



# Sexual Offences Act 1956

## 1956 CHAPTER 69

### PART I

#### OFFENCES, AND THE PROSECUTION AND PUNISHMENT OF OFFENCES

##### *Intercourse by force, intimidation, etc.*

#### **1 Rape**

- (1) It is felony for a man to rape a woman.
- (2) A man who induces a married woman to have sexual intercourse with him by impersonating her husband commits rape.

#### **2 Procurement of woman by threats**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to procure a woman, by threats or intimidation, to have unlawful sexual intercourse in any part of the world.
- (2) A person shall not be convicted of an offence under this section on the evidence of one witness only, unless the witness is corroborated in some material particular by evidence implicating the accused.

#### **3 Procurement of woman by false pretences**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to procure a woman, by false pretences or false representations, to have unlawful sexual intercourse in any part of the world.
- (2) A person shall not be convicted of an offence under this section on the evidence of one witness only, unless the witness is corroborated in some material particular by evidence implicating the accused.

---

*Status: This is the original version (as it was originally enacted).*

---

#### **4 Administering drugs to obtain or facilitate intercourse**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to apply or administer to, or cause to be taken by, a woman any drug, matter or thing with intent to stupefy or overpower her so as thereby to enable any man to have unlawful sexual intercourse with her.
- (2) A person shall not be convicted of an offence under this section on the evidence of one witness only, unless the witness is corroborated in some material particular by evidence implicating the accused.

#### *Intercourse with girls under sixteen*

#### **5 Intercourse with girl under thirteen**

It is felony for a man to have unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of thirteen.

#### **6 Intercourse with girl between thirteen and sixteen**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exceptions mentioned in this section, for a man to have unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl not under the age of thirteen but under the age of sixteen.
- (2) Where a marriage is invalid under section two of the Marriage Act, 1949, or section one of the Age of Marriage Act, 1929 (the wife being a girl under the age of sixteen), the invalidity does not make the husband guilty of an offence under this section because he has sexual intercourse with her, if he believes her to be his wife and has reasonable cause for the belief.
- (3) A man is not guilty of an offence under this section because he has unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of sixteen, if he is under the age of twenty-four and has not previously been charged with a like offence, and he believes her to be of the age of sixteen or over and has reasonable cause for the belief.

In this subsection, " a like offence " means an offence under this section or an attempt to commit one, or an offence under paragraph (1) of section five of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885 (the provision replaced for England and Wales by this section).

#### *Intercourse with defectives*

#### **7 Intercourse with an idiot or imbecile**

It is an offence for a man to have unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman whom he knows to be an idiot or imbecile.

#### **8 Intercourse with defective**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in this section, for a man to have unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who is under care or treatment in an institution, certified house or approved home within the meaning of the Mental Deficiency Act, 1913, or placed out on licence therefrom or under guardianship under that Act.

- (2) A man is not guilty of an offence under this section because he has unlawful sexual intercourse with such a woman, if he does not know and has no reason to suspect her to be a defective.

## **9 Procurement of defective**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in this section, for a person to procure a woman who is a defective to have unlawful sexual intercourse in any part of the world.
- (2) A person is not guilty of an offence under this section because he procures a defective to have unlawful sexual intercourse, if he does not know and has no reason to suspect her to be a defective.

### *Incest*

## **10 Incest by a man**

- (1) It is an offence for a man to have sexual intercourse with a woman whom he knows to be his grand-daughter, daughter, sister or mother.
- (2) In the foregoing subsection " sister " includes half-sister, and for the purposes of that subsection any expression importing a relationship between two people shall be taken to apply notwithstanding that the relationship is not traced through lawful wedlock.

## **11 Incest by a woman**

- (1) It is an offence for a woman of the age of sixteen or over to permit a man whom she knows to be her grandfather, father, brother or son to have sexual intercourse with her by her consent.
- (2) In the foregoing subsection " brother" includes half-brother, and for the purposes of that subsection any expression importing a relationship between two people shall be taken to apply notwithstanding that the relationship is not traced through lawful wedlock.

### *Unnatural offences*

## **12 Buggery**

- (1) It is felony for a person to commit buggery with another person or with an animal.
- (2) Section thirty-nine of this Act (which relates to the competence as a witness of the wife or husband of the accused) does not apply in the case of this section, except on a charge of an offence with a person under the age of seventeen.
- (3) For the purposes of the last foregoing subsection a person shall be presumed, unless the contrary is proved, to have been under the age of seventeen at the time of the offence charged if he is stated in the charge or indictment, and appears to the court, to have been so.

### **13 Indecency between men**

It is an offence for a man to commit an act of gross indecency with another man, whether in public or private, or to be a party to the commission by a man of an act of gross indecency with another man, or to procure the commission by a man of an act of gross indecency with another man.

#### *Assaults*

### **14 Indecent assault on a woman**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in subsection (3) of this section, for a person to make an indecent assault on a woman.
- (2) A girl under the age of sixteen cannot in law give any consent which would prevent an act being an assault for the purposes of this section.
- (3) Where a marriage is invalid under section two of the Marriage Act, 1949, or section one of the Age of Marriage Act, 1929 (the wife being a girl under the age of sixteen), the invalidity does not make the husband guilty of any offence under this section by reason of her incapacity to consent while under that age, if he believes her to be his wife and has reasonable cause for the belief.
- (4) A woman who is a defective cannot in law give any consent which would prevent an act being an assault for the purposes of this section, but a person is only to be treated as guilty of an indecent assault on a defective by reason of that incapacity to consent, if that person knew or had reason to suspect her to be a defective.

### **15 Indecent assault on a man**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to make an indecent assault on a man.
- (2) A boy under the age of sixteen cannot in law give any consent which would prevent an act being an assault for the purposes of this section.
- (3) A man who is a defective cannot in law give any consent which would prevent an act being an assault for the purposes of this section, but a person is only to be treated as guilty of an indecent assault on a defective by reason of that incapacity to consent, if that person knew or had reason to suspect him to be a defective.
- (4) Section thirty-nine of this Act (which relates to the competence as a witness of the wife or husband of the accused) does not apply in the case of this section, except on a charge of indecent assault on a boy under the age of seventeen.
- (5) For the purposes of the last foregoing subsection a person shall be presumed, unless the contrary is proved, to have been under the age of seventeen at the time of the offence charged if he is stated in the charge or indictment, and appears to the court, to have been so.

### **16 Assault with intent to commit buggery**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to assault another person with intent to commit buggery.

- (2) Section thirty-nine of this Act (which relates to the competence as a witness of the wife or husband of the accused) does not apply in the case of this section, except on a charge of an assault on a person under the age of seventeen.
- (3) For the purposes of the last foregoing subsection a person shall be presumed, unless the contrary is proved, to have been under the age of seventeen at the time of the offence charged if he is stated in the charge or indictment, and appears to the court, to have been so.

### *Abduction*

#### **17 Abduction of woman by force or for the sake of her property**

- (1) It is felony for a person to take away or detain a woman against her will with the intention that she shall marry or have unlawful sexual intercourse with that or any other person, if she is so taken away or detained either by force or for the sake of her property or expectations of property.
- (2) In the foregoing subsection, the reference to a woman's expectations of property relates only to property of a person to whom she is next of kin or one of the next of kin, and " property " includes any interest in property.

#### **18 Fraudulent abduction of heiress from parent or guardian**

- (1) It is felony for a person to take or detain a girl under the age of twenty-one out of the possession of her parent or guardian against his will, if she has property or expectations of property and is so taken or detained by fraud and with the intention that she shall marry or have unlawful sexual intercourse with that or any other person.
- (2) In the foregoing subsection, the reference to a girl's expectations of property relates only to property of a person to whom she is next of kin or one of the next of kin, " property " includes any interest in property and " guardian " means any person having the lawful care or charge of the girl.

#### **19 Abduction of unmarried girl under eighteen from parent or guardian**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in this section, for a person to take an unmarried girl under the age of eighteen out of the possession of her parent or guardian against his will, if she is so taken with the intention that she shall have unlawful sexual intercourse with men or with a particular man.
- (2) A person is not guilty of an offence under this section because he takes such a girl out of the possession of her parent or guardian as mentioned above, if he believes her to be of the age of eighteen or over and has reasonable cause for the belief.
- (3) In this section " guardian" means any person having the lawful care or charge of the girl.

#### **20 Abduction of unmarried girl under sixteen from parent or guardian**

- (1) It is an offence for a person acting without lawful authority or excuse to take an unmarried girl under the age of sixteen out of the possession of her parent or guardian against his will.

---

*Status: This is the original version (as it was originally enacted).*

---

- (2) In the foregoing subsection " guardian " means any person having the lawful care or charge of the girl.

## **21 Abduction of defective from parent or guardian**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in this section, for a person to take a woman who is a defective out of the possession of her parent or guardian against his will, if she is so taken with the intention that she shall have unlawful sexual intercourse with men or with a particular man.
- (2) A person is not guilty of an offence under this section because he takes such a woman out of the possession of her parent or guardian as mentioned above, if he does not know and has no reason to suspect her to be a defective.
- (3) In this section " guardian " means any person having the lawful care or charge of the woman.

*Prostitution, procuration etc.*

## **22 Causing prostitution of women**

- (1) It is an offence for a person—
- (a) to procure a woman to become, in any part of the world, a common prostitute ;  
or
  - (b) to procure a woman to leave the United Kingdom, intending her to become an inmate of or frequent a brothel elsewhere; or
  - (c) to procure a woman to leave her usual place of abode in the United Kingdom, intending her to become an inmate of or frequent a brothel in any part of the world for the purposes of prostitution.
- (2) A person shall not be convicted of an offence under this section on the evidence of one witness only, unless the witness is corroborated in some material particular by evidence implicating the accused.

## **23 Procuration of girl under twenty-one**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to procure a girl under the age of twenty-one to have unlawful sexual intercourse in any part of the world with a third person.
- (2) A person shall not be convicted of an offence under this section on the evidence of one witness only, unless the witness is corroborated in some material particular by evidence implicating the accused.

## **24 Detention of woman in brothel or other premises**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to detain a woman against her will on any premises with the intention that she shall have unlawful sexual intercourse with men or with a particular man, or to detain a woman against her will in a brothel.
- (2) Where a woman is on any premises for the purpose of having unlawful sexual intercourse or is in a brothel, a person shall be deemed for the purpose of the foregoing subsection to detain her there if, with the intention of compelling or inducing her to

remain there, he either withholds from her her clothes or any other property belonging to her or threatens her with legal proceedings in the event of her taking away clothes provided for her by him or on his directions.

- (3) A woman shall not be liable to any legal proceedings, whether civil or criminal, for taking away or being found in possession of any clothes she needed to enable her to leave premises on which she was for the purpose of having unlawful sexual intercourse or to leave a brothel.

## **25 Permitting girl under thirteen to use premises for intercourse**

It is felony for a person who is the owner or occupier of any premises, or who has, or acts or assists in, the management or control of any premises, to induce or knowingly suffer a girl under the age of thirteen to resort to or be on those premises for the purpose of having unlawful sexual intercourse with men or with a particular man.

## **26 Permitting girl between thirteen and sixteen to use premises for intercourse**

It is an offence for a person who is the owner or occupier of any premises, or who has, or acts or assists in, the management or control of any premises, to induce or knowingly suffer a girl not under the age of thirteen, but under the age of sixteen, to resort to or be on those premises for the purpose of having unlawful sexual intercourse with men or with a particular man.

## **27 Permitting defective to use premises for intercourse**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in this section, for a person who is the owner or occupier of any premises, or who has, or acts or assists in, the management or control of any premises, to induce or knowingly suffer a woman who is a defective to resort to or be on those premises for the purpose of having unlawful sexual intercourse with men or with a particular man.
- (2) A person is not guilty of an offence under this section because he induces or knowingly suffers a defective to resort to or be on any premises for the purpose mentioned, if he does not know and has no reason to suspect her to be a defective.

## **28 Causing or encouraging prostitution of, intercourse with, or indecent assault on, girl under sixteen**

- (1) It is an offence for a person to cause or encourage the prostitution of, or the commission of unlawful sexual intercourse with, or of an indecent assault on, a girl under the age of sixteen for whom he is responsible.
- (2) Where a girl has become a prostitute, or has had unlawful sexual intercourse, or has been indecently assaulted, a person shall be deemed for the purposes of this section to have caused or encouraged it, if he knowingly allowed her to consort with, or to enter or continue in the employment of, any prostitute or person of known immoral character.
- (3) The persons who are to be treated for the purposes of this section as responsible for a girl are (subject to the next following subsection)—
  - (a) any person who is her parent or legal guardian; and

---

*Status: This is the original version (as it was originally enacted).*

---

- (b) any person who has actual possession or control of her, or to whose charge she has been committed by her parent or legal guardian or by a person having the custody of her ; and
  - (c) any other person who has the custody, charge or care of her.
- (4) In the last foregoing subsection—
- (a) " parent " does not include, in relation to any girl, a 'person deprived of the custody of her by order of a court of competent jurisdiction but (subject to that), in the case of a girl who has been adopted under the Adoption Act, 1950, or any Act thereby repealed, means her adopters and, in the case of a girl who is illegitimate (and has not been so adopted), means her mother and any person who has been adjudged to be her putative father;
  - (b) " legal guardian " means, in relation to any girl, any person who is for the time being her guardian, having been appointed according to law by deed or will or by order of a court of competent jurisdiction.
- (5) If, on a charge of an offence against a girl under this section, the girl appears to the court to have been under the age of sixteen at the time of the offence charged, she shall be presumed for the purposes of this section to have been so, unless the contrary is proved.

## **29 Causing or encouraging prostitution of defective**

- (1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in this section, for a person to cause or encourage the prostitution in any part of the world of a woman who is a defective.
- (2) A person is not guilty of an offence under this section because he causes or encourages the prostitution of such a woman, if he does not know and has no reason to suspect her to be a defective.

## **30 Man living on earnings of prostitution**

- (1) It is an offence for a man knowingly to live wholly or in part on the earnings of prostitution.
- (2) For the purposes of this section a man who lives with or is habitually in the company of a prostitute, or who exercises control, direction or influence over a prostitute's movements in a way which shows he is aiding, abetting or compelling her prostitution with others, shall be presumed to be knowingly living on the earnings of prostitution, unless he proves the contrary.

## **31 Woman exercising control over prostitute**

It is an offence for a woman for purposes of gain to exercise control, direction or influence over a prostitute's movements in a way which shows she is aiding, abetting or compelling her prostitution.



### *Solicitation*

#### **32 Solicitation by men**

It is an offence for a man persistently to solicit or importune in a public place for immoral purposes.

### *Suppression of brothels*

#### **33 Keeping a brothel**

It is an offence for a person to keep a brothel, or to manage, or act or assist in the management of, a brothel.

#### **34 Landlord letting premises for use as brothel**

It is an offence for the lessor or landlord of any premises or his agent to let the whole or part of the premises with the knowledge that it is to be used, in whole or in part, as a brothel, or, where the whole or part of the premises is used as a brothel, to be wilfully a party to that use continuing.

#### **35 Tenant permitting premises to be used as brothel**

- (1) It is an offence for the tenant or occupier, or person ' in charge, of any premises knowingly to permit the whole or part of the premises to be used as a brothel.
- (2) Where the tenant or occupier of any premises is convicted (whether under this section or, for an offence committed before the commencement of this Act, under section thirteen of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885) of knowingly permitting the whole or part of the premises to be used as a brothel, the First Schedule to this Act shall apply to enlarge the rights of the lessor or landlord with respect to the assignment or determination of the lease or other contract under which the premises are held by the person convicted.
- (3) Where the tenant or occupier of any premises is so convicted, or was so convicted under the said section thirteen before the commencement of this Act, and either—
  - (a) the lessor or landlord, after having the conviction brought to his notice, fails or failed to exercise his statutory rights in relation to the lease or contract under which the premises are or were held by the person convicted; or
  - (b) the lessor or landlord, after exercising his statutory rights so as to determine that lease or contract, grants or granted a new lease or enters or entered into a new contract of tenancy of the premises to, with or for the benefit of the same person, without having all reasonable provisions to prevent the recurrence of the offence inserted in the new lease or contract;

then, if subsequently an offence under this section is committed in respect of the premises during the subsistence of the lease or contract referred to in paragraph (a) of this subsection or (where paragraph (b) applies) during the subsistence of the new lease or contract, the lessor or landlord shall be deemed to be a party to that offence unless he shows that he took all reasonable steps to prevent the recurrence of the offence.

References in this subsection to the statutory rights of a lessor or landlord refer to his rights under the First Schedule to this Act or under subsection (1) of section five of the

---

*Status: This is the original version (as it was originally enacted).*

---

Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1912 (the provision replaced for England and Wales by that Schedule).

### **36 Tenant permitting premises to be used for prostitution**

It is an offence for the tenant or occupier of any premises knowingly to permit the whole or part of the premises to be used for the purposes of habitual prostitution.

*Powers and procedure for dealing with offenders*

### **37 Prosecution and punishment of offences**

- (1) The Second Schedule to this Act shall have effect, subject to and in accordance with the following provisions of this section, with respect to the prosecution and punishment of the offences listed in the first column of the Schedule, being the offences under this Act and attempts to commit certain of those offences.
- (2) The second column in the Schedule shows, for any offence, if it may be prosecuted on indictment or summarily, or either, if an indictment is not triable by a court of quarter sessions and what special restrictions (if any) there are on the commencement of a prosecution.
- (3) The third column in the Schedule shows, for any offence, the punishments which may be imposed on conviction on indictment or on summary conviction, a reference to a period giving the maximum term of imprisonment and a reference to a sum of money the maximum fine.
- (4) The fourth column in the Schedule contains provisions which are either supplementary to those in the second or third column or enable a person charged on indictment with the offence specified in the first column to be found guilty of another offence if the jury are not satisfied that he is guilty of the offence charged or of an attempt to commit it, but are satisfied that he is guilty of the other offence.
- (5) A provision in the fourth column of the Schedule enabling the jury to find the accused guilty of an offence specified in that provision authorises them, if not satisfied that he is guilty of the offence so specified, to find him guilty of any other offence of which they could find him guilty if he had been indicted for the offence so specified.
- (6) Where in the Schedule there is used a phrase descriptive of an offence or group of offences followed by a reference to a section by its number only, the reference is to a section of this Act, and the phrase shall be taken as referring to any offence under the section mentioned.
- (7) Nothing in this section or in the Second Schedule to this Act shall exclude the application to any of the offences referred to in the first column of the Schedule—
  - (a) of section twenty or twenty-one of the Magistrates Courts Act, 1952 (which relate to the summary trial of young offenders for indictable offences); or
  - (b) of subsection (5) of section ninety-eight of that Act (which limits the punishment which may be imposed by a magistrates' court sitting in an occasional courthouse); or
  - (c) of any enactment or rule of law restricting a court's power to imprison; or
  - (d) of any enactment or rule of law authorising an offender to be dealt with in a way not authorised by the enactments specially relating to his offence; or

- (e) of any enactment or rule of law authorising a jury to find a person guilty of an offence other than that with which he is charged.

### **38 Powers of court in case of incest with girl under twenty-one**

- (1) On a man's conviction of an offence under section ten of this Act against a girl under the age of twenty-one, or of attempting to commit such an offence, the court may by order divest him of all authority over her.
- (2) An order divesting a man of authority over a girl under the foregoing subsection may, if he is her guardian, remove him from the guardianship.
- (3) An order under this section may appoint a person to be the girl's guardian during her minority or any less period.
- (4) An order under this section may be varied from time to time or rescinded by the High Court.

### **39 Evidence of wife or husband of accused**

- (1) Where this section applies, the wife or husband of the accused shall be competent to give evidence at every stage of the proceedings, whether for the defence or for the prosecution, and whether the accused is charged solely or jointly with any other person:

Provided that—

- (a) the wife or husband shall not be compellable either to give evidence or, in giving evidence, to disclose any communication made to her or him during the marriage by the accused ; and
  - (b) the failure of the wife or husband of the accused to give evidence shall not be made the subject of any comment by the prosecution.
- (2) Subject to the following subsection, this section applies on a charge of any offence under this Act, except in so far as it is excluded in the case of section twelve (buggery), section fifteen (indecent assault on a man) and section sixteen (assault with intent to commit buggery).
  - (3) This section shall not affect section one of the Criminal Evidence Act, 1898, or any case where the wife or husband of the accused may at common law be called as a witness without the consent of the accused.

### *Powers of arrest and search*

### **40 Power of arrest in case of procuration or prostitution of women**

A constable may arrest a person without a warrant, if the constable suspects him of having committed, or of attempting to commit, an offence under section twenty-two or twenty-three of this Act, and has reasonable cause so to suspect.

### **41 Power of arrest in cases of trading in prostitution, or of soliciting by men**

Anyone may arrest without a warrant a person found committing an offence under section thirty, thirty-one or thirty-two of this Act.

---

*Status: This is the original version (as it was originally enacted).*

---

#### **42 Power of search in case of man living on earnings of prostitution**

Where it is made to appear by information on oath before a justice of the peace that there is reasonable cause to suspect that any house or part of a house is used by a woman for purposes of prostitution, and that a man residing in or frequenting the house is living wholly or in part on her earnings, the justice may issue a warrant authorising a constable to enter and search the house and to arrest the man.

#### **43 Power to search for and remove woman detained for immoral purposes**

(1) Where it is made to appear by information on oath laid before a justice of the peace by a woman's parent, relative or guardian, or by any other person who in the opinion of the justice is acting in the woman's interests, that there is reasonable cause to suspect—

- (a) that the woman is detained in any place within the justice's jurisdiction in order that she may have unlawful sexual intercourse with men or with a particular man; and
- (b) that either she is so detained against her will, or she is under the age of sixteen or is a defective, or she is under the age of eighteen and is so detained against the will of her parent or guardian ;

then the justice may issue a warrant authorising a named constable to search for her and to take her to and detain her in a place of safety until she can be brought before a justice of the peace.

- (2) A justice before whom a woman is brought in pursuance of the foregoing subsection may cause her to be delivered up to her parent or guardian, or otherwise dealt with as circumstances may permit and require.
- (3) A constable authorised by a warrant under this section to search for a woman may enter (if need be, by force) any premises specified in the warrant, and remove the woman from the premises.
- (4) A constable executing a warrant issued under this section shall be accompanied by the person applying for the warrant, if that person so desires, unless the justice issuing it otherwise directs.
- (5) In this section "guardian" means any person having the lawful care or charge of the woman.
- (6) The powers conferred by this section shall be in addition to and not in derogation of those conferred by section forty of the Children and Young Persons Act, 1933.

#### *Interpretation*

#### **44 Meaning of "sexual intercourse"**

Where, on the trial of any offence under this Act, it is necessary to prove sexual intercourse (whether natural or unnatural), it shall not be necessary to prove the completion of the intercourse by the emission of seed, but the intercourse shall be deemed complete upon proof of penetration only.

#### **45 Meaning of "defective"**

- (1) In this Act, "defective" means a person—

- (a) in whose case there exists mental defectiveness which is of such a degree that he requires care, supervision and control for his own protection or for the protection of others or, in the case of a child, involves disability of mind of such a nature and extent as to make him, for the purposes of section fifty-seven of the Education Act, 1944, incapable of receiving education at school; or
  - (b) in whose case there exists mental defectiveness coupled with strongly vicious or criminal propensities and who requires care, supervision and control for the protection of others.
- (2) For the purposes of this section, " mental defectiveness " means a condition of arrested or incomplete development of mind existing before the age of eighteen, whether arising from inherent causes or induced by disease or injury.

**46 Use of words "man", "boy", "woman" and "girl"**

The use in any provision of this Act of the word " man " without the addition of the word " boy ", or vice versa, shall not prevent the provision applying to any person to whom it would have applied if both words had been used, and similarly with the words " woman " and " girl".

**47 Proof of exceptions**

Where in any of the foregoing sections the description of an offence is expressed to be subject to exceptions mentioned in the section, proof of the exception is to lie on the person relying on it.