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**BROTHELs IN LONDON:  
UNIQUE NEW RESEARCH EXPOSES REALITY OF THE OFF-STREET  
SEX INDUSTRY**

*Big Brothel: a survey of the off-street sex industry in London*, to be launched on 4<sup>th</sup> September by Eaves' POPPY Project, exposes the alarming growth of the off-street sex industry in London and the proliferation of dangerous practices. The launch is timed to coincide with a visit to the POPPY Project by Minister for Women and Equality Harriet Harman.

Solely using adverts placed in local newspapers, researchers posing as potential sex buyers found high-risk services - such as unprotected anal sex - available for as little as £10 extra in many of the 921 brothels surveyed. Seventy-seven different ethnicities of women providing services were identified, many from known trafficking hotspots such as Eastern Europe and South-East Asia.

Penetrative sex was available for only £15 in some places, and a number of premises offered "very young girls" although were reluctant to explicitly admit to having underage girls available.

Many of the brothels advertised were operating as legitimate businesses – licensed as saunas or under the guise of massage parlours, although the vast majority of premises were private flats in residential areas.

Harriet Harman says: "Prostitution is the abuse and exploitation of women by men, and this important research highlights the sad realities of the so-called 'off-street' trade in the capital. We have done much to end the evil trade in sex trafficking, including strengthening the law and supporting police operations and the Crown Prosecution Service to catch and prosecute traffickers as well as supporting victims. But to protect women, we also need to tackle the demand side. Many papers are already following the Newspaper Society's guidelines and no longer accept this kind of advertising, but we need more to follow suit, to stop carrying these ads and help stop fuelling demand."

Brothels were identified in each of London's 33 boroughs, with an average of 28 per borough, ranging from 71 (Westminster) to 8 (Southwark). Given that only newspaper advertisements were used as source information (as opposed to websites or phone cards) it can be assumed that the numbers in the report represent the tiniest tip of a very large iceberg. It is estimated that between £86-209.5 million is generated for brothels through illegal newspaper ads alone.

Helen Atkins, co-author of *Big Brothel*, comments: "it has been said that we are never more than six feet away from a rat in London. Apparently, something similar applies to brothels, places where thousands of women are regularly exploited by men who buy sex. This research shows the disturbing prevalence of the sex industry in every corner of London - fuelled by the demand for prostitution services. Multi-media misrepresentations of commercial sex as a glamorous, easy and fun career choice for girls and women further contribute to the ubiquity of London's brothel industry.

However, for most women involved in prostitution, the reality is a cycle of violence and coercion, perpetuated by poverty and inequality.”

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

The POPPY Project at Eaves Housing for Women provides services for women trafficked into prostitution, and carries out research, education, training and lobbying to raise awareness about trafficking and exiting prostitution. Between March 2003 and June 2008, POPPY has received 995 referrals; accepted 199 for accommodation and support; and 159 for outreach support.

Eaves is a London-based charity that provides high quality housing and support to vulnerable women. We also carry out research, advocacy and campaigning to prevent all forms of violence against women.

#### **ENDS**

To download an electronic copy of the report, please visit

<http://www.eaves4women.co.uk/Publications.php>

For further information, please contact: Sarah Mills, Press and Information officer.

Tel.: 020 7840 7126 or [sarah.mills@eaveshousing.co.uk](mailto:sarah.mills@eaveshousing.co.uk)

#### **Sarah Mills**

Press and Information Officer

Eaves: 2nd Floor, Lincoln House, 1-3 Brixton Road, London, SW9 6DE

*Tel: +44 20 7840 7126*

*Fax: +44 20 7820 8907*

*Email: [sarah.mills@eaveshousing.co.uk](mailto:sarah.mills@eaveshousing.co.uk)*

*Web: [www.eaves4women.co.uk](http://www.eaves4women.co.uk)*