

# Inquiry fails to find single trafficker who forced anyone into sex work

The UK's biggest ever investigation of sex trafficking failed to find a single person who had forced anybody into sex work in spite of hundreds of raids on sex workers in a six-month campaign by government departments, specialist agencies and every police force in the country. The failure has been disclosed by a Guardian investigation which also suggests that the scale of and nature of sex trafficking into the UK has been exaggerated by politicians and media.

Current and former ministers have claimed that thousands of women have been imported into the UK and forced to work as sex slaves, but most of these statements were either based on distortions of quoted sources or fabrications without any source at all.

While some prosecutions have been made, the Guardian investigation suggests the number of people who have been brought into the UK and forced against their will into prostitution is much smaller than claimed; and that the problem of trafficking is one of a cluster of factors which expose sex workers to coercion and exploitation.

Acting on the distorted information, the government has produced a bill, now moving through its final parliamentary phase, which itself has provoked an outcry from sex workers who complain that, instead of protecting them, it will expose them to extra danger.

When police in July last year announced the results of Operation Pentameter Two, Jacqui Smith, then home secretary, hailed it as "a great success". Its operational head, Tim Brain, said it had seriously disrupted organised crime networks responsible for human trafficking. "The figures show how successful we have been in achieving our goals," he said.

Those figures credited Pentameter with "arresting 528 criminals associated with one of the worst crimes threatening our society". But an internal police analysis of Pentameter, obtained by the Guardian after a lengthy legal struggle, paints a very different picture.

The analysis, produced by the police Human Trafficking Centre in Sheffield and marked "restricted", suggests there was a striking shortage of sex traffickers to be found in spite of six months of effort by all 55 police forces in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland together with the UK Border Agency, the Serious and Organised Crime Agency, the Foreign Office, the Northern Ireland Office, the Scottish government, the Crown Prosecution Service and various NGOs in what was trumpeted as "the largest ever police crackdown on human trafficking".

The analysis reveals that 10 of the 55 police forces never found anyone to arrest. And 122 of the 528

arrests announced by police never happened: they were wrongly recorded either through honest bureaucratic error or apparent deceit by forces trying to chalk up arrests which they had not made. Among the 406 real arrests, more than half of those arrested (230) were women, and most were never implicated in trafficking at all.

Of the 406 real arrests, 153 had been released weeks before the police announced the success of the operation: 106 of them without any charge at all and 47 after being cautioned for minor offences. Most of the remaining 253 were not accused of trafficking: 73 were charged with immigration breaches; 76 were eventually convicted of non-trafficking offences involving drugs, driving or management of a brothel; others died, absconded or disappeared off police records.

Although police described the operation as "the culmination of months of planning and intelligence-gathering from all those stakeholders involved", the reality was that, during six months of national effort, they found only 96 people to arrest for trafficking, of whom 67 were charged. Forty-seven of those never made it to court.

Only 22 people were finally prosecuted for trafficking, including two women who had originally been "rescued" as supposed victims. Seven of them were acquitted. The end result was that, after raiding 822 brothels, flats and massage parlours all over the UK, Pentameter finally convicted of trafficking a grand total of only 15 men and women.

The head of the UK Human Trafficking Centre, Grahame Maxwell, who is chief constable of North Yorkshire, acknowledged the importance of the figures: "The facts speak for themselves. I'm not trying to argue with them in any shape or form," he said.

He said he had commissioned fresh research from regional intelligence units to try to get a clearer picture of the scale of sex trafficking. "What we're trying to do is to get it gently back to some reality here," he said. "It's not where you go down on every street corner in every street in Britain, and there's a trafficked individual.

"There are more people trafficked for labour exploitation than there are for sexual exploitation. We need to redress the balance here. People just seem to grab figures from the air."

Groups who work with trafficked women declined to comment on the figures from the Pentameter Two police operation but said that the problem of trafficking was real.

**Nick Davies, The Guardian 20/10/09**



## Smiley Faces Survey Results



Thank you to all the sex workers and managers/owners that completed the Smiley Faces evaluation survey. These are the results!

### Comments:

#### Have you seen any changes since the introduction of the Smiley Faces project?

- Information concerning tax obligations and how to pay.
- Bosses eager to be part of Smiley Faces project to make brothel seem friendlier.
- Promotes awareness and issues
- Owners strict on D.C health checks on clients.
- Some places that didn't pass on magazines before are now doing so.
- More understanding about job and the award.
- More professional workplace and women.
- More brothels have Smiley Faces
- More magazines.
- The girls are aware that they have back-up, if they have any problems with management or a client eg bullying by management or assault by a client.
- Everything is regulated better and a lot more supportive.
- Availability of current and relevant information.
- More information available.
- Better information and resources, helpful RhED workers.

### Additional Comments:

- Please keep us informed of new policies as you always do.
- Have always had access to RhED resources since starting in the industry.
- Keep up the good work.
- Not able to give more informative opinions, I have not seen copy of magazine for about 18 months.
- Perhaps give key chains instead of badges as most girls have lockers but may not wish to wear a badge.
- Great accessible information and support.
- Recently came to Melbourne. Your presence is well advertised as I knew about RhED before getting work.
- I have never heard of the Smiley Faces project.
- Our workplace has always been informative and allowed access to RhED because you do such a great job.
- They help the girls to know where to get support.
- Many thanks for the visit today.
- Only just learnt about the Smiley Faces survey.
- I have been at the same place all this time and they have always been RhED friendly.
- New to the industry and found out about this by RhED on brothel outreach.
- Didn't previously know about this project but excellent idea.
- Have your magazines, very informative.
- Smiley Faces project promotes better communication.
- Where I work RhED has always been around and RhED are welcomed in. Where I work has always been excellent in industry standards but from what I hear from other girls it sounds like things have gone backwards in a lot of places. Smiley Faces might have been given out too easily and that not all places that have a smiley face deserve it. We don't see RhED enough and would also like to see RhED do something about project respect degrading the legal industry and us as workers who do not want their help.