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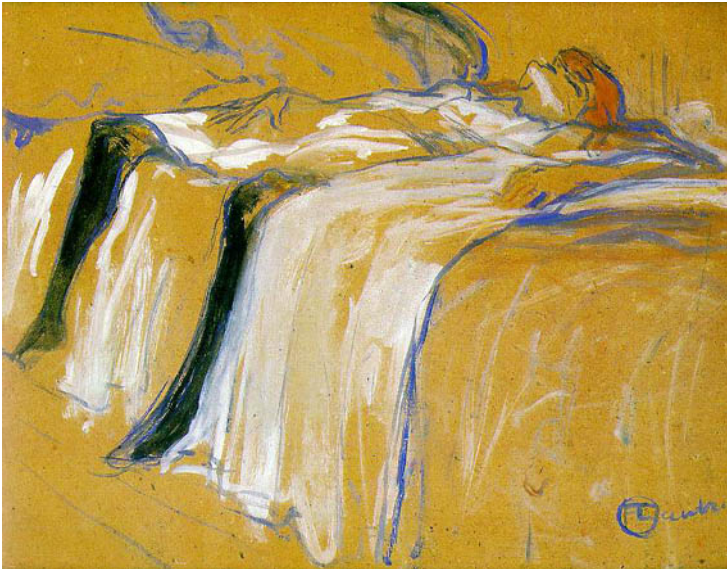
Nordic/Swedish models: laws criminalising the purchase of sex

Posted By [laura agustin](#) On 12 December 2012 @ 13:45 In [migration](#) | [5 Comments](#)

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[2] **Nordic model** is [a new tag](#) [3] on this website, and it doesn't refer to leggy blondes. People contact me ever oftener asking for what I've written on prostitution laws in the Nordic countries, so I have now tagged everything I could find. This is a sub-set of the [Sweden tag](#) [4], which includes other sorts of issues related to gender equality. Norway's law is even more stringent than Sweden's.

What you will not find are quantitative, definitive, bottom-line debunkings of abolitionist and anti-prostitutionist claims. Those don't exist, *they cannot exist*, and anyone who says they can is spinning a line. There's widespread disagreement about how to define trafficking and who is a victim of it, so when you see numbers

you should immediately be skeptical. Sometimes ideology is at the bottom of large figures for victims. Other times the issue is that different countries and organisations use non-comparable categories for counting people. Where sex businesses operate in the informal sector there are no formal lists of employees. Where sex workers are supposed to register with the state (as prostitutes) many do not. Undocumented migrants are not eligible to register anywhere as workers and are not counted at the border. Everyone estimates all these numbers; the words *research* and *evidence* are tossed about wantonly. The most egregious example I know of ideologically based, subjective, sloppy counting is [Siddharth Kara's](#) [5]. There are other grotesque examples I describe as [Garbage In, Garbage Out.](#) [6]

When someone asks for 'the most reliable statistics on the effect of the Swedish Model of prostitution criminalisation', they are assuming those exist somewhere. To understand why they do not exist, look at critiques of the government evaluation of its law. They were unable to evaluate it, they didn't know how, I wouldn't know how either, so no conclusions can be drawn from the evaluation. There are only *claims*. Go to the [nordic-model tag](#) [3] and find things like

- [Big claims, little evidence: Sweden's law against buying sex](#) [7]
- [Trafficking Convictions in Sweden: tortuous laws about sex](#) [8]
- [What do sex-buying statistics mean?](#) [9]
- [Doubtful report on sex-purchase law](#) [10]
- [Smoke gets in your eyes: Evaluation of Swedish anti-prostitution law offers ideology, not methodology](#) [11]

Moral entrepreneurs go on pretending large numbers prove their points. People say the Nordic model – laws that prohibit the purchase of sex and punish purchasers – is effective in reducing prostitution

and trafficking. As for reducing prostitution, the only thing that *possibly* has been reduced is the number of people selling in the street, but those were tiny numbers to begin with and already shrinking. The Swedish evaluators anyway used famously [wrong Danish numbers for street prostitution](#) ^[12] to make their claim and never issued a correction after being informed of their error. On any other kind of commercial sex, they had no numbers at all because they did not know how to do that research (and they admitted it).

As for claims about trafficking, you cannot know you have 'reduced' something for which you had *no baseline numbers* in the first place. All you have are police officials' impressions and claims. The 'effect' of the law is unmeasurable.

I've begun tweeting, by the way, and realise I am starting to reach people who don't know why anti-trafficking campaigns are so conflicted and unsuccessful. Do come [join me](#) ^[13] (@LauraAgustin) in the challenge to make incredibly complex subjects lucid in under 140 characters.

–Laura Agustín, the Naked Anthropologist

 [14]

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[4] Sweden tag: <http://www.lauraagustin.com/tag/sweden>

[5] Siddharth Kara's: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/02/27/sex-trafficking/>

[6] Garbage In, Garbage Out.: <http://www.lauraagustin.com/irresponsible-use-of-trafficking-data-or-garbage-in-garbage-out>

[7] Big claims, little evidence: Sweden's law against buying sex:

<http://www.thelocal.se/27962/20100723/>

[8] Trafficking Convictions in Sweden: tortuous laws about sex:

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[10] Doubtful report on sex-purchase law: <http://www.lauraagustin.com/in-english-evaluation-of-the-evaluation-swedens-sex-purchase-law>

[11] Smoke gets in your eyes: Evaluation of Swedish anti-prostitution law offers ideology, not methodology: <http://www.lauraagustin.com/smoke-gets-in-your-eyes-evaluation-of-swedish-anti-prostitution-law-offers-ideology-not-methodology>

[12] wrong Danish numbers for street prostitution: <http://www.lauraagustin.com/swedish-report-based-on-wrong-danish-numbers-for-street-prostitution>

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