



Ruhama

Fighting Sexual Exploitation, Prostitution and Human Trafficking

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Ruhama calls for urgent action against the sexual exploitation of tenants

In response to last night's Prime Time programme revealing how landlords seek sex in exchange for reduced rent or free accommodation, Ruhama calls for the protection of tenants and prospective tenants from sexual exploitation by landlords who are taking advantage of people, predominantly women, in extreme financial distress. The housing crisis has driven an excess in demand for accommodation which has created a breeding ground for the sexual exploitation of women faced with a shortage of accommodation and exorbitant rents. Sexual exploitation is the abuse of a position of vulnerability for sexual purposes, including the exchange of sex or sexual acts for money, accommodation, and other goods. This is not tolerable, but, while it is against the law to purchase sex in Ireland, we have not yet legislated against the exchange of sex for services or benefits.

Barbara Condon, CEO Ruhama said "Ruhama witnesses daily the harms and impact of sexual exploitation among individuals accessing our services. Poverty is one of the main drivers of sexual exploitation which often starts with a woman in a vulnerable situation who is at risk of being exploited by offers of money, accommodation or drugs in exchange for sex. Whilst this form of exploitation has been highlighted for some time, there is a danger that the true rate of coercion of sex for rent has so far remained hidden as the victim may see it as a once-off or short-term solution to survive rather than sexual exploitation. However, when money, accommodation or any other goods are exchanged for sex or sexual acts, there is no choice involved, it is an act of need and desperation. Sexual consent is bypassed in order to survive, and sex without consent cannot be tolerated in a progressive society."

"Sexual exploitation predominantly affects women who are exploited by male predators. Society continues to turn a blind eye to the injustices wrought by the social, cultural and economic power imbalance between women and men, be they landlords, perpetrators or pimps. The language used by the landlords exposed by RTE is reminiscent of that used by 'punters' who rate and review women active in prostitution on the main websites, highlighting the misogyny that remains prevalent"

"Ruhama calls on the Government to reconsider the Sex For Rent Bill 2022 given the delay in the review of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017. Appropriate legislation is required to recognise those offering accommodation in exchange for sex as offenders, to penalise the platforms that host their advertisements, to provide legal recourse to victims of predatory landlords and to ensure that this complex issue is treated with due regard to its seriousness. We need to ensure zero tolerance for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. Tackling sexual exploitation is key to combatting and eradicating violence against women."

ENDS

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