

The End Demand Model

The end demand model—also called the Nordic or Equality model—seeks to eliminate the sex industry through eradicating the demand for paid sex work. However, this model fails to curb demand and instead creates new structural barriers to safety and protection for both sex workers and victims of trafficking.

End demand reforms maintain the criminal penalties for purchasing sex or facilitating sex work, while removing the penalties for selling sex.¹ In other words, sex workers are not criminalized for selling sexual services but their clients and people enabling the sale, such as erotic massage parlor owners or security, are criminalized. However, this approach has failed to dissolve the sex industry, led to loss of income for sex workers, and exposed sex workers and victims of sex trafficking to more violence.

The end demand model falsely assumes that all sex work is inherently violent, and overlooks the reliance sex workers have on the industry for income and livelihood.² As a result, this end demand policy fails to amplify sex workers' access to stability and safety, and risks criminalizing people who might support sex workers such as landlords or roommates. End demand policy also pushes the sex industry further underground³ by removing sex workers' access to online advertisement and thorough screening protocols; this forces sex workers into increasingly unsafe and isolated environments with fewer protections, less time to screen clients, and greater risk of violence. More so, decreased visibility makes it harder for health and safety programs to reach sex workers.

When end demand policies push the sex industry further underground, victims of trafficking also lose access to legal support and protection.⁴ These policies make it harder for law enforcement to identify and help victims because they are less visible online and in public spaces. The decreased visibility of the sex industry isolates victims and furthers their reliance on exploitative third parties. Overall, the end demand model has failed to dissolve the sex industry and protect victims of sex trafficking. Instead, these policies perpetuate

¹ Anderson, 2022

² Berger, 2012

³ Global Network of Sex Work Projects

⁴ "What is SESTA/FOSTA?"

harm against victims of trafficking, and make it more difficult for victims to seek necessary resources and needed support.

The end demand model does not consider sex workers' agency or needs, and conflates sex work and trafficking, which subsequently harms both victims of trafficking and sex workers. Read more about the difference between sex workers and victims of sex trafficking, and the implications for this conflation, [here](#).

Myth #1: Do End Demand Models End the Demand for Commercial Sex?

No, end demand does not eliminate client demand for commercial sex, but further pushes the sex industry underground and into increasingly unsafe environments.⁵

End demand reforms increase the risk of violence and exploitation for sex workers.⁶ The SESTA/FOSTA laws, passed in the United States in 2018, criminalize third parties by holding platforms accountable if users were advertising or facilitating sex work or sex trafficking on their site.⁷ An American study investigating the impact of these laws found that 78 percent of surveyed sex workers lost access to an online platform.⁸ These included advertising platforms, social media, and payment processors. Of those who lost access to an online platform, an additional 88 percent reported a direct decline in income, and 64 percent noted a loss of clients.⁹ The sudden loss of income caused by third party criminalization, like SESTA/FOSTA, has forced sex workers to take on riskier work to compensate for that loss and can contribute to financial insecurity for sex workers who relied on online platforms.¹⁰

Sex workers use online platforms to screen clients, collect payments, form networks with other sex workers, and provide services.¹¹ However, when these avenues are removed, sex workers are often pushed into street-based sex work and unsafe environments, which have a greater likelihood of exposure to violence and exploitation.¹² A study from the United Kingdom reported that 50 percent of outdoor sex workers experienced violence in the past

⁵ Kingston and Thomas, 2019

⁶ Majic and Ditmore, 2024

⁷ "What is SESTA/FOSTA?"

⁸ Majic and Ditmore, 2024

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ "What is SESTA/FOSTA?"

¹¹ Majic and Ditmore, 2024

¹² "What is SESTA/FOSTA?"

six months, and 81 percent specifically experienced client violence. Comparatively, 26 percent of indoor sex workers experienced violence in the past six months, and 48 percent experienced client violence.¹³ Online platforms allow sex workers to negotiate with potential clients, share information about abusive clients with networks of sex workers, and screen and decline abusive clients. When these protections are removed, they have serious consequences on the safety and health of sex workers. A 2020 report found that 30 percent of sex workers experienced increased client violence following the passage of SESTA/FOSTA.¹⁴ The criminalization of clients can also make them less likely to comply with in-person safety measures, like screening. Furthermore, client criminalization negatively impacts the identification and reporting of victims of trafficking.¹⁵

End demand reforms also harm victims of sex trafficking by creating barriers to identifying victims and investigating traffickers. Exact calculations of the impact of end demand reforms on sex trafficking are often biased, and independent data is sparse because the sex industry has been pushed further underground by end demand reforms.¹⁶ For example, five years after Norway adopted end demand legislation in 2009, the Group of Experts on Action Against Sex Trafficking reported that the reforms had so far been inconclusive and difficult to adequately measure.¹⁷ The next year, when the Norwegian government concluded that the commercial sex market had decreased by 20 percent, the results were repeatedly questioned and disproved by additional studies.¹⁸ However, in 2015, the Coordinating Unit for Victims of Trafficking in Norway (KOM) reported that sex trafficking cases had remained relatively stable from 2006 to 2014, with a slight increase, despite the end demand legislation being implemented in 2009. KOM additionally reported that while cases have remained stable, the number of potential victims of trafficking has seen a significant increase from 2007 to 2014.¹⁹

Similar to international end demand reforms, SESTA/FOSTA has a stated aim to prioritize victims of sex trafficking. However, SESTA/FOSTA has instead interfered with investigations of trafficking and increased the risk of exploitation. During the hearings for SESTA/FOSTA, the U.S. Department of Justice testified that SESTA amendments would create several barriers to investigating and prosecuting sex trafficking cases. Since then, a 2021 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report emphasized the hindrance of these policies

¹³ Church, 2016

¹⁴ Congress of the United States, 2024

¹⁵ Global Network of Sex Work Projects

¹⁶ Berger, 2012

¹⁷ Amnesty International, “The Human Cost...”

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

on sex trafficking investigations.²⁰ Law enforcement previously relied upon online advertisements to conduct sting operations and locate trafficking victims. Thus, the removal or suppression of these online platforms has hindered law enforcement's ability to effectively track online posts advertising sex trafficking.²¹ The removal and suppression of online platforms for advertising has additionally inhibited sex workers' ability to independently find clients online. Sex workers are therefore further reliant on third parties such as managers, brothel keepers, etc., to identify clients, increasing the risk of trafficking and exploitation.²² San Francisco police statistics reported that sex trafficking increased by 170% after the passage of SESTA/FOSTA. This increase can be directly attributed to the removal of online platforms and sex workers' subsequent reliance on third-party managers to identify clients.²³

Myth 2: Does the End Demand Model Protect Sex Workers?

No, the end demand model further contributes to stigmatization of sex work and creates barriers to accessing vital health and safety resources.

In 1999, Sweden passed the Sex Purchase Act and became the first country to adopt an end demand model, criminalizing the purchase of sex while decriminalizing selling sex. However, research shows the law has had adverse effects on the health and safety of sex workers.²⁴ A study conducted by two Swedish scholars demonstrated that the Sex Purchase Act further isolated sex workers from each other and from health initiatives.²⁵ This isolation has increased the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease because sex workers have less access to sexual health resources. End demand reforms additionally target people who offer services to sex workers, like landlords. By prosecuting landlords as third parties, these reforms discourage landlords from renting to sex workers and leave sex workers vulnerable to housing instability.²⁶ Similar effects on the isolation, health, and vulnerability of sex workers have been found outside of Sweden, further demonstrating the failure of end demand reforms to protect sex workers.²⁷

²⁰ United States Government Accountability Office, 2021

²¹ Ibid

²² Congress of the United States

²³ "New Laws Forced Sex Workers Back on SF Streets...", 2019

²⁴ Berger, 2012

²⁵ Dodillet and Östergren, 2011

²⁶ Amnesty international

²⁷ Krüsi, 2016

Sex workers' access to health and social services are also negatively impacted by end demand laws. End demand ideology falsely assumes that all people engaged in sex work are victims in desperate need of escaping the sex industry.²⁸ Therefore, service providers, such as social workers, healthcare providers, and law enforcement, often stigmatize and shame sex workers who refuse these labels and continue engaging in sex work. In 2014, fifteen years after end demand legislation was implemented in Sweden, the Rose Alliance reported that over half of surveyed sex workers feared prejudice from authorities and 46 percent reported experiencing discrimination based on their work.²⁹ The Rose Alliance report additionally found that almost 30 percent of surveyed sex workers experienced difficulty in accessing HIV testing, including being interrogated on why they wanted an HIV test. In addition, less than 10 percent received condoms or HIV prevention services from a government or health care organization.³⁰

In addition to healthcare barriers, end demand legislation also fails to improve stigma and bias from service providers, such as law enforcement and landlords.³¹ A study in Vancouver demonstrated that legislation changes failed to significantly modify law enforcement perceptions of sex workers, and therefore sex workers' trust in law enforcement.³² While participants noted a decrease in arrests and threats of arrest, they remained reluctant to report experiences of violence to law enforcement. This reluctance was heightened for Indigenous sex workers.³³

Law enforcement's stigmatizing perceptions of sex workers were not challenged by end demand reforms, but rather the reforms solidified law enforcements' binary perceptions of sex workers as either victims or criminals.³⁴ When sex workers are perceived as criminals, law enforcement are less likely to adequately respond to sex workers' concerns and protect them.³⁵ Similarly, when sex workers are viewed solely as victims, they are stripped of their agency and are unable to consistently access resources.

End demand reform models have also failed to change behavior and stigmatized perceptions in the United States. In Chicago, the police department and local prosecutors were directed to prioritize arresting customers, third-party managers, and traffickers after

²⁸ Berger, 2012

²⁹ Global Network of Sex Work Projects

³⁰ Global Network of Sex Work Projects

³¹ Kingston and Thomas, 2019

³² Krüsi, 2016

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Kingston and Thomas, 2019

³⁵ Krüsi, 2016

the city implemented end demand reforms.³⁶ However, sex workers continued to be disproportionately targeted and arrested. Arrests were still overwhelmingly made on sellers of sex, with 80 percent of arrests reported to be sellers, 17 percent reported to be buyers, and 2 percent reported to be facilitators.³⁷ Additionally, a case study of the effort recorded that undercover officers conducted over 200 sting operations from 2015-2017, but only 2 percent specifically targeted buyers of sex work. Instead of protecting sex workers, end demand reforms in Chicago caused disproportionate surveillance of sex workers, further contributing to sex worker distrust of law enforcement. When sex workers distrust law enforcement, they are less likely to report experiences of violence and seek help.³⁸

Legislation which assigns monolithic labels to sex workers and criminalizes any or all aspects of sex work contributes to stigma and harm against sex workers. Neither full criminalization nor partial criminalization reforms, like end demand, promote the health and safety of sex workers or protect victims of trafficking. Instead, they establish tangible barriers to safety, security, and well-being. Full decriminalization, which removes the penalties for all aspects of the purchase and sale of consensual paid sex work, would allow people engaged in sex work to better access the resources and support they need.

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³⁶ Rosental <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01910-9>

³⁷ Rosental <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01910-9>

³⁸ Crago, 2021

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