

Gender Policy Models and Calls to “Tackle Demand” for Sex Workers

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Abstract Why have proposals to “tackle demand” for sex workers by criminalizing their clients gained political traction in the UK? This article treats sex work policy debates as a site of contested norms concerning gender, sexuality, individual agency and the market. I argue that recent shifts away from a male breadwinner/female homemaker model of family life have disrupted established policy visions of desirable family and employment patterns. Calls to “tackle demand” for sex workers provide terrain to construct norms of gendered, sexual and market conduct which align with new policy visions of the dual earner family, nurturing fathers and employed mothers. Analysing recent policy documents, this article shows that governmental arguments in favour of “tackling demand” claim the policy will promote both women’s employment and gender equality in personal relationships. Furthermore, end demand discourse individualizes responsibility for continued gender inequality to the deviant sexual desires of a few bad men. The article concludes that end demand discourse deflects tensions inherent in policies which promote gender equality while reducing support for at-home mothers and thus exacerbating feminized poverty.

Keywords Adult worker model · Activation policy · Sex-buyers · Criminalizing clients · Prostitution · Sex work policy

Introduction

The notion of “tackling demand” for prostitution by criminalizing clients but not sex workers has gained credibility across Europe, provoking fierce policy debate in the UK. Sweden introduced a law that criminalized paying for sex but not selling sex in 1999. Since then, the Swedish government has strongly advocated for other countries to adopt their model. Norway and Iceland passed similar laws in 2009 and after much debate France criminalized paying for sex in 2016. In 2008, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade (APPG) formed to develop proposals for “tackling demand” in England and Wales. In June 2015, Northern Ireland criminalized paying for sex. However, Scotland, England and Wales have not yet followed. The Home Affairs Committee’s on-going Prostitution Inquiry issued an interim report in 2016 stating they needed more time to investigate the merits of criminalizing clients and would be closely monitoring the situation following criminalization in France and Northern Ireland (Home Affairs Committee, 2016).

Why has criminalizing paying for sex become a reasonable political proposition in the UK at this point in history? The notion of criminalizing clients first appeared at least as far back as the early twentieth century within social hygiene movements (Mackey, 2005). However, for the most part, policy in the UK has long reflected a sexual double standard that punished and attempted to rehabilitate sex workers but not their clients. Scholars have traced contemporary arguments in favour of criminalizing clients and decriminalizing sex workers to “radical feminist” analyses of pornography, prostitution and heterosexuality (Scoular, 2004; Scoular & O’Neill, 2008; Serughetti, 2013, p. 41). Much of this literature contests radical feminism for failing “to move outside the hetero-normative order which separates work from sex” and

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“naturalising men’s power and women’s victimhood” (Scoular & O’Neill, 2008, pp. 19–20).

Yet why would radical feminist theory on sexual politics suddenly find purchase among European political elites? I address this question in the UK context by treating sex work law and policy as significant for authorizing particular discourse on gender, sexuality and the marketplace. Scholars have shown that sex work laws and policies make minimal difference to supply and demand or geographies of sex work in different European states (Agustín, 2008; Hubbard, Matthews & Scoular, 2007; Scoular, 2010). Nevertheless, family-values, conservative, libertarian and feminist political actors have engaged in heated debate over the realities of sex work and appropriate sex work policy. Sex work provides rich terrain for debate over market freedoms, individual agency, commodification, exploitation and gender equality. Thus although policy responses to sex work may have minimal impact on sex markets, sex work policy and law constructs norms, authorities, subjectivities and spatializations in relation to gender, sexuality and the market (Scoular, 2010, pp. 30–36).

Therefore, sex work policy should be thought about in the broader context of shifts in gendered social policy. Much of the literature on gender and welfare regimes has focused on care work and family policy. Scholars interested in the gendering of welfare systems have pointed to the ways social policy has fostered particular visions of family life and appropriate gendered and sexual conduct (Daly, 2011; Lewis, 1992). However, research on gender and welfare regimes has mostly concerned “the heterosexual family, and the relationships between men, women, the state and the market, in the work of heterosexual social reproduction” to the neglect of other questions concerning the government of sexuality (Roseneil, Crowhurst, Hellesund, Santos & Stoilova, 2013, p. 167). This article shows how changing policy visions of the gendering of paid employment and domestic life provide important context for understanding the political traction of calls to “end demand” for sex work. The article begins by discussing the gendering of the domestic sphere and paid employment according to the breadwinner/homemaker model of family life which informed UK social policy for much of the twentieth century. I describe how policy constructions of a feminized domestic sphere and masculine economic power aligned with prostitution policy which criminalized sex workers but not their clients. I then consider twenty-first century changes in social and labour market policy, in particular efforts to “activate” female labour-power. Activation policies entail a shift away from a breadwinner/homemaker model of family life toward an “adult worker model”, disrupting established gendered norms of conduct.

I argue that activation policies and the shift to an “adult worker” model of family and employment policy helps explain the recent traction of calls to “end demand” in the UK. Thus, the final section of this article analyses how arguments

in favour of ending demand construct appropriate gendered conduct in domestic life and paid employment in two significant policy documents: the APPG (2014) report *Shifting the Burden: Inquiry to Assess the Operation of the Current Legal Settlement on Prostitution in England and Wales* and documents from the Home Affairs Committee’s Prostitution Inquiry (2016). My analysis shows how the UK governmental discourse on ending demand frames criminalization of clients as fostering gender equality in personal and marketplace relationships and thus aligns with the “adult worker” model of family and employment policy. I conclude that political elite actors’ support for calls to end demand may deflect tensions between normative policy support for gender equality and the exacerbation of feminized poverty produced by reduced state support for at-home mothers. End demand discourse can be deployed to individualize responsibility for such social ills to the deviant sexual desires of a few bad men.

Paid Work, Parenting and Sex Work Policies in the UK

For much of the twentieth century social policy in the UK, as in many other states, followed a male breadwinner/female homemaker model of family life (Lewis, 1992). Thus, social and employment policies disadvantaged married women’s paid work and access to welfare benefits on the assumption that husbands should provide for their wives. Furthermore, the state provided little in the way of maternity leave or childcare, but supported at-home mothering through programmes such as health visitors and child benefits. Widow and lone mother benefits provided state support for women to stay home caring for children in the absence of a male breadwinner. Thus, Lewis categorized the UK as a “strong male breadwinner” state (Lewis, 1992). In such a state, social policy represented the problem of female poverty as the absence of a male breadwinner.

In the context of social policy assumptions of women’s economic well-being as secured through married life, the problem of prostitution appeared as one of female deviance. Sex work contradicted the norms of feminine domesticity and sexual fidelity at the core of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model. Consequently, laws, policy and discourse constructed sex workers as in need of sanction and rehabilitation. By contrast, men’s payment for sexual services did not invite social policy intervention because it did not contradict heterosexual masculine norms of sexual and economic power. The law punished clients of sex workers for “kerb-crawling” but not for purchasing sexual services at indoor venues. Rationalizations for policing “kerb-crawlers” upheld ideals of the domestic sphere as the appropriate place for women’s sexuality, constructing non-sex worker women as victimized by the risk that men seeking services from street sex workers

might proposition them (Cook, 2015, p. 6). From this point of view, sexual commerce should be kept indoors to protect (non-sex worker) female, rather than male, sensibilities. Thus, sex work and family policy supported male economic power in the market place and domestic life. Men enjoyed sexual freedom in both spheres and expected to compensate women for sex as breadwinners or clients. By contrast, women's place in the non-domestic worlds of market or politics often raised questions about sexual propriety and (possibly neglected) private responsibilities. Indeed, the term “public woman” still carries connotations of prostitution (Friskin, 2000; Matthews, 1992; Wright, 2006).

However, recent analyses suggest a general twenty-first century move away from the male breadwinner/female homemaker model even in traditionally strong breadwinner states such as the UK. “Activation” and “social investment” policies which aim to draw as many adults into paid work as possible, including mothers of young children, inform this move. Social investment policies address the challenges of developing a highly skilled, flexible labour force able to flourish in a rapidly changing knowledge and service economy which offers increasingly insecure employment (Jenson, 2009). Policy makers envisage the dual earner couple as more able to weather the uncertainties of such an employment market and explicitly treat the male breadwinner/female homemaker family as belonging to the past (Jenson, 2009, p. 448). Since families depend on women's paid employment, policy makers seek to promote their labour force participation by advocating state support for childcare and parental leave. With its series of country reports on “Babies and Bosses”, beginning in 2002 and synthesized in 2007, the OECD recommended that member states do more to facilitate harmony between childcare responsibilities and paid employment (OECD, 2007). Thus, Lewis and Giullari (2005) conclude that an “adult worker model” of family has become normative in the OECD, including in states which previously promoted a vision of the male breadwinner/female homemaker family as ideal.

As UK social policy shifts toward the “adult worker” model, established norms of masculinity and femininity necessarily come under scrutiny. Since the turn of the century, fatherhood policies in the UK have sought to encourage both married and unmarried fathers to spend more time with their children. Policy debate has problematized men's long hours in paid work and considered whether some parental leave should be reserved for fathers on a “use it or lose it” basis (Gregory & Milner, 2011, p. 593). Shared parental leave was introduced in the UK in 2015, although not dedicated fathers' leave. Policy discourse on parental leave has represented fathers as wanting to spend time with their children and government's role as facilitating engaged fatherhood (Scourfield & Drakeford, 2002, p. 623). A recent Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2016) report, *Working Better: Fathers, Family and Work*, reiterates this theme, reporting that men

want flexible paid work so they can be more active fathers. The report presents fathers' engagement with childcare as complementary to mothers' and recommends the UK move toward gender-neutral parental leave with better pay and greater flexibility (EHRC, 2016).

Although OECD reports cite changing gender norms and patterns of family life as necessitating changing parental leave and childcare policies, in practice women still do the bulk of care work and have a disadvantaged position in employment markets (Daly, 2011; Lewis, 2001; Lewis & Giullari, 2005). Margarita León (2009) argues that, while European Union social policies have converged in support of drawing women into paid work, most states have not paid attention to the unequal division of domestic work between men and women nor formulated policies to address this inequality. This “rapid shift ... in normative ideas about the contributions that women especially should make to families, and in the goals of social and labour-market policies” can leave women worse off than when welfare systems recognized their care work (Lewis & Giullari, 2005, p. 77).

Increasing rates of marital breakdown and single parenthood form an important context for policy makers' rejection of support for mothers to stay home with young children in the UK, where child poverty is associated with single parenthood and welfare receipt. “Activation” policies treat paid work as a solution to poverty, and to child poverty in particular. “Work testing” of single parents, usually mothers, seeks to move them into paid work (Knijn, Martin & Millar, 2007; Kowalewska, 2015). Policies have also become less flexible in taking childcare responsibilities into account when testing work availability. For example, the age of the youngest child before a work test is applied has shifted from 13 to 5 or 6 years old. At the same time, efforts to “make work pay” involve financial sanctions for welfare beneficiaries who do not attend required meetings or courses. Furthermore, benefit rates have been reduced based on the assumption that poverty will motivate beneficiaries to seek alternative sources of income (Kowalewska, 2015). “Activation” policies toward single parents thus force those who cannot maintain paid employment into poverty, along with their children.

Researchers and activists point to links between a lack of employment opportunities for mothers, feminized poverty and women's engagement with sex work. Recent research in England about women subject to “engagement and support orders” (ESOs) after being caught doing sex work found that women cited welfare cuts and penalties as necessitating sex work. One woman told researchers: “Because all this dole and all that now, it's just, like, three minutes late, five minutes late, [for a welfare appointment] you're getting sanctioned, how can you live? You're gonna starve. What if you've got no family and friends to help you?” (Carline & Scoular, 2015, p. 109). Police also told the researchers they had noticed women returning to sex work since the introduction of austerity

measures following the global financial crisis (Carline & Scoular, 2015, p. 109). Rape Crisis Surry and Sussex (2016) told the Home Affairs Committee Prostitution Inquiry that:

From our frontline work we know that the most common reason for selling sex is to earn money due to limited funds and low social economic status, or simply a lack of opportunities. Our workers have noticed that in recent years, alongside austerity measures, there has been an increase in women who sell sex online to survive; something bolstered by other organisations such as the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP), who noted that that more and more women, in particular mothers, are going into sex work because of benefit cuts, sanctions or destitution.

Research in the USA also points to welfare cuts and gender inequality in employment markets as motivating women to choose sex work (Dunlap, Golub & Johnson, 2003; Scott, London & Myers, 2002). Likewise, an Australian study found that mothers, students and women with health problems reported choosing sex work because of flexible hours and comparatively high pay compared with their other options (Maher, Pickering & Gerard, 2012).

Belinda Brooks-Gordon (2010, p. 146) argues that Labour Party (UK) women's turn to the question of prostitution in the twenty-first century should be understood in the context of their presiding over welfare cuts which had a devastating impact on single mothers during the 1990s. She argues that the welfare cuts produced a "critical mass of female parliamentarians eager to be seen to be doing something for women". In 2008, some of these parliamentarians cooperated with a fundamentalist Christian group to form the APPG (Brooks-Gordon, 2010, p. 155). The APPG tasked itself with developing proposals on "tackling demand" and, in 2014, released the report *Shifting the Burden: Inquiry to Assess the Operation of the Current Legal Settlement on Prostitution in England and Wales* which strongly recommended criminalizing clients. An "End Demand" campaign sponsored by a coalition of women's groups focuses on mobilizing supporters to lobby their representatives in support of criminalizing sex buyers. Many of these groups and individual supporters submitted witness statements to the Home Affairs Committee's, 2016 Prostitution Inquiry.

The Prostitution Inquiry called for both written and oral evidence on the following issues:

- Whether criminal sanction in relation to prostitution should continue to fall more heavily on those who sell sex, rather than those who buy it.
- What the implications are for prostitution-related offences of the Crown Prosecution Service's recognition of prostitution as violence against women.
- What impact the Modern Slavery Act 2015 has had to date on trafficking for purposes of prostitution, what further action is planned, and how effectively the impact is being measured.
- Whether further measures are necessary, including legal reforms, to:
 - Assist those involved in prostitution to exit from it.
 - Increase the extent to which exploiters are held to account.
 - Discourage demand which drives commercial sexual exploitation.

Thus, the Inquiry's terms of reference focused on probing the APPG's recommendation that the law should "shift the burden" of criminality and stigma from prostitutes to their clients and treat prostitution as violence against women. The Inquiry received slightly more individual witness statements favouring decriminalization of both sex workers and clients, including numerous submissions from sex worker organizations and individual sex workers, than submissions favouring an "end demand" approach. In the face of strongly polarized opinions and conflicting evidence, the Committee refrained from making a recommendation on the matter until a future date and called for more research (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2016).

Below I discuss the APPG's (2014) *Shifting the Burden* report and those submissions to the Prostitution Inquiry (2016) which favoured criminalizing clients. My analysis considers how arguments in favour of ending demand for sex workers represent appropriate sexual conduct in domestic life and the marketplace. I show that arguments for ending demand in these documents suggest that shifting norms of domesticity and employment along with their associated male and female subjectivities have cast the policy problem of sex work in a new light for UK political elites. Thus, these shifting norms help to explain the recent political traction of calls to end demand. My analysis highlights how governmental discourse in the UK articulates calls to end demand in a way that resonates with wider gender equality policies and market-based solutions to feminized poverty. Thus, my analysis cannot be generalized to broader end demand discourse on gender which encompasses diverse positions such as radical feminism and fundamentalist Christianity. Rather, I seek to specifically understand the traction calls to end demand has gained with UK governmental elites.

Arguments for Ending Demand in *Shifting the Burden* and the Prostitution Inquiry

Arguments for "tackling demand" in both the APPG (2014) report and submissions to the Prostitution Inquiry aligned with

broader governmental projects to engage men with domestic life and women with paid work. Below, I unpack these arguments according to how they represented good heterosexual relationships, how they represented good labour market relationships and how they justified punishing clients. For the sake of brevity, I refer to “end demand arguments”, or “calls to end demand” and so forth. Such phrases should be read as referring to the policy discourse evident in the APPG (2014) report and submissions to the Prostitution Inquiry rather than characterizing the broader end demand campaign.

Good Heterosexual Relationships

Arguments for ending demand constructed sexual relationships as an important bastion of non-market relations which are free of power imbalance and involve authentic self-expression. End demand campaigners discussed sexual activity as inalienable from the body/self and thus represented sex work as selling the body and/or selling the self. For example, Mia de Faoite (2016) told the Prostitution Inquiry: “I do not believe anyone has the right to buy another human being, and that should be enshrined in law regardless”. Equality Now told the APPG that in the commercial sex transaction, “the power rests in those who can buy and use the women at will” (APPG, 2014, p. 40). The words “power imbalance” and “imbalance of harm” recurred throughout the APPG report and their witness statement to the Prostitution Inquiry (APPG, 2016). Thirteen other witness statements also referred to power imbalances as the problem with prostitution. For example, both the National Board of Catholic Women (2016) and Women at the Well (2016) said: “The law condones a power imbalance in prostitution that does not exist in non-commercial sexual transactions: despite receiving payment the cost to the seller is much greater than to the buyer in terms of violence, poor mental and physical health”. In this view, sex can only be healthy in a non-market relationship because such relationships do not involve the kind of power relations present in commercial exchanges. The repeated focus on “power imbalance” reflects a key argument for criminalizing clients presented by the End Demand campaign: that payment constitutes an unacceptable power relationship in the context of a sexual relationship.

The call for criminalization positioned commercial sex as catering to a minority of men’s desire for gender inequality in heterosexual encounters. The Prostitution Inquiry and some witnesses in favour of “ending demand” noted that only a minority of men in the UK have ever paid for sex (Home Affairs Committee, 2016, p. 12; Banyard, 2016; Thomas, 2016). Banyard told the Prostitution Inquiry that “what we need to do as a society is send a message to the minority of men in this country, because most men do not pay for sex, that it is not an acceptable way to treat another person” (Banyard, 2016). Thus, sex workers’ clients appeared as a sexually

deviant minority in arguments for criminalization, contrasted to a normalized majority who do not seek sexual domination.

Nevertheless, arguments for “tackling demand” represented commercial sex as a threat to equality and stability in all heterosexual relationships because all men could be tempted. Jill Thomas (2016) warned that decriminalization would make England and Wales more like “prostitution cultures such as Germany and Spain” where women are “disempowered in their relationships and live with the emotional insecurity of knowing that multiple infidelities in brothels are likely”. From this point of view, any move to liberalize prostitution law threatened equality in heterosexual relationships because heterosexual men would be enticed into commercial sex to the detriment of all their sexual relationships.

Arguments for ending demand thus positioned paying for sex as a powerful model of male-dominant heterosexual conduct which required repressive government action. According to the European Women’s Lobby (2016) witness statement to the Prostitution Inquiry: “Buying sex is a particularly gendered act. It is something men do as men. It is an act in which the actor conforms to a social role that involves certain male-gendered ways of behaving, thinking, knowing and possessing social power”. In this view, the male-dominant model of sexual conduct evident in paying for sex gained much of its power from its connection to past norms which contemporary enlightened government should overturn. One witness statement said “The legality of purchasing a woman for sexual acts echoes a regressive standpoint by being no different to the old-fashioned and offensive opinion of women being treated as property” (Gender and Law Class 2016). Another called commercial sex an “archaic evil” (Rooms of our Own, 2016). Jill Thomas (2016) argued that prostitution “has no place in a modern egalitarian society”. Thus, witnesses represented prostitution as rooted in gender inequalities which should be relegated to the past.

End demand advocates therefore recommended to the Prostitution Inquiry that the government support public education aimed at changing men’s and boys’ sexual attitudes and desires. Dr. Ruth Van Dyke (2016) told the Inquiry: “the government needs to ask questions about how men are defining themselves in relation to ideas of masculinity. Has it become normalised for men to believe that it is acceptable to commodify women and children’s bodies because of their ‘need’ or their right to make a sexual purchase?” The European Women’s Lobby (2016) recommended government “increase awareness through the media and school education, particularly among children and young people, with regard to respectful, gender-equal and violence-free sexuality”. Police and Crime Commissioner Vera Baird QC (Baird & Vera, 2016) advised “[s]tarting young, with the provision of Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) Education in schools to ensure that young people have an understanding of healthy relationships and an understanding that buying sex is about the abuse of power and gender inequality and that

prostitution is violent and exploitative”. Similarly, the Manchester Feminist Network (2016) said: “Young men should be educated to understand that prostitution is harmful, dehumanising and degrading to women, and an exchange of money is in no way real consent”. From this point of view, the state needs to play an active role in constructing egalitarian heterosexual conduct and stigmatizing payment for sex as coercive.

Good Market Relationships

Arguments presented to the APPG and the Prostitution Inquiry represented sex work market relations as different from regular market relations because they do not arise from normal mechanisms of supply and demand. The group Women Analysing Policy on Women (WAPOW, 2016) told the Prostitution Inquiry that: “Prostitution is not inevitable and indelible, the product of individual women’s autonomous decisions to sell sex, but a *deliberately created economic institution*, sometimes even regulated and profited from by the state” (emphasis added). The APPG report approvingly quotes one witness who says “if she’s gone into it [sex work] consenting, it’s in a context that is actually often very uninformed and is part of a *wider movement* that wants to create the circumstances where that is a choice that we make” (Heather Harvey, Eaves for Women in APPG, 2014, p. 33, emphasis added). This formulation suggests something abnormal about commercial sex markets as “deliberately created” by a “wider movement” to meet a “demand” for which a supply must be manipulated since it does not arise naturally out of suppliers’ choices. Thus, the APPG report put forward arguments for ending demand that claim the demands of sex buyers contribute to social forces which maintain gender inequality because of their interest in sustaining commercial sex markets.

Advocates of tackling demand represented prostitution as causing gender inequality in employment markets by casting all women as potential sex workers. Thus, they held sex workers’ clients as responsible not only for harm to sex workers but for broader gender inequality in employment. The APPG report argues that: “Whilst mitigating the harmful effects of prostitution on those involved is essential, it must be recognized that the existence of prostitution has harmful consequences for women throughout society” (APPG, 2014, p. 46). Witnesses to the Prostitution Inquiry who favoured “ending demand” argued that where men can legally purchase sex the law sanctions the “ideology of women as commodities” and that “the normalisation of the buying and selling of women in prostitution impacts on the image of all women” (SAY Women, 2016). The Immigrant Council of Ireland told the Prostitution Inquiry “If one woman is for sale this sends the message that potentially all women are for sale” (Immigrant Council of Ireland,

2016). Furthermore, end demand witnesses statements assumed sex buyers would not separate appropriate conduct with a sex worker from appropriate conduct with female co-workers, thus one witness statement said:

Imagine a senior woman executive having a meeting with a male colleague who has just visited a prostitute in his lunch hour. Having forced the prostitute to carry out all his wishes and in general behave like a willing slave, how can he possibly interact on an equal basis with his work colleague? (Rooms of our Own, 2016)

Thus, calls to end demand represented sex markets as negatively affecting women’s employment status regardless of their involvement with sex work.

End demand arguments naturalized *empowered* choice as a property of normal market relationships. Such arguments contrasted the coercion present in commercial sexual transactions with presumably freely chosen non-sexual forms of work. The APPG report concludes “entry into prostitution is rarely the result of an *empowered* choice” (APPG, 2014, p. 47 emphasis added). The Fawcett Society’s (2016) witness statement to the Prostitution Inquiry claims:

[P]rostitution is *unlike other labour markets* due to the large numbers of women who work in it involuntarily. Because of this, there will always be a supply of women trafficked or otherwise forced against their will to meet any demand there is for the purchase of sex (emphasis added).

The phrase “unlike other labour markets” suggests that most workers choose their employment free of economic compulsion. Jill Thomas told the Prostitution Inquiry:

As women face increasing debt from university fees, welfare cuts and continued unequal pay, prostitution becomes a depressing option ... the reality is that women who end up in the trade do so because of lack of choices and the trade grooms and chooses them rather than the other way round (Thomas, 2016).

The APPG report also discussed economic need as a coercive factor. They cited one former sex worker who said: “There’s one [sex worker] I know, an Irish woman... her desperation increased. She was hungrier, you know. She was more desperate and she had a lot less hope and it was - eat and have sex with a strange man - or starve” (APPG, 2014, p. 20). Since economic motives underpin most employment market activity such a position implicitly assumes that sexual services should not be commodified.

End demand arguments also pointed to psychological factors as coercing some women into sex work. The APPG

(2014) report says “coercion is often a gradual, manipulative process” and frequently involves childhood sexual abuse (APPG, 2014, p. 20). The report quotes former sex worker, Ruth Jacobs (Oral Evidence, APPG, 2014, p. 40).

For me, sexually abused as a child, saw herself as a sex object and carried on doing it – did I have agency? Was it a choice? You know, I think I’d say no, it wasn’t actually, it was a choice made from a really damaged mind, but for someone currently in that you can’t tell them that because it’s too painful.

End Demand campaigners argued that many adult sex workers began as child prostitutes and their adult sex work reflected an adaptation to abuse. For example SAY Women, a support organization for young women survivors of childhood sexual abuse, told the Prostitution Inquiry that sexual abuse survivors formed a disproportionate percentage of sex workers. Similarly, End Demand campaigner Kat Banyard told the Inquiry that 50% of sex workers began sex work aged under eighteen (SAY Women, 2016; Banyard, 2016). Thus, end demand arguments drew a strong link between adult sex work and the sexual abuse of children.

Why Sex Buyers Should be Punished

Advocates of criminalization represented clients as responsible for the social vulnerability and suffering experienced by sex workers. The APPG (2014, p. 2) report bemoans that “men who create the demand often walk away, without taking responsibility for the damage they do”. The report suggests that the “damage” clients do perpetuates sexual violence, poverty and addiction, creating the conditions in which sexual exploitation flourishes in the first place (APPG, 2014, p. 30–33). The Fawcett Society (2016) told the Prostitution Inquiry:

The extent to which those working in this industry experience coercion, abuse and constrained choice means that in the majority of cases the purchase of sex continues to be harmful to women. As such the penalties for the harm caused by prostitution should fall upon those responsible for such harm – the buyers (Fawcett Society, 2016).

Thus, the Fawcett Society portrays clients as responsible for the “constrained choices” experienced by sex workers as well as more overt violence in their lives.

Arguments for ending demand linked individual men’s support of commercial sex to the broader problem of violence against women and wider gender inequality. For example, writing as “a mother of teenaged girls” Jill Thomas (2016) told the Prostitution Inquiry:

The main cause of sexual violence and abuse is a man’s attitude and belief in the worth of women. The relegation of women to a commodity to be enjoyed without any care for her feelings or impact on her health is dehumanising to all women and girls and ultimately dangerous.

An anti-violence women’s organization asked the Inquiry “What sense could we make of work against sexual violence, rape, sexual harassment and stalking if men can simply buy these activities through prostitution?” (Women’s Support Project, 2016). Thus, end demand discourse cast sex buyers as responsible for not only violence against sex workers but broader gender-based violence. Both the APPG report and witness statements to the Prostitution Inquiry describe prostitution as both “a cause and consequence of gender inequality”, holding clients responsible for perpetuating feminized poverty and sexual exploitation (APPG, 2014, p. 44; Rape Crisis South London, 2016; European Women’s Lobby, 2016).

End demand arguments positioned the criminalization of clients as aligning the state with defence of equal citizenship for women against the anti-equality forces of retrograde men. Campaigners claimed that current prostitution legislation in England and Wales failed to treat women as equal citizens and represented criminalizing clients as a significant step toward equality. The APPG (2014, p. 48) report concluded that current prostitution law influenced culture “by normalising the demand for women who sell sexual services and allowing for the assumption that these women are making an empowered choice, despite innumerable instances of coercion and harm”. They thus described the law as “inconsistent with strategies to pursue gender equality in the UK” (APPG, 2014, p. 48). A women’s policy analysis group told the Prostitution Inquiry that by outlawing commodification of female sexuality, a policy to “end demand” would represent a “shift in the state’s relation to its female citizens” (WAPOW, 2016). From this point of view, the law has normative force, evident in the oft-repeated claim that criminalizing clients would “send a message” about women’s status (Banyard, 2016; Immigrant Council of Ireland, Home Office, 2016; WAPOW, 2016).

Conclusion

The adult worker policy model depends on arguments against the male breadwinner/female homemaker model of family life and its relegation to the past. Likewise, arguments in favour of ending demand presented to the APPG and Prostitution Inquiry relegate commercial sex to a past in which men dominated women in family life and excluded them from equality in paid employment. Such arguments assume that past models of male sexual dominance appeal to men and that if the state

does not sanction commercial sex then more men will choose it. Hence, arguments for criminalizing commercial sex put to the Prostitution Inquiry sat alongside calls for sex education which presents commercial sex as morally reprehensible. By seeking to restrict men's sexual conduct to non-commercial and equal private relationships, arguments for ending demand resonate with broader governmental projects to emotionally engage men with domestic life.

Furthermore in the face of disruption to policy visions of the wife/mother presiding over home as haven from the harsh worlds of politics and the market, arguments for ending demand discussed by the APPG and Prostitution Inquiry delineate a private sphere of non-market relationships unswayed by power imbalances. Arguments for ending demand constructed sexuality as an aspect of the self that should never be commodified and drew a sharp line between sexual relationships and market relationships. They represented sexual relationships as belonging to a realm of freedom, equality and authenticity. This representation of sex as inalienable from the self explains the conflation of sex work with slavery in much end demand discourse.

Calls to end demand for commercial sex often articulate resistance to commodification of relationships by privileging sex as a site of authenticity which must be walled off from the marketplace. Social policy traditionally delineated home life as private and gendered the domestic sphere as sustained by women's unpaid work, assumed as motivated by feminine virtues rather than market imperatives. Arguments to end demand in the APPG report and presented to the Prostitution Inquiry continue this delineation of the private sphere but reconstruct domestic life as built upon a sexual couple motivated by an authentic bond which is separate from commercial imperatives. Such arguments construct both an authentic self and private relationships as a sphere free of market imperatives.

Policy efforts to attach women to life-long paid employment recast the problematization of feminized poverty from one of no male breadwinner to that of failure to secure a paid job. Punishing men who pay for sex situates the state as defending economically vulnerable women from exploitation instead of as perpetuating their vulnerability through welfare cuts. At the same time, attempts to exclude sexual exchanges from the marketplace construct women's sexuality as irrelevant to their position in employment markets. Arguments to end demand may thus present criminalization of clients as helping to construct employment markets free of sex and sexually safe for women.

The surprising political traction of the previously radical proposition to criminalize sex workers' clients can thus best be understood when contextualized within broader shifts in governmental policy models of gender, family and employment. Governmental elites can deploy end demand arguments to reconcile their normative policy support for gender equality, on the one hand, and the exacerbation of feminized poverty produced by reduced state support for at-home mothers, on the other hand. The end demand arguments entertained by the UK government

do not challenge market-based solutions to feminized poverty or the logic of "activation" or work testing single mothers. Rather such arguments have been deployed to imply that normal market relationships do not involve gendered exploitation or economic desperation. While many arguments for ending demand draw attention to feminized poverty and sexual violence, in the APPG report and submissions to the Prostitution Inquiry, these arguments individualized the causes of such problems. Thus, end demand arguments have represented the sexual demands of a minority of men as perpetuating gendered inequality in the marketplace. From this point of view, politicians can address gender inequality and feminized poverty by legislating to punish men who pay for sex and mandating education programmes for men and boys about the harms of prostitution.

This article has confined itself to understanding the political traction of end demand discourse in the UK, which has undergone a dramatic shift from strong male-breadwinner/female homemaker family policies toward promotion of a dual-earner model of family life. Thus, my argument cannot be generalized to welfare states where policies on the gendering of the domestic sphere and paid employment have followed a different trajectory. Nevertheless, contextualizing discourse on criminalizing clients within broader shifts in social policy on gendered conduct undoubtedly has relevance to cases such as Sweden, for example, where the government has long promoted women's participation in paid employment and men's engagement with domestic work. Future research could explore the lack of traction end demand discourse has found in other states such as New Zealand in light of developments in gendered employment and family policies there. Our understanding of sex work policy could thus be enhanced by considering it as part of broader governmental policy visions on proper gendered conduct.

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