

Here's How Legalizing Prostitution Really Affects Women

Amnesty International, the human-rights watchdog organization, voted Tuesday to support the decriminalization of “sex work” at its Dublin-based International Council Meeting. This was in spite of the fact that anti-human trafficking organizations around the globe pushed for just the opposite.

Sex workers are one of the most marginalized groups in the world who in most instances face constant risk of discrimination, violence and abuse,’ Salil Shetty, Amnesty International’s secretary-general, said in a statement.

Shetty called it “a historic day” for the organization. Equality Now, an organization that works against female genital mutilation and human trafficking, released a statement regarding Amnesty International’s decision:

Amnesty International today has voted to adopt a policy that seeks to decriminalize all aspects of the commercial sex industry in the name of protecting the human rights of people in the sex trade. In doing so, it has ignored the clear links between prostitution and sex trafficking that it says it opposes, as well as the incompatibility of the commercial sex trade with gender equality, human rights and international law. It has ignored survivors of the commercial sex trade who repeatedly called on the organization to rethink its position based on their experiences and to adopt a policy that seeks to curb, rather than facilitate, the commercial sex trade.

Prostitution Research & Education [PRE], founded by Melissa Farley, calls Amnesty International’s decision a betrayal,

adding that the vast majority of sex workers do not do the work voluntarily. PRE's work includes an assessment of sex work in the Netherlands and Sweden. In 2000, the Netherlands legalized brothels. Since then, "several studies" cited by PRE show:

There has been no significant improvement of the situation of persons in prostitution. The prostitutes' emotional well-being is now lower than in 2001 on all measured aspects. The use of sedatives [among sex workers] has increased. Requests for leaving the industry were in high demand, while only 6% of municipalities offer such assistance.

In 2011, the deputy mayor of Amsterdam called the decision to legalize sex work "reprehensibly naive." In Sweden, purchasing sex has been illegal since 1999. Sweden's Ministry of Justice, in 2010, evaluated the situation.

The number of persons exploited in street prostitution has halved since 1999, while it tripled in Denmark and Norway for the same period. There is no evidence of more Swedish men going abroad to buy sex. Prostitution through the Internet has increased in Sweden as it has in other countries, due to the development generally of online technology. However, the number of individuals that are sold via Internet web pages/ads is much larger in neighbouring countries such as Denmark and Norway. The proportion of prostituted persons from third-countries did not increase in the same way it exploded in neighbouring countries. There has been no increase in 'hidden' prostitution. Social services and the police highlight that prostitution cannot completely 'go underground' as it needs some form of publicity to attract sex buyers.

The study concluded that the law had acted as a deterrent for "johns" and that the demand for prostitution had decreased. Of course, none of this speaks to the fact that no human being

should be commodified – used as a “thing” for the pleasure and use by another person. While many reach this conclusion based on religious values, it is also a conclusion based on reason. Human beings are not meant to be used or treated as chattel. Legalized prostitution is akin to legalized slavery or legalized child abuse. Amnesty International’s decision to support the decriminalization of prostitution is a violation of basic human rights, and a step back in the fight against human trafficking. *This article originally appeared at the Acton Institute.*