

Survivor Participation in Campaigns for Legal Change

Study Examining Campaign Strategies in Member
States to Introduce Legislative Measures to
Discourage Demand for Sex Trafficking

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Authors: Denise Charlton and Mia De Faoite



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The Role of Survivors in Campaigns for Legal Change

Introduction

This paper is based on a roundtable discussion on the role of survivors in campaigns for legal change, held as part of the Disrupt Demand project, involving participants from Ireland, France, Cyprus, Lithuania, Sweden, and Finland.

The project is designed to support efforts to prevent human trafficking for sexual exploitation by reducing demand, through researching successful strategies involving legal changes, and fostering cooperation among key stakeholders. Addressing and discouraging demand that fosters exploitation, especially of women and children, is recognised as an effective prevention strategy in all major international treaties dealing with human trafficking. The EU law (Directive 2011/36/EU Art 18[1] & [4]) and the current EU Strategy towards Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings have a special focus on demand reduction. Given that trafficking for sexual exploitation represents the most prevalent form of trafficking in Europe (Eurostat 2014), this project focuses on the demand generated by users of sexual services, which is of particular importance in destination countries throughout the EU. The objective of the project is to reduce demand fuelling trafficking for sexual exploitation, as a way of prevention, by mapping and researching legal changes to that effect, sharing information on successful campaigning elements that achieved the legal change, and resulted in activities that fostered cooperation among key stakeholders. For this purposes, existing implementation strategies of new laws, and mechanisms for monitoring their effectiveness will be analysed with a view to identifying and promoting good transferrable practice among EU Member States.

As part of the project's implementation, a series of roundtables were held involving the project partners and experts. The purpose of these roundtables was generating knowledge and gathering and disseminating information in key areas, relevant to the focus of the project. This paper is the product of a roundtable on survivor participation in campaigns for legal change, involving input from survivor activist Mia de Faoite and Fiona Broadfoot of SPACE International.

Survivor advocates have played an important role in campaigns for legal change. There are a number of examples of survivor participation in campaigns targeting demand for trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation. Examples include the work of SPACE International and Equality Now's Trafficking Survivor Stories. The purpose of the Roundtable was thus to discuss the participation of survivor advocates in campaigns seeking legal change vis-à-vis laws targeting demand for human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The discussions considered lessons learned about survivor participation. The contributors also highlighted their views and experience of communicating the experiences of those exploited by the trade. The meeting discussed the strategies implemented for success when advocating legislative change in the area of human trafficking and demand reduction.

The thematic discussion considered the role and presence of survivors in campaigns against sex trafficking and demand and featured Turn off the Red Light (TORL), the Irish national campaign as a catalyst for discussion. Survivors Mia De Faoite and Fiona Broadfoot also shared their experiences of campaigning work and their perspectives on survivor activism. The participating organisations further contributed, highlighting the role of survivors in their work. The roundtable discussed representation of those affected within the commercial sex trade, and the importance of this voice as a core part of campaigning looking for legislative change.

Context

“Listening to the voices of those who have survived any form of oppression is crucial as the truest way to get to the heart of that which has been survived.”

Rachel Moran, Survivor, SPACE International

Among numerous campaigns to decrease demand for sex services and prevent human trafficking, survivor participation is crucial for not only creating public awareness of sex trafficking, but perhaps more importantly, instigate legal changes and understanding among key stakeholders.

Before legislative change can be made, minds have to be influenced and persuaded. The storytelling of survivors is important in creating empathy and understanding among both policy makers and the public. There are many misperceptions and disconnects between those affected by the sex trade and the public-at-large. The ability to empathise with women in prostitution can be blocked due to such misconceptions. In order to change minds and create understanding, storytelling of survivors allows a transfer of experience which in turn garners support against sexual exploitation and trafficking.

According to Raymond (2013: 183-188), survivor advocates have “exposed the “myth” that only those who identify as “sex workers” who defend the sex industry represent women in prostitution”. Moreover, owing to their experiential knowledge, they are well placed to expose “myths about an industry that severely damages women and children” and discuss “the policy and programs [which] should be developed to prevent sexual exploitation, protect victims, and punish the perpetrator”.

The importance of hearing the voice of survivors is echoed by Grizelda Grootboom, a civil society representative and sex trafficking victim from South Africa, who spoke at the UN



General Assembly last year. She stressed that she was not speaking because she wished to be an activist, but because she understood the true pain of being a sex slave.¹

The storytelling and activism of survivors is an important means of communication to guide supporters towards actions they can take to support efforts against sexual exploitation and trafficking. In regards to legal changes, survivors gain the attention of policy makers, raising awareness of the experiences, needs and demands of women who have undergone prostitution and trafficking.

With survivor activists, campaigns like Turn Off the Red Light have been able to mobilize and call on legislators to ensure that victims are adequately supported, while those enabling trafficking and exploitation are held accountable.

Survivor participation greatly benefits both the work of campaigns and the survivor herself. Many survivors find campaigning to be therapeutic and empowering, while also giving them skills such as media training, leadership, and public speaking. Not only does survivor participation increase campaign credibility and the likelihood of legislative change, but it provides these women various opportunities and advantages in a life post-sex trade, which is crucial in their recovery and reintegration into society.

Recognising survivor empowerment should not just be as a means towards better legislation and law enforcement, but as an end in itself. The power of words, of storytelling and the recovery of collective memory, can be used as a healing mechanism for these women and provide a sense of leadership. Through understanding the importance of sharing memories, however painful, many survivors are able to start the process of moving on to the next step in their life.

Reintegration involves establishing a safe environment, access to a reasonable standard of living, opportunities for personal and economic development, and access to social and emotional support.² Survivor participation in campaigns for legislative change often provides such windows of opportunity and support for these women.

Survivor mentorship and empowerment can help survivors with their reintegration into the community and society so they can truly be free and independent.³ Encouraging and engaging survivors in their leadership capacity will not only help governments and NGOs do better in their anti-trafficking work, but it will give survivors a healthy environment to recover and prosper as well. It is highly beneficial to empower, engage, and employ

¹ "General Assembly Adopts Political Declaration Affirming Commitment to End Human Trafficking, Amid Calls for Victim-Centered Approaches." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/ga11955.doc.htm>

² Muco, Ervin. (2013). Trafficking in human beings: Paradigms of a successful reintegration into society (Albanian case). *European Scientific Journal*, 9(4), 92.

³ U.S Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, 2017 Annual Report. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277080.pdf>



survivors who bring their experience and expertise to create better programs and anti-trafficking policies.⁴

Another benefit to survivors who participate in campaigns is they get to actively help other women still suffering from the sex trade and they can give a voice to those who cannot. In doing so, survivor activists feel empowered and valuable to not only themselves, but also to other victims of sex trafficking and prostitution who are not in the position to publicly advocate or campaign for themselves. Through anti-trafficking campaigns, survivors are also connected with other survivor activists and can form a community of empowerment, empathy and support.

For Sabrina Valisce, a former prostitute who once campaigned for decriminalisation of the sex trade but now argues that men who use prostitutes should be prosecuted, the best therapy is working with women who understand what it's like to go through the sex trade, and those who also campaign to expose the harm prostitution brings. She is also determined to ensure that the women who are usually silenced by their abusers have a voice. "It's not my goal to trap people in the industry or tell anyone to go get out," she says. "But I do want to make a difference, and that means speaking out as much as I can, in order to help other women."⁵

It is also important to understand how trafficked survivors cope with trauma and experience recovery. Research indicates that factors of hope and resilience play a vital role in the way individuals cope with trauma and experience recovery, and such hope and resilience are exemplified in campaigning for legislative change and public awareness. In a 2017 study, six significant qualitative themes were derived from the interviews of victims of trafficking describing various ways that participants experienced hope and resilience. The themes included (a) Need for positive attachment (b) Positive Self-Portrayal (c) Introspection (d) Adaptability (e) Need for money, and (f) Desire for change.⁶ Survivors who participate in campaigns will most likely experience at least a few of the factors due to their participation in such a campaign, specifically: introspection, positive self-portrayal, and desire for change. When working with victims and survivors on campaigns, placing emphasis on the importance of developing hope and resilience throughout the rehabilitation process will prove to be advantageous to the survivor.

It is important that when working with survivors on a campaign there is fully informed consent and support for the survivor. Those working with survivors should check in on a regular basis and ensure as much inclusion and feedback of survivors as possible. Survivors often have their voices silenced, so when they have the courage to speak up it is important that they share only what they want to share and only with audiences they feel

⁴ U.S Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, 2017 Annual Report.
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277080.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-41349301>

⁶ Egger, A., Seegobin, Winston, Gathercoal, Kathleen, & Thurston, Nancy. (2017). *Human Sex Trafficking: How Sex Trafficking Victims and Survivors Experience Hope and Resilience*, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.



comfortable sharing. As survivor participation is instrumental in having a successful campaign, NGOs or agencies collaborating with survivors must offer support, sensitivity, and ethical guidelines to create a safe space for all involved.

National Contexts

Survivor advocates have played an important role in campaigns for legal change in the participating Member States. This is particularly so in the case of Ireland and France.

IRELAND: TURN OFF THE RED LIGHT CAMPAIGN

Survivor leadership was critical to the success of the TORL campaign, demonstrating strength, courage and activism. The natural authority and breadth of first-hand experience of survivors made survivor activism a powerful mechanism for change. Survivors of the sex trade, and those still effected by it, were central to TORL with many taking an active part. Their voices were further supported by the participation of frontline services, working with those affected by the sex trade, who were not in a position to publicly advocate or campaign themselves.

The issues of sex trafficking and exploitation within the commercial sex trade in Ireland is invisible to many, as it is mainly indoors. The campaign wanted to ensure that any visuals or representation of those affected was communicated directly by survivors or influenced and informed by same. The campaign was coordinated by a core group with representation from SPACE International and survivor activist Mia De Faoite. Both were powerful advocates for the campaign. TORL was fortunate to have a strong survivor activist voice to inform and persuade key decision makers. TORL also had their expertise and knowledge, as expert witnesses, to inform any visuals or representations designed and used by the campaign.

Challenging popular misconceptions about prostitution was central to the campaign's work. Members of the public, both in Ireland and abroad, often have a limited understanding of prostitution, the effect it can have on individuals, society and its connection to organised crime. Given this lack of understanding, by drawing on the lived experience of prostitution and sex trafficking, survivors influenced decision-makers, raising awareness of the challenges facing survivors.

With the participation of survivors, TORL gained the attention of policy makers and legislators, raising awareness of the experiences, needs and demands of women who have experienced prostitution and trafficking. A key moment in boosting political support was a decision to bring the voices of survivors to the attention of politicians and key legislators who were visibly affected by their testimony.

The campaign strove to be a safe forum for survivors to share their experiences, shape the conversation among the public and policy makers, and guide supporters towards

actions they could take to support efforts against sexual exploitation and trafficking. With survivor activists, TORL mobilised and called on legislators to ensure that victims are adequately supported, while those fuelling trafficking and exploitation are held accountable.

FRANCE: ROSEN HICHER'S MARCH ON THE FRENCH SENATE

Survivor advocates similarly played an important role in the French campaign leading to the introduction of the law criminalising the purchase of sex.

A particular example of survivor advocacy was the walk undertaken by Rosen Hicher, the co-founders of a survivors' group based in Paris. a survivor of prostitution and advocate for change.

Rosen undertook a 743 km walk in 39 days from the last place where she had sold sex to the French Senate in order to place pressure on French politicians to adopt the then draft legislation.

Throughout her journey, Rosen received a very positive welcome and largely contributed to the evolution of mentalities and the media's coverage of the prostitution issue. Many politicians across the political spectrum showed their support for her and in favour of the adoption of the draft legislation.

Rosen's march was a way of ensuring that the voices of survivors could be heard. Through the march, Rosen gave voice to other survivors, while shifting the discussion in the media to focus on the role of the client in the prostitution system. It also helped raise awareness of the issue among public and elected representatives.

Roundtable Discussion Points

Throughout the Roundtable discussion, a number of the themes identified above emerged in the conversation between survivor activists, frontline providers, and advocates for change.

In the first place, the central role and importance of survivors in campaigns for change was recognised. The survivors and others at the meeting concluded that without survivors there is no movement. Frontline providers remarked that influencers are most likely to listen to survivors.

Participants also discussed the need to focus on measures which can offer appropriate support to survivor advocates. It was suggested that in terms of NGOs working with survivors, they must ensure that there is fully informed consent from survivors when asking them to engage in any campaigning. It was also suggested that those working with survivors should check in on a regular basis and ensure as much inclusion of survivors as possible. The importance of space and support to decide what elements of their experience to share was strongly advocated by survivors.

A further discussion was had on managing the role of pro-sex worker groups and advocates in debates. The opinion was expressed that such voices must be heard. In hearing those voices, however, it is often possible to see the dangers of the practice. However, it was also concluded that survivors are the most effectual in public debates with those that have this position.

Communications support and training was advocated for all spokespersons campaigning on the issue. However, it was also noted, that survivors often have their voices silenced, so that this support should be offered with sensitivity, with survivors core to any decisions about its development and delivery.

The discussions concluded that perhaps the project could lead to the creation of ethical guidelines pertaining to the involvement of survivors in campaigns for legal change.

Recommendations

- The central importance and role of survivor advocates in campaigns for change should be recognised. Survivor advocates should thus play a central role in campaigns for changes
- The involvement of survivor advocates must be based on their informed consent
- They must be given control over how they share their stories and to whom
- Survivor advocates engaging in media and communications work should be offered training and support
- Survivor advocates must be offered appropriate support, both during their time campaigning and after
- There is a need to draft of ethical guidelines pertaining to the involvement of survivors in campaigns for legal change, which should be based on their experiential knowledge and come from their active participation in any drafting process.

Appendix

MIA DE FAOITE – BEING A SURVIVOR INVOLVED IN CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE (PRESENTATION TO THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON SURVIVOR PARTICIPATION IN CAMPAIGNS FOR CHANGE)

I exited prostitution with the help of a social worker in October 2010. After about a year I was in a very different place, a good place but as hard as I tried I could not forget the friends I had left behind, I could not forget what I had witnessed, and the memories of what had been done to my own body still haunted me.

In May of 2012 I went to a screening of a documentary called ‘The Price of Sex’; after it was shown, there was a panel discussion and it was the first time I heard Denise Charlton, Chair of the TORL campaign speak. Afterwards I approached her to thank her, I told her that I had left prostitution not long ago but I never knew that women like her existed; I



didn't know that there were people out there fighting to end this suffering. She asked me if I would like to add my voice to the campaign and gave me her number. I called a few weeks later, and therein my search for justice began by the telling of my own story because justice evolves out of recognition.

For the first ten months, I did not speak publicly nor were there any demands made on me to do so. I had to figure out what I wanted to say, how I would say it and who I would say it to first. I had a very supportive team beside me and any questions or concerns I had I could reach out to them. I wrote a submission to the Justice Committee; finally putting my experiences and thoughts down on paper was in itself therapeutic but the first time I read those words to an audience was a profound moment. I had agreed to speak on a panel alongside a few other survivors to a private audience of politicians. After I had spoken, the atmosphere in that room was palpable and I realised two things that day, the first was that there was power in my truth.

The second realisation came to me when a politician, an older gentleman came up to me after the event. He held my hand with both of his, he said some kind words about my speech and then he said, 'You could be my daughter and I will support this law', and he has ever since. I have always known that the ability to empathise with the prostituted can be blocked due to the many misconceptions about who we are. In this world, we have gotten used to dividing each other up into 'us' and 'them'. Those affected by prostitution predominately come from disadvantaged backgrounds, there are, of course specific reasons for that but it is not always the case. We as humans are much more connected than what we would like to think but it is finding or reminding people of that connection which is often the challenge. What I realised that day was that I could form part of the bridge that joined the gap of the 'them' and 'us'. I had valuable insight into what it meant to be prostituted and how it felt to be there and owing to my background to which the politicians had identified with, I was now in a position to bring them into that world because the connection had been made.

This was not unlike the experience I had when I first arrived onto the street, the women saw me as different to them also, my accent and education, so they were suspicious of me. It took time for them to realise that although we had come from different backgrounds, we were connected. Eventually they accepted me and then they became quite protective of me and still are. They protected me by offering to do the more perverted buyers, by sheltering me from violence and even correcting each other for cursing in front of me. They thought I was of more value and this didn't tell me that I was in some way special, no, it told me one thing and one thing only and that was just how little value they placed on their own lives. Most of them believed that if anyone would manage to get off the street that it would be me and I now in turn believe that I have a responsibility to fight to protect them, like they fought for me when I couldn't.

Every year I meet with a group of women who were also involved in prostitution, some going back to the 1970s; it's something we all look forward to, none of these women speak publicly nor do they ever intend or have to. We enjoy the day together but every year



someone is a little more unwell because although my friends may have left prostitution, prostitution has never left them. I fill them in with the news about the law and how it's progressing, one of them said to me recently, 'Ah I don't understand all that law stuff but I trust you, so I trust what you're doing is the right thing and I support you'. Sadly, this year two of my friends passed away and they were far too young to die. I was lucky enough to be able to speak to one of them before she passed, she had requested that the nurse call me and let her speak to me. Her words were poignant and I'll never forget them, her last words to me were, 'My time is nearly up and I wanted to say goodbye and to tell ya to keep fighting and I'll be watching from above'. She passed away peacefully three weeks later. Her words and those of my other friends serve as a constant reminder as to why I have fought for this law. Every morning I wake up I am grateful that I survived. I am one of the lucky ones. I have gone on to live again, to laugh again and to love again when so many others haven't, so although it is my story, it is not about me but it is through my story that the others become visible. Connection, trust and love for our fellow human beings are powerful tools against injustice.

Being part of the TORL campaign was a learning experience to say the least. I was quite naive in regard to the media (among other things) and in hindsight there are a number of things I would now do differently but I had to learn. In April of 2013 I went public on national radio, I wanted the first time I told my story to be live and in my own words. Again, I had a supportive team behind me and looked for advice including a media expert. I had to learn to think strategically, to figure out where my voice was best placed so as to be the most effective. Survivor voices are incredibly important within any abolition campaign but it must remember that we are not only survivors with our own stories but we are witnesses to some of the most heinous crimes, committed against our own bodies and we are also witnesses to crimes committed against others. We provide the evidence and without that evidence there is no case.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned deriving from my first interaction with that politician was the importance of knowing my audience. From then on whenever I sat down to write a speech for an event or conference, instead of saying, 'What do I want to say to these people?', I would ask myself, 'Who are these people and is there any connection I can make with them?' and I would then write my story around that connection. For example, when I spoke to the INMO (Nurses Union): in my introduction, I stated that I come from a long line of nurses in my family and did a couple of years training myself and immediately we were connected, and again when I speak to young people I read a piece that my daughter wrote, about what it is like to see your mother go through this and again we connect. I also had to gain an understanding and learn skills, some of which are very practical in regard to coping with the sense of exposure and vulnerability which often follows after you have disclosed personal experiences. I had to learn that I was in control of what I was willing to share or not to share and that was a lesson learnt hard in the beginning, in fact it was picked up by others prior to my own acknowledgement but again that is why it is imperative that you are in a supportive environment, where the team that surrounds you have your best interest at heart.



Campaigning within the political arena is quite complex and challenging at times and I discovered over time where my voice was most useful and of course learning and acknowledging where it is actually not useful. Survivor experience was always at the core of the campaign, but it was not always appropriate or indeed necessary for me to be present at every meeting. That did not have anything to do with exclusion; it was about strategic political planning. Knowing where the survivor voice is best placed was vital for the campaign and the only way to combat feelings of exclusion is through good communication, transparency and teamwork of which the TORL campaign had in abundance.