

Trafficking, Forced Prostitution, and Minors in the Sex Trade in Post-Legalisation New Zealand

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Abstract : New Zealand legalised and regulated prostitution 13 years ago with the hope of eradicating unsafe or exploitative practices in the sex trade, but the extent to which this has been successful has been hotly contested, with the New Zealand Government denying any existence of sex trafficking and evidence generally indicating the success of the 2004 reform. The aim of the research was therefore to establish the circumstances in which sex trafficking may be occurring without using any previously instrumental gatekeepers of the New Zealand sex industry. 14 survivors of gang, family, or intimate partner trafficking (all of whom had first been trafficked prior to the age of 16) were interviewed, as well as several key informants. It was found that there was a perceived lack of commitment by Police to investigate instances of trafficking, and this was considered to be linked to the legal status of prostitution. The lack of recognition at both community and political levels of the existence and prevalence of trafficking also meant that medical and social service practitioners were unaware trafficking was occurring, and would not know who to refer to if it was disclosed. Participants commonly normalised coercion into sex, seeing this as a continuation of prior sexually abusive experiences that were prevalent in their childhood and early adolescent environments. Their experiences with the helping services were typically either negative or non-existent, and they expressed frustration regarding the absence of justice, the lack of awareness, and health and outcomes they suffered in relation to their experiences of having been trafficked. Barriers to engagement and strategies to facilitate meaningful and sustainable engagement with this population group are therefore presented.

Keywords : legalisation, regulation, service access, socio-political context

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