



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further
Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill:
SPACE International

30 January 2014

orgasms are so harmless, why did I need years of therapy to get over them?". Far from being some kind of middle ground, New Zealand is simply a free-for-all where prostitution has been socially sanitised and, as an obvious consequence, the demand for it has risen. When any government sanctions prostitution as socially tolerable and above-board behaviour for men, demand will rise. That has been proven in the Australian states where it has been legalised, and in Holland, Germany and every other country, state and county where men are told that it is OK to buy sexual access to women's bodies. Of course, in response to the inevitable rise in demand, there is the inevitable rise in supply, and the number of brothels and women exploited in them rise, exponentially in many cases. Demand dictates supply. It is simple economics.

What you will not be told by the proponents of the decriminalisation model is that many New Zealand citizens have had enough of it and are calling for a change in the law to make the purchase of sexual services illegal. Some of those citizens are formerly prostituted women, and the Government there have put together a committee to consider the public backlash against the law. I will read a short excerpt from a report written in relation to that:

"Former prostitutes and their advocates are calling for clients of sex workers to be prosecuted, saying the decriminalisation of the industry has failed them.

Freedom from Sexual Exploitation director Elizabeth Subritzky told Parliament's justice and electoral committee the only solution to the damage that prostitution caused, and the violence it created, was to prosecute buyers of sexual services through a reform of prostitution laws.

The Prostitution Reform Act decriminalised brothels, escort agencies, and soliciting when it narrowly passed into law by one vote in 2003.

The act not only encouraged more men to buy sex, but transformed prostitution into an acceptable, even attractive job for young, poor women in New Zealand, Subritzky said."

Committee chairman Scott Simpson said the committee would consider the petition and release a report next year.

The proposed Bill concerns itself with human trafficking, and we are well aware that the contentious element is clause 6, which criminalises demand for paid sex. Obviously, it is prudent to take a look at the effects of similar legislation that is in operation elsewhere. The purchase of sex has been criminalised in Sweden for 15 years but, in almost half that time, in 2007, Jonas Trolle, an inspector with the Stockholm police prostitution unit, said:

"we have significantly less prostitution than our neighbouring countries ... We only have between 105 and 130 women — both on the Internet and on the street — active (in prostitution) in Stockholm today. In Oslo [in neighbouring Norway], it is 5,000."

Another relevant aspect of the ban is the reduction in the number of foreign women being trafficked into Sweden for sex. The Swedish Government estimate that, in the past few years, only 200 to 400 women and girls have been trafficked each year into Sweden for prostitution, while, in neighbouring Finland, that number is 15,000 to 17,000. Those figures speak for themselves, and I should not need to add a lot to them, but if anyone is unmoved by them, they might want to compare the murder statistics between Sweden and Holland in recent years, which stand at one versus more than 170.

Let me state that it is not possible to defend prostitution without defending all the harm and damage it causes. Therefore, it is not possible to be pro-women in prostitution but not pro-prostitution, as some argue for upholding the sex trade. Nor is it possible that prostitution could be harmful in some cases and not in others. The harm and damage of prostitution is not open to subjective interpretation; it is an objective reality.

The universal harm of prostitution is very often unwittingly acknowledged by prostitution's proponents. Very often, I have heard those who propose that prostitution is a choice state that sex trafficking is a horrific crime against humanity. They are right, but they never explain why and how, if prostitution is not intrinsically damaging, being forced into it should be so horrific. What if women were kidnapped and forced to work as hairdressers, secretaries or florists? Would the proponents of prostitution consider that a horrific crime against humanity on a par with sex trafficking? No, they would not. The mantra that prostitution is ordinary work is simply a lie, and we all know it.

It is not some sort of arbitrary coincidence that prostitution weighs most heavily on women and girls. The truth, which remains obvious, regardless of the absolutely endless efforts to obscure it, is that prostitution is a highly gendered form of oppression. The truth is that women had to fight for the vote. We had to fight for contraception. Now, we have to fight for freedom from commercial sexual exploitation. Underpinning all those battles is one fight: the fight to be recognised as fully human.

Other groups are damaged by prostitution. Because the harm falls most heavily on prostituted women, people pay scant attention to the others, but they should. The truth is that prostitution is harmful to society generally, so of course it is harmful to all those within it. There are women up and down this island whose husbands are buying sex, week in and week out. Those women are left to deal with damaged marriages and, in some cases, irreparably damaged physical health, yet those women — the wives and partners of sex-buying men — are rarely seen to merit a mention. When they are occasionally mentioned, the proponents of prostitution conveniently sidestep their very real dilemmas and their right to live their life free of prostitution's poisonous intrusion. I have been personally contacted by some of those women and listened to what they had to say about destroyed marriages and shattered families. It is only right that we give voice to their position and the damage that prostitution has been responsible for in their lives. Please know also that they are very aware of how almost invisible they have been thus far in this debate, which only adds insult to injury.

There are some who state that some disabled men need to use prostituted women for the sake of their health. That bizarre statement confuses wants with needs. It also endorses and encourages the categorisation of women into classes, some of whom must submit themselves to unwanted sex or face poverty. That argument, at the same time, pits one marginalised group — the disabled — against another — the prostituted — and insists that one has a right to use the other for the sake of their health. For the sake of our health, women need not be forced into a class that submits itself to unwanted sex, not for the benefit of the disabled or anyone else. Members of SPACE International know this because we have lived it. We are just glad that there are others who do not need to have lived it to know it. We fervently hope that we will be able to number the Members of this Assembly among them.

Unfortunately, there are some who have not lived through prostitution and arrive at suppositions about the essence of it, which, in whole or in part, invert, ignore and deny its degrading nature. Those who have theorised these ideas into being feel entitled to regurgitate their hypotheses back to us as though they were facts. Being told that prostitution is suitable work by someone who thinks that they are book-learned enough to educate us about it is simply insulting. It is also wildly inappropriate. I wrote my thesis on Holocaust memoirs. That never gave me the impression that I had the right to dissect the nature of the death camps for those who had survived them.

Any of you — I imagine that it is most if not all of you — who have lived through the worst of the Troubles will be able to relate to the sense of insult that I am talking about. Imagine that someone from the Republic of Ireland, England, Scotland or Wales studied the recent history of Northern Ireland and came here to educate you about it. That is what those of us who have lived prostitution are up against every day. We experience that negation of our lived experience from those in the medical profession, academia and, most bizarrely, from some in the human rights community who do not seem to recognise that women's rights are human rights. We find that most bizarre, because their position is at odds with several key UN human rights instruments, including the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, which holds that:

"prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person".

Article 6 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women articulates a similar position. The 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons similarly views prostitution as trafficking when it occurs under certain circumstances. The protocol also discourages the demand for commercial sexual exploitation.

With regard to Lord Morrow's proposed Bill, I think that the Assembly needs to pay special heed to the 1979 convention, which obligates state parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of trafficking women and the exploitation of trafficked women. It has already been proven that legislation such as that proposed here suppresses trafficking in women. I do not know whether politicians here travelled to Sweden to speak to Swedish politicians, police and those who provide services for prostituted persons. If they have not, I urge that a cross-party Committee go there and see for themselves how the law is working. I met Swedish police twice to discuss this, and I

travelled to Norway twice also. I am utterly convinced that this law is the only reasonable way to proceed. I say that for many reasons, not least of which is the normative effect at play here. A whole generation of young people has now grown up in a Sweden where purchasing the body of someone else to satiate yourself on is regarded as simply shameful, and so it should be.

There are those, though, in our currently less enlightened part of the world who view prostitution as some sort of public service. Let me suggest that, if prostitution is a necessary public service, perhaps we should introduce a lottery-style system that would function much like jury duty, whereby the women of this island take their turn to sexually satiate sex-buying men. Every woman would be expected to undertake her civic duty and open her legs for any man who decides he has the need and the right to lie down between them, and every man would have to see his daughters, sisters, mother and wife being so used. If anyone in this room feels the queasy, oily sensation of revulsion that that suggestion ought to provoke, let me directly assert that, regardless of what position you currently hold or what you have come here to argue, you understand the noxious and abusive nature of prostitution. You do: you just felt it.

That is the end of my statement. I am happy to answer your questions.

The Chairperson: Rachel, thank you very much for those comments. I just want to get a bit more of an insight into who you are as an individual. Obviously, you have written a book, 'Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution'. At what stage in your life did you get involved in prostitution and why?

Ms Moran: I got involved in prostitution in August 1991, after leaving home 18 months previously. I spent those 18 months in intermittent residential care home placements, B&Bs and every type of residential care out there. I was moved consistently because that is how the system operated in Dublin at that time. During those 18 months, I was homeless for stretches of time ranging from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, and I knew that I just could not face that again. So, when I met a young man in his early twenties who came up with the idea of how I could provide for myself, I really did not have any options beyond that or going back to homelessness, and I was actually homeless at that time. Of course, what I did not know then was that I would be providing much more for him than for me. From that point, I spent seven years in prostitution. When I got out of prostitution at 22, I was no better off financially than I had been when I went into it. The only difference was that I had a roof over my head. I also had a chronic cocaine addiction. I returned to education two years later, at 24. I did well at the post leaving certificate (PLC) college that I attended and, the following year, I went on to secure a place on the journalism degree programme at Dublin City University. It was shortly thereafter, in, I think, second year, when I began to write that book.

The Chairperson: It is a remarkable story. As someone who was involved in prostitution for that period and who is now a very strong advocate on behalf of survivors, you are supportive of Lord Morrow's Bill. What have been the consequences for you of being so outspoken and articulate in voicing your views on prostitution?

Ms Moran: The first thing that happened to me was that, within a week or 10 days of my 'Late Late Show' appearance, which was timed for the day the book was released, I had my front door hammered down by grown men who shouted that they were looking for Rachel Moran. I was not home at the time. My family were there — my brother and son. That went on for two consecutive days, and they were terrified. They said that there was an extremely aggressive manner and it was obvious that somebody wanted to hurt me. So, I had to involve the guards. They put the house under surveillance for about a week after that. It was a very frightening time.

I have had a lot of support from the Irish people. I have had a lot of goodwill. I have also had some really disgusting experiences, the worst of which, besides having those strangers at my door, was the time, several months back, when I was walking through a tunnel near my home. About five young men in their early or mid-20s followed me into the tunnel, laughing and joking about how much fun it would be to gang rape me. They were saying, "She's a prostitute. Get stuck into her" and that type of talk. That should give women in prostitution a perfectly clear view of the degradation that they are marked out for.

Mr A Maginness: Rachel, that was a very powerful statement and I thank you for it. You said that you thought legislation of this kind — the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services — would have a normative effect. Will you expand a little on that? In your letter to us, you talked about other legislation that had had similar effects in changing attitudes and values, for example towards drink-driving, indoor smoking and so forth. Would you like to expand on that point?

Ms Moran: Sure. I am 37, and I remember that, when I was a child, in my teens and in my early 20s, the idea of getting into a car and driving home, zigzagging all the way, drunk out of your mind, was considered highly amusing. It was simply laughed at. It has been really only in the past generation — the past 10 or 15 years — that it has come full circle with legislation in the Republic to the point where doing that is an absolute disgrace. Were a person to get into a car drunk and drive home in that condition, they would keep it to themselves; they certainly would not discuss it in public. It is similar as far as smoking is concerned. You simply do not smoke in a workplace now; you would not even consider it. To just light up in a pub or anywhere else, with no regard for anyone, would be considered extremely ignorant, arrogant and all other things negative.

My point in the notes that I sent was that legislation drives human behaviour. It is the one sure thing that will change and shape social attitudes, along with behaviour. That is what the law exists for in the first place, and it is working in Sweden, Norway and Iceland — it absolutely is. In Sweden, a person who pays for sex would be considered very desperate. It would be considered that a man is challenging his own masculinity if he had to pay for sex, and that is exactly how it should be because that — along, of course, with a lot of other extremely damaging behaviours — is what he is doing. The normative effect of this law will be absolutely huge. It is very curious and interesting to me that it has been shown that a majority of the older population in Sweden — people in their 50s, 60s and 70s — support the law but not in the same vast majority of 80% plus that young people do. Teenagers and younger people have grown up with the law. This is the way that it has always been for them. That is the world now, as they understand it.

Mr A Maginness: An argument has been put forward by those who are, in real terms, against clause 6, which is that prostitution is a choice for women. I know that you say it is not a choice for women. There is an argument that at least some women — a significant minority — go into prostitution, make that choice for themselves and do well in that context. I suppose that you might call it the "happy hooker" argument. What is your view on that?

Ms Moran: I have a couple of views on that. The first is that, in seven years, across every aspect of the sex trade — I am not proud to say it, but I was everywhere on the spectrum — I never met a woman who would fit that profile. I never met a woman who went into prostitution in a circumstance where she was choosing from a range of viable options. People talk about choice, but they really should talk about viable choice, because there is a difference.

I am not a legislator — you are — but I am sure that it is perfectly obvious to everyone around this table that, if you are going to legislate, it has to be for the majority. You cannot legislate for the 1% or the 2% or even the 20%, which, believe me, it is not. You cannot legislate for the minority. I do not think I have ever seen an example of legislation that is geared towards a minority anywhere on Earth. It makes no sense.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much for your presentation, Rachel. We met you before Christmas, and I received a copy of your book, for which I thank you. Obviously, your testimony is very powerful and it is your own very traumatic experience, so I want to be careful about the sensitivities of the issues. However, we have received and will receive evidence in which people have contended that the process of criminalisation to date has not tackled prostitution, but, in fact, has driven it further underground and made women more vulnerable. How do you feel that clause 6 will, if you like, buck that trend or prevent it from happening?

Ms Moran: First, of course you are going to hear those types of testimonies from people who do not want this law in place. The evidence from the Swedish police force shows consistently that sex trafficking is down massively. I have met Simon Hagström from the Stockholm police prostitution unit and listened to him deliver presentations about what is going on over there. I also listened to a German police officer when I was in Brussels in recent months. That man was practically wringing his hands at the situation in Germany, which is completely unrestrained and totally out of control. There are too many young eastern European teenagers and young women to count. They do not have a clue what to do over there. I am quite sure that the countries where matters are totally out of control, and they are, will, eventually, end up having to look at the Nordic model. There is already talk about that among politicians in Holland, of all places, which really should say it all.

The bald fact is that people are always going to refute the evidence when it does not suit their argument. You are going to hear a lot of that, and my advice, as I said, is to get over to those countries and check them out for yourselves. By all means, visit Germany and Holland as well if a fair comparison and balance is what you are looking for. That would be a good idea.

Mr McCartney: I was not among the Committee members who went to Sweden, but my party colleague, Rosaleen, who is not here today, provided us with an account of that visit. It is interesting that some people say that, although sex trafficking has reduced under the Swedish model, the demand for sexual services has not.

Ms Moran: The demand for sexual services most certainly has dropped in Sweden.

Mr McCartney: That is the area of contention. Some say that it has, and some say that it has not.

Ms Moran: Of course people will say that the demand has not dropped, but the reality is that, when men know that the act of purchasing sex is criminalised, they know that they already have one foot in a jail cell. Even if we did not have the statistics, which we do, it would only stand to common sense and reason that men would be reluctant and less likely to purchase sex if it were criminalised. It is nonsense for anyone to say that there is no drop in sex purchase in Sweden when, consistently all over the globe, evidence has been collected from punters. It is worth looking into the Boston study, in which 101 or 102 sex-buying men were interviewed. They overwhelmingly said that what would stop them buying sex in Boston would be if they were liable to get a criminal conviction or end up on the sex offenders register. It makes no sense to pretend that that does not have an effect on the behaviour of sex-buying men.

Mr McCartney: In your book, you talk about the many women who have been coerced and trafficked. There is very good law on coercion and on sex trafficking, but it does not seem to be employed. Have you any view on that, and why do you think that, if this law were brought in, it would be pursued with any more rigour, given the obvious failure at present?

Ms Moran: There are a lot of factors, some of which are outside my understanding, for why the current laws are not more effectively employed. Ruhama gave a presentation here recently, and I am curious about whether its representatives were asked the same question. I remember having a discussion with Sarah Benson, and she talked about the legalities and trafficking having such a heavy penalty attached to it. I think that she said that it carried a life sentence, which in some way impeded the police in carrying out their duties. I am sure that it is broader than that, but that is my understanding.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, Rachel, for coming along to the Committee today and for your powerful presentation. The Chair mentioned your book, 'Paid For: My Journey through Prostitution', in which you talk about drug and alcohol abuse being endemic. I know that substances can be used to numb the awful feelings that people experience having sexual activity. How common is drug addiction for people who work in prostitution?

Ms Moran: It is absolutely rampant. However, one thing that is misrepresented or wrongly characterised in the media is the idea that it is about young heroin-addicted girls going onto the street and that being the main entry route into prostitution for young women as far as drug abuse is concerned. I saw that — it most definitely exists — but it was much more common for me to see women who did not have drug addictions in the first instance go on to develop them in prostitution. I was one of those women.

Mr Anderson: It is interesting that you use the term "rampant". That tells a story in itself.

Ms Moran: Yes, it is absolutely rampant. As I said, I worked indoors and outdoors, and, when I was indoors, I worked in massage parlours and escort agencies — the whole nine yards. The manner in which women abuse drugs and the types of drugs that they abuse shift as the spectrum shifts. In escort prostitution, most of us were cocaine addicts. Not too much heroin was done at that end of the market. I have always found that to be a very curious thing. I suppose it is the same as any other part of society really, in that sense.

Mr Anderson: You also talked about being happy early on in prostitution as being simply unrealistic. A few weeks ago, a lady who gave evidence to the Committee said that she actually enjoyed working in prostitution. How do you respond to those claims?

Ms Moran: I would ask her where women like her were hiding when I was on the game.

Mr Anderson: You simply did not see that. You were just unhappy in prostitution.

Ms Moran: While I was there, I never met a woman who told me that she was happy in prostitution. We might have tried to pull the wool over other people's eyes, and we did, but we did not play those games with each other. As I said in the book, some lies are embarrassingly obvious.

Mr Anderson: You would say that they were putting on a good face.

Ms Moran: Yes. I did that myself when I was interviewed at about 16 or 17 years of age. I certainly did not want to tell a reporter whom I did not know from Adam the most painful aspects of my life that I had to deal with every day. I did not want to reveal that.

Mr Anderson: You also said that prostitutes encounter violence as a matter of routine. That is a generality. Could you, for the Committee, elaborate on that?

Ms Moran: First of all, prostitution is violence, and that is something that the world needs to wake up to. It is violence in and of itself. There is also the threat of physical violence, which is ever present and never goes away. When you are in a situation where your body is being used by somebody else to satiate their sexual desires, if you do not do what they say, then, in their mind, you are not delivering the goods. Those situations can turn deadly dangerous very quickly. However, the predominant violence that a woman is under in prostitution is the threat of violence and having to continually go along with things that she does not want to do and that are outside the contractual agreement that she has made. In that moment for that period of time, her autonomy has gone because she has sold it. That, itself, is an act of violence. Then, of course, the physical acts of violence are an occupational hazard. That is how you view it.

Mr Anderson: As a follow-on to the subject of violence, there are those who suggest that criminalising the purchase of sexual services would make prostitution more dangerous. What are your thoughts on that?

Ms Moran: A report was released in Norway a couple of years ago by a group that delivers front line services to women in prostitution. That group was called the Pro Sentret. The study found that violent battery and rape had dropped significantly, but the hair-pulling and name-calling had risen significantly. It released a public statement to say that violence in prostitution had gone up. I do not know whether that makes sense to anyone around the table, but it certainly does not make sense to me. Women's groups and human rights groups in Norway immediately refuted that, rightly so, and the Pro Sentret was forced into a public retraction of its own statement, which was based on its own statistics. It is simply not true that violence goes up. Like I said, if the man already knows that he is on the wrong side of the law, he is less likely to start knocking lumps out of her.

Mr Anderson: I have one final question. What type of people buy sex? Are they men who treat you well; are they men who already have a wife or partner and suchlike? Is thinking about your welfare an exception to the rule?

Ms Moran: Could you repeat the last question?

Mr Anderson: Would they be an exception or would they, in some way, show some kindness towards their client?

Ms Moran: You have to bring it back to the fact that prostitution is an act of violence in itself. It does not matter how gentle a man is, and it does not matter how nice he is. If he is putting his penis inside you for money, that is a violation. It feels like a violation; it is experienced and lived as a violation. The fact that you have 50 quid or 250 quid in your purse does nothing to erase that. In fact, in a way, the money is actually the crueller aspect of the contract because it puts a sense of culpability on you. Almost no woman is prepared to stand up in public and discuss and describe what that is like. There is a reason why women have been silent for so long: it is exactly that shame and pain that has kept us quiet.

You also asked about the type of men. When I was in prostitution throughout the 1990s, the men who bought me were usually three or four times my age. As I said, I started at 15 years old. By the time I was 16, I had a regular punter who was 83 years old. Certainly, sometimes you would meet men who were so ignorant that they did not understand the nature and depth of what you were going through. That I will concede: it is true. However, it does not make it any less traumatic when you are the person in the situation. There are men who buy sex from prostitutes to play out their misogynistic,

women-hating fantasies on your body. I have had that experience so many times. It is a wonder that I can sit here and discuss it. However, it is the truth. What people do not understand — you can forgive them for that because they would have no way of understanding — is the type of interactions that you deal with every day in prostitution.

I had one punter who used to love to rip at my nipples with his teeth. I was 16 years of age at the time. I absolutely hated and despised that man. However, sometimes, if you were on the corner for an hour in the winter, in the cold, and he came along, you would take what you could get. Many years later, long after I got out of prostitution, I picked up a newspaper one day and saw that he had been convicted of physically ripping off a prostituted woman's nipples with his teeth. The kick that he got the whole time — the fantasy that he came very close to playing out with me — was something that I always knew was in him. Nobody would have believed me, but the evidence ended up in the papers eventually. Those are the people you have to deal with in prostitution. Your body is just some kind of living thing with a pulse that they use to play out their fantasies. They could have gone into a sex shop and bought a blow-up doll that happened to have a heartbeat and a pulse. That is all you are to them, nothing more.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, Rachel.

Mr Wells: I have to say, Rachel, that you would need a strong stomach to read your book. I am sure that you will agree that it is pretty horrific. It is not easy to go through it. It is very revealing.

I ask these questions because I have to and for no other reason. There is a chain of thought — we heard this in Sweden — that prostitutes provide a service to the severely disabled and those with learning impairment and that the only chance they have of having a physical sexual relationship is to buy it from a prostitute. You have already referred to that. In your experience and time in prostitution, was that a common issue?

Ms Moran: In seven years of prostitution, I had one disabled punter. I am not likely to forget him. I was either 16 or 17 years old at the time. I know that because I was working on Waterloo Road. It was in the run-up to the 1993 legislation coming in. I have always remembered that man because we went into an underground car park that was barely lit because there were slats at the side where the street lights were throwing in shafts of light. I knew that he had some kind of unusual arrangement going on with the car that he was driving. I did not pay too much heed to that until we got out of the car. He had a set of crutches that he needed to walk. What I will never forget as long as I live is the experience of kneeling in front of this man, who was leaning up against the wall, and he dropped his trousers while I was kneeling at eye level to his groin area. He had the most twisted, deformed, distorted legs that I had ever seen or imagined. We talked about it afterwards, and he told me that he contracted polio when he was a baby when his parents had been abroad somewhere. I think that he said that his father worked in India when he was young. The man was in his late 60s. I will never forget the fright that I got and the fear because I had never seen such a deformity. It happened in an underground car park in the dead of night. That is the absolute extent of men with disabilities that I had to deal with in prostitution. There is a lot that I could say about that. Like I said in our statement, it defies logic that one marginalised group should be allowed to use the other for the sake of their health.

Mr Wells: We also heard from a representative from the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW), who said that she had encountered very few pimps or those who control prostitution. Her view is that the vast majority of prostitutes are free agents operating willingly and earning money. They might have had a pretty wretched upbringing and this was the only form of income that they could have. In your experience, are pimps active in the Irish Republic?

Ms Moran: First of all, let me say that it is amusing to hear a statement like that repeated to me from someone representing the IUSW because it is known, in our terminology, as the pimps' union. It is funny that someone from what we call the pimps' union would tell you that there are not that many pimps around. It gets that reputation because it is littered with pimps. Are there many pimps around? There are clusters of small organised gangs, and I was told that by the head of the trafficking unit in Dublin. A lot of them are foreign, and a lot of them are home-grown. They are Albanian, Romanian, African. They are from all over the place — the whole nine yards. Rather than having two or three big pimping cartels, we have hundreds of smaller operations that have six, eight, 10 or 12 women working for them.

I will be careful what I say because I do not want to give out too much of somebody else's personal business, but, when I arrived in Belfast this morning, I met a young woman who was trafficked into this country and sold from gang to gang. I will meet her again when I leave here, and I am staying in Belfast tonight. The girl got in touch with me recently. She has a lot to talk about and a lot to work through. I wish that she was sitting beside me now because, if you want to hear about pimps, she would be the right person to talk to.

Mr Wells: Finally, we will hear later from academics who have carried out research into this issue. Have they interviewed people like you who have come out of the industry and have quite a shocking tale to tell?

Ms Moran: That depends on the academics. Some have a pro-lobby line and go out of their way to prove it and talk to the right people in order to be able to do that. That is very common. Unfortunately, for us abolitionist survivors, a good 90% of academics not only on this island but all over the place take a pro-lobby position. My feeling on that is that it is simply fashionable.

Mr Wells: For instance, has Queen's University or Amnesty International talked to you?

Ms Moran: No, not at all.

Mr Wells: Yet you would be seen as one of the most high-profile survivors of this trade.

Ms Moran: They would not dream of coming near me; I would not tell them what they want to hear.

Mr McGlone: Thanks very much for coming along and being so open and candid with us. A lot of what you said has been prefaced by something being mandatory or compulsory and a compulsion to do this and having to do this and that. For the average person, where does that compulsion come from in all cases? We have heard about what is referred to loosely as the sex trade. We have also heard the other issues of some people who say that it is a life choice or a career choice. Could you put that to bed for us, please? Maybe that is the wrong analogy: could you explain to us where that compulsion comes from? In other words, when there is no choice — or is there any choice? You reached a point at which you made a choice, and you were successful in making it. You are now the product of that. You are extremely articulate and made the correct choice at that point for fear of the place that you had wound up in. Can you explain how that compulsion or force exists and the absence or lack of choice for people to do what they can with their lives and the lifestyle choices that they make?

Ms Moran: Let me first clarify that it is not compulsion that I am talking about; it is coercion. Coercion is rather like a string of beads: one leads to the next. By the time I was only one day in prostitution, I felt so dirty and so sullied that I could not imagine being the girl I had been the day before. After a couple of years have gone by, you have no education and no way of recommending yourself to an employer. You have no work experience. You have nobody in the sphere of normal life. By the time I got out of prostitution, I basically had to throw my address book in the bin because everybody surrounding me was prostituting, selling drugs, couriering drugs or selling drugs to women in prostitution. I knew several pimps. The people who surrounded me and those I ended up in the midst of because of the direction in which my life had gone never discussed the things that happen in normal situations. When I got out of prostitution, for example, as I said in my book, I had never heard the term "mature student". I simply did not know that, if you did not have your leaving certificate, you had any chance in life. I did not even have my inter cert, never mind my leaving cert, because I had been expelled from school at the age of 14. These are the things that happen: you get thrown out of a hostel, expelled from school and are out on the street, and you meet a man who is clearly exploitative, manipulative and knows what he is doing. You are five, six or seven years younger than he is, and you do not know what you are doing. I have seen that story play out far too many times to put a number on.

Mr McGlone: You are telling us that that is a consistent pattern of abuse, backgrounds and associations with drugs in all cases. You are saying that people do not, as some might allege, choose that avenue?

Ms Moran: I did not say that the pattern that I saw around me most commonly, and the one that I lived, was absolutely exclusive. I said that prostitution is riddled with it, and it is. As I stated about

women who say that they are happy, it is their choice, they want to continue doing it and do not want the law to impede them in any way, I say that we do not make legislation for the minority.

Mr McGlone: Also, it is not just women?

Ms Moran: It is predominantly women and girls, but some men and boys and transgender persons are involved. However, I have to say that, in the seven years that I was in prostitution, those figures were absolutely tiny. They may be somewhat higher today. There have been shifts and changes, especially in the Republic, in the way in which prostitution operates for various reasons, including the Celtic tiger economy, and also the virtual nature of prostitution today. It has gone online. That was not the case when I was in prostitution. I got out in the year that all the online business began.

Mr Dickson: Thank you very much for the information and the very personal way in which you described it to us. Patsy asked you about the number of men involved. Have you any sense, from your experience, of the number of women who are, according to the law, trafficked into prostitution and those who are not trafficked in Ireland? How many people have you met along the way who have been trafficked? Does your organisation count the numbers trafficked, as opposed to those who are, for the sake of argument, voluntarily in prostitution?

Ms Moran: We have no way of counting in that manner. The reality is that —

Mr Dickson: What is your perception or experience of that?

Ms Moran: You would have to define for me exactly what you mean by trafficking. People have different interpretations of the term.

Mr Dickson: There is a legal determination of trafficking. I am talking about those people who, in the eyes of the law, are forced into prostitution.

Ms Moran: I understand that but —

Mr Dickson: I am just trying to get an idea of the balance of numbers.

Ms Moran: The agencies that deal with the issue such as Ruhama — as far as I am aware, you do not have an equivalent up here — and the gardaí would be better people to ask for the figures. However, I do know that a massive number of women come into this country from very impoverished countries in South America and elsewhere who are led to believe that —

Mr Dickson: That they are coming to other types of work.

Ms Moran: No, I was about to say that they are led to believe that the shape and face of the sex trade that they are about to enter into is very different to what it actually is. I have heard of a lot of cases of women who have been told, "You will go in here, and you will have to see a few men each week. You will be able to do your English language classes, your computer courses and all of that". They then find themselves in their brothel servicing eight, nine or 10 men a day, seven days a week. That is not trafficking by the legal definition, but is it fair and just? We should ask that question.

Mr Dickson: Have you seen trafficked people, who are in enforced prostitution and effectively locked up, coming in and essentially interfering in the patch that you had when you were operating?

Ms Moran: I learn most of what I know about trafficking from the women who are out of prostitution only a couple of years. I am out of prostitution for 15 years. As I said, with the boom in the Republic of Ireland, there were massive shifts in prostitution. The influx of trafficked women was one of those.

Mr Dickson: Clause 6 proposes what is described as the Swedish model, whereby the buyer of the service is criminalised. Should we not close that circle completely? You cannot expect us to believe that all prostitutes are innocent and all buyers are guilty. Maybe all buyers are guilty; certainly, under the Swedish model, they are. Should we not close the circle and make the total process a criminal process? In other words, should we not criminalise those who sell the service as well as those who buy the service?

Ms Moran: I do not believe so, and I will tell you why. There are many reasons why I do not believe that. If I were to concede that we ought to do that, I would have to concede that I was deserving of being arrested the moment that I turned 18 years of age when, at that point, I had spent three years being abused as a minor, day in and day out, by the men of Ireland. What exactly would have happened on my eighteenth birthday? Would some magical fairy have come along and sprinkled sexual abuse fairy dust on my head so that I was transformed from an abused minor into a criminal? That makes no sense. I do not believe that anybody should be criminalised for their own exploitation.

Mr Dickson: That is interesting. Thank you.

The Chairperson: There are no other questions. Rachel, thank you very much. It has probably been one of the most difficult evidence sessions that we have heard in a long time, but you were right to speak so candidly. I certainly appreciate the evidence that you have given to the Committee. I think that you are an incredibly brave woman, and I thank you for coming to the Committee to help members to get an understanding of what goes on. Thank you very much.

Ms Moran: Thank you for listening to me.