

# Is it time to legalize prostitution in britain? essay sample



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Apparently if you go back through history, as far back as you can, as far back as we have records, you will find evidence of people selling sex for personal gain. It seems that prostitution has been around for a very long time and that the sex industry was thriving at least a few thousand years before the Industrial Revolution; a good deal longer than it's name suggests. So, it comes as no shock to discover that, many people consider prostitution to be the oldest profession in the world and that in some ancient civilisations the sex trade positively flourished. According to Claudine Dauphin, " Graeco-Roman domestic sexuality rested on a triad: the wife, the concubine and the courtesan", and this would have been the case for many centuries to come but, as she goes on to say, " the advent of Christianity upset this delicate equilibrium". However, although prostitution may have existed in most or every human culture in the past, it hasn't always been tolerated. It has been repressed, criminalized and, for many different reasons, fought against in many different societies. Prostitution has been blamed for the spread of disease, vice, crime and more simply for being against God's will.

But such reasons make poor arguments. Any of them could be shown to be consequences of the illegality and repression of prostitution. In a society such as ours in Britain that prides itself so heavily on the principle of democracy and personal freedom, and isn't ruled by a single religion, why should it be deemed immoral? Also, none of them disprove the idea that if people are allowed to sell their bodies in various other ways to make money, then why can't they sell them sexually in order to make money? It is hard to believe that any government in the Western world would forbid any activity

between two consenting adults or prohibit what seems to be a harmless pastime.

The truth is, though, that prostitution is not as harmless as it seems: there are victims. Many sex workers (mostly women) are not working out of their own free will and, aside from the brutal realities of being ‘sex slaves’, are subjected to further abuse, drugs and rape. “Each year, several thousand women are trafficked from Eastern European countries for prostitution in sex industry centres all over the world. The practices are extremely oppressive and incompatible with universal standards of human rights. The sex trade is a form of contemporary slavery.....” (Donna M. Hughes, Making the Harm Visible) There is no doubting that organised criminals have a large lucrative interest in the sex industry and control many of the large brothels, and the workers within them, throughout Europe. For too long now the industry has been largely ignored and as a result has become a shelter for rapists, drug dealers and organised crime.

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Surely then, if prostitution was legalized and brothels were controlled by the government the exploitation of sex workers could be drastically reduced?

The removal of the criminal element (pimps) and the introduction of security guards, CCTV and police checks would not only protect prostitutes but customers as well. Regulation could monitor the health of prostitutes, provide

better training and impose strict standards for conduct while at work, resulting in a safer working environment and assuring quality and efficiency of service. But, not everyone would agree with this possible solution. Donna M. Hughes, who has been an activist in the feminist anti-sexual violence and exploitation movement since the early 1980's argues that, " Legalisation will not end abuse; it will make abuse legal". She and most other feminists have argued for years that prostitution exploits women and reinforces their status as sexual objects and in doing so undoes many of the gains women have made over the last one hundred years. They would like to see prostitution outlawed and disappear from society for good. Donna M Hughes believes that under no circumstances should brothel owners or men who pay for sex not be prosecuted: " All legal reforms should aim to stop these perpetrators and profiteers." This is an interesting idea as, presumably, if the trade was to become legal then the government would become the criminals.

Nevertheless, the economical benefits if prostitution was to become legal could be huge. The Royal Economic Society claim that the amount of money spent on prostitutes a year by people living in Britain is nearly double that spent on going to the cinema. As a result, they estimate that if prostitutes were taxed they would raise the Treasury an additional  $\frac{1}{2}$ 250 million a year. (BBC News/UK 11-04-2001) Such a large sum of money could be beneficial to society if reinvested wisely.

At present we can only assume that the vast majority of the revenue from the sex trade goes into the pockets of the criminal syndicates who run it.

But, can we rely on the government? What if large companies were to

become involved? Imagine the aggressive marketing techniques of large  
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supermarket chains for example, that could be used by businesses to sell sex to the public: loyalty cards and special offers such as 'two for one' to develop brand loyalty, and promotions of 'specialised products' to serve the unfulfilled and niche markets, perhaps. It could change the way sex is perceived altogether, turning it into just another commodity like other consumer and entertainment goods. There is no need for us, the public to worry though, if tobacco and alcohol can be so easily restricted in the marketplace then why not prostitution?

What some people may find worrying, however, is the prospect of prostitution becoming a realistic career option for young school leavers and the unemployed. Many potential students may be lured away from university by the financial gains of prostitution or use the trade to pay for their education: not an appealing notion for parents. It may be that, if prostitution becomes legal, government welfare agencies might require the unemployed to take work that becomes available in the sex trade or lose their benefits. Of all the problems associated with legalisation, these, perhaps, cause the most concern - but should they? We already have a porn industry that may employ people who are currently out of work, should they apply, but should a job offer be refused there is no loss of benefits - acting in a pornographic movie, by the way, is legal as is committing a sexual act for money, however, it is an offence to solicit in a public place or for two prostitutes to operate together in the same place. Are we to assume, then, that one prostitute in a private location, earning a living without soliciting in public, is legal? And, that the government not only tolerates the sex trade but has almost legalised it in the process? It would appear so.

Although prostitution is still classed as illegal in many countries as well as in Britain no attempt is made to fully enforce this and some countries simply turn a blind eye to it. Some countries, however, have accepted the fact that there will always be a market for sex and have made prostitution legal.

Desmond Morris who has studied human behaviour and written several best selling books on the subject says, “ Despite these difficulties (illegality of prostitution), the worldwide demand for this type of sexual service has never lessened. Even where it is totally illegal it somehow manages to flourish.” It is difficult to disagree with this. Maybe prostitution should be made legal simply because trying to eradicate it through prohibition hasn’t worked. Is it not time to try another approach? Should we in Britain not follow the example of other countries such as the Netherlands, Australia and certain states of the USA, and make prostitution safer by fully legalizing it?

Certainly Donna M. Hughes doesn’t think so. She claims that, “ In the Netherlands, where two thirds of the women are immigrants and one-half of them are trafficked illegal immigrants, legalization has, in fact, increased prostitution and trafficking.” If this is the case then it is the Dutch government who are to blame. Clearly they have failed in removing the criminal controlling element from the trade. But let us not be too harsh, illegal immigrants are a colossal problem throughout Europe and are working in inhumane conditions in many trades, not just prostitution.

As with any legislation there will always be those for it and those against it, however, the issue of legalizing prostitution provokes more than a simple yes or no. Traditionally there has always been a barrier between sex and commerce, especially in Britain. People view sex as special, with more

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dignity perhaps, and as a result want to protect it. But there is another more fundamental reason for which, alone, prostitutes will never be accepted in society: Desmond Morris wrote, “ Although they provide a valuable sexual service they also encourage pair-bond betrayal, and this will forever cloud their image.” Maybe so, but isn’t legalization not just about acceptance, more importantly, is it not about protecting prostitutes?

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