



Shifting the Burden of Criminality

An analysis of the Irish sex trade in the context of prostitution law reform

Dr Monica O'Connor and Ruth Breslin
The Sexual Exploitation Research Programme, UCD

“Encouraged into it by a man and woman who told her she was beautiful and befriended her...she was approached through her open Facebook page by fellow nationals who suggested they could help her find a job/ flat in Dublin...she had developed a relationship with them over Facebook and she believed that they were a caring couple who wanted to help a fellow national. She agreed to sleep with men, although later realised she had been drugged.”

Case Study 10¹



1 O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020. *Shifting the Burden of Criminality: An Analysis of the Irish sex trade in the Context of Prostitution Law Reform*. Dublin: SERP, p. 42.

Background context

The *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act*² was enacted in March 2017 following lengthy debates in both houses of the Oireachtas.³ The Act is a wide-ranging piece of legislation on sexual offences which includes an offence in Part 4 criminalising any person who purchases or attempts to purchase sexual activity from another person. Through an amendment to the older legislation (the *Criminal Law, Sexual Offences Act, 1993*) pertaining to the selling of sex on the streets, the law now ensures that those exploited in prostitution are decriminalised. The Act also strengthens the provisions in relation to the buying of a trafficked person for sexual exploitation and increases the penalties for those who organise and profit from the prostitution of others.

The 2017 law reform followed a considered process of consultation overseen by a Joint Oireachtas Committee.⁴ Over 800 submissions from civil society organisations and survivors of prostitution were received, with more than 80% supporting the introduction of the Swedish approach, or what is now called the ‘Nordic’ or ‘Equality model’, as the most effective way to address the growth of the indoor sex trade and trafficking for sexual exploitation in Ireland. This legislative approach is intended to act as a deterrent to potential buyers, prevent sexual exploitation of vulnerable people, reduce the scale of prostitution and trafficking, increase penalties to those who profit from exploitation through brothel keeping and organising, and act as a declarative and normative law which makes the buying of any person for sexual gratification unacceptable.

The 2017 Act is only three years old – a relatively short period in which to assess the impacts of any law, not least a law, such as this, that seeks sustained normative change. This should be borne in mind when considering the findings that follow.

2 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/2/enacted/en/html> (Last retrieved 15/10/20).

3 The national parliament of Ireland.

4 The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence, which was charged with overseeing the consultation process.

The study

The overall aim of this study is to provide empirical data on the commercial sex trade in Ireland in the context of the current laws on prostitution. The research was funded by the Department of Justice and Equality under the Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2018, with the intention of contributing to the evidence base to inform the 2020 review of Part 4 of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017*. This study was undertaken using a multi-methods approach, which drew on a range of different means of enquiry. A broad variety of sources was used to gather and analyse data, including:

- Service user data from Ireland's two largest support providers⁵ for women in prostitution,⁶ which span four years 2015-2018
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with key frontline workers providing direct support to women in prostitution
- Detailed case studies of women in prostitution compiled in collaboration with frontline service Ruhama
- Service user records of 144 women currently in prostitution accessing the HSE's⁷ specialist Women's Health Service (WHS) in relation to their experiences of harm and violence in the sex trade and their interactions with An Garda Síochána⁸

- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with senior members of the GNPSB – the Garda National Protective Services Bureau⁹
- Ireland's largest online prostitution advertiser (Escort Ireland), with a focus on the profiles of those advertised and the reviews of women posted by sex buyers
- Official recorded crime statistics for prostitution provided by the CSO (Central Statistics Office)
- Press reporting of Garda actions against sex buyers and the organisation of prostitution
- Press reporting of violent assaults against women in prostitution.

This study achieved full ethical approval from University College Dublin's rigorous Human Research Ethics Committee and from An Garda Síochána's Research Unit, and adhered to the highest ethical standards throughout.

5 The NGO Ruhama and the Irish Health Service Executive's (HSE) Women's Health Service and Anti Human Trafficking Team.

6 Throughout this report the authors use the terms 'women in the sex trade' or 'women in/involved in prostitution'. The term 'prostitute' is avoided as far as possible; whilst it is the term used in law, it has very negative connotations for women. Nor is the term 'sex worker' used, as only a minority of women in the sex trade self-identify as such. Furthermore, the terms 'sex work'/'sex worker', in attempting to frame prostitution as a form of regular work, are regarded by survivors of the sex trade as serving to obscure and obviate the profound harms and sexual exploitation they have endured. The focus of this study is women and girls, who represent the vast majority of those in prostitution, both in Ireland and globally. Throughout the report this includes transgender people in prostitution who self-identify as women.

7 Ireland's Health Service Executive.

8 Ireland's national police service.

9 The GNPSB has a broad remit, providing advice, guidance and assistance to Gardai investigating sexual offences, online child exploitation, child protection, domestic violence, human trafficking and organised prostitution. The Bureau also leads investigations into more complex cases.



313 women of 40 different nationalities who were affected by prostitution received support from Ruhama in 2018. 122 of these were suspected victims of trafficking and they originated from 29 different countries including Nigeria, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Romania and Albania.¹⁰

Key findings

Women in the Irish sex trade

- The findings paint a picture of an indoor sex trade populated by largely vulnerable, often young, migrant women, alongside a continued presence of drug dependent and also very vulnerable Irish women on the streets
- Several hundred women access the two largest support services for women in prostitution in Ireland each year, representing over 40 nationalities, primarily from Africa, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe
- Over 650 women are typically advertised for prostitution online every day, in addition to the likely presence of more hidden subgroups and private markets of coerced and trafficked women within the Irish sex trade
- The vast majority of those involved in prostitution are women – this is clearly borne out in the advertising of prostitution – with less than one percent of profiles (0.7%) advertised as ‘male’
- It is clear that a wide range of vulnerabilities and risk factors precipitate entry into prostitution, including poverty, extreme adversity in childhood, lack of guardianship, experiences of child sexual abuse, mental health issues, lone parenthood, struggles with gender identity and addiction issues, with many first entering as minors
- These vulnerabilities create the context in which people are actively targeted, recruited, coerced and trafficked into the Irish sex trade. Whilst coercion and deception are prevalent, some women make the difficult decision to enter prostitution, but this is typically a choice made in highly constrained circumstances
- Once involved, women continue to face a series of significant adversities including high levels of mobility and transience, onerous financial pressures and severe isolation, which often serve to entrap and entrench them further within prostitution

- Many of the migrant women in prostitution in Ireland are of ‘no fixed abode’ – with no safe place to stay, living in very precarious circumstances and often having nowhere else to sleep but wherever they see buyers
- Multiple pressures in the lives of these women to pay rent, support family, manage debt and poverty and regularise their status is exacerbated for some by the wrench of separation from loved ones or experiences of domestic and sexual violence in their personal lives. It seems clear that experiencing such adversities not only led many women into prostitution in the first instance, but also left them vulnerable to further exploitation and harm once involved
- A common thread in women’s experiences identified by this study is that while many first entered prostitution to escape poverty, the financial pressures, especially obligations to support their loved ones, that led them there, are often the same pressures that keep them there once they start, with women who do manage to exit often leaving prostitution in similarly impoverished circumstances to when they first began.

“Have not been with a woman so young since I was that age myself, which is not today or yesterday, unfortunately did not last long with the OWO [oral sex without a condom], but was worth it to have someone that young do it for me.”



Sex buyer comment, escort-ireland.com 05/06/20¹¹

Key Findings

Buyer demands, harm and its impacts

- The sex trade in Ireland is clearly a buyers’ market, with women expected to fulfil a whole host of buyer demands relating to appearance, dress, age or an appearance of youthfulness and ethnic stereotypes. Women are also required to ‘act’ according to buyers’ requirements – convincingly playing the role of his real girlfriend or a real ‘porn star’, or some combination of both
- When women fail to effectively perform these roles, buyers constantly complain of a distant or ‘mechanical’ experience yet show no concern whatsoever for what women’s total disengagement from them might indicate. From the buyer’s perspective women are clearly there to ‘service’ him, their wellbeing is barely a consideration
- The study reveals buyer demands and sex acts that women find very difficult or uncomfortable to provide, that carry the risk of physical and sexual health harms¹² or that are intrusive and dangerous acts, such as being photographed, filmed or ‘stealthed’.¹³ Rough, aggressive and often intimidating treatment by buyers is also in evidence
- The impacts of the harms that women experience in prostitution are far-reaching in relation to their health and wellbeing, and their mental health in particular, with women who access services displaying a variety of trauma responses
- The study highlights the traumatic consequences of prostitution and trafficking for women and the difficulties they face in recovering and rebuilding their lives. Physical

¹² The health consequences of prostitution are documented in a parallel study currently awaiting approval by the HSE: Breslin, R., Latham, L., and O’Connor, M., (forthcoming, 2020). *Confronting the Harm: Documenting the Prostitution Experiences and Impacts on Health and Wellbeing of Women Accessing the Women’s Health Service*. Dublin: SERP.

¹³ Removing a condom during sex without a woman’s consent.

injuries, sexual and reproductive health impacts, and long-term chronic pain were recorded in a number of cases, but what is consistently prevalent throughout are the traumatic mental health consequences of prostitution, which include: dissociation, sleeplessness, anxiety, fear, hyper-vigilance, hyper-arousal, distrust of others, feelings of despair and hopelessness, low self-esteem, self-harming, risk-taking behaviour and drug and alcohol dependency, as these substances are used to numb or cope with experiences of prostitution.¹⁴ Dissociating from the sex of prostitution is described by some women as a necessary way of surviving

- Women who have been involved in the sex trade therefore present to support services with a wide range of complex needs demanding a multi-disciplinary approach. Women require a range of different specialist supports, tailored to their particular needs, which are delivered in a coordinated and holistic way by practitioners they trust and can work closely with to overcome their experiences of prostitution
- When women are deeply traumatised, this can be a slow and sensitive process, requiring extensive support from specialist providers, but this work demonstrates that it is possible for women to move beyond exploitation and build new lives.

“She was beaten up last year by four men who were targeting her to go out of ‘business’. She thinks they may have been sent by her former pimp, or that she may have been targeted to encourage her to move on from the area by competitors.”



W91¹⁵

¹⁴ These findings only touch the surface in terms of the mental health impacts of prostitution on women in the Irish sex trade – this is clearly an area that warrants further investigation.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.72

Key Findings

The organised sex trade, criminality and violence

- Evidence of pimping, the organisation of prostitution, and the profiteering of criminal gangs in the Irish sex trade abounds, and brings into question how many women can truly be ‘independent’ in this context, even when so many are advertised as such
- Pimping and the organisation of prostitution are clearly in evidence in all locations. Specific evidence of organisation identified by this study includes ‘bookers’ who arrange the women’s ‘appointments’ with buyers, women who are advertised using profiles that are not their own, women who speak almost no English, women who do not have control over how they are advertised online or the acts they are described as providing, and women who are under pressure to see as many buyers as possible
- Many women’s lack of English language skills, and in some cases lack of control over how they are advertised, is likely to seriously constrain their ability to safely and confidently negotiate what they are and are not willing to do with buyers. However, it seems that purchasing sexual access to a woman you can barely communicate with, who does not even know what sex acts she supposedly provides, raises few questions in buyers’ minds as to whether these women are being controlled or coerced in this context
- Even where such indicators may suggest the presence of coercion and control by pimps and traffickers, buyers appear largely indifferent to the women’s circumstances. Their concern instead is for themselves and their ‘disappointment’ if they did not get what they expected. Buyers’ apparent willingness to readily ignore such indicators serves to further demonstrate the futility of only

criminalising the purchase of sex from identified victims of trafficking, as has been proven in other research¹⁶

- Support providers note that in cases of pimping and trafficking, the women concerned receive little to none of the money paid by buyers to their controllers. But clearly those who profit from prostitution are also making very significant sums from women who identify as independent in the sex trade – through hugely over-inflated rents charged for premises being used as brothels and the cost of advertising – which means that women may have to make €800 or more every week to cover these costs before they can earn anything for themselves or the loved ones they may be supporting. It is these conditions that often entrap women in prostitution or ensure they leave it no better off financially than when they first began
- For some of the organised crime gangs involved in the sex trade in Ireland, prostitution is just one of the ‘businesses’ they are profiting from – some of the same gangs responsible for running the sex trade are also heavily involved in burglaries, robbery, blackmail, fuel and cigarette smuggling, credit card cloning, the supply of illegal drugs, money laundering, fraud and cybercrime. There is also evidence of different networks operating chains of supply, some embedded within the sex trade in Ireland and others grooming and recruiting women and girls in their origin countries and bringing them here
- It is evident that violence against women is endemic to the sex trade in all locations and is used by criminals, pimps and buyers alike as a means to control women or ensure that they bend to their will. Analysis of criminal and violent incidents reported by women to just one support service between 2015 and 2018, shows just how serious these incidents are – involving fear of violence, actual physical and sexual violence, or direct coercion into prostitution, including trafficking. Over one fifth of the sample disclosed serious incidents of criminality, threats of harm or violence and actual violence that they had experienced in the context of prostitution, and some women disclosed more than one such incident. There are likely to be many more such incidents that go undisclosed and unreported every year

- It is clear from these findings that women in the Irish sex trade face the constant risk of violence from a variety of sources, and too often this risk becomes a reality. This was the case across all the years of data collection. However, this study found no evidence that the introduction of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017* caused a surge in violence against persons in prostitution. Rather, violence is an ever-present feature of the Irish sex trade – in fact reports of violence across the sample remained relatively steady during 2015-2018, with the exception of a series of robberies and assaults against women perpetrated by crime gangs at the end of 2017. These cases followed a particular pattern and have been attributed to a period of ‘turf wars’ between rival crime gangs involved in the organisation of the sex trade in Ireland, who use similar, violent methods in an attempt to eradicate any ‘competition’. Vulnerable women in prostitution clearly bore the brunt of this
- Documenting the harms of prostitution and the extent to which women in the sex trade are victimised, is not to deny women’s own agency and the depth of their resilience. Indeed, women’s strength and resilience are clearly in evidence in this study, illustrating women’s powerful capacity to overcome harm and trauma and establish new lives for themselves. At the same time, it is also critical to be aware that not all women survive or manage to get out of prostitution
- These findings confirm the endemic nature of violence in prostitution, and the extent of involvement of crime gangs inextricably bound up in the running of the trade. These factors, in themselves, arguably justify attempts to tackle the expansion of the trade, including by criminalising buyers in order to tackle demand.

“I was indeed misled here as good English on phone but none when I got there... she looks nothing like the lady in the pictures...”

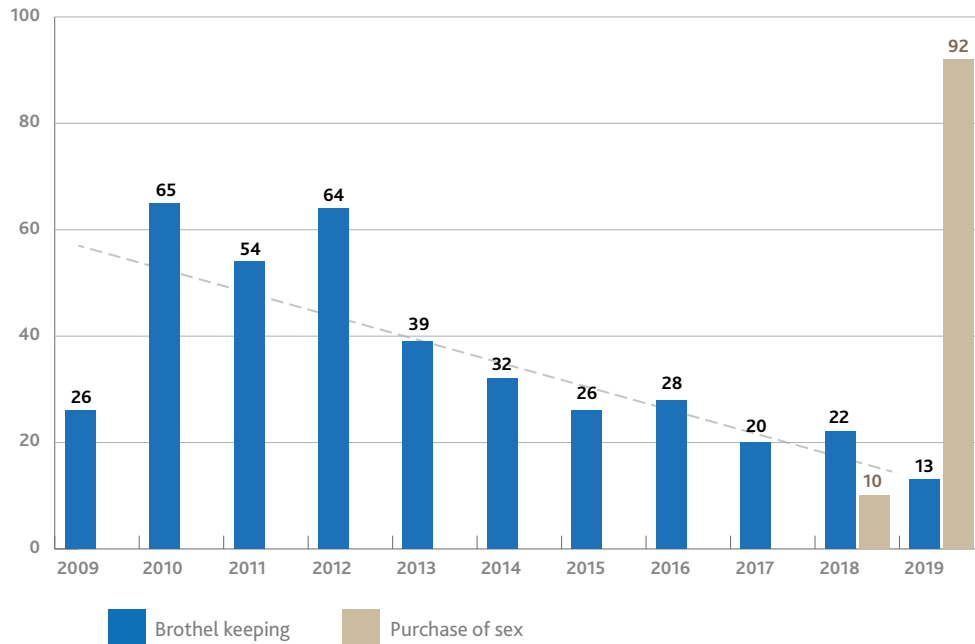
Sex buyer comment, escort-ireland.com 05/06/2017



16 See the main report for full details of all sources and references.

17 *ibid.* p. 63

Graph 1: Number of recorded incidents 2009-2019
Brothel keeping and Purchase of sex¹⁸



Source: Graph based on data provided upon request to SERP by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), May 2020.

Key Findings

The laws governing prostitution and enforcement by An Garda Síochána

- The 2017 Act has made a significant impact on the policing of the sex trade with a major shift in the focus of Garda enforcement from the criminalisation of those selling sex towards the targeting of buyers and organisers. This approach is also reflected in the official statistics in relation to prostitution-specific offences, which show a steady decline in recent years in the number of recorded incidents of soliciting and loitering, accompanied by a sharp increase in the targeting of buyers since the introduction of the 2017 Act (an 820% increase from 2018 to 2019)
- Despite much recent attention given in mainstream and social media to arrests and prosecutions for brothel keeping,¹⁹ in fact recorded incidents of brothel keeping have been declining quite steadily from 64 incidents in 2012 to a new low of 13 in 2019 (an 80% decrease). In terms of cases that make it to court, the number is even lower
- Although recorded incidents of brothel keeping are on the decline, An Garda Síochána stress the need for brothel keeping laws to be maintained in order to ensure a strong and effective criminal justice response to those responsible for pimping and organising prostitution, and those who actively profit from the sexual exploitation of others. They state that it is critical that they have powers to enter and investigate premises and conduct welfare checks,²⁰ particularly in circumstances where they suspect there may be victims of coercion, trafficking, child sexual exploitation or the exploitation of another vulnerable person. Evi-

¹⁹ Much of this attention related to a single high-profile case, as reported in the media here: <https://www.irishmirror.ie/news/irish-news/irish-prostitution-laws-not-fit-16496027> (Last retrieved 15/10/20). The women in this case pled guilty, were granted bail and were sentenced to nine months in prison, which they appealed. It is understood that they have not served any sentence to date.

²⁰ Informal visits by Gardai to premises known or believed to be used as brothels to check on the welfare of those present.

dence from other studies has also demonstrated that some of the most vulnerable and exploited women in Ireland's sex trade are most likely to be identified by Gardaí using their powers to enter brothels as part of a raid or welfare check

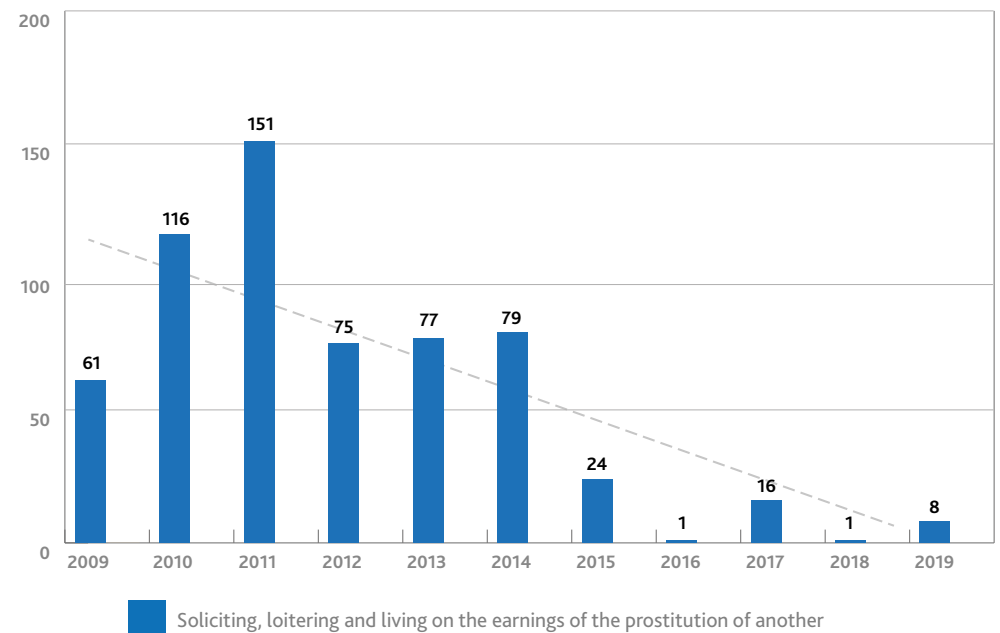
- The introduction of the offence criminalising buyers has received strong support from GNPSB, who regard this offence as contributing to their capacity to reduce demand and therefore reduce organised prostitution in Ireland. The GNPSB also recognise that the intention of the law is in acting as a deterrent and that it is buyers who have the power to change their behaviour
- The GNPSB are aware of the levels of organisation in the Irish sex trade, the movement of mostly young women into Ireland and around the country, and the highly lucrative nature of the trade. The level of profit being accrued by organisers and advertising agencies is an increasing focus of Garda activities. It would appear that progress is being made on this front, with a number of confirmed cases against prostitution organisers before the courts at the end of 2019,²¹ alongside a series of recent operations led by CAB²² targeting those involved in many forms of organised criminality, including organised prostitution
- While the GNPSB has expressed its full support for the Act and the shift from a seller offence to a buyer offence, it is also recognised that this major shift in the approach to people in prostitution since 2017 needs to be embedded across the police service and that the Gardaí need to work to build their trust. The need for continuing education and training across the service is recognised as key to ensuring the full implementation of the decriminalisation of the seller
- The shift towards a protective rather than a punitive role by An Garda Síochána towards women in prostitution has been demonstrated in a number of ways, and was further in evidence when the Covid-19 crisis began, as An Garda Síochána recognised the increased risks posed to those in the sex trade during the pandemic and reached out to them directly to offer their assistance

21 See: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-12-03/274/> (Last retrieved 15/10/20).

22 An Garda Síochána's Criminal Assets Bureau.

- Now that persons in prostitution are decriminalised, the possibility of expunging previous convictions for the sale of sex represents a promising future move by An Garda Síochána in terms of embracing the full intentions and spirit of the 2017 Act.

Graph 2: **Number of recorded incidents 2009-2019**
Soliciting, loitering and living on the earnings of the prostitution of another²³



Source: Graph based on data provided upon request to SERP by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), May 2020. Note: It was not possible for the CSO to disaggregate the data for these different offences. In order to preserve statistical confidentiality and to protect the identity of individuals, the CSO suppresses small cell (non-zero) values of less than 5. The precise number of incidents in 2016 and 2018 are not known because they were less than five. For the purpose of this graph the minimum possible number for each of these two years has been used, which is 1.

23 *ibid.* p.79

“We’ve gone from the seller’s market to a demand market, from a seller offence to a demand and a purchaser offence and that’s important. Where, you know, a couple of years ago your local Garda may as well have been prosecuting the worker. Now that’s not the case...”

“The people who purchase sex have a lot to lose and they have more of a say in their behaviour. They can switch their behaviour off much quicker than an exploited person who has very little say in what they do.”²⁵



Key Findings

Women’s reported experiences of An Garda Síochána and the law

- Historically, women on the streets bore the burden of criminality in Ireland, so perhaps the most immediate and visible impact of the 2017 Act has been the decriminalisation of women in street prostitution. This has had largely positive outcomes, including an increased willingness amongst women to report crimes committed against them and in their improved relationship with Gardaí overall
- An analysis of the experiences and impacts of policing and prostitution legislation reported to one support service by women in indoor prostitution between 2015-2018 found that 12.5% of the sample self-reported concerns or fears they had about Gardaí, immigration authorities and/or the law, 5.5% reported specific negative experiences they had had with Gardaí and/or the law and 8% reported specific positive experiences
- Women’s reported fears and concerns primarily relate to becoming known to the Gardaí or members of their local community for their involvement in prostitution, or because they are undocumented. Both can create a barrier to women reporting concerns, but also reporting crimes committed against them to the Gardaí, which is a serious issue. Some of these fears relate to negative experiences not with Gardaí in Ireland but with the police or other authorities in their country of origin. It is notable that only two women in the whole sample made specific reference to concerns they had about the laws on prostitution
- Women’s negative experiences of An Garda Síochána largely relate to their sense of being targeted by the Gardaí for their involvement in prostitution and specifically for brothel raids, which continue to prove very problematic for the women concerned. The small number of women who had experienced a police

raid also had to deal with the aftermath – such as having to seek new accommodation or the return of essential possessions that had been seized as evidence by Gardaí

- In terms of the proper investigation of organised crime, Gardaí state that they must remove evidence, but acknowledge that the removal of phones and money in particular can create major difficulties for women. The GNPSB are clear that women found in brothels are not the target of criminal investigations, rather their focus is on identifying the organisers that are profiting from the prostitution of others
- The GNPSB strongly believe that, with education and training, the capacity to distinguish between an individual occupying a brothel and an organiser will improve, and that explaining to women what is happening during and in the aftermath of a raid, including when any property seized will be returned to them, should be part of enhanced Garda practice in the future
- In terms of positive experiences with Gardaí that women described, there is no doubt that welfare visits, being listened to, and being taken seriously when they report concerns or incidents to Gardaí is appreciated and valued by women and their support workers, and that building trust will increase the protection of women and the likelihood that they will report crimes committed against them in the future
- The evidence largely demonstrates Gardaí's stated commitment to the safety and welfare of persons in prostitution and their right to access justice for crimes committed against them. This study found that some of the most serious, violent crimes that have been perpetrated against women in prostitution in recent years have been very proactively investigated by Gardaí. The study documents a number of significant cases where Gardaí have taken such crimes very seriously and have prosecuted cases to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

“She dealt with a difficult, aggressive buyer who threatened her. Staff encouraged her to report him to the Garda liaison but she was worried that if she did so Gardaí would record details about her being in prostitution.”



“Gardaí came on a few occasions [on welfare visits to the brothel where she was based]. A friend tried to help her escape [she had been trafficked from Romania into prostitution in Ireland by her boyfriend] and then she asked Ruhama to assist her with the help of Gardaí to flee the apartment...The woman reported the trafficker. Gardaí responded promptly and took statements.”²⁷

Case Study 9



26 *ibid.* p.89

27 *ibid.* p.98

“This law is about reducing prostitution in the country and about making it very unattractive to people so that it’s not a worthwhile business for organised traffickers... we want to make Ireland a very unattractive place for organised prostitution.”²⁸



Conclusions

The study starkly illustrates the multiple vulnerabilities and adversities facing women who are drawn into Ireland’s sex trade. Women and girls take many different paths into prostitution, but coercion, deception, and difficult choices made in very constrained circumstances tend to litter these paths. These experiences are compounded by buyers with no concern for the women’s welfare or true circumstances – most are focused entirely on their own sexual gratification – which often leads to demands for risky acts and complaints or even aggression if their demands are not fulfilled. The harms to women as a result are clear, but this does not give pause to those who organise prostitution and profit as a result – the levels of organisation within the trade identified by this study continue to give cause for grave concern. As do the levels of fear and violence experienced by women in prostitution and perpetrated by those who seek to dominate and control them to fulfil their own sexual or financial desires.

Based on the evidence presented here, it can only be concluded that this highly exploitative trade cannot be permitted to persist or expand. While no single piece of legislation can fully mitigate the negative consequences for women of an inherently harmful and frequently violent system, at just over three years old, the official statistics, reports from women, service providers and the GNPSB presented in this research indicate that the initial outcomes of the 2017 law reform are very promising. These indicate a major shift in the burden of criminality in the right direction – from the seller, who is now decriminalised, to the buyer who is criminalised for fuelling the demand for women that sustains the sex trade.

Whilst persons in prostitution can no longer be criminalised for soliciting or loitering, the statistics also clearly indicate a steep decline in women being prosecuted under brothel keeping laws. However, the need for clarity and guidance in relation to distinguishing between individuals simply living/seeing buyers in premises and those who are organising and profiting from the prostitution of others is recognised as a key area that needs continuing improvement.

There is no doubt that Ireland’s sex trade causes untold misery and harm to very many of the women who are caught within it, many of whom were facing difficult and chal-

lenging life circumstances to begin with. Buyers are indiscriminate, displaying indifference and anger rather than concern when there are clear indicators of control, coercion and even trafficking in evidence, underpinning the importance of addressing demand to reduce the number of girls and women being pimped and trafficked for sexual exploitation. Full and effective implementation of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017* by all relevant State bodies is therefore required as a matter of urgency to tackle all those responsible for sexual exploitation, and to minimise the serious harms and human rights breaches endemic to the sex trade as far as possible, building on some of the promising practices and interventions highlighted here.

Recommendations

The study makes a series of recommendations relating to:

- Law enforcement and justice:** including proactive operations against sex buyers to deter the demand that fuels the trade; continued education and training of An Garda Síochána to ensure that the culture change involved in shifting the burden of criminality from seller to buyer in prostitution is fully embedded across the police service; activities to enhance women's safety and confidence in reporting crimes committed against them; dedicated national guidelines for brothel raids that ensure that the negative impacts on women found on brothel premises are minimised as far as possible; enhanced resourcing of operations by An Garda Síochána targeting pimps, traffickers, the organisers and advertisers of prostitution; and action by State bodies to expunge all historical criminal records relating to convictions for selling sex
- Holistic support:** including enhanced resourcing of specialist NGO and statutory services with a proven track record of providing holistic, trauma-informed responses to women in prostitution both locally and nationally; exiting prostitution to be recognised and resourced by the State as a statutory right – with a package of supports (similar to those currently provided to victims of trafficking in Ireland) that includes regularisation of their immigration status, access to housing, health services and social protection, access to justice and the provision of education, training and employment opportunities
- Public awareness:** including targeted awareness raising efforts to ensure that women in prostitution know that they are decriminalised and the protections they can expect; enhanced awareness campaigns so that buyers know that their actions are illegal; specific education programmes for young people on the harms of prostitution and sexual exploitation; and broader public awareness strategies to enhance public understanding of and support for the law, ensuring its wider normative and declarative effects
- Monitoring and research:** including continued monitoring of the implementation of the 2017 Act, enhanced by improvements in the way prostitution offences are recorded by An Garda Síochána and in the official statistics; further research in a number of key areas to strengthen the evidence base in this area in Ireland, including a more in-depth exploration of the mental health impacts of prostitution; an examination of racialised systems of exploitation within the Irish sex trade, the patterns, tactics and recruitment methods used in drawing migrant women into the trade, and how these can be tackled from a prevention perspective; and an exploration of women's entrapment within prostitution and the complexities of the exiting process, including documenting a model of good practice in the provision of exiting supports.

