**Input from the Anglican Consultative Council for the**

**SR VAWG’s report on Violence Against Women and Prostitution**

This report is compiled and submitted by the Anglican Communion Office’s UN team and Gender Justice team, reflecting information collected from across the global Anglican Communion, which has presence in more than 165 countries. We have provided answers to all questions except question 13.

1. **Provide examples of the hidden forms of prostitution, and explain to what extent they are recognized and dealt with as such?**

Hidden forms of prostitution include:

* **Early forced marriage**, in which exchange of money or cattle can be involved and a girl is ‘traded’. In these contexts, the female is usually powerless and lacks legal rights, and can often be later ‘discarded’ and then subject to cultural taboos, leaving her more exposed to working in prostitution or being prostituted as the only option for income.
* **Kidnapping of brides**, in which young women/girls are stolen to order and essentially become slaves. Again, this takes place in contexts where there is a lack of any rights and the women can be later discarded, but regarded as culturally taboo, forcing them into prostitution.
* **Widow Inheritance,** the practice of ‘cleansing’ a widow after her husband has died. The vulnerable widow can be exploited in societies/cultures without legal protection or the observance of law. This can result in STI’s and HIV and leave the widow destitute and on a pathway into prostitution.
* **Refugees or asylum seekers,** who in many states have no recourse to public funds, and few options to gain income or food to support family members. Poverty and the lack of options for many women leads to feelings of little choice but to work in prostitution.

1. **Describe the profile of women and girls affected by prostitution in your country, and provide disaggregated data, where possible.**

In the Anglican Communion, which has some of its largest congregations in African and Asian states, women affected by prostitution are economically poor themselves or from poor families, or refugees who have been forced out of their home communities.

Victims are often female-headed households, having lost husbands to disease, illness, accident, war or abandonment, and are therefore vulnerable and alone, struggling to feed the children under their care.

1. **Describe the profile of those who solicit women in prostitution and whether such relations are regulated, and provide supporting data, where possible.**

Men from any social and economic background solicit women for prostitution. In most states the relationship between men and women working in prostitution is not regulated.

The men who access and buy sex are from all sections of society including top political leaders, high-flying businessmen, aid workers and UN peacekeepers, middle-managers, unemployed, religious leaders and on every peg of the economic ladder.

Some women are recruited to “hire” other women into prostitution, but there is always a male / group of male controllers at the top using coercive and controlling behaviour, threats of violence, etc, to control the female recruiters.

1. **What forms of violence are prostituted women and girls subjected to (physical, psychological, sexual, economic, administrative, or other)?**

Women and girls in prostitution are subject to every form of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, administrative, and any other form. The women face manipulation and coercive and controlling behaviour.

When they are not paid, this is rape; and because of the lack of choice the women face, it is abuse. A woman saying “yes” but with no income to feed her children, because she is stuck as an asylum seeker and legally denied the chance of employment, lacks the equality needed to freely consent. She is instead engaged in survival sex.

1. **Who is responsible for the perpetration of violence against women and girls in prostitution?**

It is mostly men that are responsible[[1]](#footnote-1). As previously stated, male perpetrators can be from any economic or social background. A patriarchal society and culture and structural, economic, and institutional inequality fuels and creates environments where women working in prostitution face violence and abuse.

Using women working in prostitution is an issue of power and the misuse of economic power, dehumanising women for sexual purposes. There is a real need to challenge male attitudes and behaviours that see women as less than equal, and that then lead on to VAWG with the frequent result of women ending up working in prostitution[[2]](#footnote-2).

Use of pornography has dramatically increased and this has had a direct impact on the use of women working in prostitution and violence against them. Research shows that a continued use of pornography impacts the brain, and often normalises violence against women and inequality[[3]](#footnote-3).

There needs to be wide-ranging reform in government, media, and society to change how women are portrayed and how boys and men are educated.

1. **Describe the linkages, if any, between prostitution and the violation of the human rights of women and girls.**

Using the UN Declaration of Human Rights as our foundation, Article 1 states that all are born with equal rights, yet poverty works to deprive the women and girls who become prostitutes of real choice. The rights in Article 2 are also reduced by poverty, as wealth in most places increases one’s access to mechanisms that provide human rights. There is little security, especially of one’s body, in prostitution; and the lack of option for most women mean they are *de facto* in slavery (Articles 4-5).

Exploitation of the bodies of women and girls that begins with pornography and ends in prostitution is degrading (Article 5), and due to social stigmas very often means that women are reluctant to access legal help, or have it denied to them (Articles 6, 7, 8).

The inherent connection between poverty and prostitution works against Article 16, as forced marriage becomes a way to survive; and Article 23 presumes there is a choice of employment: in reality, many women have no choice when they enter prostitution; it is ‘survival sex’.

1. **What links are there between pornography and/or other forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution?**

Pornography fuels prostitution[[4]](#footnote-4). Pornography sexualises and objectifies women and their bodies, reducing them to objects and commodities[[5]](#footnote-5). The online space creates a permissive environment and community in which this selfish gratification can occur.

Research shows a progression from developing motivation, to overcoming conscience, then overcoming external inhibitors, and finally doing the actual offence[[6]](#footnote-6). Online pornography offers a supportive environment where the “use” of women as objects is encouraged, leading then to the acting out of the abusive fantasy behaviours “normalised” online.

The wider media, alongside social media, also consistently sexualises women’s bodies, reinforcing the concept of women being objects and undermining the inherent value of women as individual persons.

1. **How is the issue of consent dealt with? Is it possible to speak about meaningful consent for prostituted women and girls?**

Consent does not really exist in most situations of prostitution, where any consent given is coerced consent, coming from desperation. How can a woman give consent when she has to feed her children and pay for their education?

As such, a “yes” from a woman is rarely consent. The real driver is desperation at her poverty and disempowerment in her context.

There are groups of women working in prostitution arguing that they are fairly meeting market demand and should be allowed to ‘trade’. These groups represent wealthy collectives that have choice, and thus **DO NOT** represent most of the world’s women who are forced into prostitution and have no voice and no choice but to ‘service’ men brought to them.

For example, some women in India have been kept as prisoners and forced to have sex, often drugged or made drunk to keep them compliant. This creates substance abuse and is another form of control used by the men running groups of prostitutes.

1. **How effective have legislative frameworks and policies been in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in prostitution?**

Legislative frameworks and policies have rarely done a good job, though Scandinavian moves to target the purchasers (users) of prostitutes rather than the sellers (prostitutes themselves) are a step in the right direction[[7]](#footnote-7) (though some prostitution is then driven underground).

To bring about lasting change, the main issue, of power and control lying in male hands and the need for behavioural change from male purchasers, needs to be confronted. This was noted in the 57th Commission on the Status of Women in 2013, where the need to address structural and underlying causes, transform social norms, develop appropriate education programs, and work through media outlets were all identified as key[[8]](#footnote-8).

Bringing about mass behavioural change is a difficult, long-term project, and governments rarely consider this due to short-termism and the desire for immediate results, combined with power very often lying with men who do not desire structural change.

1. **What measures are in place to collect and analyse data at the national level with a view to better understanding the impact that prostitution has on the rights of women and girls?**

There is **insufficient**, robust, sex disaggregated data in this area in most countries. There is real need to invest in alternative pathways out of prostitution and collect robust data so future decisions can be based on good evidence. The voices of those who have exited work in prostitution is important to hear and can be overlooked.

1. **What measures are in place to assist and support women and girls who wish to leave prostitution?**

There is rarely enough support for women and girls seeking to leave prostitution, or to help them deal with the consequences of prostitution. Very often returnees face cultures where great shame and stigma is placed on them, with little compassion on the fact that they had no choice.

Long-term work is needed to help communities break the stigma and shame they attribute to these women, to transform them into places of healing where women can be restored.

The reskilling and educating of women is often underinvested, yet access to business acumen empowers women to seek new areas of employment. One church project in Kenya retrained prostitutes as hairdressers, giving them a trade to earn money in a safer way.

Women leaving prostitution need medical support to deal with HIV or sexually transmitted diseases, or where pregnancy has occurred, support with raising the child and getting that child into education. These are all problems connected with the poverty cycle: the woman had to be a prostitute to gain food and money, then suffered illness as a result, or became pregnant, and then had to pay for medical supplies or for the child’s care, which meant she then had to work harder as a prostitute. **Breaking this poverty cycle is key.**

1. **What are the obstacles faced by organizations and frontline service providers in their mission to support victims and survivors of prostitution?**

In most situations, charities and churches are doing the work of changing cultures, providing skills training, giving medical support and offering counselling[[9]](#footnote-9). There is simply not enough funding being provided by governments or business.

The stigma and shame cultures in communities, as already mentioned in Question 11, works to undermine the work done by frontline workers and agencies to help, support and restore women and girls forced into prostitution.

Ultimately long-term change is needed so communities will not see their daughters leave into lives of prostitution.

1. **What are some of the lessons learned about what works and what does not when it comes to stemming any negative human rights consequences from the prostitution of women and girls?**
2. **Are frontline organizations and survivors' organisations sufficiently included in policymaking at the national and international level?**

In our experience across the 165 countries in which the Anglican Communion works, the answer is no. Frontline and survivors’ organisations, which have great expertise, are rarely included, listened to or have their advice adopted to necessary levels. In many places the involvement of survivor’s organisations appears tokenistic, with governments involving them for appearances’ sake[[10]](#footnote-10).

1. **What recommendations do you have to prevent and end violence associated with the prostitution for women and girls?**

Our recommendations are:

1. To launch **wide-ranging programmes of education for boys and men on the value and dignity of girls and women** to bring about long-term structural reform and change. This must begin at school, and be enforced at school – early examples of boys disrespecting girls must be addressed.
2. **Legal equality between women and men must be engrained in law and in culture, alongside an authoritative plan of action that is regularly monitored**. As Christians, we know women to be created in the Image of God as men are, and we believe sex to be a gift from God to be given and offered to a partner, not coerced out from one person stuck in a position of desperation.
3. There needs to be a **huge change in the way women are portrayed in the media**, via supporting and partnering with media campaigns that are changing the portrayal of women.
4. **Pornography needs to be banned outright**. It is a potent weapon that fuels the demand for prostitution by conditioning men to see women as sexual objects.
5. **Regular consultation** between Ministers or senior civil servants and faith groups / NGOs working on these issues is required in every country.

1. <https://www.iusw.org/sex-worker-statistics/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M. Farley, J. Golding, E. Schuckman Matthews, N. Malamuth, L.Jarrett (2015) *Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Do Not Buy Sex: New Data on Prostitution and Trafficking*, Journal of Interpersonal Violence <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515600874> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Skorska, M.N., Hodson, G., & Hoffarth, M.R. (2018). *Experimental effects of degrading versus erotic pornography exposure in men on reactions toward women (objectification, sexism, discrimination).* The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 27, 261 – 276; and Seabrook, R. C., Ward, L. M., & Giaccardi, S. (2019). *Less than human? media use, objectification of women, and men’s acceptance of sexual aggression.* Psychology of Violence, 9(5), 536-545. doi:10.1037/vio0000198 ; and Bevens, C. L., & Loughnan, S. (2019). *Insights into* *Men’s sexual aggression toward women: Dehumanization and objectification.* Sex Roles, 81(11), 713-730. doi:10.1007/s11199-019-01024-0; and Fiona Vera-Gray, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi, Kate Butterby, (2021) *Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography*, The British Journal of Criminology, Volume 61, Issue 5, September 2021, Pages 1243–1260 <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/61/5/1243/6208896> ; and [Pornography addiction: A neuroscience perspective - PMC (nih.gov)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3050060/) ; and *The relationship between pornography use and harmful sexual behaviours* – independent report, UK Government Equalities Office, February 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1241&context=mjil> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Skorska, M.N., Hodson, G., & Hoffarth, M.R. (2018). *Experimental effects of degrading versus erotic pornography exposure in men on reactions toward women (objectification, sexism, discrimination).* The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 27, 261 - 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/news/preventing-child-sexual-abuse/> ; <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118574003.wattso002> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://academic.oup.com/book/32177/chapter-abstract/268316983?redirectedFrom=fulltext> ; <https://swedishgenderequalityagency.se/men-s-violence-against-women/prostitution-and-human-trafficking/prostitution-policy-in-sweden-targeting-demand/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Council of Europe, <https://rm.coe.int/168063bc34> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example, *The Mothers’ Union* in Burundi has delivered frontline work to increase literacy and create savings groups that has in turn reduced gender-based violence <https://www.mothersunion.org/burundireport> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Religious groups too are frequently marginalised, yet often the first groups survivors turn to <https://www.researchsquare.com/article/rs-3481054/v1> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)