

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

COLLEGE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS

The Exploitation of Sex Workers in Italy

BRIGID OSTROWSKI

SUMMER 2022

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for baccalaureate degrees
in Global and International Studies and Italian
with honors in Global and International Studies

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Maria Truglio
Professor of Italian and Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies
Thesis Supervisor

Krista Brune
Director of the Global and International Studies Program
Honors Advisor

* Electronic approvals are on file.

ABSTRACT

This thesis will analyze the various avenues of exploitation that sex workers and victims of human trafficking who are forced into sex work experience. Chapter one describes the context of sex work in Italy, exploring the history of sex work in Italy, the contemporary legal landscape, and the deeply influential role of the catholic church in shaping public opinion. Chapter two analyzes migrant sex work, human trafficking, the prevalence of sex trafficking in sex work in Italy, and a case study on two victims of sex trafficking from Nigeria. Chapter three focuses on exploitation—the violence sex workers experience in every avenue of life—as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sex workers. Chapter four goes on to analyze the four different legal models that can be implemented in Italy— legalization, criminalization, the Nordic model, and decriminalization.

The argument of this thesis is that, through exploring the condition of sex workers and victims of human trafficking, we can better understand the legal model that is best suited to their needs and circumstances. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to address the issues that sex workers and victims of human trafficking face with due respect and proper consideration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Sex Work in Italy.....	3
History of Sex Work in Italy	3
Contemporary Political Landscape.....	4
The Church.....	6
Chapter Two: Migrant Sex Work.....	9
Human Trafficking in Italy.....	9
Victim Exploitation.....	11
Sex Trafficking v. Sex Work.....	12
Case Study: Joy and Blessing.....	14
Chapter Three: Exploitation.....	19
Violence of Profession.....	19
Political and Legal Violence.....	20
Poverty and Quality of Life.....	22
Case Study: The COVID-19 Pandemic.....	24
Chapter Four: Legal Approaches.....	27
Legalization.....	27
Criminalization.....	29
Nordic Model.....	31
Decriminalization.....	33
Conclusion.....	36
Bibliography.....	38

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Truglio, without whom this thesis would never have been possible. I will forever be thankful for her patience, direction, knowledge, and wisdom. Her suggestions, guidance, and advice during this process have been invaluable to me. She has been an extraordinary teacher to me that I have been fortunate to have multiple times throughout my college experience. Her classes have shaped my investment in women's studies and my passion for Italian, and it is her influence on me that has made me consider a future in education.

I am also immensely thankful for the support of my family, who have been endlessly patient with me both during this process and my entire college experience. My parents, Alexander Ostrowski and Tara Connolly, have always encouraged me to follow my dreams and passions. Their support allowed me to study in Italy during the recent spring semester, which only further fostered my investment in the condition of Italian women. I also have to thank my brother, Finn, who has always encouraged me to look at things from a different perspective.

Introduction

In Italy, there are an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 prostitutes (United Nations Statistics Division, n.d.). While a small percentage of Italy's population of 59 million, sex workers are a vulnerable group highly susceptible to increased rates of violence, HIV, homelessness, and food insecurity (World Bank, n.d.). The stigma surrounding sex work goes beyond social stigma and impacts nearly every facet of life for sex workers—politically, legally, economically, socially, and more. This violence committed against sex workers on essentially every level robs them of their humanity and reduces them to a harmful stereotype without agency. Sociopolitical stigma seeks to take away social and political power from sex workers, trapping them in a cycle of shame, violence, and abuse (Grittner & Walsh, 2020). Furthermore, the prevalence of sex trafficking in Italy, which is home to major travel routes for human traffickers, adds a complicated nuance to the issue of sex work.

There is significant debate in the academic community regarding the use of the terms “prostitute” and “sex worker”, such as, but not limited to, what each signifies, the sociopolitical implications of the word, and the role of choice. Prostitution is a term that is regularly used to dehumanize sex workers, but it is also utilized at times to exclusively refer to street-based prostitution. “Sex worker”, in contrast, encompasses the extensive majority of sex work and is often regarded as explicitly voluntary in comparison, although there is discussion concerning the notion of “choice” in the realm of sex work (Gerassi, 2015). The term “prostitute” indicates that the act—and therefore the person—is criminal in nature. The stigma surrounding sex work and prostitution acts to create a culture where violence against sex workers is normalized and demonstrates that violence is an essential quality of the profession rather than a result of its stigmatization (Grittner & Walsh, 2020).

Sex work is defined by Gerassi as “the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation and can refer to direct physical contact between buyers and sellers as well as indirect sexual stimulation” (2015). While the term “sex worker” often denotes freedom of choice, there are arguments about how freedom of choice functions in the sex work industry when there are external factors such as poverty and former trauma at play (Gerassi, 2015). As both sex work and sex trafficking is defined by the European Parliament in its *Resolution of 26 February 2014 on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality* as “forms of slavery incompatible with human dignity and fundamental human rights” and “a violation of women’s rights – a form of sexual slavery –, which results in and maintains gender inequality for women”, it is obvious that many countries conflate sex work and sex trafficking, and view all under the umbrella term of prostitution (Di Nicola, 2021). This thesis will largely use the term sex worker, although will at times use prostitute when referring to the profession in an official capacity when the terminology is used by sex work groups or government agencies, or when the person in question is a victim of sex trafficking and therefore incapable of freely choosing sex work.

CHAPTER ONE: SEX WORK IN ITALY

History of Sex Work in Italy

Prostitution is oftentimes considered the oldest profession in the world. In the Roman Empire, prostitutes were largely regarded as slaves, worked in brothels, and were required to register with the Aedile (McGinn, 2004). The Aedile were an agency that enforced public order and maintained public works, and as such, they regulated brothels, enforced dress code, issued *licentia stupri*— a license to prostitute— and managed role (McGinn, 2004). Once a prostitute's name was licensed and listed on formal registry, it could not be removed, subjecting prostitutes to a lifetime of limitations such as marriage and class movement restrictions (McGinn, 2004). Prostitutes were required to pay an imperial tax, starting during Caligula's rule in 37 CE. This form of income tax actually served to validate prostitution as a legitimate business, creating a positive shift in attitude towards prostitutes— or at least, public toleration. Prior to this taxation, sex work was viewed as acceptable but morally questionable (Weisner, 2014). Higher class and more expensive prostitutes did exist, and were referred to as *meretrix*. They could obtain great wealth and esteem, in contrast with lower class and less respected *scortum* or *lupa* (Weisner, 2014).

The middle ages and the advent of the Renaissance saw the birth of courtesans— or, *cortigiana onesta*— which were a unique class of prostitute who were educated, held esteemed reputation, shaped clothing codes and fashion, ran brothels, and at times wielded considerable political influence (McGinn, 2004). One such city that thrived on the influence of courtesans was Venice. Venice's location on the Adriatic Sea combined with its maritime power allowed it to

become a major trade city and tourist destination. In turn, it became a cultural epicenter. Venice legalized prostitution, taxed it, and turned it into a vastly profitable market.

One such notable Venetian courtesan is Veronica Franco. Franco was a successful published poet, intellectual, and esteemed courtesan who entertained the likes of King Henry III of France and important patrons of the arts such as Domenico Venier (Dornsife & Dornsife, 2013). Despite her successes in literary circles, wealth, and considerable influence, Franco readily acknowledged the difficulties of her profession, writing to one mother who sought to involve her daughter in sex work that “this is a life that always turns out to be a misery. It's a most wretched thing, contrary to human reason... to make oneself prey to so many men, at the risk of being stripped, robbed, and even killed” (Franco, 1998). Franco maintains that, despite the freedom that the life of a courtesan can afford one, it is ultimately rife with danger and pain.

Contemporary Political Landscape

After centuries of foreign domination and political division, the unification of Italy into a constitutional monarchy in 1861 brought a series of changes to the legal status of sex work. The first such institutional change was the introduction of *Regolamentazione*, alongside the unification of Italy as one country (Crowhurst, 2012). Decreed into law in 1860, *Legge Cavour* legislated "Regulations of the Security Service on Prostitution" that legalized prostitution (Crowhurst, 2012). With Italian unification, prostitution was confined to state regulated brothels (Crowhurst, 2012). *Legge Crispi* of 1888 banned the sale of food and drink, dancing, singing, or any social gathering in brothels. It also dictated that no brothels could be within a certain distance of churches or schools (Crowhurst, 2012). *Legge Nicotera*, passed in 1891 declared that prostitution in Italy was completely legal in private establishments and homes (Crowhurst, 2012). It also established the *sifilicomi*, or hospitals for sex workers set up. The Italian

government largely believed that sex workers were the source of the spread venereal diseases. The use of sex workers as a scapegoat for the spread of disease is a part of a larger precedent—sex workers were previously blamed for syphilis during the medieval ages, targeted for COVID-19, and consistently looked at as perpetrators of HIV/AIDS (Cabras & Ingrassi, 2022).

Legge Merlin, named after Lina Merlin of the Socialist Party, was passed in 1958 “to prohibit and punish the exploitation of prostitution by others (including the state) by forbidding the establishment of new brothels, ordering the closure of existing ones, and banning the registration and medical examinations that were previously compulsory for prostitutes. The law also criminalizes loitering, kerb crawling, and soliciting” (Crowhurst, 2012). Only street prostitution was legalized. This law also strictly refers to women, ignoring the reality that male sex workers do exist, and— while intentioned to prevent the exploitation, has been the subject of great political debate on if it truly supports sex workers (Crowhurst, 2012).

Instrumental in the system of regulating prostitution as it currently stands in Italy right now was media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, who served nine years in total as Prime Minister from the mid 1990s to the early 2010s (Friedman, 2015). Berlusconi has been subject to scandal and controversy throughout his term, such as his alleged link to the mafia, his friendly relationship with Russia’s president Vladimir Putin, and numerous sex scandals (Friedman, 2015). Most relevant was when he was convicted— although then acquitted— of having sexual relations with an underage prostitute in 2013 (Davies, 2013). Berlusconi was notably in favor of harsher restrictions on sex work. He supported the passage of the stringent Carfagna Bill, stating that:

We have to clean the streets [of prostitutes]. Like many Italian people, I can no longer stand feeling ashamed when walking in the streets with my children. Prostitution is everywhere, you can see people's g-strings on display, and also the rest, everywhere, shamelessly! Maybe we will have to open the closed houses [brothels] again, and regularize [prostitution], we will see. In the meantime, also in order to protect those girls—many of whom are in slavery-like conditions—we will soon have to start an extremely rigorous fight against the criminals who rule over them, and we will make the streets suitable for families to walk on them again (Crowhurst, 2012)

The Carfagna Bill of 2008 was intended to criminalize street prostitution. In response, vast opposition formed towards the bill, claiming that “by moving indoors, those who were already in vulnerable situations would become even more marginalized and easily exploited” (Crowhurst, 2012). Government response maintained that it would be impossibly complicated to hide prostitution inside (Crowhurst, 2012).

To circumvent government debate, Berlusconi supported the measures of the Security Package of 2008, under which local mayors were granted new corrective and punitive powers to enforce public security in order to combat “illegal immigration and organized crime” (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, 2018, my trans). In a press conference regarding these emergency measures, Berlusconi urged mayors to adopt portions of the Carfagna bill (Ministero dell'Interno, n.d.). The bill had stalled through approval into law (Ministero dell'Interno, n.d.).

Mayors across the country started issuing anti-street prostitution ordinances “forbidding and punishing with hefty pecuniary fines, not only the actual exchange of sexual services for remuneration in public places but also a host of newly formulated offenses” such as “attitudes, behaviors, or wearing clothes that unequivocally manifest the intention to exercise the activity of prostitution, having a verbal exchange with people exercising the activity of prostitution on the streets, and walking in public spaces with the intention of selling sexual services” (Crowhurst, 2012). Essentially, street prostitution was locally criminalized, forcing many sex workers and migrant workers inside, where there was no visibility or regulation to provide some semblance of protection— which is the supposed intention of the official legalization of prostitution.

The Church

While the Catholic Church and Vatican City is now considered a separate entity from the government of Italy, they have been closely intertwined throughout history. The Roman Catholic

Church has deeply shaped the world in which we live today— so it is not surprising that it has influenced public opinion on sex work throughout history. Throughout the medieval era, sex work was deemed a necessary evil that protected people from the “greater evils” of illicit sexual practices through allowing young boys to explore pleasure while protecting the honor of unmarried girls. This is largely thought to have discouraged “deflowering” of maidens when sex was readily available for purchase (Leahy, 2018).

While the Church publically maintained its steadfast hold on the Bible's contempt for prostitution, in practice this was largely disregarded as prostitution was believed to discourage men from committing “greater sins” such as masturbation, sodomy, and rape. While “prostitutes were encouraged to abandon their occupation and repent” an “examination of primary works by Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas reveals that the profession was widely accepted as a ‘necessary evil’” (Leahy, 2018). This especially came into play in Italy in the middle ages, where many cities— such as Venice— established their own “civically-run brothels” to entertain men of all backgrounds and marital statuses and, most intriguing—even clergymen (Leahy, 2018). Brothels even existed in the Papal State. Notably, it was a syphilis outbreak in Naples during 1495 when religious leaders began to look more negatively at prostitution (Leahy, 2018).

A notable interpretation of prostitutes encouraged by the church was Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene is often popularly depicted as a “holy harlot” or the “penitent prostitute”— a woman freed from seven demons by Jesus, repenting for her sins— although there is no biblical evidence for this depiction (Schlumpf, 2016). She was utilized by the church in their creation of the Order of Saint Mary Magdalene, a popular convent movement that encouraged sex workers to repent and become nuns— inspired by Mary’s “penance” (Loewen & Waugh, 2018). Her reputation for having been “saved” from prostitution by Christ directly reflects the church’s view

of the selling of sex as inherently immoral, and therefore meritorious of judgement no matter the circumstance (Loewen & Waugh, 2018)

With the increased focus on human/sex trafficking in Italy, and in the wake of the child sex abuse scandals, the Catholic Church has increased emphasis on prostitution. Sex workers are now viewed as victims: “prostitutes are predominantly viewed as passive victims who are involuntarily engaged in sex work.” (Haker, 2020) Pope Francis, in the prologue of Fr. Aldo Buonaiuto’s book *Crucified Women*, even goes so far as to state that “Any form of prostitution is a reduction to slavery, a criminal act, a disgusting vice that confuses making love with venting out one's instincts by torturing a defenseless woman... It is a sickness of humanity, a false way of thinking in society.” (Esteves, 2019). He speaks on the horrors of sex trafficking, but also denotes that *all* sex work is a violation against women— completely removing the autonomy of those who *do* choose sex work. His words not only further silence the voices of sex workers, but also turns them into victims who *need* to be spoken for.

Reducing sex workers to powerless victims is detrimental to sex workers, victims of sex trafficking, and all women alike— through the vilification of sex and women as the gatekeepers of it (Haker, 2020). Furthermore, he ignores the reality that men and boys engage in sex work and are trafficked— albeit to a lesser degree. To have one's voice effectively taken from them by an institution that is built on misogynistic patriarchal values such as war and greed¹ that serve to reduce women to harmful stereotypes rather than recognize them as complex individuals. The historical, contemporary, and religious landscape of Italy is essential to understanding both the root and full extent of the treatment of sex work and trafficking.

¹ In reference to the Crusades (Holy Wars), exclusion of women from priesthood, and clergy sex abuse (Janse, 2007) (Pew Research Center, 2019)

CHAPTER TWO: MIGRANT SEX WORK

Human Trafficking in Italy

In order to fully comprehend the stigma associated with sex work in Italy, the nature of the majority-migrant sex workers must be analyzed—namely, its criminal origins. Human trafficking is a deeply prevalent issue within Italy, a criminal industry whose profits are only exceeded by arms and drug dealing (InfoMigrants, 2021). In a 2018 study conducted by the Borgen Project, Italy was among the top five countries in the EU with the highest number of registered victims of human trafficking (Fontana, 2021). The UN defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). The UN further outlines the tactics often employed by traffickers, such as, but not limited to, “violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). Criminal organizations engage in these tactics to lure victims from vulnerable countries, often forcing them into sexual labor.

Human trafficking further expands into sex trafficking, of which “Italy tied fourth for the highest percentage of sexually trafficked people at 82%” of all trafficked persons in Italy (Fontana, 2021). Criminal organizations directly engage in the sex trafficking and sexual exploitation of migrant workers as victims of human trafficking, capitalizing on several key factors that make Italy uniquely poised to profit off of the industry. Italy’s mafia organizations are deeply enmeshed in the global human trafficking trade, supporting sex trafficking to such an extent that an estimated 90% of sex workers in Italy are migrant workers (Brussa, 2009). Their

connections with criminal organizations in vulnerable countries, such as Albania, their prime location in the Mediterranean along several travel routes, and the dubious legal situation of prostitution in Italy, all allow them to profit off of a transnational criminal market. Public stigma, whether rooted in anti-immigrant or anti-mafia sentiments, is uniquely shaped by the presence of these criminal organizations in Italy.

Italy's convenient location in the Mediterranean posits it in a prime spot for trafficking—known as the Central Mediterranean Route (Nadeau, 2018). Mafia organizations utilize major ports in the southern regions of Calabria and Sicily—home to the infamous Cara di Mineo migrant camp (Nadeau, 2018). There, they capitalize on corrupt, ill-maintained, and poorly run migrant camps. Traffickers lure women and girls out of the camps and “deliver them to the Nigerian women who control forced prostitution rings” where they are coerced into sex work (Nadeau, 2018).

The commission reported that in 2016, of the over 500,000 migrants that entered the European Union illegally, 364,000 utilized the Mediterranean route (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, 2018). Criminal organizations capitalize on internal and global conflict in order to take advantage of impoverished and racialized vulnerable groups. Political, social, and economic instability in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, such as the warfare and political instability in Eastern Europe, full-blown warfare and displacement in the Middle East, and political unrest in China, all spur migration (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, 2018). External mafias such as the Nigerian mafia and the Albanian mafia take advantage of internal conflict, promising transportation and jobs to vulnerable persons.

It is important to note that cracking down on immigration will not solve the issues that human trafficking presents. The Commission report acknowledges that “we must be aware of the

fact that in the face of the massive, unprecedented exodus of entire peoples fleeing situations of objective hardship and who are ready to face the multiple risks of the journey and to endure the infinite hardships and atrocious sufferings to make a dream come true” and further claims that “the raising of walls to protect the borders, the entry bans imposed by the push-back policies will not serve to stop its advance” (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, 2018, my trans).

Regardless of the status of immigrants in Italy, undocumented immigration, smuggling, and trafficking will continue to occur— and holding migrant sex workers and victims of sex trafficking (the line between which is in constant flux) responsible accomplishes little else beyond scapegoating a deeper issue.

Victim Exploitation

Sexual exploitation is defined by the United Nations as “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including but not limited to profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from sexual exploitation” (Gerassi 2015). Sex trafficking is sexual exploitation committed against victims of human trafficking, often coerced into sexual labor by threat of violence or coercion. Victims of sex trafficking are viewed as little more than commodities. According to national deputy anti-mafia and anti-terrorism prosecutor Giusto Sciacchitano, “A human person, a woman is exactly comparable to a pack of cocaine. Both of these traffic objects - we must say so - have a country of origin, a transit country and a destination country. For drugs it is evident and in the same way it is for the person” (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, 2018, my trans).

Sciacchitano affirms that victims of the sex trafficking trade exist as objects. As such, sex trafficking is not merely about sex. It is about an exertion of power— manipulation, coercion,

fear. Mafia organizations thrive in a patriarchal system that fosters a perverted worldview of masculine power. Male-dominated mafioso culture is rooted in patriarchal power structures that subjugate not only all things deemed traditionally feminine, but women themselves (Radford and Stanko, 2007). Sex trafficking is a gendered issue, with the EU reporting that “Most traffickers in the EU are EU citizens and nearly three quarters of perpetrators are men” (EU European Commission, 2022)

Sex Trafficking v. Sex Work

Victims of sex trafficking, as they are forced into prostitution, are not sex workers. The term “sex work” denotes choice— which is inherently absent when a victim is forced into the profession. Due to the questionable legal nature of sex work in Italy, there is a great deal of grey area in which criminal organizations can maximize profits. Prostitution, as it is not recognized as an official occupation, is therefore unable to be regulated by the government— which is supposed to be the purpose of the legalization of prostitution. In the contemporary legal landscape, brothels and mandatory medical examinations are banned— two avenues that actually could provide state regulation that would allow for the identification of and aid for victims of sex trafficking (Brussa 2009).

Unfortunately, In order to deter illegal immigration and organized crime, the 2008 Security Package granted local mayors special emergency powers to enforce public security. They were encouraged to intervene in “urban decay... and behaviors, such as street prostitution, that ‘offend public decency and disrupt the use of public spaces’” (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, 2018, my trans). Street prostitution was effectively criminalized, reversing the ruling of 1958’s *Legge Merlin*. Mayors across the Italy began to issue anti-street prostitution ordinances

that essentially locally criminalized street prostitution, forcing migrant workers— many of whom being victims of sex trafficking— inside, where there is absolutely no visibility.

Modern attitude toward sex workers in Italy is largely based on street perception. As migrant workers— and by extension, victims of human trafficking— make up the majority of sex work in Italy, there is public perception that sex work and “foreigner” are synonymous (Crowhurst, 2007). It was the visibility of “foreign prostitutes” that caused panic about the apparent public disturbance of peace in the early 1990s. During this time, there was notable prevalence of trafficking and migration from Eastern Europe and South Africa (Crowhurst, 2007). Despite initial resistance, it was domestic sex workers and the Committee of the Civil Rights of Prostitutes that were among the first to realize that these women rarely acted independently of a pimp, and the first to extend support due to the level of control these women were under (Crowhurst, 2007).

While the penalties for engagement in human trafficking can range anywhere from eight to ten years, it can be difficult for authorities to ascertain whether vulnerable parties are sex workers or victims of human trafficking— especially when the victims have been successfully conditioned by traffickers (Brussa, 2009). While article 18 of the Immigration Act “guarantees protection to victims of sex trafficking as well as various forms of assistance provided by a number of selected organizations, both local authorities and non-governmental, across the country”— many victims of sex trafficking are likely to remain in the industry, due in part to the quasi-criminalization of the profession, but also the cyclical nature of trauma and sex work (Gerassi, 2015). Due to the unregulated nature of prostitution and social stigma surrounding migrant sex work— largely in part due to their domination of the sex work industry— victims of

human trafficking are often encouraged to stay within the fragile “protection” of their traffickers (Brussa, 2009).

Case Study: Joy and Blessing

In 2016, the Global Slavery Index estimated that “there were 145,000 people living in conditions of modern slavery² in Italy” with the most common form of slavery being sexual exploitation (Heezen, 2018). 81% of the approximate victims were female, and an estimated 59% were Nigerian women (Heezen, 2018). Nigeria is a central hub for human trafficking due to “extreme poverty (now the world’s poverty capital), lack of economic opportunities, corruption, conflict/insecurity, climate change/resulting migration and western consumerism” (Pathfinders Justice Initiative, 2022). Nigerian girls are prime targets for criminal organizations to lure into sex trafficking. Two such victims whose stories that will be addressed here are those of two teenage Nigerian girls who were trafficked to Italy through Sicily.

This case study of Joy will evaluate the 2018 article by B.L Nadeau. Nadeau interviewed Joy in 2018 and reported her story in *The Guardian*³. Joy (not her real name) is a Nigerian girl who was sent away from her family to work at a beauty salon in Benin City at the age of 15. When she turned 16, she was bound to the hairdresser mamam through a curse— if she disobeyed her mamam, she was told her family would die. This form of religious blackmail and bonding ritual is referred to as “juju” (Heezen, 2018). Victims are “psychologically bound to their traffickers to repay the debt incurred to pay for their travel to Italy” (Heezen, 2018). Joy’s trafficker sent her to Italy under the guise of working as a hairdresser for her mamam’s sister. Joy was instead being sent to work as a prostitute— a scheme that entraps many Nigerian women. In

² Modern slavery is another term for human trafficking

³ Except where otherwise stated, this account is based on information in Nadeau's article.

fact, according to the International Organization for Migration, “more than 80% of women brought to Europe from Nigeria are unknowingly ‘sponsored’ by sex traffickers who have paid for their journey”.

Trafficked through Tripoli and eventually docking in Sicily without papers or documentation, Joy was sent to the Cara di Mineo migrant camp with only a phone number to call her mamam’s sister. Most African migrants who arrive in Sicily are processed through Cara di Mineo, which was built to house US military units, but instead repurposed as migrant housing. Nadeau reported that “people have to sleep on the floor or in tents. The buildings are overrun by cockroaches and rats that feed off festering piles of garbage, while mangy, flea-infested dogs duck in and out of holes in the razor-wire fence” As such, the camp has become a beacon for exploitation— camp officials mismanage state funds for food and amenities and pocket the profits, and mafia organizations exploit these underfed and poverty-stricken migrants by recruiting them as drug runners, petty criminals, and prostitutes.

Once Joy reached Cara di Mineo, she was placed with nearly a dozen other Nigerian girls—most of whom were also sent to work in beauty salons, and with only a phone number to call her mamam’s sister. She called the number using a phone card given to her by an Catholic charity, and was told to apply for asylum with a fake name and birthdate. Later, a man came to her camp and instructed her to wait at the roundabout down the street from the camp, where a car would pick her up. That roundabout is where Nadeau found Joy— who was certain she would be working as a hair braider for her mamam’s sister, although she knew that other Nigerian girls became prostitutes under the same promises. Joy claimed that she would “never do that”— no matter what she was threatened with.

The case study of Blessing will evaluate the 2017 article by F. Mannocchi. Mannocchi reported on Blessing's story in 2017 and reported her story— among others— in *The New Humanitarian*⁴. Blessing (not her real name) was 16 when she was trafficked to Italy from Nigeria through Libya. Hailing from one of the poorest regions of Nigeria, Blessing and her siblings struggled to support their family after the death of their father. Capitalizing on her vulnerability, a strange woman approached Blessing and her friend, promising them jobs with her sister in Italy as a cook in order to help support their families. The woman promised them that her friend would help assist their passage, and shortly after, both girls packed a small bag and ran away.

The woman's "friend" was a human trafficker "connection man", who assists criminal organizations by escorting victims from their home nations through politically unstable countries, as "the traffickers know they can take advantage of Nigerian poverty and, on the other end, the power vacuum in Libya." Furthermore, these organizations capitalize on the ill-managed migrant centers in Italy and Italian laws on prostitution— which make it difficult to identify victims of human trafficking.

When the girls reached Italy, they were given a phone number to call their madams. Blessing explains that "When I came to my madam, she told me I had to start working immediately to repay the debt of the trip. In that moment, I realized that my debt was 40,000 euros... She gave me a bra, saying: This is your job. Go onto the street at night and come back in the morning with money." Blessing further details the shame and pain that followed, during which she was repeatedly and aggressively beaten until she agreed to work for her madam. Speaking no Italian beyond a basic understanding of euros and the terms for different sexual acts, Blessing was forced to have sex with up to six men each day— for nearly three months.

⁴ Except where otherwise noted, this account gathers information from Mannocchi's article.

Blessing was rescued one day by another Nigerian woman named Princess, who approached her and told her that “I know what you are doing, because I’ve lived it too”. Princess is the cofounder of Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti Onlus (alongside Alberto Mossino), which is a secular non-governmental organization that facilitates the rescuing of victims of sex trafficking (Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti, 2021). The inclusion of women like Princess is essential to the aid of these trafficked women who fear detention and deportation, and are bound deeply by the influence of their traffickers (Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti, 2021). They often feel they can better trust another Nigerian woman with the same lived experiences.

Mossino explains that it is difficult for groups like PIAM Onlus to properly assist victims of human trafficking without government assistance. In the event that a victim is a minor, they are often forced to stay in one of Italy’s detention centers for minors, and after they reach adulthood, they are left to their own devices to find housing and a job. They often fall back under the sway of traffickers, and are moved to other countries in Europe. The aim of organizations PIAM Onlus is not only to rescue victims of sex trafficking, but to help them build a better life after, too. PIAM onlus runs several of these assistance based homes as models, but Massimo asserts that they do not have the proper structure or funds to support the sheer mass of victims that they encounter (Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti, 2021).

The cases of Joy and Blessing highlight the absolute vulnerability trafficked persons experience. They are at the complete mercy of their traffickers, and it is essential to understand their desperation and fear to comprehend the absolute violation that is sex trafficking. Under the current model of legalization in Italy, girls like Joy and Blessing all too easily fall under the radar

of law enforcement— and at times are even manipulated by corrupt law enforcement. Legislative change is fundamental in the regulation of and prevention of sex trafficking.

CHAPTER THREE: EXPLOITATION

Violence of Profession

Violence against women (VAW) is defined by the United Nations as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (World Health Organization, 2021). Violence is consistently demonstrated to be an aspect of the profession— whether it is deemed sex work or prostitution.

It is important to note that not all violence and stigma is experienced by sex workers and victims of sex trafficking in the same fashion. Multiple identity factors such as race, gender identity, sexual identity, and class can drastically alter a specific individual’s unique experience with stigma (Sawicki et al., 2019). These identifiers can all transform the ways in which sex workers experience things such as “violence, stress, low self-esteem, depression, suicide, substance use, disease, malnutrition, family estrangement, police harassment and profiling, stress from intimate partners, and job insecurity” (Sawicki et al., 2019). While sex work is legal in Italy, it does not grant it immunity from public perception.

Sex workers are effectively “othered” by society. Grittner and Walsh outline two forms of social stigma that operate to define sex workers, and can become the main manner through which they are perceived. Public stigma prevents stigmatized individuals from fully participating in public life through restricting access to social opportunities. Public stigma works as discrimination, but also conditions stigmatized individuals into self-censorship, wherefore they no longer attempt to pursue these opportunities because of negative association (Grittner &

Walsh, 2020). Self-stigma is a byproduct of public stigma, where a stigmatized individual internalizes “negative social perceptions”. This can result in negative self perception, intense feelings of shame, and a severe detriment to their self-esteem and self-worth. Essentially, sex workers are publically stigmatized by society, and therefore encouraged to engage in self-stigmatization.

Political and Legal Violence

Sex workers are routinely excluded from both political discourse surrounding their profession as well as political movements that often claim to support them. Whorephobia, or harmful terminology, such as “whore,” “slut,” and “prostitute”, creates a stigma that prevents the political and legal autonomy of sex workers by reducing them to a harmful stereotype. This keeps them from being viewed as legitimate by the political and legal system, and as such they are often viewed as borderline-criminals themselves (Sawicki et al., 2019). They are further excluded from enacting real political or legal change by the stigma that is affiliated with these terms and their profession.

To avoid stigma by association, the general population often divides itself from sex workers. In turn, they alienate them from political causes that can unite them: sexual health, sexual freedom, and sexual assault (Sawicki et al., 2019). Sex workers are frequently excluded from feminist political movements when they do not “play the victim” and maintain that sex work is their freely made choice, and that they should be equally accepted. This further marginalizes and silences sex workers as legitimate political agents and makes it “more difficult for those in the sex industry to achieve political goals of decriminalization, social support for their work, and social acceptance through a reduction of stigmatization (Sprankle et al., 2018).

As such, in 1982, the Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes was formed in Italy, aimed at “fighting the social exclusion and marginalization of prostitutes, and demanding the decriminalization of aiding and abetting and the right to practice prostitution indoors” (Crowhurst, 2012). The Committee has largely been ignored by modern politicians and obstructed from participation. Its main objectives are to raise awareness regarding the treatment of sex workers, fight for decriminalization, obtain protection for the civil rights of sex workers, disseminate information regarding HIV/AIDs and STD prevention, and combat sex trafficking (CDCP Onlus, 2022).

The opinion of actual sex workers is often ignored in the debate between sex work and sex trafficking. “Some claim that both are forms of sexual slavery and advocate for the introduction of a prohibitionist prostitution reform; others, including the Committee, make a distinction between prostitution and sex trafficking and maintain that the two should not be conflated in policies and practices” (Crowhurst, 2012). Italian sex workers make an important distinction between sex work and sex trafficking— which law enforcement, government organizations, and public opinion often fails to do.

The committee for Civil Rights of Prostitutes is the only sex-worker led organization in Italy that implements an anti-trafficking and assistance program for victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. It firmly condemns trafficking of person for the purposes of sexual exploitation (CDCP onlus, 2018). During the General Assembly of the Outreach Unit of the Italian Anti-trafficking Platform held in Perugia in 2018, the Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes presented their stance on human trafficking.

The Committee expressed their explicit opposition to the Nordic model⁵, which focuses on the criminalization of clients rather than the sex worker, and would obscure victims of human

⁵ The Nordic model is explained further on page 31.

trafficking rather than address the issues they face (Nordic Model Now!, 2016). Should sex workers and victims of sex trafficking be forced into the conditions in which sex work functions under the Nordic model— that is, in hidden and often unsafe locations— they would be relegated beyond the reach of outreach services, and their access to things such as medical assistance would be hindered. The outreach unit itself criticized the current debate on prostitution— noting the stark absence of the voices of the sex workers and outreach workers who understand the phenomenon of sex work and the reality of sex trafficking better than anyone (CDCP onlus, 2018). Working with those affected, rather than for them, is essential to the elevation of their voices to protect their rights, speech, and wellbeing.

Poverty and Quality of Life

Poverty is a major driving factor of prostitution across the globe (Gibson, 1999). Furthermore, poverty is the prime component in making women and girls vulnerable to sex trafficking, and therefore susceptible to prostitution (Heezen, 2018). Poverty and prostitution are cyclical in nature— poverty drives women to sex work, and sex work entraps them in a system of poverty from which they often cannot escape (Ness, 2020).

Sex work that is completed in order to evade the conditions of poverty such as homelessness and food insecurity is referred to as “survival sex” (Moon, 2021). Poverty is as such a pathway into sex work, through which marginalized groups such as people of color, immigrants, and youths that are “homeless, former victims of abuse, or runaways” are disproportionately shuffled into a life of sex work in order to sustain themselves (Moon, 2021).

In a study conducted by the Public Health Fund of the Open Society Foundations, over half of the sex workers interviewed in Italy belonged to “multiply marginalised cohorts and had experienced high levels of financial stress, exposure to trafficking and exploitation, violence at

work, as well as police repression and abuse for being a drug user or an undocumented migrant working in the street” (Maciotti et al., 2021) A majority of respondents felt that sex work was crucial to their financial wellbeing (Maciotti et al., 2021). Most responded that it was severely detrimental to their mental health (Maciotti et al., 2021).

The mental health of sex workers is severely neglected. Sex workers who have been victims of sexual violence display elevated rates of mental health issues such as “depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and have elevated rates of trauma”— which can further exacerbate the “cyclical nature of trauma, substance abuse, PTSD, and other mental health issues” (Gerassi, 2020). Several studies have found that, for female victims of sexual violence, PTSD rates range from 27% to 50%, and depression rates can range upwards of 60% (Gerassi 2020). Poverty and homelessness are two very real effects of both the social and political isolation of sex workers, which exacerbate mental disorders such as PTSD and depression. A 2012 study concluded that “women who had recently experienced homelessness were more than four times more likely to have traded sex than women who had not been homeless” (Gerassi, 2020).

Sex workers experience unequal access to healthcare services as well (Sawicki et al., 2019). Despite Italy’s socialized healthcare system, misconceptions surrounding sex work often lead to “increases in violence and subpar access to services” (Wolf, 2019). For undocumented migrant workers, “the risks of health inequalities are magnified by the combination of poverty and other vulnerabilities, and that they can be related to problems of access to health care” (Priebe et al., 2012). The inconsistency of care makes sex workers more vulnerable to HIV+, but also prevents them from obtaining diagnosis and proper treatment. UNAIDS determines that “Sex workers are 30 times more likely to be HIV+ than the general population” (Kirkegaard,

2021). This statistic is not a result of “wanton behavior”, but rather due to the increased rates of violence and sexual assault from clients and partners that sex workers experience— such as uninformed consent and reduced condom usage— that makes them particularly vulnerable to infection (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). The inadequate access to medical care, information, and resources, as well as fear of detainment and deportation for migrant workers, all contribute to the increased rate of HIV+ in prostitutes.

There is debate in sex work discourse that consent does not truly exist due to external pressures and conditions such as poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness. There is an essence of coercion to the profession. Grittner and Walsh argue that “sex work exists along a continuum of power, agency, and agreement; at one end, sex work involves individual choice and control of the sexual exchange, while at the opposite end, individual choice and control is absent” (2020). Women who engage in sex work often turn to it as a last resort, begging the question of, if these external factors were removed, would the prevalence of sex work decrease?

Case Study: The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic harshly impacted sex workers in Italy. Sex workers are already susceptible to poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness— all of which were drastically and quickly exacerbated by the pandemic. Many sex workers were forced to defy lockdown regulations in order to provide for themselves, putting both “themselves and their clients at risk”. (Bubola, 2020) As sex workers are already viewed as social deviants, they became a scapegoat for the spread of coronavirus (Bubola, 2020). Francesca Bettio, a professor of economics at the University of Siena— a sex work and trafficking specialist— deemed sex workers are “the perfect target” (Bubola, 2020). The incrimination of sex workers as rampant superspreaders

nearly mirrors that of the unfair blame laid upon them for the spread of syphilis in the medieval era, and the spread of STDs in the modern era (D'Antuono et al., 2001).

Since sex work is not regulated as an official occupation, sex workers were largely ineligible to receive economic relief. In other EU nations, such as the Netherlands and Germany, officially registered sex workers were eligible for economic relief (Bubola, 2020). Sex workers were also denied “regular coronavirus tests and the opportunity to keep a record of their clients for contact tracing” - a method utilized in various countries such as Greece which allowed brothels to resume activity safely (Bubola, 2020).

Victims of sex trafficking were left particularly vulnerable by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic served to drastically exacerbate the factors in the Global South that leave men and women alike susceptible to human trafficking— such as poverty (Cabras & Ingrassi, 2022). It was reported that “trafficking gangs abandoned women and their children, who were unable to leave their homes or work and were left without food or money to pay the rent. Given their illegal status, they had no recourse to financial assistance or unemployment benefits” (Tondo, 2020). Sex workers— particularly migrant ones— were left without access to the socio-economic protection that the the government of Italy offered during the pandemic (Cabras & Ingrassi, 2022). The pandemic further put a strain on public resources and services that seek to support trafficking victims, such as “shelter, legal aid, health care (including psychosocial care), employment support, education and interpretation services” (Tondo, 2020).

An unintended effect during the lockdowns to mitigate COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021 was the transition of management of victims remotely rather than by physical means (Tondo, 2020). The evidence that many victims obeyed their traffickers even without their physical presence demonstrates the immense extent of the influence and power traffickers have over their

victims (Tondo, 2020). Many victims feared to seek testing due to the concern of questioning, detainment, and deportation. Moreover, many victims were without the proper technological equipment to seek services and assistance remotely— and those who did were often unable to seek help due to being trapped in lockdown with their abusers (Tondo, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic brought the plight of vulnerable groups to the forefront across the globe, but suspiciously absent from the conversation was sex workers.

CHAPTER FOUR: LEGAL APPROACHES

In this chapter, four legal models regarding prostitution will be explored and evaluated. These models will be legalization, criminalization, the Nordic model, and decriminalization/ They will be evaluated on factors such as their effect on sex workers, impact on victims of human trafficking, social impact, and worker/client relationship— determining which model is the most beneficial for sex workers, sex trafficking victims, and all of Italy.

Legalization

Italy's current model of prostitution is legalization. Under this model, the Italian government is the primary regulator of the sex trade (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). The government controls the avenues through which the selling of sex is allowed, and can create regulations such as the registration of sex workers. This model is practiced in Victoria, Australia, the Netherlands, and Germany (Mathieson et al., 2016). These governments tend to utilize the legalization of sex work to promote the sex industry and considerably profit off of it, with the most notable example being the red light district in Amsterdam— where sex shows and museums are a major tourist attraction, but sex workers also have their own union and police protection (Mathieson et al., 2016)

Italy's current requirements prevent the regulations that the previously mentioned countries utilize. Under the current Italian system, the supposed benefits of legalization are null (Mathieson et al., 2016). Sex work is not regulated as an official profession nor is it criminalized, placing it in a grey area that leaves sex workers and victims of human trafficking particularly vulnerable to exploitation (Crowhurst, 2012). Sex workers are left unprotected by the regulations that legalization can provide— such as better protection from law enforcement and increased power in their relationship with their clients— and punished by the traffickers that view this

absence of regulation as a profit opportunity, and public opinion that sees it as moral deficiency (Crowhurst, 2012).

The legalization model is not without its flaws. When sex is commodified into a legal profession and there is market demand, sex workers are often forced to obey market demands (Mathieson et al., 2016). Sex workers are pressured to oblige the demands of customers at their own expense, often being forced to engage in “unprotected sex, violent sex, anal sex, pregnant sex, bondage, group sex” (Mathieson et al., 2016). Legalization leaves sex workers vulnerable to those who are in control of regulation: law enforcement, the political system, their pimps/brothels, and the market (Raymond, 2003)

When a country legalizes and explicitly endorses prostitution, this endorsement tends to encourage those who target children. The Dutch National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking reported in 2006 that “There was a striking increase in the number of registered under-age victims, particular in the age group from 15-17 years.” (Mathieson et al., 2016). The Dutch police and Interpol reveal that the Netherlands has been fundamental in the foundation and sustainment of pedophilia groups in Europe— evidenced by the existence of The Party for Brotherly Love, Freedom and Diversity that existed in the late 2000s, a political group that promoted pedophilia (The New York Times, 2006).

The legalization model also does little to combat human trafficking. Countries with legalized prostitution are “associated with higher human trafficking inflows than countries where prostitution is prohibited” (Harvard Law School, 2014). This is in contrast with popular belief that by introducing regulation, sex trafficking will be reduced. Hughes argues that “evidence seems to show that legalized sex industries actually result in increased trafficking to meet the demand for women to be used in the legal sex industries” (Hughes, 2000). The creation of a legal

market allows for the facilitation of migration under which traffickers can fill market demand with their victims (Raymond, 2003).

Consequently, the legalization model is not the ideal model for the welfare of sex workers and victims of sex trafficking in Italy. It does not properly provide support for either sex workers or victims of human trafficking. Furthermore, it is a model that is not widely supported by sex workers (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020).

Criminalization

Criminalization, otherwise known as the abolitionist approach, criminalizes both the selling and purchasing of sex, as well as brothel-keeping and pimping (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). It is practiced in countries such as the United States, China, and the United Kingdom (United Nations Statistics Division, n.d.) Criminalization is a model historically formulated on “patriarchal and religious traditions that equate female sexuality with temptation” that further illustrates sex work as moral deficiency, although more recently under the banner of sex work being an unfortunate circumstance of the vulnerability of women (Mathieson et al., 2016). Both of these viewpoints silence women and reduce them to a stereotype— either a “whore” or a victim (Mathieson et al., 2016).

The criminalization model is deeply flawed. There is no evidence that criminalizing sex work deters persons who sell or purchase sex (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). Furthermore, arrests and a criminal record can prevent sex workers from finding alternate employment and education opportunities, trapping them in the very profession that they are persecuted for (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). Criminal records and prison sentences often serve to prevent sex workers from voting, therefore excluding them from the

very political processes that determine their autonomy (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020).

Criminalization makes it risky and difficult for sex workers to report violence from pimps, clients, law enforcement, and their partners (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). Sex workers often do not report sexual assault due to fear of violence by police— which can magnify other issues: “Physical and sexual violence, and verbal abuse or threats of abuse from police, can prevent sex workers from reporting violence to the police or accessing other public agencies (e.g., health or social services), exacerbating their trauma and health risks” (Deering et al., 2014). Due to the criminalization of sex work, sex workers— should they report sexual violence— risk arrest, imprisonment, and criminal charges (Sprankle et al., 2018). Women who engage in prostitution thus do not report acts of violence or sexual exploitation due to the illegal nature of their profession and fear of exploitation by police. Victims of human trafficking are not encouraged to seek aid under this model, often for fear of deportation or retribution from their managers or law enforcement (Mathieson et al., 2016).

Under a criminalization model, such as is the one in the United States, sex workers are 18 times more likely to be murdered in comparison to the general population (Sawicki et al., 2019). In a 2014 study, it was found that the “lifetime prevalence of any or combined workplace violence ranged from 45% to 75% and over the past year, 32% to 55%” (Deering et al., 2014). The prevalence of violent crime committed against prostitutes, specifically in comparison to the general public, reflects their dehumanization by society. Violent crime is further exacerbated by certain identity traits of prostitutes, such as trans women and women of color (Sawicki et al., 2019).

Criminalization is therefore the least effective and most dangerous model for sex workers and victims of sex trafficking. Their increased rates of incarceration, subsequent economic vulnerability, distrust of law enforcement, and fear of stringent legal repercussions does not reduce the rate of sex work, but rather creates dangerous conditions in which sex work— and sex trafficking— continues to occur (Mathieson et al., 2016).

Nordic Model

The Nordic model, otherwise referred to as partial decriminalization or “end demand”, criminalizes the purchase of sexual services as well as third-party profitters, but does not carry criminal charges for those who sell sex. It penalizes those who have the power to create and control market demand, with the concern of gendered violence rather than immorality (Mathieson et al., 2016). It originated in Sweden in 1999, adopted in an attempt to handle the sex trade. It has since been implemented by countries such as “the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, France, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Israel” (Nordic Model Now!, 2016) (Bindel, 2022).

Advocates for the Nordic Model further support that the effectiveness of the model depends on public information campaigns— such as education programs in schools that honestly address prostitution and training for social services, law enforcement, local government, and medical services (Nordic Model Now!, 2016). These educational programs are meant to demonstrate the harsh reality of sex work, and change social norms that encourage male demand for sex work, therefore eradicating the market demand for it (Mathieson et al., 2016). While acknowledging that some may remain in sex work, this model— rather than punishing sex workers— focuses on empowering and allowing individuals in sex work to leave the profession, should they choose to do so (Mathieson et al., 2016).

The Nordic model is based on a gendered view of sex work, and its supporters contend that sex work will end once the male demand for commercial sex services ends (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). The Nordic model does not entirely protect sex workers. This model still involves policing, and as the client and pimps/brothels are at legal risk, sex workers tend to work in isolated conditions and remain under the threat of coercion, violence, and exploitation by these parties to avoid arrest (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). This model also leaves sex workers with less choice over their clientele and “less negotiating power over condom use and location” (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). Sex workers are also often arrested under charges other than prostitution, as the activities associated with the selling of sex remain criminalized (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020).

The Nordic model leaves sex workers socially and economically vulnerable. Norwegian sex workers reported “harassment by police and many faced eviction by their landlords in an organized program called “Operation Homeless”” (Decriminalize Sex Work, 2022). Under this program, law enforcement incentivized landlords to report and evict tenants who they suspected engaged in sex work. Police officers in Oslo told Amnesty International that “they were instructed to prioritize this practice as a means of curtailing sex work” (Decriminalize Sex Work, 2022).

The Nordic model denotes that all sex work is involuntary. As such, this model does not adequately support victims of human trafficking. This conflation of sex work and trafficking “severely increases the ability of the police to implement measures reserved for the serious crime of trafficking”—reducing their ability to properly help actual victims (Global Network of Sex Work Projects, 2022). In fact, the Committee on Prostitution in Italy explicitly criticizes this defect of the Nordic model, arguing that any legal model that concerns the exploitation of sex

trafficked persons can not be based on “simplistic theories” but rather the variety of unique factors that address the “specific needs of migrant women, men and transgender, be they voluntarily or involuntarily affected by the multiple forms of prostitution” (CDCP onlus, 2018)

The Nordic model is not an adequate model to address the concerns of sex workers and victims of human trafficking in Italy. While it does not directly punish sex workers, the model still creates a system in which sex workers and victims of human trafficking are left vulnerable to the demands of pimps, brothels, clients, and law enforcement. While it is true that the adoption of the Nordic model has decreased the prevalence of sex work in the countries it has been introduced in, it has also made countries such as Germany a beacon for sex traffickers (Bindel, 2022).

Decriminalization

The decriminalization model removes criminal penalties for both sex workers and buyers of sexual services, while still treating it as a legal profession (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020). This differs from the Nordic model, because it protects sex workers from unsafe client situations (Decriminalize Sex Work, 2022). Differing from the legalization model, there are no special regulations for sex work and sex workers abide by the standard employment and labor practices of the countries in which they live— which normalizes sex work as a legitimate profession and reduces public stigma (Mullin, 2020). Sex work advocacy groups in Italy and organizations such as Amnesty International, the World Health Organization, UNAIDS, Human Rights Watch, and The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women predominantly support decriminalization as the favored model (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020).

Decriminalization serves to restore power to sex workers and victims of human trafficking alike. Decriminalization supports an open dialogue between sex workers and law

enforcement, which allows for better regulation and surveillance of actual human trafficking activities and reporting underage sex workers (World Aids Campaign, 2010). Furthermore, sex workers are more likely to report intimate partner violence, assault, rape, and other forms of violence within their profession (World Aids Campaign, 2010). Decriminalization allows sex workers to feel more secure in reporting crime to policing authorities— therefore decreasing the rate at which this crime occurs (World Aids Campaign, 2010).

Sex workers are better protected and therefore more likely to deny risky behaviors such as condomless sex. For example, in New Zealand— where sex work is decriminalized— sex workers' right to refuse sex is protected under the Prostitution Reform Act 2003, making them less susceptible to coercion (World Aids Campaign, 2010). In turn, the rate of STIs in New Zealand has gone down (World Aids Campaign, 2010). Under decriminalization, sex workers' access to non-discriminatory medical care and services is instrumental in decreasing the rate of STDs and STIs. The legitimization and subsequent destigmatization of sex work will allow for better education surrounding safer sex practices, both within the profession and outside of it (World Aids Campaign, 2010).

Decriminalizing sex work does not necessarily mean that sex work will increase. After the decriminalization of sex work in New Zealand, the 360 street-based sex workers in 2006 fell to 230 in 2007, while mainstream reporting attempted to say that sex work has quadrupled since sex work was decriminalized (World Aids Campaign, 2010). Furthermore, without stigmatization or barriers in place between sex workers and education or alternate employment, sex workers who seek to leave the profession will not be trapped within it (Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, 2020).

Opposition to decriminalization lies in several factors, such as conservative moral opposition to sex work that favors a stringent abolitionist approach, which ignores the reality of what actually safely reduces the prevalence of sex work (Crowhurst, 2012). Other opposition is rooted in popular government belief that legalization is the best model for reducing the prevalence of sex work, and that decriminalization would remove the government's ability to specially regulate sex work (Crowhurst, 2012). Whatever support for decriminalization exists in the current government, it largely ignores the actual input *of* sex workers, and therefore cannot properly address the concerns of sex workers and victims of human trafficking (Crowhurst, 2012). Supporters for decriminalization include migrant support networks, sex worker advocacy groups such as the Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes, a vast majority of feminist movement groups, and human rights advocates (Crowhurst, 2012)

Decriminalization is the most desirable model for sex work— for sex workers, victims of human trafficking, and Italy itself. Furthermore, the Italian Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes onlus explicitly advocates for “ the decriminalization of all forms of sex work as well as the elimination of mandatory health tests for sex workers” (CDCP onlus, 2018). Essential to the future of the debate of sex work is the inclusion of the voices of sex workers and victims of human trafficking— who best understand the nuances and harm of the profession.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

In conclusion, the most beneficial model for sex workers, the general population, law enforcement, and the government in Italy is the decriminalization model of sex work. With respect towards the cultural connotations and current legal and political landscape for sex work and human trafficking in Italy, the full decriminalization of the profession without specific regulation for sex work— and instead treating it as a legitimate profession not unlike any other— will therefore reduce the stigmatization surrounding it. Through the reduction of stigma, sex workers and law enforcement can better identify and support victims of sex trafficking, report violence and assault, and decrease the prevalence of sex work through education and alternate employment opportunities for sex workers who choose to leave the profession. For those who argue that sex work is immoral— the abolition of sex work will not eradicate it, but rather eradicate the conditions in which it can function safely.

Acknowledgment of Areas for Research Error

Possible errors for research error include possible language barrier for certain sources, and the matter that the author is not a sex worker— nor does she reside in Italy. While she has a vested interest in the welfare of sex workers across the globe, she willingly and humbly acknowledges that research does not equate to lived experiences, and only hopes that she has treated the subject with due respect and consideration.

The Future

Future research should continue to examine the condition of sex workers across the globe. Through this, we can better evaluate the differences between sex work and sex trafficking, and work to address the issues of both. Sex workers and victims of sex trafficking are politically, socially, economically, and medically vulnerable— and their voices should not be ignored because the matter of sex and sex work is sensitive. Instead, we should conduct future research that highlights their voices and work toward better social and political cohesion for all.

REFERENCES

- Bindel, J. (2022). *The tide is finally turning in Italy in favour of protecting women in the sex trade* | Julie Bindel. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/02/the-tide-is-finally-turning-in-italy-in-favour-of-protecting-women-in-the-sex-trade>
- Brussa, L. (2009). *A mapping of the prostitution scene in 25 European countries*. TAMPEP.
<https://tampep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/TAMPEP-2009-European-Mapping-Report.pdf>
- Bubola, E. (2020). *'I Am Scared': Italian Sex Workers Face Poverty and Illness in the Pandemic* (Published 2020). The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/03/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-prostitution-sex-workers.html>
- Cabras, F., & Ingrasci, O. (2022). *View of Female Migrant Street Prostitution during COVID-19 in Milan. A Qualitative Study on How Sex Workers Coped with the Challenges of the Pandemic*. Sociologica. <https://sociologica.unibo.it/article/view/13344/14192>
- CDCP onlus. (2018). *Draft general recommendation on trafficking of women and girls in the context of global migration*. Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute ONLUS.
- CDCP Onlus. (2022). *CDCP ENGLISH – LUCCIOLE*. Lucciole: Il sito del Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute.
<https://www.lucciole.org/committee-for-the-civil-rights-of-prostitutes-onlus-cdcp-onlus/>
- Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia. (2018). *Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul fenomeno delle mafie e sulle altre associazioni criminali, anche straniere*.

- Crowhurst, I. (2007). *The 'foreign prostitute' in contemporary Italy: gender, sexuality and migration in policy and practice A Dissertation Submit*. LSE Theses Online.
<http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/1973/1/U237437.pdf>
- Crowhurst, I. (2012). Approaches to the regulation and governance of prostitution in contemporary Italy. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 9(3), 223-232.
 doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-012-0094-1>
- D'Antuono, A., Andalò, F., Carlà, E. M., & De Tommaso, S. (2001). Prevalence of STDs and HIV infection among immigrant sex workers attending an STD centre in Bologna, Italy. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 77(3), 220. 10.1136/sti.77.3.220
- Davies, L. (2013). *Berlusconi found guilty after case that cast spotlight on murky premiership*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/24/silvio-berlusconi-guilty-underage-prostitute>
- Decriminalize Sex Work. (2022). *Nordic Model Failure*. Decriminalize Sex Work / Campaign to Decriminalize Sex Work. <https://decriminalizesex.work/nordic-model-failure/>
- Deering, K. N., Amin, A., Shoveller, J., Nesbitt, A., Garcia-Moreno, C., Duff, P., Argento, E., & Shannon, K. (2014). A systematic review of the correlates of violence against sex workers. *American Journal of Public Health (1971)*, 104(5), e42-e54.
<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.301909>
- Di Nicola, A. (2021). *The differing EU Member States' regulations on prostitution and their cross-border implications on women's right*. European Parliament.
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695394/IPOL_STU\(2021\)695394_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695394/IPOL_STU(2021)695394_EN.pdf)

Dornsife, D., & Dornsife, D. (2013). *Veronica Franco*. USC college of letters, arts and sciences.

<https://dornsife.usc.edu/veronica-franco/biography/>

Esteves, A. (2019). *Pope: Prostitution is 'disgusting vice' that tortures defenseless women*.

National Catholic Reporter.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/pope-prostitution-disgusting-vice-tortures-defenseless-women>

EU European Commission. (2022). *Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings*. Migration and Home Affairs.

https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings_en

Fontana, R. (2021). *The Fight Against Human Trafficking in Italy*. The Borgen Project.

<https://borgenproject.org/human-trafficking-in-italy/>

Franco, V. (1998). *Poems and Selected Letters* (A. R. Jones & M. F. Rosenthal, Eds.; M. F. Rosenthal & A. R. Jones, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Friedman, A. (2015). *Berlusconi: The Epic Story of the Billionaire Who Took Over Italy*.

Hachette Books.

Gerassi, L. (2015). From Exploitation to Industry: Definitions, Risks, and Consequences of Domestic Sexual Exploitation and Sex Work Among Women and Girls. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 25(6), 591–605.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2014.991055>

Gibson, M. (1999). *Prostitution and the state in Italy, 1860-1915*. Ohio State University Press.

- Global Network of Sex Work Projects. (2022). *Challenging the introduction of the Nordic Model*. Global Network of Sex Work Projects.
https://d8dev.nswp.org/sites/default/files/sg_to_challenging_nordic_model_prf03.pdf
- Grittner, A. L., & Walsh, C. A. (2020). The role of social stigma in the lives of female-identified sex workers: A scoping review. *Sexuality & Culture*, 24(5), 1653–1682.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09707-7>
- Haker, H. (2020). *Towards a Critical Political Ethics: Catholic Ethics and Social Challenges*. Schwabe Verlag Basel.
- Harvard Law School. (2014). *Does Legalized Prostitution Increase Human Trafficking?* | *Harvard Law and International Development Society*. Harvard Law School Student Organizations.
<https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/lids/2014/06/12/does-legalized-prostitution-increase-human-trafficking/>
- Heezen, J. (2018). *FEMM Mission to Italy*. FEMM Committee.
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/608853/IPOL_BRI\(2018\)608853_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/608853/IPOL_BRI(2018)608853_EN.pdf)
- Hughes, D. (2000). The “Natasha” Trade: The Transnational Shadow Market of Trafficking in Women. *Journal of International Affairs*, 53(2), 625-651.
- InfoMigrants. (2021). *Italy: Sharp increase in new migrant route to Calabria*. InfoMigrants.
<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/36655/italy-sharp-increase-in-new-migrant-route-to-calabria>.

- Janse, A. (2007). The crusades and the expansion of catholic christendom, 1000-1714. *Church History and Religious Culture*, 87(3), 373-374.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/187124107X232499>
- Kirkegaard, D. (2021). *Like everyone else, sex workers deserve health care*. Friends of UNFPA.
<https://www.friendsofunfpa.org/like-everyone-else-sex-workers-deserve-health-care/>.
- Leahy, S. (2018). Visions of Indecency: The Intersection Between The Church and Prostitution in Augsburg, Rome, and Southwark From The Twelfth to Seventeenth Century CE. *Young Historians Conference*, 13.
<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1142&context=younghistorians>
- Loewen, P., & Waugh, R. (Eds.). (2018). *Mary Magdalene in Medieval Culture: Conflicted Roles*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Maciotti, P. G., Geymonat, D. G., & Mai, N. (2021). *Sex Work and Mental Health Policy-Relevant Report*. Global Network of Sex Work Projects.
https://www.nswp.org/sites/default/files/65f262_75618d0bae824482bd9560929b677a59.pdf
- Mannocchi, F. (2017). *'I Was Full of Shame: One Woman's Story of Being Trafficked to Italy*. The New Humanitarian.
<https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/refugees/articles/2017/09/15/i-was-full-of-shame-one-womans-story-of-being-trafficked-to-italy-2>
- Mathieson, A., Branam, E., & Noble, A. (2016). Prostitution Policy: Legalization, Decriminalization and the Nordic Model. *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 14(2).
<https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol14/iss2/10>

- McGinn, T. A.J. (2004). *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel*. University of Michigan Press.
<https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.17679>
- Ministero dell'Interno. (n.d.). *Pacchetto Sicurezza*. Ministero dell'Interno.
https://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/speciali/Pacchetto_sicurezza/index_2.html
- Moon, M. (2021). *Symposium Introduction: Sex Workers' Rights, Advocacy, and Organizing – Columbia Human Rights Law Review*. Columbia Human Rights Law Review.
<https://hrlr.law.columbia.edu/hrlr/introduction-sex-workers-rights-advocacy-and-organizing/>
- Mullin, E. (2020). *How Different Legislative Approaches Impact Sex-Workers – The Organization for World Peace*. The Organization for World Peace.
<https://theowp.org/reports/how-different-legislative-approaches-impact-sex-workers/>
- Nadeau, B. L. (2018). *'Migrants are more profitable than drugs': how the mafia infiltrated Italy's asylum system*. The Guardian. Retrieved 2022, from
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/01/migrants-more-profitable-than-drugs-how-mafia-infiltrated-italy-asylum-system>
- Ness, E. K. V. (2020). *Antonio Pietrangeli, the Director of Women: Feminism and Film Theory in Postwar Italian Cinema*. Anthem Press.
- The New York Times. (2006). *Court refuses to ban Dutch pedophile party - Europe - International Herald Tribune (Published 2006)*. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/17/world/europe/17iht-dutch.2222178.html>

Nordic Model Now! (2016). *What is the Nordic Model?* Nordic Model Now!

<https://nordicmodelnow.org/what-is-the-nordic-model/>

Pathfinders Justice Initiative. (2022). *Nigeria: Human Trafficking Factsheet*. Pathfinders Justice

Initiative. <https://pathfindersji.org/nigeria-human-trafficking-factsheet/>

Pew Research Center. (2019). *Americans' Views on Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse*. Pew Research

Center. Retrieved 2022, from

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/06/11/americans-see-catholic-clergy-sex-abuse-as-an-ongoing-problem/>

Priebe, S., Matanov, A., & Schor, R. (2012). Good practice in mental health care for socially

marginalised groups in Europe: a qualitative study of expert views in 14 countries. *BMC*

Public Health. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-12-248

Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti. (2021). *Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza*

Migranti. PIAM Onlus. https://piamonlus.org/en/home_en/

Radford, J., Stanko, E. A., & Radford, J. (2007). The contradictions of patriarchal crime control.

A Journal of Social Justice, 6(2), 149-158.

Raymond, J. (2003). Ten Reasons for Not Legalizing Prostitution And a Legal Response to the

Demand for Prostitution. *Journal of Trauma Practice*, 2, 315-332.

Sawicki, D. A., Meffert, B. N., Read, K., & Heinz, A. J. (2019). Culturally competent health care

for sex workers: an examination of myths that stigmatize sex work and hinder access to

care. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 34(3), 355-371.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2019.1574970>

Schlumpf, H. (2016). *Who framed Mary Magdalene?* US Catholic.

<https://uscatholic.org/articles/201603/who-framed-mary-magdalene/>

- Sprankle, E., Bloomquist, K., Butcher, C., Gleason, N., & Schaefer, Z. (2018). The role of sex work stigma in victim blaming and empathy of sexual assault survivors. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 15(3), 242-248.
- Tondo, L. (2020). *Sex traffickers left thousands of women to starve during Italy lockdown*. The Guardian. Retrieved 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/10/sex-traffickers-left-thousands-of-women-to-starve-during-italy-lockdown-coronavirus>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). *Human Trafficking*. UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.html>
- United Nations Statistics Division. (n.d.). *Sex workers: Population size estimate*. UN Data. <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNAIDS&f=inID%3A111>
- Weisner, L. (2014). The Social Effect the Law had on Prostitutes in Ancient Rome. *Grand Valley Journal of History*, 3(2). <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1120&context=gvjh>
- Wolf, A. (2019). Stigma in the Sex Trades. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 34(3), 290-308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2019.1573979>
- World Aids Campaign. (2010). *THE CASE FOR DECRIMINALIZATION*. Global Network of Sex Work Projects. <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/Sex%20Work%20%26%20the%20Law.pdf>
- World Bank. (n.d.). *Population Total– Italy*. World Development Indicators. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IT>
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Violence against women*. WHO | World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab_1.

Yale Global Health Justice Partnership. (2020). *Consequences of the Criminalization of Sex Work*. Yale Law School.

https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/ghjp/documents/consequences_of_criminalization_v2.pdf

Yale Global Health Justice Partnership. (2020). *The Law and Sex Work - Four Legal Approaches to the Sex Sector*. Yale Law School.

https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/ghjp/documents/the_law_and_sex_work.pdf

Yale Global Health Justice Partnership. (2020). *Sex Work VS Trafficking: How They are Different and Why it Matters*. Yale Law School.

https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/ghjp/documents/issue_brief_sex_work_vs_trafficking_v2.pdf

ACADEMIC VITA

Education

Majors: Global and International Studies, Italian Language and Literature

Minors: Women and Gender Studies

Thesis Title: Exploitation of Sex Workers in Italy

Thesis Supervisor: Maria Truglio

Professional Experience

Date: May 2021- August 2021

Title: Head Intern/Creative Assistant

Description: Contacted authors, scheduled development calls, and organized team meetings. Pitched development projects, created pitch decks, and worked on film development projects. Assisted with transferring of film and film editing and labeling processes.

Company: Lou Reda Productions

Date: May 2019- current

Title: Team Member/Cashier/Hostess

Description: Developed intimate knowledge of the community and consulted with customers to understand their desires and suggest the best products to meet their local needs. Cultivated team success by working well with all members and cross-training in different positions and departments. Engaged customers and built connections using a positive, upbeat attitude.

Company: Easton Public Market Farmstand

Date: October 2019- March 2021

Title: Stocker/Starbucks Barista

Description: Kept the team safe and efficient by maintaining clean tools, equipment and work areas. Made and served specialty coffee and tea beverages.

Company: West Food District

Honors and Awards

Schreyer Honors College Scholar

GKA Italian Honor Society

Paterno Fellows Scholar

Chapel Executive Internship Scholar

Dean's List Recognition (all semesters)

International Education

Florence, Italy: Intermediate Italian, Florence: Story of the City, History of the Mafia and Global Crime, The History of Culture and Food: A Comparative Analysis, Sports History and Culture

Language Proficiency

Italian