

Curbing prostitution on the side of the demand: economics, morality and violence

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While the usual, more established ways of tackling prostitution focus on the prostitutes themselves, i.e. those offering services, the newer (Swedish) approach advocates the criminalisation of those who represent the demand side of prostitution, i.e. the clients. This approach, which has recently been followed or contemplated on by some other EU countries, stems from the belief that prostitution is per se a violent phenomenon; that it is, more concretely, a form of violence against women, which is why it needs to be fought against and extinguished. The first part of the article demonstrates the basic elements of the main arguments of the proponents of criminalisation and suggests some counterarguments, targeting the claim that voluntary prostitution equals violence. The idea that criminal law or criminalisation is the best solution for tackling undesirable social reality is then challenged and certain negative characteristics of such regulation exposed. Lastly, some other criminological considerations that militate against such a prohibitionist approach are discussed. Through the use of existing research, examples and deconstruction of the discourse of the proponents of criminalisation, the article indicates that the conception of prostitution as violence is misleading and legally-philosophically untenable, while the proposed solution to the "prostitution problem", i.e. the criminalisation of clients of prostitutes, problematic in a criminological as well as wider societal sense.

Keywords: prostitution, demand, criminalisation, client, morality, violence, harm, prostitutes, vulnerability, criminal law

UDC: 176.5:343.85