



The Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Our Ref: SC9339

12 May 2020

Dear Thérèse

We are writing to express concern about the lack of support extended to women who are exploited in prostitution, mindful that the Domestic Abuse Bill is currently before Parliament and that sexual exploitation often sits on the spectrum of domestic abuse.

Sexual exploitation is gendered: it is predominantly women and girls who are subjected to sexual exploitation, and it is overwhelmingly men who pay to sexually exploit them.

An inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, found that the sexual exploitation of women by organised crime groups is widespread across the UK.ⁱ Third party exploiters, including traffickers and brothel owners, dominate the off-street sex trade, exploiting women in order to profit from the minority of men in the UK who pay for sex. Methods used to recruit women into sexual exploitation include deception, coercion and the exploitation of pre-existing vulnerabilities. It has been estimated that approximately 50% of women in prostitution in the UK started being paid for sex acts before they were 18 years oldⁱⁱ.

We hope you agree that more needs to be done to identify women vulnerable to sexual exploitation, to prevent them from entering prostitution and to support them to exit when involved.

Many women who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation experience a range of disadvantages meaning they are less able to maintain employment. Consequently, they are likely to come into contact with the DWP and receive Universal Credit.

The DWP is therefore well positioned to take action to help prevent women being sexually exploited or to help them exit sexual exploitation and

Sarah Champion

Member of Parliament for Rotherham

Moorgate Crofts Business Centre, South Grove, Rotherham, S60 2DH

T: 01709 331035

sarah.champion.mp@parliament.uk

www.sarahchampionmp.com



prostitution. This includes women engaging in 'survival sex,' which the Work and Pensions Select Committee describes as the 'exchange of sex for basic living essentials, like food or somewhere to live.'

The DWP already provides access and support to other specific vulnerable groups, for example care leavers, homeless people, victims of domestic abuse, and offenders.

We believe a similar support should be extended to women at risk of sexual exploitation. The DWP already recognises that there are multiple psychological, physical, social and economic factors that may affect a person's ability to work.

To help vulnerable women we recommend that the DWP should (a) identify women at risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation, (b) recognise the specific vulnerabilities and needs of this group in its provision and (c) commission appropriate specialist support so that women at risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation can be assisted to exit prostitution and enter the workplace.

DWP provision, whether delivered by Jobcentre Plus or sub-contractors should be improved so that staff are able to recognise when a woman is at risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation or 'survival sex.' Staff should be trained to understand the psychological, social and economic factors inherent to keeping women involved in sexual exploitation out of formal employment so that they can prescribe appropriate specialist services.

There are multiple factors that can act as barriers to women exiting sexual exploitation. Research by Eaves, in *Breaking down the barriers: A study of how women exit prostitution*ⁱⁱⁱ, identified the following challenges:

"Nine barriers to exiting were identified within this study: 1) problematic drug use; 2) problems with housing; 3) physical and mental health problems; 4) having had experiences of violence as a child; 5) criminalisation; 6) the role of money – managing debts or high levels of disposable income; 7) experiencing coercion from others to remain in prostitution; 8) a lack of qualifications or training; and 9) entering prostitution at a young age. Many women experienced particular obstacles or patterns of obstacles that required a coordinated, individualised and tailored package of support to unravel."

Overcoming these barriers to exit is complex and requires specialist support. The DWP should consider how it can best work with and commission



specialist organisations focussed on supporting women to exit prostitution and retrain for the workplace.

We would urge you to commit to the following;

- The DWP should work with and commission specialist organisations that support women to exit sexual exploitation to enable women seeking training and/or employment to do so.
- The Government should provide funding for specialist organisations to provide holistic support to women involved in sexual exploitation to enable them to exit and rebuild their lives.

As the Government has committed to tackling domestic abuse, we believe that Government should also seek to tackle sexual exploitation as many women are coerced by partners or pimps into exploitation.

We look forward to receiving your reply

Yours sincerely

Sarah Champion MP
Member of Parliament for Rotherham

Baroness Gale

Lord McColl of Dulwich

Ronnie Cowan MP

Jess Phillips MP

Equality Now

Not Buying It

Pat Black for National Alliance of
Women's Organisations

Lynda Dearlove for Women at the
Well (watw)

Dame Grey- Thompson

Diane Abbott MP

Pauline Latham MP

Fiona Broadfoot – survivor

FiLiA

Nordic Model Now

Rosemary Hack for Press Red

Zarin Hainsworth for Widows Rights
International



ⁱ Behind Closed Doors, Organised Sexual Exploitation in England and Wales, An Inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, 2018

ⁱⁱ 'Paying the Price: a consultation paper on prostitution', Home Office, 2004. See also: M. Hester & N. Westmarland, 'Tackling Street Prostitution: Towards an Holistic Approach', report, Home Office, 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Breaking down the barriers: A study of how women exit prostitution. Executive Summary', Eaves, 2012.