears to be a man or some sort of control involved. The females we encounter very rarely pay for their own advertisements. They also don’t pay for their own flights into the UK. There is clear organisation from what we have seen on our large covert operations”

– Detective Sergeant Stuart Peall,
Lancashire Police

There are at least 212 active, ongoing police operations in the UK into modern slavery cases involving sexual exploitation.

- The largest nationality group identified among potential victims is Romanian (39% of potential victims). 85% of potential victims are non-UK nationals.

- Romanian suspects constitute the largest nationality group among individuals under investigation (40% of all suspects). The second largest nationality group among suspected offenders is British.

In 2017 there were 1185 referrals of potential victims of sexual exploitation to the National Referral Mechanism; 94% of them were female.

While only a minority of police forces work to identify all brothels in their area on a consistent, ongoing basis, figures obtained in some force areas provide important insights:

- Leicestershire police visited 156 brothels, encountering 421 women, between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017. 86% of the women in the brothels were Romanian.
- Northumbria Police visited 81 brothels between March 2016 and April 2018. Of the 259 women they encountered in the brothels, 75% were from Romania. Over half of the brothels were recorded as being connected to other brothels, agencies or non- UK Organised Crime Groups.
- Greater Manchester Police (GMP) have identified 324 potential new brothel addresses since March 2015. GMP report that *“the majority of those identified reflect the hotspot areas for modern slavery in Greater Manchester.”*

- Research by the Police Foundation identified 65 brothels in Bristol over a two-year period, with over three quarters displaying links to organised crime

groups. 83% of the women identified in the brothels were non-British nationals. The largest nationality group was Romanian.

Modus operandi

While the size and structure of organised crime groups involved in sexual exploitation varies, what unites them is their objective of obtaining money from men who are willing to pay to gain sexual access to a woman's body. This requires sourcing and retaining women, ensuring law enforcement agencies do not prohibitively infringe on their activities, and advertising to sex buyers.

Recruitment and control of victims:

- Methods used to recruit women into the sex trade include deception, coercion and the exploitation of pre-existing vulnerabilities.
- Tactics used to exert ongoing control over women include: debt bondage; sexual and physical violence; threats; surveillance; and isolation. Many of these tactics, used individually and collectively, are examples of coercive control.
- The controlling tactics used by third party exploiters serve to decrease the likelihood that women will disclose what is happening to them during any initial contact with external agencies.

detection and maintaining control over the women being sexually exploited.

- Organised crime groups also exploit women in so-called 'massage parlours' – commercial premises that masquerade as legitimate businesses; by transporting women to sex buyers at private addresses and hotels; and by requiring women to solicit sex buyers by standing on the street.

"Adult services websites represent the most significant enabler of sexual exploitation in the UK."

– The Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre - a multi-agency intelligence unit established by policing, HMG and the National Crime Agency in 2017.

Locations for sexual exploitation:

- The most common model of operation used by organised crime groups engaged in sexual exploitation involves setting up temporary, so-called 'pop-up' brothels in residential properties.
- A recurring report from police forces was of organised crime groups moving women around different properties and/or operating a 'revolving door' of women into one or a network of properties. This supports the objectives of avoiding police

Prostitution procurement websites:

- Organised crime groups typically advertise women to sex buyers on prostitution procurement websites. The sites charge fees to the individual placing the advert while being free to use by sex buyers. The sex buyer contacts the 'seller' directly via a mobile phone number provided on the advert.
- It was reported to this inquiry that Lancashire Police discovered that a man being investigated for sex trafficking had

spent so much money placing adverts of women on one prostitution procurement website – Vivastreet – totalling £25,000, that the website gave the man his own account manager.

- The owners and operators of prostitution procurement websites directly facilitate and profit from the prostitution of others.

"In the vast majority of cases males paying for sex will give no thought to where the woman has come from or what circumstances have lead her into prostitution."

– Detective Constable Julie Currie,
Modern Slavery and Kidnap Unit,
Metropolitan Police Service

— Combating organised sexual exploitation

Britain must become a hostile place for sex traffickers and other third party profiteers of sexual exploitation. This requires a holistic approach that puts prevention at its heart, while mobilising all available measures to disrupt and robustly respond to sexual exploitation happening now.

Recommendations

Prevent:

- The Government should combat the demand that drives sexual exploitation by making paying for sex a criminal offence in all locations.

Disrupt:

- The Government should review and update the law to hold prostitution procurement websites legally accountable for facilitating and profiting from sexual exploitation.
- The Government should establish a national register of landlords and issue guidance on preventing sexual exploitation for the short-term letting sector.

Respond:

- All police forces, supported by national law enforcement agencies, should prioritise the development of a robust, strategic response to organised sexual exploitation.
- The Government should remove the criminal offence of soliciting in a street or public space for the purpose of 'selling' sex.

Introduction

The trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation is increasingly recognised as a global human rights crisis. The need for Governments to respond has been reflected in a growing body of laws and treaties adopted over the past two decades at a national, regional and international level.

Sex trafficking is also a highly gendered crisis: the people who are exploited are overwhelmingly women¹, and the people who pay to sexually abuse them are overwhelmingly men. Indeed, underpinning the transportation of women across and within borders for sexual exploitation² are the attempts of organised crime groups³ and other third party exploiters to profit from the willingness of some men to pay for sexual access to women's bodies. The language used in this report reflects the gendered nature of organised sexual exploitation.

Third-party enabling and profiteering from commercial sexual exploitation is prohibited in England and Wales under laws that preclude brothel-keeping⁴, pimping and trafficking. There have also been recent national initiatives to increase the political and policing focus on the issue of trafficking and modern slavery, including the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the establishment of the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit.

"Intelligence suggests that organised crime groups (OCGs) are involved in sexual exploitation to a greater degree than other forms of slavery."

– Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre, a multi-agency intelligence unit established by policing, HMG and the National Crime Agency in 2017⁵

However, in 2017 the National Crime Agency reported that modern slavery and human trafficking are "*far more prevalent than previously thought*"⁶ and that previous estimates of 10,000-13,000 victims are the "*tip of the iceberg*". Similarly, crime figures relating to commercial sexual exploitation likely represent a tiny fraction of the problem: in 2016-17 there were 99 prosecutions for controlling prostitution and 90 prosecutions for brothel-keeping offences in the whole of England and Wales⁷, yet research in 2016 identified over 65 brothels linked to 74 offenders over a two year period in one city alone.⁸

There have also been growing reports of organised crime groups sexually exploiting women around the UK in so-called 'pop-up' brothels - a term commonly used to describe brothels which are set up for a short period of time in residential properties.⁹

In response to concerns about 'pop-up' brothels and the true scale and nature of organised sexual exploitation in the UK, in 2017 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade launched an inquiry. The inquiry sought to establish the scale and nature of the problem, who is involved and what action is required to tackle it.

The inquiry obtained evidence via: interviews with half of all police forces in England and Wales; accompanying police forces on brothel outreach visits - which involved discussions with potential victims and offenders; interviews with non-governmental organisations; oral evidence hearings; a Freedom of Information request issued to police forces; an open call for written evidence; and a literature review.

Section 1

Organised Sexual Exploitation

Prevalence

The sexual exploitation of women by organised crime groups is widespread across the UK.

Evidence obtained by this inquiry suggests that the off-street sex trade is highly organised, and that the model of organisation is typically characterised by its transient and dynamic nature. This can entail brothels operating from a particular premises for a short period of time; a regular and changing 'supply' of women into a single brothel; and/or women being moved around different locations for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The majority of commercial sexual exploitation takes place in off-street premises. The inquiry received some reports, however, of exploiters moving women between both street- and brothel-based sexual exploitation.

Organised crime groups were repeatedly cited by police forces during the course of this inquiry as playing a central, controlling role in the off-street sex trade.

"From what we can evidence there nearly always appears to be a man or some sort of control involved. The females we encounter very rarely pay for their own advertisements. They also don't pay for their own flights into the UK. There is clear organisation from what we have seen on our large covert operations, this includes targeting poor areas of their native countries, paying people to be drivers of the women, paying for accommodation."

– Detective Sergeant Stuart Peall, Lancashire Police¹⁰

As of 13th April 2018 there were at least 212 active, ongoing police operations in the UK into modern slavery cases involving sexual exploitation.¹¹ In 2017 there were 1185 referrals of potential victims of sexual exploitation to the National Referral Mechanism - the national framework for identifying victims of trafficking.¹² 94% of these individuals were female. In 2016-17 there were 162 offences of trafficking for sexual exploitation for which prosecutions were commenced¹³, while prosecutions were commenced for 99 cases of controlling prostitution and 90 cases of brothel-keeping offences.¹⁴ The evidence received by this inquiry strongly indicates that these figures for investigations, potential victims and prosecuted offences represent a small fraction of the true scale of organised sexual exploitation.

A minority of police forces work to identify all brothels in their area on a consistent, ongoing basis. One police officer told the inquiry, *"There are far more brothels than we can visit."*¹⁵ However, some forces do record data on brothels in their force area in relation to safe-guarding or intelligence work.

Northumbria Police identified 81 brothels between March 2016 and April 2018, identifying 259 women in these premises in total. Over half of the brothels were recorded as being connected to other brothels, agencies or non- UK Organised Crime Groups.¹⁶

Since March 2015 Greater Manchester Police (GMP) have identified 324 potential new brothel addresses. GMP report that *"the majority of those identified reflect the hotspot areas for modern slavery in Greater Manchester."*¹⁷

Leicestershire Police visited 156 premises identified as brothels between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2017.¹⁸ 421 individuals in total were spoken to during these brothel visits.

South Yorkshire Police identified 46 brothels in less than 9 months (between 1 June 2017 and 19 February 2018). Detective Sergeant Nikki Leach, from South Yorkshire Police's Anti-Slavery Unit, told the inquiry: *"I would suggest that this does not comprehensively reflect the scale of the problem. If you search on adult websites for the South Yorks area there are so many adverts that must relate to more locations as yet unidentified."*¹⁹

In 2017 North Yorkshire Police conducted outreach visits to 40 brothels.²⁰ These premises represented a fraction of the total number of premises thought to be operating as brothels in the area.

Nottinghamshire Police has a Prostitution Task Force, which is primarily tasked with dealing with on-street prostitution. However, the team has visited 37 brothels in Nottingham, as well as premises where multiple women were present 'on rotation' for the purpose of selling sex, since 2014. Constable David Hodson, of the Prostitution Task Force, told the inquiry that on the basis of these visits, *"one group was identified as being involved in the running and supply of females to ten addresses visited by the team."*

A scoping exercise by the Metropolitan Police Service in 2010 identified over 1000 brothels operating in London.²¹

Research undertaken by the Police Foundation identified 65 brothels operating in Bristol over a two-year period, with over three quarters of the brothels displaying links to organised crime groups.²²

A representative of Oxford City Hotel Watch, who has over 120 short-term rental holiday properties across Oxfordshire and

the M40 corridor, told the inquiry that over the past three years they have experienced an *"exponential increase"* in booking attempts suspected to be for the purpose of prostitution.²³ *"Depending on the time of year we may have between 5-10 attempts per month... The two channels with which we have the most issues are Booking.com and Airbnb."*

The advertising of women to sex buyers typically takes place via prostitution procurement websites. Figures previously made available by one such website, Adultwork, suggested that between 1st February 2017 and 30th April 2017 there were 18,685 active profiles for 'escorts' on the site.²⁴ On the 'Escorts and Massages' section of Vivastreet there were 8760 results listed on 6 May 2018.²⁵ The number of individual online profiles of women on prostitution websites at any one time is unlikely to directly match the number of individual women that sex buyers can potentially access to pay for sex. Multiple individuals may be contactable via the phone number on one online profile; or multiple profiles may be established for one individual.

Indicators of organised sexual exploitation can also be detected via the prostitution websites on which women are advertised to sex buyers. A pilot study by the Police Foundation of 795 profiles of individuals advertised on the prostitution website, www.adultwork.com, identified a sub-set of 78 profiles based on the numerical closeness of the phone numbers displayed on those profiles, with 31 discrete groups of varying size identifiable within that sub-set. The researchers observed that *"the majority of these online profiles showed additional indicators of being linked or vulnerability to control by a third party."*²⁶ It should be noted, however, that important additional evidence of potential third-party exploitation would be available to the website operators and owners - who currently operate with impunity (see page 18 for further details).

Cambridge brothel visit

In 2018 a representative of the inquiry accompanied police on a safeguarding visit to a brothel in Cambridgeshire. The brothel was identified via an online advertising profile of a Romanian woman recently added to the prostitution procurement website, Adultwork.

During the visit, there were immediately multiple indicators of organisation, which included the following:

- There were three young Romanian women found in the brothel, but none of them matched the image of the woman on the Adultwork profile.
- Police had visited the same flat 10 days earlier, when they had found three different Romanian women present in the flat for the purpose of prostitution.
- The phone number that was advertised on the Adultwork profile page did not correspond to any of the phones in the flat. The advertised phone number was being managed by someone external to the flat.
- When asked a series of questions by police about the organisation and operation of the brothel, including how they had each met, the women provided contradictory and changing information.
- The women initially said that they managed their own online profiles on Adultwork. However, when asked to demonstrate this, it became apparent that none of the women could access their profiles.

None of the women in the brothel disclosed information concerning the involvement of an organised crime group and declined help or assistance from the police. They were provided with emergency contact information and details of local support services. The brothel, and the third party organisers subsequently identified in connection with it, are now part of an ongoing police investigation.

Operation Ludlow

In 2017, nine men were convicted for their role in a sexual exploitation ring that trafficked young Romanian women around the North West of England and Northern Ireland.

The trafficking ring was first detected by Lancashire Police when they visited a suspected brothel in Blackburn in 2016. In the property they found two women and two of the men later convicted for trafficking. One of the men present was Florinel Mitru, the leading figure in the organised crime group. Mitru commented to police officers during the initial visit, *“Romanian girls love cock”*. He had previously been arrested in Swindon in 2014 for Human Trafficking, but was released without charge.

The activities of this organised crime group, uncovered as part of Lancashire Police’s ‘Operation Ludlow’, involved: controlling the entry of women into the UK, organising their accommodation, advertising women for sex on prostitution websites, managing and laundering the proceeds, and transporting women to and from ‘out-calls’ – whereby women were driven to private addresses and hotels to be sexually abused by sex buyers.

The organised crime group advertised the women they sexually exploited on Vivastreet – a classified ads website. In total, 11 women were identified as having been exploited by the group. However, some of the Vivastreet adverts placed by the group also included photos of women who were not identified by police.

The trafficking group exerted significant control over the women they exploited. This included issuing instructions to women during ‘outcalls’ in order to extract as much money as possible. This can be seen in the following text messages from Marius Trasca, one of the convicted traffickers, who was instructing a woman to perform sex acts that would require further payment from the sex buyer in addition to the £120 ‘hourly rate’:

Female: **“I just told him we have 10 minutes left and he asked me to stay another hour”**

Trasca: **“So he paid you?”**

Female: **“He gives me now another 120”**

Trasca: **“Ok so fucking do something to make him give you some more if you staying there anyway cause I see he has”**

[Back to results](#)
[Ads North West](#)
[Ads Lancashire](#)
[Ads Preston](#)
[Escorts and Messages Farington - PR5](#)

KELLY - 100 % Real Pictures - STOP! HERE IS YOUR LOVE
 Posted by [Rowling](#) on 21/01/2017 [Webcams \[+18\]](#)

Location North West
Lancashire
Preston
Farington - PR5

Type of ad Independent

Gender Female

Age 19 years old

Ethnicity Mixed

Language English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Portugese, Russian, Chinese, Other

Service(s)

- Massage
- Strip-tease
- Casting adult
- Role play & Fantasy
- PSE
- French Kiss
- OWO
- GFE
- WS
- Tantric Massage
- Escorting
- Domination
- "A" Levels
- DUO
- Quickie
- OW
- FETISH
- BDSM
- Dinner Date

Advert on Vivastreet of woman exploited by the trafficking group.

On a separate occasion Trasca told the woman: **"And why don't you wash him bitch, make a video so you can do me once from start to finish not just oral for fuck sake"...** **"see if you can get anything extra if not that's it".**

Lancashire Police stated that the messages recovered from Trasca's phone demonstrated *"he has total control over [the victim] and will use violence against her."*

Another member of the group, Ionut Dogaru, was found to be directing women at their appointments with sex buyers:

Read: **"I'm in"**

Sent: **"That guy said when you finish that one call him too"**

Sent: **"do them both at the same time cause that is how you drive themcrezi"**

Read: **"OK"**

Sent: **"call the other one too and stay with both"**

This direction was also evidenced in the following text conversation:

Female: **"what's my name?"**

Dogaru: **"Raluka"**

Female: **"give me the post code cause I forgot it"**

Traian Gavrilă, another member of the organised crime group, was found to have communicated directly with sex buyers to arrange appointments. For example, he received a text message saying *"How much one hour outcall including anal if you it x"*, and responded: *"Hy it's 120 hour normal services and anal it's 100 extra"*.

In December 2017 the nine members of this trafficking group were sentenced to jail terms totalling 25 years.

Text messages sent by sex buyers to women being exploited by the organised crime group:

saw your ad on vivastreet, and wonder could you do an hour and a half for £150.?

There's 4 of us. That okay? X

hi will u let me make video?

I am worried about wasting my money what if I don't cum x

Hello do you do daddy role play

Hi baby can u meet up x

Ok I want to have you. But I'm worried you won't look like the picture x

Would you mind if my best mate joins us? X

2 hours for £200. No condom x

Do you do anal or bareback baby?

How much for you and your friend for 3 people for 30minutes

will book hotel now and send you confirmation of booking as my wife's away on that date and I want to take u out all night if pics are real xx

Would you stall the whole hour or would you just leave when I'm finished?

Who is involved?

Organised crime groups

The Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre reported to the inquiry that *“The majority of offenders are male, although we see female offenders controlling brothels and acting as ‘madams’. Some of these will have started as victims of trafficking, securing a position in the hierarchy of the offending group over time.”* Research published by the European Commission notes that *“around three-quarters of traffickers found at three different stages of the Criminal Justice System across the EU-28 are male. Over two-thirds of offenders were suspected or prosecuted for trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.”*²⁷

Figures provided by the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit reveal that Romanian suspects constitute the largest nationality group among the individuals under investigation in the 212 ongoing police operations into modern slavery involving sexual exploitation in the UK (as of 13th April 2018).²⁸ This equates to 40% of all suspected offenders. The second largest nationality group represented among suspected offenders in live investigations is British - constituting 25% of suspects, followed by Chinese and Hungarian suspected offenders.

While the size of organised crime groups engaged in human trafficking varies, Europol

note that the typical organisational structure is comprised of *“loose networks linked by kinship or ethnicity with interchangeable roles amongst members... The loose structure of the criminal networks thwarts detection, especially of the leaders, even when an operational cell is identified and prosecuted.”*²⁹

Detective Chief Inspector Denise Pye, of Greater Manchester Police’s Organised Crime and Modern Slavery Coordination Unit, told the inquiry: *“In my experience as a Senior Investigator on an operation, when it comes to sexual exploitation there appears to be a business model. There is usually a main person or group of people who are top managers, if you like CEO’s, they would generally be in the country of origin of the females but visit the country where the activity is taking place. Then there are tiers of responsibility, so under that there will be managers who have responsibility of areas of the country and housing of the females, including recruitment and facilitating travel from country to country. Lower in the model there will be people who complete other lower end duties at a local level, such as removal or safekeeping of documentation from the females, arranging advertising on websites and local travel when bookings are made to hotels etc.”*

Victims

Victims of organised sexual exploitation are overwhelmingly female. Consistent with the preponderance of Romanian suspected offenders in live police operations into modern slavery involving sexual exploitation, the largest nationality group identified by the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit among potential victims is Romanian.³⁰

This cohort equates to 39% of potential victims. The next largest nationality groups represented among potential victims are Hungarian and Chinese. 85% of potential victims in current investigations into modern slavery involving sexual exploitation are non-UK nationals.

According to the Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre, *“Offenders tend to exploit victims of their own nationality, almost certainly owing to ease of access and communication upstream. British offenders represent an exception, and are found exploiting both British and non-British nationals. In cases of the latter, they can often be found to be working with offenders of other nationalities.”*³¹

Reports received from police forces to this inquiry highlighted the high representation of Romanian women among those individuals who are sexually exploited in brothels and prostitution rackets in the UK. For instance, Leicestershire police encountered a total of 421 women in the 156 brothels they visited between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017. 86% of the women were from Romania. Only one of the women (0.2%) identified in the brothels was English.

Between March 2016 and April 2018 Northumbria Police identified 81 brothels. 75% the women in the brothels were from Romania.

Research by the Police Foundation which identified 65 brothels operating in Bristol over a two year period found that 83% of the women selling sex in the brothels were non-British nationals.³² The most frequently recorded nationality was Romanian (43% of women).

An organisation that provides support services for women exploited through the sex trade in London, and conducts outreach visits to approximately 20 brothels per week, told the inquiry that the women they find being prostituted in brothels are almost exclusively non-British nationals. The most common nationalities of the women they encounter include Romanian, Hungarian, Thai and Chinese.

The inquiry obtained evidence that in some parts of the country the preponderance of Romanian women involved in off-street sexual exploitation is also reflected in street-based commercial sexual exploitation. For instance, between 1st April 2015 and 31 July 2016, 92% of women who were issued cautions for loitering/soliciting on the street in the London Borough of Redbridge were Romanian.³³

Phillipa Roberts of Hope for Justice, a charity that works with frontline agencies to identify victims of trafficking, told the inquiry that traffickers are *“very, very clever on who they are targeting. In our experience victims are targeted due to a variety of vulnerabilities which can include but are not limited to childhood trauma, unemployment, homelessness, drug or alcohol issues, homelessness, mental health issues and learning disabilities.”*

Elizabeth Flint, an Expert Witness on human trafficking and modern slavery, also stated that vulnerabilities among women that can be exploited by traffickers include, though are not limited to, *“a prior history of abuse (including child abuse), violence and/or exploitation; a prior history of neglect (physical, emotional and/or psychological) and/or of parental mental health problems or parents with substance misuse problems and chaotic lifestyles that may result from this”*.³⁴

Maria

In 2015 police identified an organised crime group operating brothels in Blackburn and Burnley. When officers went to arrest the organisers they discovered the lead member of the trafficking ring, Romanian national Gabriel Razvan Ursu, inside the Burnley brothel with a woman - Maria.

Maria initially told police officers that she was Ursu's wife and wasn't in need of help. Prior to being discovered in Burnley, Maria had also come into contact with police in East Anglia, who had visited the brothel she was in at the time as part of their human trafficking operations. Consistent with her initial response to officers in Burnley, Maria had not disclosed to police in East Anglia what was happening to her and no further action was taken.

However, after being informed by police in Burnley that Ursu had been arrested, Maria began to disclose what had happened to her. Sion Hall, former Detective Chief Inspector of Lancashire Constabulary, who was leading the police operation into Ursu's activities, recalls, *"I showed Maria a map of the UK and asked her if she had any idea where she was – and she hadn't got a clue."*³⁵

Maria had been living in her home country of Romania when *"she was tricked into prostitution by an uncle who was paid for her"*, Hall told the inquiry. Maria was then trafficked around Europe to be abused by sex buyers. *"She recalled a time where she was bartered over and subsequently sold [by traffickers]... She was present whilst this sale occurred"*. Maria was eventually brought to the UK by Ursu, and exploited in brothels around England.

Gabriel Razvan Ursu was convicted of running a brothel and living off the proceeds of prostitution. He was sentenced to four years imprisonment.

Sex buyers

Research consistently shows that the vast majority of sex buyers are male, and that this group predominantly pays to sexually access the bodies of women.

In 2014 a study of 6000 men by University College London found that 3.6% of men reported having paid for sex in the previous five years.³⁶ Overall, it was found that men who are more likely to have paid for sex are young professionals with high numbers of (unpaid) sexual partners. A separate study of prevalence rates found the number of men in the UK who report having ever paid for sex

doubled during the 1990s, from one in twenty to nearly one in ten.³⁷

Giving evidence to this inquiry, Mia de Faoite, who became involved in prostitution after developing a drug addiction, was asked why she thought men paid her and other women for sex. She said: *"I think it's partly the fact that they can and society says they can and the law says they can... You must ask yourself what are they buying? It's power. It's a very powerful thing to have control of someone else's body in that way. It's a power-fix and they know it"*.

"In the vast majority of cases males paying for sex will give no thought to where the woman has come from or what circumstances have lead her into prostitution."

– Detective Constable Julie Currie,
Modern Slavery and Kidnap Unit,
Metropolitan Police Service³⁸

A European Commission report on the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings notes: *"trafficked persons are located within existing sex industries... there is no separate or specific market for trafficked persons"*.³⁹ A five country study of men who pay for sex, led by the Immigrant Council of Ireland, concluded: *"irrespective of a buyers' knowledge of human trafficking as a crime and as a phenomenon, it is unlikely that they will consider the possibility that a seller may be a victim of trafficking when purchasing sex."*⁴⁰

Also giving evidence to this inquiry, A/Inspector Dick Doggrell of Bedfordshire Police reported an incident wherein officers from his force had encountered a sex buyer whilst conducting a safeguarding and intelligence-gathering visit to a brothel. The sex buyer disclosed to officers that he had located the brothel in question via a phone number obtained from a basic internet search for brothels in the area. The operator(s) of that one mobile number had directed him to up to six different brothels on separate occasions. A/Inspector Doggrell noted that this indicated a high degree of third-party organisation, with the phone number acting as a "call centre" for sex buyers. Additionally, *"some of the [brothels] he'd been to that had been signposted from this telephone number, he felt there were young women that were less happy that they were there. In some cases, they seemed to be visibly frightened."*

Yet despite the sex buyer believing the women to be in distress, A/Inspector Doggrell said, *"he didn't give us addresses. He was speaking in generalities. He gave us the website he was using, and how he was signposted, but wouldn't give us any further information."* It was A/Inspector Doggrell's understanding this man had still proceeded to pay for sex at the property where women were "visibly frightened" and he continued to visit other brothels that were connected to it via the same phone number.

Operation Greengrass

In November 2016 four members of an organised crime group were convicted of trafficking women from Romania and Moldova to London and exploiting them in a prostitution racket.

The Metropolitan Police Service identified the two men and two women running this organised crime group as part of an investigation dubbed Operation Greengrass. The group were found to have trafficked and sexually exploited women in a London-based brothel, as well as transporting women to 'outcalls' in hotels and private residences.

The trafficking group set up 58 separate websites to advertise to sex buyers. This included paying companies that specialise in Search Engine Optimisation to boost online traffic to their sites. The group also operated what police described as *"a call centre consisting of cheap disposable mobile phones that were constantly ringing."*

Police report that one of the traffickers, Aliona Pislaru, *"was responsible for controlling the conduct of the exploited women... dictating the hours they'd work, that they must undertake anal sex if requested and that they weren't allowed to use condoms while performing oral sex."* At the time of her arrest, Pislaru's husband was also serving a jail sentence in Romania for trafficking women to Italy and the UK for sexual exploitation. Pislaru's financial benefit from the trafficking operation was established by the courts as totalling almost half a million pounds.



Modus operandi

The size and structure of organised crime groups involved in sexual exploitation varies, as can the tactics they employ. What unites these groups is their objective of obtaining money from men who are willing to pay to gain sexual access to a woman's body. This requires organised crime groups to source and retain women for sexual exploitation, ensure law enforcement agencies do not prohibitively infringe on their operations, and advertise to sex buyers.

Recruitment and control of victims

Methods used by organised crime groups and other third party exploiters to recruit women into the sex trade include deception, coercion and the exploitation of pre-existing vulnerabilities.

"They use all resources at their disposal to exploit an individual's vulnerability and their power over an individual."

– Elizabeth Flint, Expert Witness on human trafficking and modern slavery⁴¹

The 'boyfriend' model of recruitment featured heavily in reports to this inquiry. This tactic involves a man establishing an intimate relationship with a girl or woman with the specific intention of subsequently exploiting her in the sex trade. A corollary of this method involves a man in an existing relationship with a woman coercing her into prostitution. This 'one-on-one' tactic can be used to recruit women into wider sexual exploitation networks.

Figure 1 features a text message conversation between two men, Alexandru Pitigoi and Razvan Mitru, who were subsequently convicted for their involvement in a sex trafficking ring in 2017.⁴² In the conversation they discuss recruiting Pitigoi's girlfriend for prostitution, despite acknowledging she did not want to do it.

Figure 1:

Alexandru Pitigoi / Razvan Mitru

Pitigoi: "let me talk to her too cause she doesn't really want anymore"

Mitru: "why:))"

Pitigoi: "cause she is not happy about it"

Mitru: "what the fuck is she not happy about?"

Pitigoi: "and she doesn't really like it as you can imagine it's hard on her bro"

Mitru: "she doesn't have a penny in her pocket and she is being fussy maybe it is hard for her but if she fucked at least she knows what for

not for nothing"

Pitigoi: "I know that:))"

Mitru: "let me see how it is with another guy and then I don't do it anymore for nothing

Pitigoi: "it's not difficult for me"

Mitru: "to make money so at least she knows why she got herself 'stained'"

Pitigoi: "I don't give a fuck"

Mitru: "bravo"

Pitigoi: "it was weird for me the first couple of times"

Mitru: "yes I know

now you don't give a fuck now all you see is money"

West Yorkshire Police informed the inquiry about a suspected organised crime group involved in trafficking women from Eastern Europe to the UK for sexual exploitation. The principle male suspect *“recruited females via the social media site called ‘Badoo’ where he instigated conversations with females promising work and/or relationships. This could then move onto the use of Skype. Having been promised work (e.g. shop work) in the UK, females would be assisted in their travel by the suspects to the UK with the purchase of flights, where they would be met at the airport. When in the UK they were taken to the suspects home address, where up to four [women] would be residing. Having arrived the females were then told that the job they had come for wasn’t available and they were taken to a brothel to work (massage parlours in Leeds and Sheffield). They were then taken daily to these brothels to work, where the suspects took the money.”*⁴³

Once women have been recruited or obtained by organised crime groups, exerting ongoing control over women enables groups to maintain their involvement – and therefore the profits that flow from it – whilst inhibiting women from disclosing incriminating details about the operation to law enforcement agencies.

Tactics used by organised crime groups to exert control over women they sexually exploit include: debt bondage; sexual and physical violence; instilling fear via threats to the welfare of the woman or her family; surveillance, monitoring and control of her movements; and isolation.

“To begin with [the offenders] were my friends but, as soon as we came to England, they started to physically abuse me. He beat me many times because I was not earning him enough money. After a while the beatings

became routine... Even though the clients did not physically abuse me I felt abused because I was forced to have sex with them even when I did not want to do so. Sometimes that was painful. After a while, I felt disgusted by what I was doing and I wanted to stop but [he] wanted more money and he forced me to continue. I was scared because he kept threatening me that he was going to hurt my mother.”

– Female exploited by an organised crime group that was convicted in the UK in 2017⁴⁴

Many of these tactics, used both individually and collectively, can be seen as clear examples of ‘coercive control’ – acts or patterns of acts common in cases of domestic abuse and which are a criminal offence under UK law. According to Women’s Aid, *“This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour.”*⁴⁵

The controlling tactics used by exploiters contribute to a scenario which makes it unlikely that women will fully disclose what is happening to them while being exploited by organised crime groups during any initial contact they have with external agencies.

Elizabeth Flint is an Expert Witness on human trafficking and modern slavery, whose work involves assessing, advising, interviewing and supporting women trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation. She told the inquiry: *“I have never come across a female victim of sexual exploitation that has not faced multiple barriers to disclosure.”* When police visit brothels as part of safeguarding or intelligence operations, *“more often than not women’s disclosure in this context is limited at first and/or includes false elements”*.

Discussing the control tactics used by traffickers, Phillipa Roberts of Hope for Justice told the inquiry: *“They are masters of manipulation... They are brilliant at breaking people down. Over a period of time a trafficker will know that he or she is not going to leave. So the victim can be given a phone and won’t need*

to be accompanied. The perception given by the trafficker is we’re everywhere. We know where your family live.”

Locations

Evidence received by this inquiry suggests that the most common model of operation used by organised crime groups engaged in sexual exploitation involves setting up temporary, so-called ‘pop-up’ brothels in rented residential properties. In addition to renting properties via letting agents and private landlords, there were also reports of properties being rented through online booking companies such as Airbnb and Booking.com for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

A recurring finding among reports from police forces was of organised crime groups moving women around different properties and/or operating a ‘revolving door’ of women into one or a network of properties, providing a regularly changing supply of women into a particular location.

“Organised crime groups move women around as a way of controlling women and evading police.”

– Detective Chief Inspector Phil Brewer of the Metropolitan Police Organised Crime Command⁴⁶

Moving women between different locations can foster disorientation and isolation, reducing the likelihood that if women do come into contact with any external agencies such as police or support services that they have time to establish a relationship of trust, which may in principle facilitate disclosure and help-seeking.

In addition to operating temporary brothels in residential properties, organised crime groups have also been found to exploit women in so-called ‘massage parlours’ – commercial premises that masquerade as legitimate businesses; by transporting women to sex buyers at private addresses and hotels in what are referred to on prostitution websites as ‘out-calls’; and by requiring women to solicit sex buyers by standing on the street. Kent Police also reported that they had obtained intelligence that vans were being used as “mobile brothels”. In one van that was stopped by police, “the rear had been retro-fitted with a bed taking up almost all of the available space”. This activity is “believed to be linked to human trafficking and facilitation”.

This inquiry found that street-based prostitution constitutes a minority of commercial sexual exploitation overall. This is consistent with an organised crime objective of retaining control over women and avoiding police interference. The public visibility of women in street prostitution can increase the likelihood they will come into contact with external agencies, and sex buyers face a personal risk engaging in this form of sexual exploitation due to kerb-crawling being a criminal offence.

Prostitution procurement websites

The model of operation typically used by organised crime groups sexually exploiting women in the UK involves advertising women to sex buyers on commercial websites. These websites can be dedicated in full or in part to facilitating prostitution. They charge fees to the individual placing the advert while being free to use by sex buyers, with the sex buyer contacting the ‘seller’ directly via a mobile phone number provided on the advert.

“Adult services websites represent the most significant enabler of sexual exploitation in the UK.”

– The Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre⁴⁷

Evidence obtained by this inquiry suggests a small number of websites dominate the marketplace of online prostitution advertising. Adultwork and Vivastreet are two such sites.⁴⁸ Adultwork is a website that solely lists adverts relating to the sex trade, while Vivastreet also hosts classified ads relating to a range of other products. However, Vivastreet acknowledges the shared function of the sites in a section of the website titled ‘Vivastreet or Adultwork?’: *“Most of you will be aware there is another big site you can find escort advertising in the UK. Yup, Adult Work. This page is to take a quick look at the differences between Vivastreet and Adult Work so you can decide the best place to spend your hard earned cash.”*⁴⁹

Vivastreet currently hosts a section on its homepage titled ‘Our popular links’. At the time of writing, those links are listed as: *“London escorts, Brighton escorts, Handyman London, Manchester escorts, Belfast escorts, Indian escorts, Cheap escorts, Heathrow escorts, Black escorts, Mature Escorts, Adultwork”*⁵⁰

Vivastreet was used by the trafficking ring convicted in 2017 and led by Florinel Mitru, featured on page 8, to advertise the women

they exploited. Judge Robert Altham, who oversaw the group’s prosecution, noted: *“No one, including those who make a profit from Vivastreet, could have been left in any doubt prostitution services were being offered.”*⁵¹

It was reported to this inquiry that Lancashire Police discovered that a man being investigated for sex trafficking had spent so much money placing adverts of women on one prostitution procurement website – Vivastreet – totalling £25,000, that the website gave the man his own account manager.

The Vivastreet website is owned or controlled by the off-shore holding company⁵² W3 Ltd, based in Jersey, and founded by Yannick Pons. Vivastreet operates in 19 countries and bills itself as among the top two *“free, classified ads”* websites in the UK⁵³ (although it should be noted that ‘escort’ adverts hosted on the site are not hosted for free). Adultwork is owned by CDLB Holdings Inc, a company registered in Panama. It is operated by a company called AWS Affiliate World Systems International Limited, which is registered in Malta and also based in Cyprus.⁵⁴ Since the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) was introduced in the U.S. in April 2018, AdultWork.com has been prevented from hosting prostitution adverts from the U.S.⁵⁵

The owners and operators of prostitution procurement websites directly facilitate and profit from the prostitution of others. They are third party profiteers of commercial sexual exploitation and are the most significant enabler of sex trafficking in the UK.

Operation Wombarra

In 2017, David Archer was convicted of trafficking and sexually exploiting women, with the help of two accomplices, in a network of London-based brothels.



David Archer

Archer, a British national, was found to have trafficked women into the UK and targeted vulnerable women already in the UK in order to coerce them

into prostitution. One woman was recruited after Archer found her crying at a bus stop and offered her a place to stay.⁵⁶ Detective Sergeant John Kirby of the Metropolitan Police noted: *“The vulnerability of the women and his position of strength created an imbalance which he exploited again and again – financially, emotionally, and in some cases sexually.”*⁵⁷

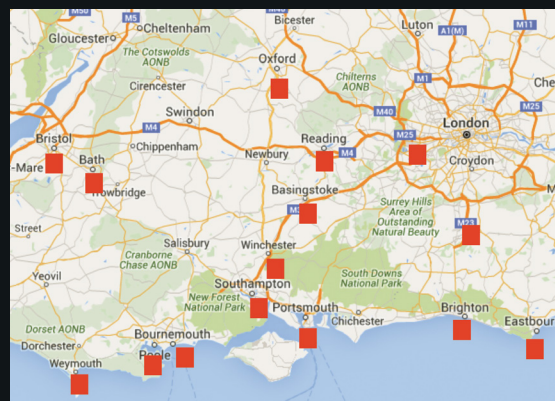
During the course of ‘Operation Wombarra’ police found that Archer advertised women to sex buyers on the website, Adultwork. Women were moved around a network of premises that included a residential property converted into a 20 room brothel. When police visited one of Archer’s brothels they found a woman locked inside one of the rooms.⁵⁸ During the course of the investigation, multiple women reported that Archer had sexually assaulted them while he took explicit photographs of them to use on prostitution procurement websites.⁵⁹ At the time of his arrest, Archer’s assets were estimated to be worth almost £16 million, and he was reported to have made £1.6 million from the brothels in a single year. He was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment.

Operation Effect

Three members of an organised crime group were convicted in 2017 of trafficking women from China, Hong Kong and South Korea to be abused by sex buyers in hotels across south England and in Wales.

The trafficking ring was first identified by Sussex Police after they received calls from two hotels participating in Gatwick Hotel Watch – a scheme bringing together 34 hotels in and around Gatwick Airport to identify and alert police to potential human trafficking. From these initial calls police identified two women who were being advertised on a prostitution procurement website. During the police operation, called Operation Effect, it was revealed that the lead member of the organised crime group, Hong Chin, had placed the adverts and booked the hotel rooms for the women. One of the women later disclosed to police that she had been debt bonded in China. During the investigation approximately 80 mobiles phones were seized from the group. Overall, Sussex Police identified 19 women who were exploited as part

of the trafficking ring. Each trafficker played a different role in the operation, which included the recruitment, management and movement of women. All phones used to field calls from sex buyers and arrange the prostitution were held and managed by the organised crime group. In 2017 all three members of the group were convicted of human trafficking and controlling prostitution.



Sites of exploitation by the group.

Section 2

Combatting Organised Sexual Exploitation

Overview

The organised sexual exploitation of women is widespread across England and Wales. While the on-street sex trade still exists in some parts of the UK, most commercial sexual exploitation takes place in off-street premises, predominantly in residential properties rented or used on a temporary basis.

This inquiry has found that the off-street sex trade is highly organised, with traffickers, brothel operators and other third party exploiters playing a central, controlling role in the ‘supply’ of women to sex buyers. It has also found that the overwhelming majority of women in UK brothels are foreign nationals, with a high proportion of these women coming from a small number of countries.

The harms caused by commercial sexual exploitation are immense. The litany of abuses that can be experienced by victims at the hands of traffickers, third party exploiters and sex buyers include: rape, sexual abuse, (non-sexual) physical violence, kidnapping, psychological abuse and coercive control. These abuses may be experienced repeatedly and over a prolonged period of time. The psychological and physical consequences for victims can be profound, wide-ranging and long-lasting.

The Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, has rightly set a clear ambition for the Government to “*end modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030*”⁶⁰ The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade welcomes recent efforts to provide political leadership and practical initiatives that shine a spotlight on the scourge that is modern slavery.

However, evidence obtained by this inquiry clearly shows that the present strategy being pursued by the Government to end sex trafficking is failing. The legislative and practical response to the crime is wholly inadequate. Britain is currently a highly profitable and low risk destination for sex traffickers and other third party enablers of sexual exploitation. That has to change urgently.

Britain must become a hostile destination for sex traffickers. This requires a holistic approach that puts prevention at its heart, while mobilising all available measures to disrupt and robustly respond to sexual exploitation happening now.

This section identifies the primary actions required to reverse the growing scourge of organised sexual exploitation in this country.

Prevent

Recommendation: The Government should combat the demand that drives sexual exploitation by making paying for sex a criminal offence in all locations.

The objective of organised crime groups engaged in sexual exploitation is very simple: to obtain money from sex buyers. Vulnerable women are trafficked into and around the UK because of the minority of men in this country who choose to pay to gain sexual access to women's bodies. Without their demand there would be no 'supply'.

It is vital that our law serves to combat the demand from sex buyers that motivates traffickers, pimps and other third party exploiters. This is fundamental to a strategy seeking to combat trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The Government should extend the existing offence in England and Wales that prohibits paying for sex in a street or public space to apply to all locations.⁶¹

Background

Most men in the UK do not pay for sex – it is a minority that do.⁶² Neither is the size of the cohort of men who pay for sex fixed and unchanging. Prevalence rates vary over time and between countries. Demand is context-dependent, based on a decision-making process entered into by each individual man who pays money in return for gaining sexual access to a person's body.

A survey published 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.⁶³ Researchers at London Metropolitan University's Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit concluded from their research on men who pay for sex that *"legality contributes to normalisation, which in turn increases the likelihood of paying for sex"*.⁶⁴

"You cannot help and support people, you cannot give them hope and a chance, you cannot promote human rights or the dignity of every human being – whilst paying them for sex, and whilst funding an industry that exploits them."

– The Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP,
International Development Secretary,
2018⁶⁵

An effective prevention strategy targeting demand is underpinned by the fundamental principle that it is the duty of the state to work to end sexual exploitation, not to tolerate or 'manage' it; and that society must act now to prevent girls and women from being at risk of sexual exploitation in the future, which will continue as long as demand from sex buyers creates a profitable 'market' for it. It also recognises that society has a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities, with research consistently showing that it is the most vulnerable and marginalised women and girls who are most at risk of being involved in prostitution.

The harm caused by the minority of men in this country who pay for sexual access to women's bodies is immense. That harm is unjustifiable and indefensible. The actions of this group directly entail the sexual exploitation of vulnerable women and girls; motivate traffickers and pimps to 'supply' women to meet their demand; and require state agencies and non-governmental organisations to attempt to deal with the aftermath of this exploitation. It is therefore imperative that public policy works to end demand, by sending a clear message that it is unacceptable to pay for sex under any

circumstances - and anyone choosing to do so will face legal consequences.

In 2014 an inquiry into prostitution laws in England and Wales by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution found that the current legal settlement is inadequate, and recommended *“a shift in the burden of criminality from those who are the most marginalised and vulnerable – to those that create the demand in the first place.”*⁶⁶ A subsequent ‘Commission on the Sex Buyer Law’ produced practical guidance on how to effectively and efficiently implement this *“shift in the burden of criminality”* through a law that criminalises paying for sex while decriminalising selling sex and providing support and exiting services for people who have been sexually exploited.⁶⁷

“State Parties shall adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures ... to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking.”

– Article 9.5 of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)

Countries that have acted to combat demand for sexual exploitation by criminalising the purchase of sex include France, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. These nations have prohibited paying for sex as part of ‘abolitionist’ legal frameworks which also decriminalise selling sex. They are designed to end demand and support women to exit sexual exploitation.

Sweden became the first country to adopt this abolitionist law in 1999. Anonymous surveys conducted in 1996 and 2008 revealed that the

proportion of men in Sweden who reported paying for sex dropped from 13% to 8%.⁶⁸ The most recent study conducted on prevalence rates found that 0.8% of men in Sweden had paid for sex in the previous 12 months - the smallest proportion recorded in two decades and the lowest level in Europe.⁶⁹

Analysis in 2011 of the size of Sweden’s sex trade found that the number of people involved in prostitution was approximately a tenth of Denmark’s ‘prostitution population’ - where buying sex is legal.⁷⁰ This is despite the fact that Sweden has 3.8 million more inhabitants than Denmark. This finding is consistent with a nine country study of prostitution laws conducted by the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University which observed: *“legalised and unregulated regimes have considerably larger sex industries.”*⁷¹

In 2010 an official review of Sweden’s prostitution law noted, *“According to the National Criminal Police, it is clear that the ban on the purchase of sexual services acts as a barrier to human traffickers and procurers considering establishing themselves in Sweden.”*⁷²

“How will the traffickers survive without sex buyers? The sex buyers are the crucial sponsors of organised crime. The traffickers are not into this because of sex... They are in this because of the money.”

– Detective Inspector Simon Häggström, head of the Stockholm Police Prostitution Unit⁷³

In response to claims that the law criminalising paying for sex and decriminalising selling sex has simply displaced sexual exploitation or made it less visible, Detective Superintendent Kajsa Wahlberg, Sweden’s National Rapporteur

on Trafficking in Human Beings, states: *“I want to underline that prostitution activities are not and cannot be pushed underground. The profit of traffickers, procurers and other prostitution operators is obviously dependent on that men easily can access women who they wish to purchase for prostitution purposes. If law enforcement agencies want to find out where prostitution activities takes place, the police can”*.⁷⁴ Indeed, European Commission research on the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings similarly notes, *“Sex markets are reliant, by definition, on buyers finding spaces and places where it is possible to pay for sex. In this sense, the underground argument has a logical fallacy at its heart since some level of visibility is required.”*⁷⁵

A review of Norway’s abolitionist law, adopted in 2009, concluded: *“A reduced market and increased law enforcement posit larger risks for human traffickers...The law has thus affected important pull factors and reduced the extent of human trafficking in Norway in comparison to a situation without a law.”*⁷⁶ In recognition of the centrality of combating demand in preventing sex trafficking and the effectiveness of sex buyer laws, the Council of Europe recommended states adopt this approach *“as the most effective tool for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings”*.⁷⁷

There is extensive evidence demonstrating that legalising/decriminalising third party profiteering from prostitution enables organised sexual exploitation. A cross-sectional analysis of up to 150 countries found that trafficking flows are larger in to countries where prostitution is legal.⁷⁸ Similarly, an analysis of European countries found that sex trafficking was most prevalent in nations with legalised prostitution regimes. The researchers suggested: *“slacker prostitution laws make it more profitable to traffic persons to a country.”*⁷⁹

An example of a highly enabling legal environment for organised sexual exploitation can be observed in the Netherlands, where paying for sex and third party profiteering – including brothel keeping – is legal. Third-party profiteering from prostitution was decriminalised in 2000, and seven years afterwards the national police force estimated that between 50% - 90% of women in the country’s legal prostitution trade *“work involuntarily”*.⁸⁰ An evaluation of the law in 2007, commissioned for the Dutch parliament, found that pimping was *“still a very common phenomenon”*⁸¹ and *“does not seem to have decreased”*. Fieldwork researchers reported that the *“great majority”* of women in Amsterdam’s infamous ‘window brothels’ *“works with a so-called boyfriend or pimp.”*⁸²

Researchers at VU University Amsterdam, who analysed trafficking in the Netherlands legalised prostitution market, concluded: *“the screening of brothel owners and the monitoring of the compliance of licensing conditions do not create levels of transparency that enable sex trafficking to be exposed”*...*“The regulation has hidden the legalized sector from the view of the criminal justice system, while human trafficking still thrives behind the legal façade of a legalized prostitution sector. Brothels can even function as legalized outlets for victims of sex trafficking”*.⁸³

Ending organised sexual exploitation requires ending the demand from sex buyers. To stop the UK being a profitable and low risk environment for sex traffickers it is vital that the Government criminalises paying for sex.

Disrupt

Recommendation: The Government should review and update the law to hold prostitution procurement websites legally accountable for facilitating and profiting from sexual exploitation.

Prostitution procurement websites advertise individuals to sex buyers for the purpose of prostitution. As the judge prosecuting a trafficking gang which advertised women on Vivastreet observed in relation to that website in 2017⁸⁴, the website companies themselves can be in no doubt that individuals are being advertised for the purpose of prostitution. The owners and operators of these companies directly and knowingly facilitate and profit from the prostitution of others.

Websites such as Vivastreet and Adultwork are key to the typical ‘business model’ used by the organised crime groups and third party exploiters who dominate the UK’s off-street sex trade. They provide a quick and easy way for traffickers to connect with men around the country who are willing to pay to gain sexual access to a woman’s body. Any notion

that prostitution websites introduce ‘safety’ to the sex trade by making procurement visible is a dangerous and misleading fallacy. They hide sexual exploitation in plain sight. The websites significantly contribute to the ease and scale of sex trafficking.

Individual owners/operators of prostitution procurement websites must be held legally accountable for the sexual exploitation they enable and profit from. Corporate entities must also be held legally responsible for negligently failing to prevent their online platforms being used to facilitate prostitution. The Government should urgently review and update the law to prevent new and emerging forms of third party profiteering from sexual exploitation – including prostitution procurement websites.

Recommendation: The Government should establish a national register of landlords and issue guidance on preventing sexual exploitation for the short-term letting sector.

The Government should introduce a mandatory registration scheme for landlords in England and Wales, as already exists in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This would enable the efficient identification of owners of properties being used as brothels and assist law enforcement with their investigations.

This inquiry received evidence from Neil Radford, team leader of Nottinghamshire Police’s Prostitution Task Force between 2004 and 2017. Radford informed MPs that during investigations to uncover organised sexual exploitation, *“I have spent several days on enquiries in trying to trace landlords of properties. Invariably, the Land Registry*

provides a name, but is listed as living at the address being used as a pop-up brothel, which clearly isn’t the case.” Establishing a national register of landlords would prevent such unnecessary delays and wasteful allocation of resources during vital safeguarding and intelligence gathering operations.

The Home Office should also issue guidance for the short term letting sector on preventing trafficking for sexual exploitation and other forms of modern slavery. The guidance should be developed in consultation with the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and equip letting companies, agents, landlords and owners of short-term let

properties with the necessary information and tools to take preventative action, identify indicators and respond to concerns regarding sexual exploitation. The guidance

should be disseminated in conjunction with tourist boards and specifically address the responsibilities of online booking companies such as Airbnb and Booking.com.

Respond

Recommendation: All police forces, supported by national law enforcement agencies, should prioritise the development of a robust, strategic response to organised sexual exploitation.

Current policing practice in relation to organised sexual exploitation is inconsistent. This inquiry directly observed and obtained evidence of some effective policing in relation to tackling third party exploiters and supporting victims. However, this is not reflected in all force areas.

Modern slavery and human trafficking is now among the six national priority serious organised crime threats.⁸⁵ All police forces should prioritise the development and implementation of a proactive, strategic response to organised sexual exploitation which robustly targets organised crime groups and other third party exploiters while

safeguarding and supporting victims. This requires dedicated resourcing; consistent, ongoing intelligence gathering; the provision of training and guidance for personnel; and partnership working with local authorities and support services.

Police and Crime Commissioners, the National Crime Agency, the National Police Chiefs Council and the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Fund all have a vital role to play in supporting police forces to respond effectively to organised sexual exploitation and to ensure that local responses produce a robust national intelligence picture.

Recommendation: The Government should remove the criminal offence of soliciting in a street or public space for the purpose of 'selling' sex.

While most commercial sexual exploitation takes place in off-street locations, street-based sexual exploitation still exists in parts of the UK. This inquiry obtained evidence that some organised crime groups recruit sex buyers by requiring women to solicit on the streets, and that victims can be moved between street-based and off-street sexual exploitation. At present, however, women being exploited through street-based prostitution can face criminal sanction for the act of soliciting.

Criminal sanctions for soliciting create barriers for all women exploited through

prostitution to seeking help, exiting sexual exploitation and rebuilding their lives.⁸⁶ This offence should be removed in parallel with the introduction and implementation of a law prohibiting the purchase of sex in all locations.

Operation Lockrum

In 2017 three members of an organised crime group were convicted of trafficking women from Romania to be sexually exploited on the street and in hotels in London. According to police, the group ran a *“fairly rudimentary yet effective operation”*.⁸⁷

The Metropolitan Police Service first began ‘Operation Lockrum’ to investigate the group after a Romanian woman attended a police station to report she had been exploited by the group. The woman in question had been targeted by the gang via the ‘boyfriend’ model of recruitment: she had met a man online who told her that if she went to London she could get work in a restaurant and they could be together. On arrival in the UK she was told she was in debt to the organised crime group for her travel and accommodation and forced into prostitution.

The group used a range of tactics to maintain control over the women they exploited. This included debt bondage, threats, withholding the women’s ID cards, surveillance and violence. According to police, Romelia Florentina Radu, one of the male members of the organised crime group, perpetrated the bulk of the physical violence: *“He was responsible for the majority of assaults against the victims... Several victims spoke of his presence as more remote, that he was watching and monitoring their actions from a location slightly removed, however they were aware that they would suffer the consequences of displeasing him.”* However, a female member of the trafficking group *“was responsible for controlling the conduct of the exploited women, she would accompany them on the streets and negotiate with clients”*.

If the women being exploited by the traffickers came into contact with police while soliciting on the streets, they were instructed to lie about their identity and address. If women were arrested and fined under existing legislation for persistent soliciting, the organised crime group refused to give the women money to pay the fines.

According to police, the trafficking ring deliberately worked to *“[transfer] the sense of criminality and responsibility from the [organised crime group] onto the exploited women themselves, removing them farther away from being able to seek the help of the authorities.”*

Endnotes

Evidence collection

The inquiry obtained and considered evidence from the following sources:

- Face-to-face or telephone interviews with representatives of 22 police forces in England and Wales.
- A Freedom of Information request issued to all police forces.
- Accompanying police forces on five brothel outreach visits.
- A literature review.
- Oral evidence hearings, with evidence provided by: Mia de Faoite, survivor of prostitution; Neil Radford, formerly team leader of the Nottinghamshire Police Prostitution Task Force; Assistant Chief Constable Dan Vajzovic, Cambridgeshire Constabulary; A/Inspector Dick Doggrell, Bedfordshire Police.
- Meetings with practitioners and representatives from the following organisations: National Crime Agency; Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre; Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit; women@thewell; Hope for Justice; CAP International; Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner; Wales Anti-Slavery Co-ordinator; Caroline Haughey QC; Elizabeth Flint, Independent Expert Witness on human trafficking and modern slavery.
- Open call for written evidence. Evidence was received from the following organisations and individuals: Andrew Boff; Avon and Somerset Constabulary; Basis Yorkshire; Beyond the Gaze; Bristol Sex Workers Collective; CARE; Chris Roper; Dame Vera Baird QC, PCC for Northumbria; Dr Robert Shields; ECP; Ella Parsons; Equality Now; Francis Voisey; Giles Beaumont; International Union of Sex Workers; Josephine Butler Society; 'Lydia'; Muslim Women's Network UK; National Ugly Mugs; Neil Radford; Nordic Model Now; Not Buying It; Oxford City Council; Professor Phil Hubbard; Ruhama; SCOT-PEP; Sex Work Research Hub; The Police Foundation; Victoria.

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- 1 Eurostat report that 96% of people trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls. See: 'Study on the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings', European Commission, European Union, 2016.
- 2 The United Nations 'Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' defines sexual exploitation as "*Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another...*" "*Sexual exploitation*" is a broad term, which includes a number of acts described below, including "*transactional sex*", "*solicitation of transactional sex*" and "*exploitative relationship*." "*Transactional sex*" is defined as "*The exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favours other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour.*" United Nations Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Thematic Glossary of current terminology related to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in the context of the United Nations, Prepared by the Task Team on the SEA Glossary for the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, 24 July 2017.
- 3 The National Crime Agency states that organised crime is "*serious crime planned, coordinated and conducted by people working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain.*" <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/crime-threats/organised-crime-groups> [Accessed 7 May 2018]
- 4 'Controlling prostitution for gain' and 'causing or inciting prostitution for gain' are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. 'Keeping, managing, acting or assisting in the management of a brothel to which people resort for practises involving prostitution' is illegal under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 (inserted by

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