

## The Lilith Project Women's Weekly News 277

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Special edition - spotlight on trafficking

### **No *Guardian* angel for trafficked women**

Shame on you Nick Davies for your four and a half thousand words in the *Guardian* newspaper on Tuesday this week claiming that in the UK there are hardly any trafficked women; very few pimps or traffickers whom we know to have forced or coerced anyone into prostitution; that feminists and politicians have made it all up; and that those in prostitution would be fine and dandy if only the police and support agencies would leave them alone.

Oh, and a supporting letter, conveniently published the next day, helps us to understand that men who pay for sex are blameless and kind-hearted – in fact criminalising them would prevent them from reporting any suspicions that they have just had sex with a trafficked woman to the police, for fear of being criminalised. But wait! If there are no trafficked women why would we need them to dial 999?

We refer to an article by Nick Davies published in the *Guardian* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October entitled *Sex, lies and trafficking – the anatomy of a moral panic* (for shortened versions of the original printed article please click [here](#) and [here](#)).

The implication by Davies and the pro-sex industry academics and activists he has been speaking to at length is that organisations which support trafficked women are part of a shadowy cabal in the halls of power. He then implies that expert advice shouldn't be blown out of proportion, comparing reports of tens of thousands of sex slaves in this country to the Iraq dossier. Davies prides himself on being someone who claims to be going after discrepancies in media reporting and trying to find the truth. However, what truth has he found?

The denial of human rights abuses is nothing new. It took centuries of feminist activism to expose atrocities towards women and children, such as rape and domestic violence, and to this day there are plenty of folk who seek to argue that

such things do not happen. One shameful consequence of Davies' argument is that some people will now assume that trafficked women are lying about the circumstances in which they were brought into this country. The argument goes that they are merely 'migrant sex workers' who would be fine if only they had the correct documentation to remain in the UK.

Well done Davies – you have effectively labelled the women who use POPPY services as 'bogus asylum seekers'. Are you proud that one outcome of your ideologically driven comment piece is that services for women who have been raped and tortured en route to and whilst in the UK could effectively disappear? As a left-wing politico, does it please you to imagine these women in Yarl's Wood rather than in a safe environment where they are treated as human beings in need of care and repair rather than punishment?

When the article appeared Eaves received scores of letters, many of which had been sent to the letters page of the Guardian, protesting about the biased reporting, selective use of facts and statistics, and the political and ideological thread running through it. "Davies' chief reason for writing this," wrote one, "seems to be to argue for the continued existence of prostitution and against any legislation penalising the punters."

Another said that for her, the piece was indicative of a serious backlash against feminist achievements in exposing the abuse inherent within the sex industry "in almost exactly the same way that the False Memory Syndrome Society and its supporters accused the rapists and other adults of 'planting' memories of sexual abuse in children in order to argue that child abuse doesn't exist."

Eaves is one of 28 organisations which signed a letter submitted for publication to the Guardian on the day the article appeared. Signatories included every single one of the major anti-trafficking organisations in the UK, such as Anti-Slavery International, Asylum Aid, ECPAT, Kalayaan and TARA.

All 28 work directly on the issue of trafficking, and some, such as Eaves, with the women themselves. Despite confirmation that it would be published, it was not. There were, however, letters published in support of Davies' article, including one signed by 22 academics and practitioners who are known to be pro-sex industry lobbyists. We submitted a 550-word response to Davies for publication on the Guardian's Comment pages. It was rejected on the grounds of minor technicalities (relating to editorial style). The Guardian has censored Eaves and the other organisations working on the front line of anti-trafficking. The voices of trafficked women have also been silenced, and they have effectively been told they do not exist. One of our service users, devastated by the words of Davies, wrote a response to the article and asked the Guardian Comment is Free to publish it. As yet, it has not appeared.

In this special edition of Women's Weekly News we give you the opportunity to read the letters and articles the Guardian have, to date, refused to publish.

**Denise Marshall**  
**Chief Executive, Eaves**

**Joint letter (unpublished) to the Guardian letters page in response to *Sex, lies and trafficking – the anatomy of a moral panic***

Sir,

Nick Davies' article on sex trafficking (*Sex, lies and trafficking – the anatomy of a moral panic*, 20 Oct) was thoroughly misleading.

It is a mistake to judge the extent of this crime by citing the number of convictions secured against traffickers.

Human trafficking is a notoriously difficult crime to bring to a successful prosecution. Davies' article fails to acknowledge the multiple barriers victims face in approaching support services, let alone the authorities. Until victims feel safe and protected, and police, immigration, social and health services, people at all stages of the criminal justice process and members of the public fully understand the nature and complexities of human trafficking in all its forms, it will always be difficult to secure convictions.

As organisations working with victims of trafficking, we see the human devastation caused by this gross abuse of human rights on a daily basis. Perhaps Mr Davies felt it unnecessary to include their voices in his analysis of the issue, but to our ears it was a deafening omission. His article has done a grave disservice to all victims of trafficking. Not only has he discredited their experiences, he is in danger of jeopardising the little existing support available to them.

Debbie Ariyo, **AFRUCA**  
Adam Weiss, **AIRE Centre**  
Tim Hancock, **Amnesty International UK**  
Jalna Hanmer, **Anneli Project**  
Aidan McQuade, **Anti-Slavery International**  
Raggi Kotak, **Anti Trafficking Legal Project (ATLeP)**  
Nasim Minhas, **Ashiana**  
Maurice Wren, **Asylum Aid**  
Mutale Merrill, **BAWSO**  
Denise Marshall, **Eaves**  
Chris Beddoe, **ECPAT**  
Clare Lazarus, **Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize**

Finn Mackay, **Feminist Coalition against Prostitution**  
Keith Best, **Immigration Advisory Service (IAS)**  
Nusha Yonkova, **Immigrant Council of Ireland**  
Marai Larasi, **Imkaan**  
Harriet Wistrich, **Justice for Women**  
Camilla Brown, **Kalayaan**  
Karen Ingala-Smith, **nia Project**  
Rachel Cooling, **Northern Refugee Centre**  
Anna van Heeswijk, **OBJECT**  
Katie Russell, **Rape Crisis England and Wales**  
Sarah Cutler, **Refugee Council**  
Cate Briddick, **Rights of Women**  
Caroline Slocock, **Refugee & Migrant Justice**  
Ann Hamilton, **TARA**  
Di Martin, **Trust**  
Akima Thomas, **Women and Girls Network**

***Quote from Amnesty International***

*“Reliable statistics on trafficking into the UK whether for sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation are very difficult to obtain and need to be treated with caution. However, specialist women's sector organisations have dealt with plenty of cases where the women have been trafficked into sexual exploitation. A serious problem that is often overlooked, but that women's sector has regularly emphasised, is that since the launch of the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking, the government has chosen to use only police and border agency staff as the gatekeepers to identify someone as trafficked or not. This is liable to be a contributory factor to lower numbers of women being ‘identified’”.*

**Heather Harvey**  
**Campaign Manager, Amnesty International**

**Guardian Comment is Free submission (unpublished) from Eaves**

Following your article “Sex, lies and trafficking – the anatomy of a moral panic”, the uninformed might suppose that good old Blighty is one of the only countries in Europe which doesn't have a problem with the trafficking of women into the sex industry.

He mentions the familiar tide of “misinformation which has swept though the subject of sex trafficking in the UK: it flows through the same channels as the now notorious torrent about Saddam Hussein's weapons.”

When you look at the figures which are bandied about he appears to have a point. Since the opening of the POPPY Project I have heard numbers as high as 25,000 and as low as 142, with a huge range in between.

But, Nick, have you thought about the reason for this? It is quite simply that no one actually knows how many victims of trafficking are in the UK. Given the hidden nature of and societal response to trafficking, this is not surprising. You are unlikely to find a victim of trafficking selling sex on the streets. You will find that there are even fewer police officers adequately trained to investigate trafficking cases. Too many victims are scared to come forward because they do not trust that they won't be deported by the UKBA, dismissed by the police or have their very existence questioned by trafficking deniers – like you – who are prepared to step on the neck of the victims in order to promote their own pro-prostitution agenda.

They are not real, we are told; like weapons of mass destruction, they have been dreamt up to scare us and justify an attack on the poor beleaguered (multi-billion-pound) sex industry, which exists only to find work for women who always wanted to end up in a brothel in London, Leeds or Liverpool.

Tell that to the women we support. Explain to them that being forced to have sex with several men a day and hand over money, passport and free will isn't really happening. And even if it is, they should understand that it's only happening to a few of them so they shouldn't complain.

Later Davies again states that "claims about trafficking cannot be substantiated"; but neither can the tired old assertion from the pro-prostitution lobby that every woman working in prostitution is doing so of her own free will. Yet he chooses not to challenge this. In fact, the timing of the piece is interesting; just as the House of Lords prepares to debate Clause 13, which aims to tackle demand for trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, Nick Davies attempts to deny the extent of trafficking. One would almost think he had an agenda.

One of the cornerstones of Davies' piece is the lack of trafficking convictions resulting from Pentameter 2: "...the six-month national police operation which failed to find a single person who had forced anybody into prostitution."

So because conviction rates are low, trafficking doesn't exist? A laughable non-sequitur. We have supported nearly 500 trafficked women at POPPY since 2003. These women do not compare themselves to weapons of mass destruction but to victims of rape and sexual assault; another area where we have a lamentably low conviction rate. I suppose Davies would claim that because these convictions are lacking, women who were raped must actually have been saying "yes" when they meant "no".

**Denise Marshall**  
**Eaves Chief Executive**

**Guardian Comment is Free submission (unpublished) from a former POPPY Project service user**

I read your article on 20<sup>th</sup> October (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/20/trafficking-numbers-women-exaggerated>), and it made me wonder how people educated on your level could write all those things.

It's so easy for some people to say, "Trafficking does not exist". These are people who cannot see beyond their nose, who live in a beautiful world where pimps and sex slaves are just stories to be discussed in the pub. But trafficking does exist. It is happening everywhere.

I was trafficked to UK when I was 22, but was in the grip of the traffickers for two years before that. As soon as I arrived here I was forced to work in brothels, and was controlled not only by the traffickers but by the owners of the brothel and the customers, who pretended to feel sorry for me and the rest of the women. When they had finished what they were there to do – get pleasure – they would close the door behind, leaving me and other women to suffer on in the hellish world you said does not exist.

In your report, which says the police didn't arrest anyone in the operation Pentameter Two except women or the owners of the brothels; of course they haven't. Pimps do not stay at the brothels. The business is not run by stupid people. It is a well developed industry; it is organised crime. And now journalists like you are helping them to grow their business and make women more afraid in their hearts to tell people what is happening, because no one will believe us. And you have proved pimps right when they say, "No one can touch us".

I've been in brothels all over the UK, between early 2003 till mid 2007, when I got my freedom. I stayed under the protection of Poppy Project for about one and a half years, where I had help and the support to survive and get my life back (what was left of it).

In my opinion, you don't know what real trafficking is, and I am wondering if you have ever met any woman who was trafficked. Believe me, I know plenty, including myself. I can't explain to you on a piece of paper my years of experience in that world, but I have made an effort to stand up for what you and other people like you are trying to hide. You are behaving like trafficking does not exist. Human trafficking does exist. Don't close your eyes to it.

**Angela (not her real name), Albania**

**So what can you do to right these wrongs and ensure that women who have been trafficked get justice?**

1. **Write a letter to the Guardian** complaining about their unbalanced coverage of this issue, and their complete exclusion of women who have been trafficked and those who directly support them from the debate. Write to [letters@guardian.co.uk](mailto:letters@guardian.co.uk)
2. **Write a letter to Peers** (template letter attached) encouraging them to demonstrate their support for **Clause 14** of the Policing and Crime Bill (Clause 13 in previous editions of the Bill), which is currently passing through the House of Lords. Clause 14 will make it an offence to pay for sexual services from *someone who has been exploited or subjected to force*. This clearly applies to all victims of trafficking. Clause 14 is a crucial measure that has been effective in other countries in combating trafficking and securing gender equality.
3. **Sign our Demand Change! Campaign [petition](#)** to tackle the demand for prostitution that fuels the growth of the sex industry and the proliferation of trafficking.
4. Visit our website to find out more: [www.demandchange.org.uk](http://www.demandchange.org.uk)
5. **Sign [this](#) petition to save the London Metropolitan Police's Human Trafficking Team**, which is currently threatened with closure.

**Thank you in advance for your support!**

*Your regular edition of Women's Weekly News will return next week, packed full of news stories and a wealth of information about events, campaigns, conferences, job and volunteering opportunities.*