

Sex Workers Tell Twitter: 'We Don't Want Rescuing'

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This month, sex workers across the globe have been declaring themselves, Not In Need Of Rescuing, tweeting their independence on the hashtag, #NotYourRescueProject. Here's why you should pay attention to what they're saying.

January 11 is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day and focus will be turned to the horror of human trafficking. It is sickening beyond belief that, in 2014, millions of people will be trapped in bonded labour (slavery), kidnapped and forced into work.

That any human being should be sold quite rightly provokes fury. However, given the usual coverage, you could easily come to the conclusion that sex trafficking is the only exploitation of this type. How much less frequent to hear stories from those sold into factory work, farm labour, domestic servitude? According to reports, sex trafficking is marginally more prevalent than trafficking into other (non-specified) labour but some, most notably academic Laura Agustín - who, as a former economist at Merrill Lynch, knows her way around a statistic - believe these studies are highly flawed, with terms like 'human trafficking' and 'trafficked women' far from clearly defined. Likewise, the English Collective of Prostitutes questions evidence of such widespread sex trafficking.

The more salacious press no doubt gets off on reporting sex trafficking stories but alongside this is the deep-seated notion that, surely, all women in the sex trade must need rescuing?

Not so, say Twitter's outspoken sex workers and activists:

Well I am certainty #notyourrescueproject because I am very happy being who I am - @MolliDesi

I love My work I am #NotYourRescueProject but if you want to make it easier for exiting stop the slutshaming and firing of former SWers - @TrancewithMe

#notyourrescueproject because sex workers need to direct their own lives, not prop up your gritty documentary/TED talk/thesis/grant proposal - @melissagira

Because lots of jobs are dangerous, ethically dubious, expose you to misogyny etc. #notyourrescueproject - @Slutocrat

Coz 'rescuers' can't even bring themselves to talk to us if we're not sayin what they wanna hear #notyourrescueproject - @pastachips

#NotYourRescueProject because I know we are just the excuse you're using to be able to police every woman's sexual behavior and choices. - @FemWho

#notyourrescueproject because your moral code doesn't put food on my family's table. -

@GlasgaeLauraLee

11/1 is human trafficking awareness day and we want to be sure it doesn't turn into anti sw day #notyourrescueproject @wanderinggulb

#NotYourRescueProject - @wanuenniggyipri

Not Your Rescue project was started by two women, N'jaila (@BlasianBytch) and Molli (@MolliDesi).

Molli, who now lives in London, has direct experience of the rescue industry in India, having been a target of it herself. Tweeting from the @Whorephobia account, Molli described her experience, saying she was beaten by NGO workers, locked in a barred room and offered candy in exchange for sexual favours. You can read the Storify of her tweets here.

For U.S. sex worker and journalist, N'jaila, #NotYourRescueProject was about reclaiming the sex work narrative from the purveyors of "tragedy porn".

"I think we all had reasons to speak," N'jaila says. "For me, I felt many people wanted to use my body for their tragedy porn. They want to talk about me like some cautionary tale. People want to ask me how I 'fell into sex work', when in actuality it was a conscious choice I made as an adult.

"I'm sick of people trying to explain to me why their brand of feminism is superior to mine, despite the fact I object to it because it's racist, classist and built on patriarchal ideas of purity and self-worth.

"I think news becoming a form of entertainment has a lot to do with the prominence of ghastly stories about sex work. A dead hooker sells papers. A dead trans woman sells even more. Conversations about legalizing or examining how we criminalize both sex workers and trafficked children sell a lot less."

Listening to what sex workers have to say is more crucial than ever, given recent events such as the raids of working premises in Soho, which led to numerous arrests and accusations of trafficking which, according to reports, were largely denied by the women themselves.

According to the English Collective of Prostitutes: "The widely used claim that of 4,000 women trafficked into the UK a year is based on research which makes the incredulous claim that: "every single foreign woman in the 'walk-up' flats in Soho had been smuggled into the country and forced to work as a prostitute." This would come as a surprise to the over 60 women who work in walk-up flats in Soho who regularly attend meetings called by the English Collective of Prostitutes, do interviews with the press, meet parliamentarians and who describe their situation as mothers supporting families or working to send money back home."

Other less than flattering reports on the rescue industry come from India, France, the U.S. and around the world.

None of this is to deny that sex trafficking occurs or that - like other forms of trafficking - it is a terrible thing, but simply to caution that knee-jerk reactions to sex work are not always accurate. Sure, not all sex workers love their jobs. Of course most of them are doing it as a means of paying the rent and bills. But then, aren't we all?

Find out more about #NotYourRescueProject and add your voice here.