

**Submission  
No 27**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE REGULATION OF BROTHELS**

**Name:** Ms Geena Leigh

**Date Received:** 16/08/2015

Hi Parliament

I don't know much about politics but I do know a lot about prostitution; how other people make it sound so alluring to get a young girl to do it, how harmful it is to a woman's well-being (during and consequences later) and how challenging it is to get out of the industry.

I was recruited into sex work at 18. If they'd approached me earlier, I probably would have started earlier because at 15 I was homeless, broke and desperate for a better life. I'm thankful for those few years I got to live like a (semi) normal teenager. Once immersed in the sex industry I quickly became addicted to alcohol and any drug I could get my hands on to numb the pain of the horrible work I was doing.

When I worked in sex work I lost touch with the real world, I couldn't relate to regular people. I was scared of anyone finding out what I was doing and distanced myself from people. I got stuck. I got used to it. I was mentally imprisoned for 19 years.

What kept me working in prostitution for so long? It was fear. I was scared of; not fitting in to the real world, not being good at anything else and not able to financially support myself.

Sex work has this way of stripping/depleting/stealing all the dreams, goals and beautiful essence out of a woman. During my 19 years working in sex work (in massage parlours, brothels, on the street, escort agencies, private apartments, etc -in Australia and overseas), I did not meet one woman who enjoyed what she was doing. Everyone was trying to get out and was trying to figure out how they could have a normal career and a chance of a happy life.

When I was trying to get out of sex work, one of my thoughts was, "It's legal so it really can't be that bad" so I told myself to 'handle it' and kept working, despite I was living a life of utter misery. I hear the argument from people today of, "It's ok if they do sex work –but not my daughter!" If sex work isn't good enough for their daughter, why should it be good enough for anyone else's? Why should sex work be a valid option of employment for one young woman but not another?

It was very scary leaving sex work and trying to find regular employment with no resume, no work history and no references. It wasn't easy creating a new life for myself but I did it.

Some consequences from doing sex work include my ability to bond with people (I've been trained to have sex, not be intimate or create friendships or relationships). If I get an unexpected bill, I have nightmares about being a prostitute because that was the only way I knew how to make money for so long. Working in the straight world is still an adjustment for me, even years later. I had to learn the norms of regular employment and interacting with people.

Since leaving sex work, my life is one billion times better. I created a career in corporate management, have been drug and alcohol free for ten years, earned 3 university degrees, have perfect health, am a published author and now I've started speaking about the harms of sex work to young women; seeking to empower them with knowledge on what the sex industry is really like so if they ever consider working in prostitution, they will be able to make a better informed decision.

I acknowledge that not all sex workers get out of the industry with perfect health or even get out of it alive. I know 2 women who committed suicide because they were so unhappy and felt so trapped doing sex work. There was most likely more but I kept moving so I don't know what happened to many of them.

I found working in the sex industry as beneficial to my level of happiness, ability to contribute to society and to my overall quality of life comparable to that as being in a coma. I wasted 19 years of precious life. 19 years. It saddens me to think of what I could have achieved if I was doing some other work all that time. It saddens me to think of the unnecessary emotional and physical stress my body endured over that time.

I feel that keeping prostitution legal makes people think sex work is "ok". It might be ok for the client - but it's not ok for the woman. The brothel owner where I worked drove a Porsche and I was taking the bus to work. 'The Game' is not one where the woman wins. I believe Australia would benefit greatly by encouraging its female citizens to be the best they can be in life –to inspire women utilise their

mind, creativity and bodies in a way that truly serves them. Let's encourage women to strive for careers they can be truly proud of instead of a mind numbing job having sex.

I am asking Parliament to criminalise third party profiteers (pimps/brothel managers) as well as buyers and decriminalise the prostituted person.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Geena Leigh