

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jan/06/child-prostitution-term-outdated-mp-ann-coffey>

End use of outdated term ‘child prostitution’, says MP

Ann Coffey wants term removed from 16 pieces of legislation, arguing that it suggests victims were complicit in abuse



Ann Coffey, the Labour MP for Stockport. Photograph: Dave Thompson/Getty Images

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Tuesday 6 January 2015 12.56 EST

An MP has launched a campaign to remove all references to “child prostitution” from UK legislation, following a series of high-profile court cases that have revealed the endemic grooming and sexual exploitation of underage children across the country.

Ann Coffey, the Labour MP for Stockport, [called for](#) the “outdated” phrase to be removed from 16 pieces of legislation, arguing that its continued use was a barrier to overhauling attitudes that leave thousands of children vulnerable to abuse. She has tabled amendments to the serious crime bill currently being discussed in parliament.

Coffey wrote a report on child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester, titled [Real Voices](#), published in October last year, which said child sexual exploitation had become a “social norm” in some areas of Greater Manchester and victim-blaming attitudes persisted.

A series of reports on child sexual exploitation scandals in Rochdale, Rotherham, Oxford and Telford revealed that abused children were repeatedly dismissed for making “poor choices” and having “problematic lifestyles”.

“When you read report after report about the attitudes of agencies to these children, you find they did actually see [the exploitation] as a lifestyle choice, the children were considered to be child

prostitutes – that suggests victims were complicit in their abuse, it protects the abusers and it absolves agencies from failing to take action,” she said.

In 2013 there was condemnation of a court’s decision to allow a paedophile to walk free after his 13-year-old victim was described as a [sexual predator](#), and in another trial victims of abuse in Oxford were [branded “naughty girls” by defence barristers](#).

Barnardo’s called for the term “child prostitution” to be removed from legislation earlier this year following a parliamentary inquiry undertaken with Sarah Champion, the Labour MP for Rotherham.

It is understood that the use of the phrase “child prostitution” in international legislation may prove a barrier to the wording being changed in the UK, but Coffey said the government must set out on the public record what it intends to do about the issue.

Advertisement

“We are trying to get a commitment from the government that if they accept that the use of this language is unacceptable then they will commit to the legislative changes that are necessary,” she said.

When Coffey brought up the question in parliament, the Home Office minister Karen Bradley said the government could consider options for making the change.

Bradley said: “I want to be absolutely clear that children who are sexually exploited – whether for commercial or other reasons – should not be referred to as prostitutes. They should be recognised as victims and we will certainly consider references in older legislation and guidance as opportunities arise, as well as considering carefully the wording used in any new legislation or guidance.”

The office of the children’s commissioner welcomed the push for a change to the wording of legislation. “We are delighted to see Ann Coffey’s amendments tabled to the serious crime bill to remove all references to the term ‘child prostitution’ from UK legislation,” said Sue Berelowitz, deputy children’s commissioner for England.

“During our inquiry, we often heard professionals describe children they had responsibility for protecting as ‘prostituting themselves’ and turning a blind eye to their sexual exploitation because they believed that the children were at fault,” she said. “We firmly believe that removing references in the legislation to children as ‘prostitutes’ or ‘involved in prostitution’ will change attitudes and behaviours toward children who are being sexually exploited.”

The Barnardo’s chief executive, Javed Khan, said: “It is disgusting that sexually exploited children are labelled as ‘prostitutes’ by those they turn to for help. The fact that any children can be seen as complicit in their own abuse is deeply disturbing. Yet we know from working with more than 2,000 sexually exploited children every year that this view sadly still exists. It is tragic

that government legislation still contains this ugly, stigmatising reference. It needs to be expunged from the statute books now.”