

## **Account of a Bristol Woman**

I wish to remain anonymous.

I worked in the sex industry in Bristol for several years. During the time I worked in the industry we were encouraged to go into lap dancing clubs to solicit business.

We'd sit and drink and it was like dangling a carrot. Then the girls would go back to the parlour and the boss would sit there telling everyone those are my girls from my parlour down the road. If a guy crosses the line they're told to just try the parlour down the road. The massage parlours don't have bouncers or security in them. All you've got is you and the other girls and no-one's got your back. Many lap dancing clubs are open near massage parlours. And the massage parlours operate at the same time because a lot of their business comes from the lap dancing clubs. If there was such a great need for lap dancing clubs they'd be open during the day and not just at night. Just because you're asleep when it goes on doesn't make it okay.

I've taken drugs in the lap dancing club. The drugs keep people there and it's openly encouraged. You're encouraged to take a stage name to make it easier to cope with emotionally so that you've got that disassociation.

I'd like the council to think about how they would police a lap dancing club. To those who say that it's ok if a club is well run, I'd asked them to define "well run". What safeguards and checks and monitoring are they going to put into place to prove that it's well run?

There is always going to be a man that will assault a woman, it will just be that the girl won't report it and the police won't get involved because the club will worry that it will lose its licence. There are always men touching grabbing at the dancers. I've seen it happen. The managers try and be strict about checking ages but all you need is a bit of fake ID and they're happy. The ID checks aren't that stringent. I know they ask for passports but if you're in this country illegally you've got a fake passport anyway no matter how old you are.

I'd like to know if the committee have been into a strip club - have they actually thought about the implications of seeing a woman taking her clothes off for money? Go in on a busy Saturday night, pretend you've got a wad of cash, then you'll see what really happens. I'd just like the councillors to see that ignorance may be bliss for them but it's not bliss for the women who are stuck in this abusive life.

To anyone who says that the girls are choosing to work there, I'd say that the self esteem and the psychological effects of being in that situation can last for years on a woman. You don't see many lapdancing clubs run by ex-lapdancers. It's not a long-term thing. It's not nice. It's not something that you want to be reminded of. There's always a price to pay...always...whether it's the price of your freedom, the sort of men you're associating with or your own self-image. Lap dancing clubs are detrimental to the long term emotional well being of all the women who are involved with them. Because they're not around nice men. It's a slippery slope for women, who are possibly a bit vulnerable in the first place and they can get stuck into a life that they can't get out of.

Should we not worry about the girls working on the street because they are choosing to work there? The girls on the street, the girls that are choosing to work on the street are the girls that are choosing to work in the strip clubs five years before. So where's that choice really? Because I don't think there really is a choice. This freedom of choice is really not that free in the society that we live in.

I'd love to be able to say that at least if one girl doesn't have to walk the same path because I've told my story, I'm really proud to do it. I went through hell for 10 years and if I can just say something to someone to just change someone's opinion it would make a huge difference.