

# Why it's time to legalize prostitution

It is essential that prostitution be completely lifted from the black market for the safety of those involved.



Dickie Anderson Jr., right, listens as his public defender and prosecutor argue bail during his arraignment in Connecticut superior court on June 2 in the strangling death of Renee Pellegrino, a prostitute, whose body was found on June 25, 1997. When prostitution is illegal and unregulated the safety of sex workers is compromised.

( Sean D. Elliot/AP Photo/The Day)

By The Adam Smith Institute

posted June 3, 2010 at 9:34 am EDT

As the trial of Stephen Griffiths, the “crossbow cannibal” accused of murdering three Bradford prostitutes unfolds, it is impossible not to be appalled by the allegations. Like far too many similar incidents before it, this case shows all too clearly the failings of the UK’s sex industry.

While the act of prostitution is legal in the UK public solicitation is prohibited, making street prostitution and curb-crawling illegal. Third-party involvement in the act of prostitution is also prohibited, which makes it illegal to keep a brothel, ‘pimp’ prostitutes or control them through an agency. This current state of legality can make selling oneself in a safe manner rather tricky, especially for the vulnerable.

Setting aside the moral controversy surrounding the sex industry, it is essential that prostitution be completely lifted from the black market for the safety of those involved. In the USA, female street prostitutes are 18 times more likely to be murdered than other women of a similar age and race. As prostitution operates in a hazy legal field, sections of the market are tied up in further criminality, such as people trafficking and drug dealing. Those people who turn to prostitution face a stark choice: break the law by working in a brothel or through an agency, or ‘go it alone’ with next to no support or protection from the potential dangers of an unregulated profession. It is often those in severe financial straits or suffering with an addiction who find themselves exploited and abused, unable to seek help because of their position. A tough police stance on prostitution does little to help the welfare of sex workers, but much to put them at risk. A crackdown on activities like streetwalking simply encourages women to seek new locations from which to work, such as more obscure neighborhoods or those without CCTV.

Instead of the current system, prostitution should be treated like many other professions; legal and regulated, as is the case in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and New Zealand. Allowing prostitutes the safety and security of a fixed workplace and network of co-workers would put them at much less risk. Evidence shows that the commercialization of prostitution would lead to better rights for workers, better working conditions and more established routes through which to seek help. A legal, competitive brothel or agency would

have the incentive to make sure their workers are clean and well looked after - or risk losing business.

You cannot just legislate against a 'problem' to make it go away, and the age-old profession of prostitution is absolutely no exception. This case should act as a catalyst for reform. David Cameron has indicated that he will reconsider the UK's current legislation, although there seemed no discernable conviction behind his statement. The legalization of prostitution in all its variants is needed to make Britain a freer and more importantly, a safer society.

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