

Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill

Stage 2 Amendment 516 on the control of lap dancing and other adult entertainment venues

Engender works on a feminist anti-sexist agenda to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men, children, society and our social, economic and political development. We do this by making the causes and impact of women's inequality visible, promoting gender equality in policy and practice and increasing women's power and influence.

We welcome this opportunity to provide a written submission to the *Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill* – Stage 2 amendment 516 on the control of lap dancing and other adult entertainment venues.

Views of our members

Since 2004 Engender has continually worked to raise discussion among our members and the public about the issues surrounding certain forms of so-called 'adult entertainment' such as lap-dancing, stripping, pole-dancing and table dancing. The outcome of our research and discussion has been clear – rather than promoting female empowerment, financial security and freedom of expression, the normalisation of lap-dancing and strip-tease instead develops the illusion of sexual availability, while actively damaging women and reinforcing gender inequality.

Annual turnover in the UK 'Adult Entertainment' industry is estimated to be in excess of £300 million (approximately £15 million in Scotland alone) and is one of the fastest growing elements in the UK's "leisure services" industry. This is of great concern to our members who view this 'industry' as legitimized commercial sexual exploitation.

Tackling commercial sexual exploitation

Engender holds that activities such as stripping, lap dancing, pole dancing, and table dancing are forms of commercial sexual exploitation. For this reason, we support the amendment lodged by Sandra White MSP which seeks to allow local authorities to apply a specific licensing regime to 'adult entertainment' venues, including limiting the number of premises in the local authority area that are permitted to provide 'adult entertainment'.

We believe that Local Authorities should be empowered to decide on a local level of provision for lap dancing clubs and that current licensing regulations do not provide sufficient controls for lap dancing and related activities. Because we view such activities as exploitative we are opposed to any regulation that condones or manages them.

There is a recognisable link to prostitution and human trafficking (Holsopple, 1998; Bindel 2004). It can be argued that the clubs should be viewed and licensed as sex establishments and subject to the same controls.

Scottish research with men who had bought sex in prostitution found that 31% of the men had located accessed prostitution through a lap-dancing club. 34% of the men interviewed in Edinburgh who bought sex indoors reported that they had located prostitutes in a lap-dancing club.

Negative impacts on local communities and society as a whole

These establishments can also have negative consequences for those not directly involved. The areas surrounding 'adult entertainment' clubs are subject to higher levels of crime, sexual violence and increased levels of fear amongst women travelling in the vicinity (Lilith project 2007). The mixture of explicit sexual 'dances', and the availability of alcohol creates an atmosphere, which is extremely unsafe for women, and we know from our members that they will avoid such areas if possible which effectively creates city centre areas which are 'no go' areas for women and children. During a recent survey carried out with our members, 90% of respondents asserted that they would, or already had, objected to 'adult entertainment' premises being located within their neighbourhood. Again this demonstrates that members have concerns about the detrimental effects of such establishments and these concerns are supported by research. It has been shown that sexual assaults have increased in the geographic area surrounding 'adult entertainment' venues.

Advocates of 'adult entertainment' clubs argue that they are purely entertainment, not prostitution and the women work of their own volition. However, there is little doubt that the way that lap-dance clubs are organised, and the conditions that the dancers operate in, reinforces gender inequality, and normalises men's sexual objectification of women.

At Engender we fully support Sandra White's amendment because we believe that it gives power back to local authorities and to communities to oppose applications for commercial sexual exploitation venues in their areas. It would also potentially work to highlight the fundamental problem in our culture where men's expectation of entitlement to paid-for sexual activity remains unchallenged.

If you require any further information please contact Carol.Flack@engender.org.uk or telephone 0131 558 9596