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GENDER EQUALITY OR GENDER OPPRESSION? UNDERSTANDING SWEDEN'S SEX WORK PARADOX

Maddie Krips

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Sex work is a well-studied topic that has been highly contested across time and space. Multiple social, political, and economic factors inform policies and cultural views toward sex work. In Sweden, the buyer of prostitution services is criminalized and prostitution is perceived culturally to be inherently v against women. Sweden presents an interesting case study of sex work because the impact of its policy is the opposite of its intent. The policy aims to eradicate gender violence yet ultimately perpetuates it. This study addresses the following research questions: (1) What historical and economic factors influence Sweden's sex work policies? (2) How do Sweden's policies related to gender equality relate to its legal stance on the purchase and sale of sexual services? This research presents three main factors that contribute to Sweden's aim to abolish sex work: Sweden's gender histories and welfare identity; anxieties following Sweden's economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s; and, changing migration trends and racism in Sweden. Policy recommendations are presented to encourage Sweden to objectively investigate the impact of its sex work policy and develop a harm reduction approach to legal reforms. This research study concludes that Sweden's current strategy to eliminate prostitution has been ineffective and stands in stark contrast to its historic commitment to gender equality.