

Written submission from Nordic Model Now! (SPP0051)

About us

Nordic Model Now! is a grassroots group campaigning for the Nordic Model (also known as the Abolitionist Model or Sex Buyer Law). As well as cracking down on pimps, this decriminalises those who are prostituted, provides services to help them exit, and makes sex buying a criminal offence, with the key aim of changing social norms and reducing the demand that drives sex trafficking. For more information, see <http://nordicmodelnow.org/>.

The scale and impact of sexual harassment of women and girls in public places

Male sexual harassment of women and girls in public places is widespread, with at least two-thirds¹ of women in the UK saying they have experienced it. Most is not reported or logged, because generally it is not considered a crime and women feel they have no recourse.

The latest crime figures² suggest it is increasing. The British Transport Police reported³ a doubling of reported sexual offences on public transport in the last five years and there has been a tripling of reports⁴ on London Transport. Recent research⁵ from UK Feminista and the NEU have documented unprecedented levels of sexual harassment of girls by boys in English schools. This suggests that new sexist/misogynistic norms are taking hold among our young people. There is an abundance of evidence⁶ that this is connected with the proliferation and ease of access to online porn, the majority of which portrays extreme violence against women.

There is evidence⁷ that in areas where there are lap-dancing clubs and other “sexual entertainment venues,” men are more likely to harass women and girls in the street. This makes these areas threatening for women and girls and many avoid them, which impacts their ability to participate fully in public life.

Meagan Tyler says: “If you allow some women to be bought and sold for men’s sexual arousal or entertainment, then you compromise the position of all women in a community.”



This chimes with our own experience. Women in Leyton told us that street harassment has reached alarming proportions in the area, with many of them regularly getting propositioned, even on busy streets in broad daylight, by men who want to buy them for sex. They say it has got significantly worse in the last few years – coinciding with a proliferation of prostitution and its advertising in the area. This suggests that a normalisation of prostitution is taking place and this has strengthened men’s sense of entitlement and their view of women and girls as objects of consumption.

We went to the area and saw for ourselves that nearly every lamp post was plastered with stickers advertising prostitution. Although local council workers periodically remove the stickers, those responsible (almost certainly pimps and traffickers) clearly believe they have impunity because within a day or two they are back. Similarly those

who run the brothels that are so clearly advertised must feel they have impunity. Women we talked to in the street said the situation had got much worse in the last few years and several told us that when they take a minicab, the driver frequently harasses them for sex in lieu of payment.

Here are some examples of what the women told us:

“Nearly every time I go out now, no matter what time of day, I get men harassing me and trying to buy me. On Wednesday two men tried to buy me for sex within a five minute period when I was walking from Leyton Station. It was at about 5:30 pm. I was across the street from the Library when these two instances happened.”

“On Friday three men tried to buy me. I was turning the corner onto Jewel Road off Hoe Street, when they tried to buy me in front of my five-year old at 6:00 pm and even though I’m clearly pregnant.”

“It makes me feel afraid and uneasy about going out. And so disrespected and unsafe. I’m afraid to say anything back because they might attack me if I do. And I don’t want to lose my baby if one of them kicks off.”

“The whole area is plastered with adverts for prostitution. They’re everywhere. And I do think this has made men more bold and think it’s OK to just proposition women on the street.”

“I’ve also had men driving past me and throwing rubbish out the window at me and yelling ‘Slut’.”

“I don’t feel safe where I live anymore. It wasn’t like this in 2010. You still got men asking your number and saying sexual things to you on the street. But they were not trying to buy you like they are now. It’s a big problem now.”

“The other day a guy who looked about 20 shouted, ‘Slut, slag,’ at me. Another day a van of twenty-something men on Hoe Street shouted out, ‘You’re really working that ass.’”

“It has gotten worse and it needs to be clamped down on. I can’t BEAR being made to feel unsafe while out and about. I even saw a young girl being catcalled by a much older man (not that age matters) last week and I tackled him on it. He just laughed in my face. That was near High Street Market, past the Rose and Crown.”

“I’m no spring chicken, I’m a grandmother. These men have no shame and they need to be named and shamed. It makes me fecking mad. I’ll report it next time.”

Testimony from women⁸ in Germany where the sex trade is legalised supports the view that the normalisation of prostitution does affect men’s behaviour to women in the general population:

“And of course, we can see also how it affects every woman in this country. If I compare going to a bar in Germany with going to one in Sweden, there is a huge difference. If I go to a bar in Sweden, I can stay there with my friends all night, without

being harassed. Nobody comes over and sits at our table without asking. But if I go to a bar in Germany, men are totally annoying. They sit at your table without being invited and talk to you without asking if you are interested. And women in Germany tend to see that as normal.

“They don’t understand that it doesn’t happen everywhere. There’s a lot of talk along the lines of, “Yes we have a problem, we are sexually harassed by men, but we’re happy that prostitution exists so we don’t have to have sex with them because they can go to brothels.” I have heard that so many times.”⁹

Many people in The Netherlands, where prostitution was legalised in 2000, are beginning to wake up to the damage that legalised prostitution causes to society. A recent article in the Daily Mail ¹⁰ said:

“The men are probably British. They come here in their droves, on holiday or for stag weekends, to gawp through the windows of the city’s brothels. [...]

Jolanda Boer, a senior public prosecutor specialising in human trafficking, says: ‘The British tourists see the red light district as a circus, but they should keep in mind that these girls might not stand there voluntarily and they are exploited.’

Jackie, 42, a prostitute who works for Proud – an advocacy group for sex workers, says: ‘At the weekends we’re packed with British tourists – they’re so loud and rowdy.

They think anything goes in this area, but it doesn’t. It’s like an erotic Disney World, but people also live and work here.’

And a trafficked woman is quoted as saying:

‘The English are the worst. They treat me like dirt. One even urinated all over me and laughed while he was doing it. They are always drunk. They hurt me.’

The parallels between how these men treat the prostituted women and women’s testimony of men harassing them in the street are clear. For example, one woman told us this:

“I was cycling really fast on a city street one time and felt something touch my rear end... I felt a jolt of terror thinking it was someone’s side mirror and it turned out it was a construction worker reaching his hand out of the passenger side of a truck... A poor little old lady had no idea why I shrieked a bunch of curses as I rode by her... But the guys in the truck laughed... They could have really hurt me if I’d been knocked off my bike.”

The men **laughed** at the woman’s fear, distress and confusion, just like the British men on the stag weekends laugh at the pain and distress of the prostituted women in the Amsterdam brothels.

We are struck that Tell Mama, which measures and records anti-Muslim attacks revealed ¹¹ in 2015 that:

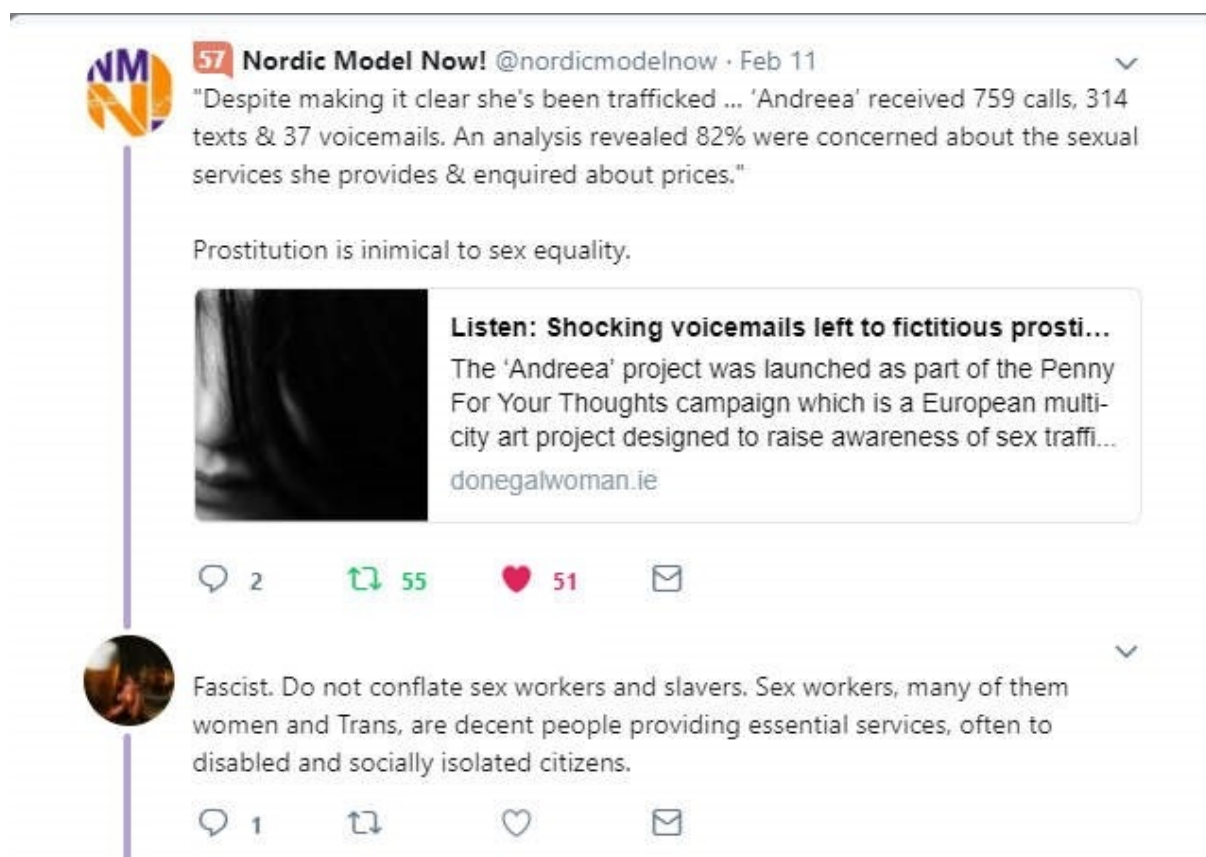
“Muslim women are more likely to be attacked than men in most settings. The largest proportion of perpetrators are white males. This means that the largest proportion of

incidents involves Muslim women, usually wearing Islamic clothing – be it the hijab, abaya or niqab. Verbal abuse from men often carries misogynistic, racist and Islamophobic overtones.”

In other words, many, perhaps most, racist and Islamophobic incidents are **also** incidents of sexual harassment. We do not mean to minimise or trivialise the seriousness of racism and Islamophobia, but rather to draw attention to the picture that Tell Mama’s data reveals: that men most often act it out on women.

Women who are active on social media and other online forums, particularly about issues facing women and girls, are also subjected to male harassment, often extreme. The big social media companies do little to stop this, resulting in a culture of impunity similar to that on the street.

As a small example of online harassment, we show screenshots below of some responses from a male Twitter user to one of our recent tweets ¹² calling us “Fascist,” “despicable Nazi cunts” and telling us to “FOAD” (internet slang for “fuck off and die”).





Survivors of prostitution are particular targets of this type of abuse and worse. We know cases of employers being informed that women have a history of involvement in prostitution and the women nearly losing their jobs as a result. This leads to many women hiding their previous involvement in prostitution or not speaking out about its reality. As a result the voices of those who are in favour of the sex industry unfairly predominate the debate.

When individual women and girls receive this type of behaviour, it leads to many of them reducing their engagement with political, social and feminist issues – just as harassment in physical spaces leads to many women going out less and engaging less in public events.

The subliminal message to bystanders – in both physical and online spaces – is that women do not deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and they are therefore lesser than men. This makes it more likely that those watching will contribute to such behaviour in the future.

Thus we can see that male harassment of women and girls serves to maintain male dominance of public spaces and discourse.

Why does sexual harassment of women and girls in public places happen?

The feminist philosopher Kate Manne explains misogyny,¹³ harassment and similar male behaviours as “the system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women’s subordination and to uphold male dominance.”

We agree with her and do not believe that the sexual harassment of women and girls in public places can be understood without looking at the entire context, including social attitudes promulgated in the media, public policy, and legislative, legal and police responses to all forms of violence against women and girls, and the extraordinary impunity that men have.

Nearly every day we are confronted by news reports about yet another way in which women and children have been failed by government policies and the criminal justice system and how men are disproportionately advantaged and given impunity for violence against women and children. In the last few days alone, we have heard that the government has decided not to make ¹⁴ “upskirting” a crime and that the police ¹⁵ fail to record huge numbers of crimes, particularly those against women and children.

Occasionally the government makes a response that on the surface might appear to be appropriate but because it isn't backed up by practical measures that would actually address the situation, it is hollow and meaningless or even irrelevant. For example, Theresa May's commitment ¹⁶ to transform how we think about domestic violence has resulted in a narrow Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill that focuses ¹⁷ on the criminal justice system response while ignoring all the practical measures that make it hard for women to leave violent partners and that weakens their financial independence and therefore increase the male partner's power within the relationship. This makes it harder for women to leave the relationship and makes violence against them more likely.

In fact since 2010 the government has made many changes that have disproportionately impacted women, making their financial and social status worse and therefore indirectly benefiting men. We listed 11 of these major changes in our submission ¹⁸ to the inquiry on the implementation of SDG5. Not a single one has been addressed and there are now new changes that could be added, including the defunding of the police and the criminal justice system.

People are not stupid. When the government makes changes that disadvantage women relative to men, it sends out the message that women do not count as full human beings. This increases men's sense of entitlement and will inevitably lead to more male harassment and assaults on women and children.

The government's response to the Oxfam Haiti scandal has been particularly revealing. We applaud Penny Mordaunt, the Secretary of State for International Development's strong response ¹⁹ to the revelation that senior Oxfam workers were paying to rent Haitian women and girls for sexual use in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake that killed hundreds of thousands of people and left similar numbers homeless and the country's infrastructure devastated.

But it seems hypocritical when compared to the response ²⁰ to the revelations of Keith Vaz's [description of conduct]. Keith Vaz remains an MP and a member of important parliamentary and political committees.

Even more bizarrely, the report of the inquiry into prostitution that he chaired has been accepted ²¹ by the Home Office as valid even though he had a prima facie conflict of interests which broke parliamentary rules ²² and the report was extremely biased ²³ and was infused with misogyny.

Similarly the official response to the #MeToo revelations of sexual misconduct in parliament has failed to address ²⁴ the issue of men renting women and others for sexual use while having the power to make laws on prostitution and other laws that impact women, when it is

well documented that prostitution users are less likely²⁵ to have empathy for women and view them as equals.

And although brothels are illegal, many operate in plain sight²⁶ in towns and cities nearly everywhere because the police and authorities turn a blind eye.

All of this sends out the message that the government and official bodies do not actually want to address male violence against women and children, particularly when it requires them to change their own behaviour and thinking. This in turn feeds into a culture that women and girls do not matter and men have impunity to harass and abuse them.

Preventing and responding to sexual harassment of women and girls in public places

The devastating extent of the sexual harassment of women and girls in public places is a reflection of the profound inequality between the sexes and of the male entitlement that results from that. To address this, we call for steps that would lead to a profound culture shift – starting with the implementation of a gender mainstreaming approach. Every government department should have a team of gender analysis experts with powers to examine all policy and legislative proposals for their impact on women and children and to veto any that do not meet strict standards.

Gender neutral provisions invariably benefit men at the expense of women. To achieve gender equality, provisions need to address the systematic, historical and structural nature of sex inequality and all of the complex realities.

Evidence suggests that such an approach would pay for itself in the long term. For example, Time reported²⁷ that even small improvements in gender inequality have a big payoff for the economy, and the UN reported²⁸ on the huge costs to society of violence against women and girls.

We also recommend:

1. Following the example of Nottinghamshire Police²⁹ and defining male harassment of women and girls as a misogynistic hate crime and prioritising the policing of it.
2. Funding and creating an online portal where women can easily report incidents, along the lines of the Tell Mama project.³⁰ The portal should be publicised widely and the data analysed so the government can understand the scale and severity of the problem.
3. London Transport already has an online portal³¹ for reporting sexual harassment on the London transport network. However, it is not widely publicised and this should be addressed.
4. An ongoing public information campaign making it clear to men that sexual harassment is unacceptable and is against the law and perpetrators will be pursued and punished.
5. A similar high-quality education campaign in schools.
6. Implementation of robust age controls on all online pornography.

7. Implementation of a Nordic Model approach³² to prostitution in England and Wales.

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¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41828881>

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41677046>

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40656633>

⁴ <http://metro.co.uk/2017/04/30/sexual-assault-on-public-transport-is-an-increasing-problem-heres-why-we-need-to-speak-out-6593306/>

⁵ <http://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf>

⁶ <https://theconversation.com/parents-need-to-start-talking-to-their-tweens-about-the-risks-of-porn-91888>

⁷ <http://theconversation.com/no-harm-done-sexual-entertainment-districts-make-the-city-a-more-threatening-place-for-women-81091>

⁸ <http://nordicmodelnow.org/2017/12/17/the-increasing-monopolisation-of-the-sex-industry-in-germany/>

⁹ <http://nordicmodelnow.org/2017/12/17/the-increasing-monopolisation-of-the-sex-industry-in-germany/>

¹⁰ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5376077/Amsterdam-call-time-myth-happy-hooker.html>

¹¹ <http://tellmamauk.org/tell-mama-our-achievements-our-effectiveness-ensuring-positive-change/>

¹² <http://twitter.com/nordicmodelnow/status/962620503159640065>

¹³ <http://www.guernicamag.com/kate-manne-why-misogyny-isnt-really-about-hating-women/>

¹⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2018/feb/20/government-rules-out-upskirting-law-for-england-and-wales>

¹⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-43060030>

¹⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/17/theresa-may-domestic-violence-abuse-act-laws-consultation>

¹⁷ <http://inews.co.uk/opinion/comment/tougher-domestic-violence-sentences-huge-step-forward-bigger-threat-looms/>

¹⁸ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/women-and-equalities-committee/implementation-of-sustainable-development-goal-5-in-the-uk/written/44048.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/no-more-money-for-oxfam-say-ministers-dm2vz9n07>

²⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/dec/16/keith-vaz-police-close-investigation-drug-allegations>

²¹

http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/456208/response/1108953/attach/3/46828%20response.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1

²² <http://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmcode/1885/188502.htm>

²³ <http://nordicmodelnow.org/2016/07/17/response-to-the-home-affairs-select-committees-interim-report-on-prostitution/>

²⁴ <http://nordicmodelnow.org/2017/11/04/metoo-sexual-harassment-and-prostitution-joining-the-dots-and-demanding-change/>

²⁵ <http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Comparing-Sex-Buyers-With-Men-Who-Do-Not-Buy-Sex.pdf>

²⁶ <http://nordicmodelnow.org/2017/12/18/submission-to-the-appg-on-prostitution-the-global-sex-trades-inquiry-into-pop-up-brothels/>

²⁷ <http://time.com/4045115/gender-inequality-economy/>

²⁸ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/expert%20brief%20costs.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-36775398>

³⁰ <http://tellmamauk.org/>

³¹ <http://tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/safety/report-it-to-stop-it>

³² <http://nordicmodelnow.org/what-is-the-nordic-model/>