

# Talking Point: Nordic solution to sex trade to protect victims

BRONWYN WILLIAMS | March 29, 2016 | [themerury.com.au](http://themerury.com.au)

Simone Watson is a survivor, a woman who has known the coercion and cruelty of the sex trade.

At a time violence against women is publicly recognised as a blight on society, she is to tell her story at Parliament House in Hobart; a tale of the physical and emotional violence in prostitution.

The buying and selling of sex is something most do not want to think or speak about. We know it happens. We know women, girls and boys are trafficked worldwide to feed insatiable demand. We can express horror at their plight, contribute to groups that try to contain the apparently uncontainable, but we don't want to know details.

We don't want to know the pain of those forced to have sex, often unprotected and aggressive. Our desire to fit in with modern, progressive, liberal, sex-positive social attitudes persuades us to adopt the mantra of the sex trade lobby that sex work is a choice, a job, and it empowers those involved. We take the image of the happy hooker put forward by a tiny minority of sex workers, and those who profit from the trade, as gospel, because we don't want to acknowledge the truth lest we be called a prude or wowser.

That reality, as Simone will explain, is that the majority in prostitution want nothing more than to leave. They are in it because they are poor, they lack education, and support services are inadequate. Many have a violent, coercive male partner. Like many women trapped in violent domestic relationships, they turn to alcohol and drugs to cope, and with their integrity eroded and sense of self obliterated, they find it increasingly difficult to leave.

But the voices of those who have escaped the trade are getting louder and more focused. They speak of the harm suffered, and the struggle to rebuild their lives. They are physically and emotionally damaged, but determined to bring world attention to the assault on women's rights perpetrated by sex trade advocates.

Those who profit from prostitution – the johns, the pimps, brothel owners, and a few complicit sex workers – vilify sex trade survivors. Simone says

those who escape are called whorephobic. Those suffering PTSD or physical disabilities and with almost zero job opportunities are “selfish, uptight, despicable and non-feminist”. Victims and survivors of prostitution are monsters who want to spoil the fun for the rest.

The trade would not exist without male demand, but men are rarely mentioned in any discussion of prostitution, beyond an acknowledgment that they must have sex. It is expected women will satisfy their needs as wives and girlfriends, or through prostitution, or they will take it by means of rape.

Male demand for commercial sex underpins the lobbying for decriminalisation, now with the support of Amnesty International.

Simone will speak about an alternative approach to legislation that criminalises only buyers of sex, and those who procure and profit from the sale of sex – the Nordic Model. Nordic Model laws originated in Sweden in 1998 as part of a broader approach to legislation that supports gender equality. Those who sell sex are not criminals; rather, they are offered support to leave prostitution.

New Zealand has a fully decriminalised sex trade and is often presented by sex trade promoters as a model of the benefits of decriminalisation.

Simone Watson is the national director of Nordic Model Australia Coalition.

She will present a talk “Sex Trade Survivor Pushes for Rethink on Prostitution Laws” on Friday, April 1, between 10am and 12pm in the Reception Room at Parliament House, Hobart. Isla MacGregor will present “Amnesty International’s Sex Trade Policy: Rights for Whom?”

It is a public event.

<http://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-nordic-solution-to-sex-trade-to-protect-victims/news-story/a316620d953566d13ae1ec2715ec2b92>