

## Initiatives to “end demand” for prostitution harm women and undermine service programs

The Bush Administration is aggressively pushing the idea of ending demand for prostitution, claiming that programs oriented toward an “end to demand” are evidence- and rights-based, protecting “vulnerable” women and girls exploited by men. For example in December 2005 new provisions about “ending demand for commercial sexual services” were incorporated into the Re-authorization Act of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).<sup>1</sup> In reality these programs do not stop men from seeking sexual services, but rather, they harm women and channel social service funding into policing efforts. This frequently harms sex workers by pushing them, and their clients, to adopt strategies that heighten their risk for violence, HIV, and more.<sup>2</sup>

### *What are “end demand” programs?*

Typically when people speak about “ending demand” they are referring to a range of efforts such as diversion programs in the court system and increased policing of men often accompanied by the imposition of new laws. Diversion programs such as “Johns’ Schools” and public shaming campaigns (i.e. naming people caught for solicitation on bill boards or on websites) are thought to deter men who might consider purchasing sexual services, thus “ending demand.” These programs are often developed in tandem with heightened policing of poor neighborhoods where sex workers reside and work, in order to enforce anti-prostitution laws. These policies are construed as “progressive” because rather than targeting and policing sex workers, they instead target anyone, including clients and organizations working with sex workers. The new legislation thus “punishes” men while “helping women,” an approach developed by Swedish conservative legislators and feminists in the 1980s. Claims have been made that sex workers are provided health care and training in other forms of work with the funds obtained from arresting men (i.e. fines). Police also claim that they arrest fewer women because they are focusing on male clients of sex workers.

### **Do these programs work?**

Proponents of end demand style programming claim that they reduce prostitution without harm to sex workers, deterring men from purchasing sexual services and helping women.<sup>3</sup> Swedish proponents claim that criminalization “will affect relations between women and men in the direction of greater gender equality.”<sup>4</sup> They also claim statistics on reduction of arrests of both sex workers and their clients prove these programs are working and improving the lives of women and girls. Evaluations of end demand style programs reveal a very different picture:

∞ *Prostitution in general is not reduced by “Swedish style legislation” and sex workers are made more vulnerable to violence.* An evaluation of Sweden’s legal experiment concluded that it did not greatly reduce the number of women engaging in street sex work: figures from Stockholm show that the total number of women on the street remained stable from 1999-2003.<sup>5</sup> However, the report found that during this period street sex workers were increasingly exploited, pressured to reducing prices and to provide unprotected sex.

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<sup>1</sup> See complete text at [www.bestpracticespolicy.org/subpage10.html](http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/subpage10.html)

<sup>2</sup> For example, carrying condoms can be cause for arresting someone for prostitution. Condoms are needed to practice safe sex, yet policing policy makes this practice problematic.

<sup>3</sup> The developer of the John’s School program, Norma Hotaling of SAGE, claimed that 98% of men going through the program were “rehabilitated” (Jerome and Rowlands, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Working Group of the Legal Regulation of Sexual Services, 2004, Purchasing sexual services in Sweden and the Netherlands: Legal regulation and experiences: pp14-15

<sup>5</sup> Working Group of the Legal Regulation of Sexual Services, 2004, Purchasing sexual services in Sweden and the Netherlands: Legal regulation and experiences:

- ∞ *Highly touted end demand style programs, such as “Johns’ Schools,” have little or no deterrent effect above and beyond the effect of arrest and criminal proceedings.*<sup>6</sup> One study found that before and after participating in the program, 1 in 10 men said that they would likely seek commercial sex services again. This rate is 4 times higher than the officially reported recidivism rate of 2.4%.<sup>7</sup>

Rather these programs end up targeting and arresting clients who are poor people of color and immigrants.<sup>8</sup> These men plead guilty even though many of them may not have been doing anything illegal at the time of arrest and would have been found not guilty had they gone to trial.

- ∞ *End demand programs rely on fear tactics that endanger women’s safety.* Researchers observing Johns Schools in action found that presenters cautioned participants that “drug addicted prostitutes... have stabbed their clients with AIDS infected needles”<sup>9</sup> as a way of “scaring men straight.” Consequently sex workers are portrayed as violent, dangerous and diseased, thus increasing stigmatization and making prostitutes more vulnerable to violence.
- ∞ *End demand programs that are financed by “user fees” paid by participants lead to corruption and conflicts of interest between the police and NGO service providers.* Often funds obtained by arresting people are insufficient or are used by the city for other purposes. Research shows that close relationships between policing and funding undermine service providers’ accountability to communities served. In one case, numerous police joined the board of directors of an NGO overseeing a Johns School program. Eventually a police representative became Chair of the board. The researchers noted that “[s]ince the social service organization’s financial welfare depends... on the number and volume of prostitution offenders diverted to the ‘John School’ programme [sic], and given that this volume largely depends on the level of prostitution enforcement, it becomes apparent how... considerable conflicts of interest can arise.”<sup>10</sup>

### **What can you do to help sex workers in your area?**

We are a coalition of sex workers, service providers, advocacy groups and concerned community members who are concerned that “end demand” style programming is undermining service provisions for women in need. We are also concerned that all people engaging in commercial sex (men, women and trans-people) be provided with real social support. If you are concerned about these issues we ask that you join us by contacting representatives of the following organizations in our coalition:

Desiree Alliance, [www.DesireeAlliance.org](http://www.DesireeAlliance.org)

Sex Workers Outreach Project [www.swop-usa.org](http://www.swop-usa.org)

Best Practices Policy Project, [www.bestpracticespolicy.org](http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org)

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<sup>6</sup> Wortley, S., Fischer, B., & Webster, C. (2002). Vice lessons: A survey of prostitution offenders enrolled in the Toronto John School Diversion Program. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 3(3), 227-248: 394.  
Monto, Martin A. and Steve Garcia. 2001. "Recidivism Among the Customers of Female Street Prostitutes: Do Intervention Programs Help?" *Western Criminology Review* 3 (2). [Online]. Available: <http://wcr.sonoma.edu/v3n2/monto.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Wortley, Op.Cit: 389

<sup>8</sup> Fischer, B. , Wortley, S., Webster, C., Kirst, M. (2002). The Socio-Legal Dynamics and Implications of Diversion: The Case Study of the Toronto 'John School' for Prostitution Offenders. *Criminal Justice*, 2(4), 385-410: NEED PAGE #.

<sup>9</sup> Wortley, Op.Cit: 373.

<sup>10</sup> Fischer, Op. Cit: 393.