

This is a statement from the **leading violence against women, women's and human rights organisations in the UK.**

We strongly recommend introducing a '**nil**' **policy for Sexual Entertainment Venues<sup>1</sup>**, as permitted under Schedule 3 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (LGMPA)1982 and amended by Section 27 of the Policing and Crime Act (PCA) 2009.

Outlined below are reasons why a nil limit on lap dancing clubs is a crucial measure to **combat the spread of commercial sexual exploitation** and to **take a stand against the sexual objectification of women, male violence and all forms of inequality between women and men.**

### **1. Lap dancing clubs normalise the sexual objectification of women and run counter to efforts to promote equality between women and men.**

The lap dancing industry is highly gendered, with men paying women to strip for them in the vast majority of lap dancing clubs - otherwise known as 'gentlemen's clubs'. The gendered nature of the industry makes the proliferation of lap dancing clubs relevant to the **Gender Equality Duty 2007**. This makes gender equality a factor which should be considered during licensing process.

The ever-increasing sexual objectification of women, facilitated by the expansion of lap dancing clubs, runs directly counter to efforts to achieve equality between women and men.

The links between objectification and discrimination and violence against women are recognised at the international level by the legally binding **United Nations Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, which has repeatedly called on states – including the British Government - to take action against the objectification of women<sup>2</sup>. Similarly the UK-based **End Violence Against Women coalition** has called on the UK Government to tackle the sexual objectification of women and girls because it provides a 'conducive context' for violence against women<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> SEVs are defined as "any live performance or live display of nudity which is of such a nature that, ignoring financial gain, it must reasonably be assumed to be provided solely or principally for the purpose of sexually stimulating any member of an audience (whether by verbal or other means)." An audience can consist of just one person (e.g. where the entertainment takes place in private booths). It is stated in the Home Office guidance that while local authorities should judge each case on its merits, SEVs would apply to the following forms of entertainment as they are commonly understood: **Lap dancing; Pole dancing; Table dancing; Strip shows; Peep shows; Live sex shows:** <http://www.object.org.uk/files/SEV%20HO%20Guidance.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 1979 Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Article 5

<sup>3</sup> Realising Rights, Fulfilling Obligations: An Integrated Strategy to End Violence Against Women (EVAW) 2008

The more it becomes acceptable to view and treat women as sexual objects, the easier it becomes to disrespect women as a group. As stated by Chris Green, Director of the **White Ribbon Campaign**<sup>4</sup>: "Any expansion of lap dancing clubs feeds an increase in the lack of respect for women".

Research into **male motivations for visiting strip clubs** found that men went to strip clubs to meet women who were willing to act in more 'traditional' ways, and that they wanted a place to 'let frustration out' at the ways in which they had been forced to monitor their behaviour towards women in the workplace because of equal opportunities and sexual harassment legislation<sup>5</sup>.

In this way, lap dancing clubs represent one of the last bastions of male privilege - a place that time forgot in relation to society's efforts to achieve equality between women and men.

Recent **sex discrimination law suits** against corporate use of lap dancing clubs, and **top business women in *The Economist***<sup>6</sup> blaming corporate strip club culture for the lack of female representation at high levels of business demonstrate the negative impact that lap dancing clubs have on women's equality in wider society.

The *Sexism in the City* campaign spearheaded by the **Fawcett Society**, the UK's leading campaign for women's rights, further highlighted the links between lap dancing and gender inequality as it called on businesses to take a stand against the 'sex object culture' that lap dancing clubs promote as a crucial measure to achieve equality between women and men in the work place<sup>7</sup>.

## **2. Lap dancing clubs promote 'sex object culture' which negatively impacts on aspirations of young women and girls.**

The growth of lap dancing clubs has fed into what has been termed 'sex object culture' – the mainstreaming of the sex and porn industries and the ever-increasing sexual objectification of women and girls. With lax licensing laws leading to the number of lap dancing clubs doubling over the last five years, and a PR makeover branding lap dancing as glamorous and 'harmless fun', we have found ourselves in a situation in which major retailers sell pole dancing kits along with pink frilly garters and paper money in their 'toys and games section'<sup>8</sup>, and leisure centres offer pole dancing lessons to girls as young as twelve<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> The White Ribbon Campaign works with men to end violence against women

<sup>5</sup> Frank, K. (2005) 'Exploring the Motivations and Fantasies of Strip Club Customers in Relation to Legal Regulations', *Sexual Behavior*, Vol. 34 (5), pp. 487 – 504

<sup>6</sup> Jeffreys, S. (2008b) 'The Sex Industry and Business Practice', Seminar: School of Business, Ballara University, 21 May 2008

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/SATC%20manifesto%20public.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Eden, I. (2007) *Inappropriate Behaviour: Adult Venues and Licensing in London*, London: The Lilith Project, Eaves Housing for Women.

<sup>9</sup> BBC News Online (2006), 'Children are Taught Pole Dancing' Tuesday, 12 December 2006, url: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/6173805.stm>

Worryingly, this has led to **25% of teenage girls seeing being a lap dancer as their ideal profession**<sup>10</sup>.

### 3. Lap dancing clubs encourage demand for prostitution and trafficking

According to the **UN**, lap dancing has played an important role in the diversification of the commercial sex industry, which has normalised and encouraged ideas of male entitlement and demand<sup>11</sup>.

The structural conditions of lap dancing clubs mean that women are not paid - they pay to work - and that there are always more women than there are customers. Dancers are therefore forced to compete with one another for private dances in order to earn a wage. Research shows this leads men to expect and demand extra sexual services and it puts pressure on dancers to offer sexual services in order to attract customers<sup>12</sup>. According to an **ex-lap dancer**: *'No touching, not exposing your genitals, not allowing men to touch you is the exception rather than the rule'*<sup>13</sup>

Further research shows that strip clubs **increase demand for nearby on-street and off-street prostitution services**<sup>14</sup>, with a clear link between increased demand for the buying of sex and **women and children being trafficked** in order to meet this demand<sup>15</sup>.

More directly, anti-trafficking and prostitution organisations in the UK have been highlighting the issue that **lap dancing clubs are used by traffickers to 'hide' women trafficked into prostitution**, or to bribe them for good behaviour since<sup>16</sup>:

*"Her pimp would tell her that if she was less 'difficult', he would take her to a lap dancing club in Haringey instead. He still expected her to sell sex in the lap dancing club... she believes that there was no doubt that the owner of the club was fully aware that prostitution was taking place in his premises."*<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>[http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/161/161338\\_naked\\_ambition\\_rubs\\_off\\_on\\_teen\\_girls.html](http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/161/161338_naked_ambition_rubs_off_on_teen_girls.html)

<sup>11</sup> UN.GIFT (2008) 'Demand for Forced Labour and Sexual Exploitation: How and Why it fuels Human Trafficking' in *The Vienna Forum Report: A Way Forward to Combat Human Trafficking* New York: United Nations. url: <http://www.ungift.org/docs/ungift/pdf/vf/ebook2.pdf> (last accessed 28/08/08)

<sup>12</sup> Bindel, J. (2004) *Profitable Exploits: Lap Dancing in the UK*, London Metropolitan University, Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU)

<sup>13</sup> 'Elena' quoted in 'I was an Object, not a Person, The Guardian 19.03.08

<sup>14</sup> Coy, M, Horvath, M & Kelly, L (2007) *It's just like going to the supermarket: Men talk about buying sex in East London* London: Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, B. and O'Connell Davidson, J. (2003). 'Is Trafficking in Human Beings Demand Driven? A Multi Country Pilot Study' *International Organisation for Migration Research Series*, No. 15. December 2003 url:

<http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/about/publications/Bridget/Anderson04.pdf?event=detail&id=2932>

<sup>16</sup> Eden, I. (2007) *Inappropriate Behaviour: Adult Venues and Licensing in London*, London: The Lilith Project, Eaves Housing for Women.

<sup>17</sup> DICKSON, S. 2004. *Sex in the City*. London: The POPPY Project

#### 4. Physical and sexual violence and assault against women are common in lap dancing clubs

Researcher Kelly Holsopple, who herself worked in stripping for thirteen years, conducted a study into women's experiences of violence in strip clubs<sup>18</sup>. She found **100 per cent of the women** she surveyed had **experienced physical abuse while working in a lap dancing club**, which variously included being bitten, slapped, pinched, or punched. **All of the women had also been sexually assaulted in clubs**. This ranged from having their breasts grabbed to men attempting and succeeding to penetrate them vaginally with fingers and even bottles. **Every woman had been verbally harassed**. The women surveyed also reported that almost all of the perpetrators suffered no consequences for these behaviours.

Studies have further highlighted the psychological toll of a job description which requires 'arousing men, coping with abuse and contempt, deflecting [and] neutralizing potentially dangerous situations while extracting as much money as possible'<sup>19</sup>. This study found that one of the inherent tolls related to lap dancing stems from the commodification of the dancers' bodies and the idea that a woman's worth is related to how she is viewed by clients.

**In the UK, funding has been granted to set up support services for women who have experienced this form of physical, sexual, and psychological trauma as a result of working in lap dancing clubs.**

#### 5. Lap dancing clubs have a negative impact on women's safety in the local vicinity

Research undertaken in the London Borough of Camden found a fifty percent increase in sexual assaults in the borough after the rapid expansion of lap dancing clubs<sup>20</sup>. Personal testimony from women reinforces the idea of a link between the proliferation of lap dancing clubs and increased levels of sexual harassment for women in the vicinity<sup>21</sup>.

The **UK Royal Institute of Town Planning** has further drawn attention to concerns regarding the impact of lap dancing clubs on women in the local areas: '*Evidence shows that in certain locations, lap dancing and exotic dancing clubs make women feel threatened or uncomfortable*'<sup>22</sup>.

---

<sup>18</sup> K. Holsopple, 'Strip Club Testimony', Freedom and Justice Center for Prostitution Resources, A Program of the Volunteers of America of Minnesota, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Barton, B. (2007), 'Managing the Toll of Stripping: Boundary Setting among Exotic Dancers', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 36 (5), Morehead State University, Morehead, Kentucky: Sage Publications

<sup>20</sup> Eden, I. (2003) Lilit Report on Lap Dancing and Striptease in the Borough of Camden, London: The Lilit Project, Eaves Housing for Women

<sup>21</sup> See [www.object.org.uk](http://www.object.org.uk) for testimonies

<sup>22</sup> Royal Town Planning Institute (2007), *Gender and Spatial Planning, Good Practice Note 7*, 10 December 2007

Links between the expansion of lap dancing clubs and increased levels of sexual harassment and assault led the **Women's National Commission** to include the need to regulate lap dancing clubs in their **submission to the UN Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 2005**:

*"The use of women in degrading entertainment exacerbates violence against women...lap dancing and similar clubs must be regulated to ensure that local crimes against women do not increase"*

## **6. Lap dancing clubs have a negative impact on women's safety in wider society**

Lap dancing clubs normalise the representation of women as being always sexually available. This is worrying in light of widespread public opinion that women are in some way responsible for sexual assaults perpetrated against them<sup>23</sup>. The links between the expansion of lap dancing clubs and an increase in the levels of sexual violence have been raised by organisations who work with victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence. For example, as **Chair of Rape Crisis**, Dr Nicole Westmarland reported that lap dancing clubs '*both support and are a consequence of sexual violence in society*'.

Furthermore, in response to research it commissioned into the impact of lap dancing clubs on the city, **Glasgow City Council**<sup>24</sup> stated:

*"Images of women and 'entertainment' which demean and degrade women portraying them as sexual objects plays a part in 'normalising' sexual violence and contributes to male abuse of women being acceptable, tolerated, condoned and excused. Such entertainment runs counter to explicit commitments by a range of private, public and voluntary agencies to promoting women's equality."*

## **7. Objections to lap dancing clubs are based on issues of equality, not morality.**

The need for policy to be scrutinised in relation to gender equality was recognised by the Government in 2007, with the passing of the **Gender Equality Duty**. The Gender Equality Duty places a legal obligation on public bodies to take out **Gender Equality Impact Assessments** on all policy decisions to ensure that decisions do not have a negative impact on women's equality. Furthermore, the Gender Equality Duty requires public bodies to **actively promote gender equality and work towards countering gender stereotypes**.

Lap dancing clubs promote gender stereotypes and attitudes that say it is acceptable to treat women as sexual objects, rather than real people. They are linked to gender discrimination and sexual harassment both within clubs and in wider society (as demonstrated by recent successes of sexual harassment cases in which use of lap dancing clubs has been recognised as linked to discrimination), and to the creation of

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=16618](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=16618)

<sup>24</sup> Glasgow City Council report on the need for review of licensing legislation in the light of concerns re table dancing  
<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/0D19236F-808A-4467-96F7-6A9508C1F312/0/legtablic2.pdf>

no-go areas in the surrounding areas which reduce women's sense of security and entitlement to public space.

Setting nil limits on lap dancing clubs is not about morality, or 'having an issue with sex', it is about ensuring that local councils abide by their legal requirements to promote equality between women and men by taking a stand against an industry which runs directly counter to this goal.

**TESTIMONIES FROM WOMEN IN LAP DANCING:**

[http://www.object.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=29](http://www.object.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=29)

**STATEMENT SIGNATORIES**

The following organisations believe that a nil limit in relation to Sexual Entertainment Venues is necessary to tackle commercial sexual exploitation and to take a stand against the sexual objectification of women, male violence and inequality between women and men:

1. Eaves [www.eaves4women.co.uk](http://www.eaves4women.co.uk)
2. The Fawcett Society [www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)
3. The London Feminist Network [www.londonfeministnetwork.org.uk](http://www.londonfeministnetwork.org.uk)
4. OBJECT [www.object.org.uk](http://www.object.org.uk)
5. UK Feminista [www.ukfeminista.org.uk](http://www.ukfeminista.org.uk)

To sign the statement or for more information please email [anna@object.org.uk](mailto:anna@object.org.uk)