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## **Can Clients who Pay for Sexual Services Help Victims of Sex Trafficking?**

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# Can Clients who Pay for Sexual Services Help Victims of Sex Trafficking?

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## **Abstract**

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This article explores the possibility that clients of prostitution could help victims of trafficking for sexual purposes. In Spain, prostitution is not prohibited and the men who pay for sex are the first people who make contact with victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Ninety-seven interviews concerning the possible detection and reporting by clients of trafficking for prostitution were analysed, (48 of them with key informants – NGO members, prosecutors and police officers – 17 interviews with clients of prostitution and 22 with women who were victims of sex trafficking). The findings presented here show two types of clients, Personalisers and Thingers, with the former being the most likely to collaborate in the detection and rescue of victims of sex trafficking. However greater awareness in clients of prostitution is needed to enable them to collaborate.

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**Keywords:** Clients of prostitution, prostitution, sex trafficking

# ¿Pueden los Clientes que Pagan por Servicios Sexuales Ayudar a las Víctimas de Trata?

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## **Resumen**

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Este artículo explora la posibilidad de que los clientes de la prostitución puedan ayudar a las víctimas de la trata con fines sexuales. En España, la prostitución no está prohibida y los hombres que pagan por el sexo son las primeras personas que entran en contacto con las víctimas de la trata con fines de explotación sexual. Así, se llevaron a cabo 97 entrevistas que versaron sobre la posible detección e información de trata con fines de prostitución (48 de ellas con informantes clave: miembros de ONG, fiscales y policías; 17 entrevistas con clientes de la prostitución y 22 con mujeres víctimas del tráfico sexual). Los resultados presentados aquí muestran dos tipos de clientes, Personalizadores y Thingers, siendo el primero el que tiene mayor probabilidad de colaborar en la detección y rescate de víctimas del tráfico sexual. Sin embargo, se necesita una mayor conciencia de los clientes de la prostitución para que puedan colaborar.

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**Palabras clave:** Clientes de prostitución, prostitución, tráfico sexual

**T**he sex industry has become a very large and lucrative market offering a wide range of sexual services (Bernstein 2001; Sanders 2008). The sex trade receives different social and legal treatment in different countries, but in almost all of them the social stigma has fallen on the people who offer the sexual services and not those who buy them. From a legal point of view, three different approaches can be found: prohibition, whether punitive of one or both agents involved in the commercial sexual exchange; regulation or legislation of the commercial sex trade and decriminalization, which neither regulates nor prohibits (Brufao, 2008).

However, the sex trade can generate undesirable aspects, as for all current markets, such as is the case of forced prostitution, or more specifically the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking is a crime in the large majority of countries because it is a way of enslaving people. Trafficking is produced when women and girls are captured, tricked, transported, coerced and assaulted in different ways to force them to practise prostitution<sup>1</sup>.

Trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation has become one of the main concerns of the European Union. Between 2013 and 2014 there were 15,846 victims registered in the EU (Member States data) (European Commission, 2016). The Eurostat data also showed that 60% of the victims of human trafficking were women and around 20% were minors, and 67% of the trafficking was for sexual exploitation. In Spain, according to the Ministry of the Interior, in 2015 some 13,879 people were identified as being at risk of trafficking. The Public Prosecutor reported that 1548 people identified as victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in 2012 (Fiscalía General del Estado, 2016), 1428 victims were identified in 2014, 978 victims were identified in 2015, and 439 people were identified in 2016.

Spain has several peculiarities which lead to the country receiving particularly large numbers of women for prostitution (Guardia Civil, 2002), whether forced or voluntary. In the first place, there is a large demand for sexual services, as it is one of the countries with the greatest prevalence of male demand for this type of service, according to existing studies carried out to date (Hubert et al, 1998; Carael et al, 2006); and the offer is mainly supplied by foreign women, with very little presence of Spanish women (Meneses et al, 2003; Malgesini, 2005; TAMPEP, 2009). Secondly, Spain is

a very important tourist destination, which annually receives a large number of visitors. Last year 68 million tourists visited the country (INE, 2015). These tourists also could use of this type of service (an aspect that has been revealed by the Spanish press). Thirdly, owing to its geographic position, in the south of Europe, Spain has become one of the main entry points for the African population that want to enter Europe (Frontex, 2016). Likewise, Spain is the EU country that receives most immigration from Latin America, with which it shares cultural and linguistic links (Córdoba, 2015). And lastly, in Spain, as in many countries in the Mediterranean, there continues to be a patriarchal culture in which masculinity, virility and gender relations, although in the process of changing, are unequal and hierarchical. It might be said that currently there are relationships of subjection between men and women from the labour, economic, social, cultural and political points of view (Santolaria et al., 2004; INE, 2014). It has been suggested that the gap between the genders is related to a greater demand for sexual services and a wider view of women as sexual objects for masculine satisfaction (Mansson, 2006).

The analysis of the demand for sexual services can contribute to a better understanding of sex trafficking and other forms of forced labour (Anderson & O'Connell, 2003), but the study of the demand for prostitution is limited and fragmented in Spain, because it involves entering a hidden context and questioning the conduct and sexual behaviour of men from very varied social situations (family men, politicians, religious men, etc.) (Zaitch & Staring, 2009).

There are national and international studies that have worked on sex buyers with very different study objectives. They have described their sociodemographic characteristics, studying different samples of men to do so (Monto, 2004; Mariño et al., 2004; Ward et al., 2005). Of great interest is the prevalence of men who demand sexual services (Crauel et al., 2006; Ward et al., 2005) and the risk behaviors, especially the lack of protection during sexual activity, that are associated with such demand (Leonard, 1990; Morse, 1992; Graaf et al., 1992; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 1993; Faugier and Cranfield, 1995; Plumridge et al., 1997). The personality traits associated with the seeking of sexual services have also been studied (Xantidis et al., 2000) as well as the type of sexual practices demanded (Freund et al., 1991; Monto, 2001). Another topic examined is the violent behavior which some of the

clients display towards people in prostitution (Church et al., 2001). Also addressed is the use of alcohol and other drugs by clients in the context of sexual services, which gives an idea of the risks and the need for preventive action (Graaf et al., 1992; Sawyer et al, 2001; Meneses, 2007). Other researchers have examined the attitudes of clients towards prostitution, with such attitudes being found to be very diverse, and also the myths and beliefs concerning people who work as prostitutes (Sawyer et al., 2001). Finally, the reasons for paying for sexual services have also been explored (McKeganey & Barnard, 1996; Jordan, 1997; Monto, 2000; Pitts et al., 2004; Mansson, 2006). However, there are very few works that have focused on their relationship, attitudes and behavior in relation to trafficking for sexual exploitation (Di Nicola et al., 2009).

The motivations for men paying for sexual services are very diverse and have been highlighted in different studies (Leonard, 1990; McKeganey & Barnad, 1996; Jordan, 1997; Martilla, 2003; Pitts et al., 2004; Monto, 2004; Masson, 2006; Peng, 2007; Sanders 2008). On the one hand, it has been mentioned that clients of prostitution are looking for sex without complications or commitment, more frequent sex, sex with different women and for a variety of sexual practices. On the other hand, men seek company, friendship, someone to listen to them and a certain intimacy. In the latter case, the interaction of the clients with the people who offer them sexual services is greater, because the service is not limited to a sexual practice. It has been suggested that clients who want sexual services in more vulnerable prostitution contexts – from prostitutes who are addicts, smuggled or trafficked, who work on the street – are looking for lower-priced sexual practices and ease of access that avoids having to interact with the owners of the establishments or brothels, to avoid risks (Korf et al, 2005). Peng (2007) has mentioned that the attitude of indifference of the men who pay for sexual services towards the women who offer these services is motivated by wanting to obtain a lower price and because in general the conditions under which the women practise prostitution is not called into question. The men access a commercial relationship without thinking about who offers the service and how it is offered, because if coercion exists it would be acting as a mechanism to prop up the exploitation and this type of slavery (Raymond, 2004). The need to determine the responsibility of clients of prostitution without criminalizing or pathologizing has also been pointed to (Segurghetti, 2012).

Men who pay for sexual services are usually the first who, almost certainly, enter into contact with the victims of sex trafficking, before NGOs or the police, and could play a key role in the detection and rescue of those women who do not offer their sexual services voluntarily (Meneses et al., 2015). Distinguishing between forced prostitution and sex trafficking is not easy because there are no clear definitions, even from the professionals who prosecute this crime and those who deal with the victims (Sanchís, 2011). Therefore, the following question arises: Could they help to free women who are not practising prostitution voluntarily? What characteristics or circumstances are needed to enable clients to be a help against sex trafficking? These are the questions that guide this study, whose purpose is to explore the possibilities that clients of prostitution could be a help or a bridge to the rescue of victims.

## **Methods**

The data that are analysed in this study come from wider research into the needs of the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, commissioned from the authors by the Spanish government and carried out between November 2013 and November 2014. Only a part of this research is presented here.

### **Participants**

Information was gathered from three types of participants: a) key informants (members of NGOs, prosecutors, police officers). Forty-eight semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants from ten Spanish provinces (Asturias, Galicia, Catalonia, Andalusia, Madrid, Valencia, Castille-Leon, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands). The provinces were selected taking into account the number of adult clubs found in each of them, choosing those provinces with the largest number, by in the theoretical sampling (Robinson, 2014). This data was facilitated by the Border Police, who are responsible for the issue of forced prostitution (UCRIF). Three kinds of informants were interviewed: 9 prosecutors, 18 police officers, belonging to two different Spanish police bodies, and 21 NGO members, generally professionals who work for these organisations.

Table 1

*Key informants*

Informants	N
Prosecutors	9
National Police (UCRIF)	9
Guardia Civil (Other typology of Police)	9
NGOs	21
Total	48

b) The second group of participants were men who pay for sexual services (Table 2). Nineteen interviews were carried out with men who had paid for sexual services at least five times in their life, attempting to diversify the sample as much as possible in accordance with different socio-demographic variables. In general men are not willing to relate their experience of buying sexual services, and even less so in a recorded interview. As this difficulty was already known to the researchers, and their research involved a random telephone survey of Spanish men about their knowledge of sex trafficking (Meneses et al., 2015), at the end of the questionnaire the men interviewed were invited to participate. This option was offered to the first one hundred men in the random telephone survey, as well as to a sample gathered on a public street in the city of Madrid. From these first one hundred telephone interviews, fifteen men were willing to be interviewed, but it proved very complicated to contact them later and to carry out the interview. In 9 cases interviews were obtained. The interviews carried out on the street proved easier, at least at first. Arrangements were made to meet the men later to carry out the interview in more depth, but after a few hours or days they had usually changed their minds. For this reason, it was decided to carry out the in-depth interview at the moment they agreed to be interviewed. Ten interviews were carried out this way. All the men who participated did so voluntarily and their anonymity was guaranteed.



c) Finally, information was collected from 22 women who were victims of sex trafficking, aged between 17 and 35 years, and who came from Latin American countries, Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan countries.

## **Procedure**

The interviews carried out with the key informants were all recorded with their consent and under guarantee of anonymity. The length varied between 20 and 90 minutes, and they were transcribed literally. An interview script was drawn up which served as a guide for all informants. Although all of them were asked basic questions, further questions and nuances were incorporated as the research progressed, using emerging research design (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Three areas connected to the purpose of the study formed the basis of the fundamental questions: to what extent clients who pay for sexual services might detect and report sex trafficking situations; if they were aware of the fact that the person who they paid might be a victim of sex trafficking; and if they believed that clients would get involved with the victims if they detected them.

With regard to the interviews carried out with clients, these were structured in four areas: initiation in paying for sexual services, motivations, awareness of sex trafficking, and their possible collaboration if they detected situations of sex trafficking or coercion. Of the 19 initial interviews, two were discounted because they gave very short and contradictory replies, leaving the study with 17 interviews with clients.

Finally, two types of investigative techniques were used to compile the needs of the victims: individual interviews and group interviews. As they are victims who have lived in a situation of slavery and have therefore experienced trauma in their lives, the considerations described by the WHO for these circumstances have been applied (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003) and, following the ethical recommendations, the welfare of the victims has been prioritized over the investigation. Willingness to participate, the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality, together with the information offered about the objectives of study, were the basic instruments used for inviting them to participate in the study. Contact with the women was made through NGOs working with victims of Human Trafficking for sexual exploitation in four areas of the country (Andalusia, Catalonia, Asturias and Balearic Islands).

## **Analysis**

All information obtained from the interviews, once transcribed, was subjected to analysis, uploading it into the qualitative analysis software Nvivo v.10. Some basic categories were drawn up based on the literature review, the aims of the research and the interview script, and these were used to codify all the transcripts obtained. Later this first coding was refined, reworking it as the analysis advanced and as relationships between categories and informants appeared. Therefore, the content analysis that began in an exploratory way, inspecting the words and phrases of the transcripts, continued with a first identification of codes and categories of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Taking into account key concepts identified from the literature review, another member of the team reviewed the categorising system, which was later discussed and agreed, leading to a re-examination of the material gathered. When the categories were clarified, the coding of all the interviews was carried out. The resulting group of analytical categories and sub-categories was organised around six thematic dimensions: (1) characteristics of clients, (2) initiation, (3) motivations for paying for sexual services, (4) awareness of sex trafficking, (5) detection of women who are victims of sex trafficking, (6) help or reporting by clients. After the coding, the central codes were extracted together with their text extracts and from these, using a constant comparison of the events and incidents revealed, relationships, connections, similarities and differences were sought, in order to interpret the findings.

Different strategies of validation in qualitative methodology were used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The triangulation of the content by informant; when a minimum of three informants expressed a social fact, it was deemed valid, in this way applying criteria of credibility; triangulation of researchers was also used, especially in the analysis, in such a way that analysis was carried out in parallel and then later reviewed. The constant comparison of data and facts, as already stated, and the data saturation, which is closely related to the previous strategies. Lastly, confirmability was considered in the review by the researchers and the validation of content by other experts (Denman & Haro, 2000).

## Results

Based on the analysis and results from the interviews conducted and two previous specific works on the topic addressed (Di Nicola et al, 2009; Meneses, Rúa & Uroz, 2018), two types of clients emerged in relation to our research question. Two kinds of position appeared regarding the possibility of men who pay for sexual services being able to detect victims of sex trafficking and act in consequence. These two positions are exemplified in the two different profiles of clients based on their motivations for paying for sexual services and which we have called Personalisers and Thinkers, because of the type of relationship they establish with the women who practise prostitution.

I see two types of client: the one that goes to a club every now and then, and they do exist, as an escape, whether married or single, and who in some cases even maintain relationships that are not sexual, but rather sentimental with the women, and they get involved, and there are fewer of them; and then there are the clients that are there to have a great time, and that's it. (Police officer)

*Personalisers* are looking for something beyond the strictly sexual. In addition to sexual practices, these clients want to have an emotional relationship, with friendship and warmth. They are looking for someone who will listen to their everyday problems, or the problems they have had with their partners. It is possible that many of them do not have anyone in their lives with whom they can let off steam or talk. It has been highlighted that in general men do not access the support offered by social and health services, because it puts their manhood into question (Marcos et al., 2013). However, both men and women have similar problems and the need to share with others the difficulties they experience in life. In the case of men, it is probable that the people who practise prostitution can fulfil this function, as this is a hidden context, male, and separate from the rest of society, which guarantees them confidentiality.

In addition, some clients seek a partner from among the women that offer sexual services in adult clubs, because in their everyday social relationships they cannot find them (López, 2012). The forming of couples between the women who practise prostitution and their clients was known to many

members if the NGOs who were interviewed. However, they also mentioned the fact that many of these relationships did not last very long, or ended in domestic violence.

Victims of trafficking who were originally victims in brothels and who now end up in the domestic violence courts because of domestic violence experienced in relation to their partner. But they have prior experience of being victims of trafficking because they were rescued by their partner from a club. (NGO)

I always tell the girls: 'if you're looking for a boyfriend in a club or in a flat... you are doomed to fail. And I know this from experience, because of all the years I have spent on the job. It is a millstone that an 'abnormal' man, because a man who goes to the clubs is abnormal, will get to the first fight and he'll tell her 'well I rescued you from being a whore.' And in 95% of the cases it ends up in domestic violence. (Police officer)

The clients we have labelled Thingers were only in search of their own sexual satisfaction, buying a quick, varied service with no kind of commitment or personal involvement. Sex was something they bought like any other kind of service or product. For this reason, they did not want any problems or to know anything about the person offering them sexual services. These clients focus on the appearance of the person offering the sexual services without going deeper into her living conditions.

Other clients were looking for fun and relaxation, and paying for sexual services was a leisure activity, which might also include the consumption of psychoactive substances, principally alcohol and cocaine.

When the client goes to a whorehouse, he wants a complete party, sex and drugs. Therefore, many of the women find themselves obliged to use and sell drugs, because if they don't they won't hire them." (Prosecutor)

Many of them seek company to have fun and to have a nice time. In these motivations two of the prototypes presented can be found, but with different nuances. While some clients would not agree to obtain sexual services from a

person who was forced or trafficked, others will neither question nor care about this situation.

I am convinced that there are many clients who, if they knew about the phenomenon and what is hiding behind the smiling girls, would really think again about going. (Prosecutor)

I mean the majority of consumers of prostitution do not think about the women who are there, they just use them. (NGO)

The clients who we have called *Personalisers* might report a situation of coercion of those women who are practising prostitution against their will, or who are victims of sex trafficking. In fact, some of the women who are victims who were interviewed, and the police themselves, have experiences of rescue of these people thanks to the clients.

Years ago, when I was based in another Civil Guard Command (police building), there was a young man who detected this situation and through him an operation was initiated that ended safely. (Police officer)

I was on the street, closely watched, and he brought me food and everything... he helped me. (Albanian victim, 23 years old)

However, the prosecutors and some members of NGOs were quite sceptical about the idea of clients as collaborators, who might detect and report situations of sex trafficking. They mostly had the vision of the second profile; that is to say, a client who was only seeking his own self-interest and didn't want any problems; a client for whom women who practise prostitution are just a sexual product for their satisfaction.

The client who is going to consume a sexual service, wants sex pure and simple, he wants absolutely nothing else. If that wasn't the case he'd look for his sex elsewhere; that's what he wants and that's why he goes to a prostitute. In other words, I want this, I go, I pay and I don't want to have anything to do with anything else. (Prosecutor)

## **Women Victims of Sex Trafficking**

The contributions from women who are victims of sex trafficking regarding clients were in a similar vein to the interviewed informants. The majority of the women indicated that an important group were those clients who had a family and who paid for sexual services secretly. For this reason, they didn't want to find themselves involved in any incident. They were quite sceptical about the idea that they might offer them help or support.

The majority of the men are married and they don't want to get involved in this kind of problem. (Victim from the Dominican Republic, 30 years old)

Sub-Saharan victims indicated that the clients they had had, not only wanted sexual services, but also some of them had wanted to receive domestic services (house cleaning). In this case they were dealing with men who lived alone.

The clients paid for sex or to get married, to go to their house to clean for them and have sex, to be a cleaning and sexual servant. (Nigerian victim, 23 years old)

Sub-Saharan victims also perceived a certain racism in many of the clients they catered for. In some cases, they expressed their fear of saying something to the clients because they didn't know whether they had any connections with the traffickers. And in other cases they were monitored, mainly on the street, so that they wouldn't talk too much with their clients, just enough to agree the sexual service. This prevented them from being able to ask for help.

They watched me so that I couldn't talk to a client for more than 5 minutes. If more than 5 minutes passed, then I had a problem.

E: Were there other girls like you, from your country?

R: Yes, there were 3. Me and 2 more.

E: And could the 3 of your do something together? Escape together?

R: No. One did escape. She escaped and she is married to a Spaniard. She's well and she has a daughter. We were closely watched and in the end I couldn't stand it any more and I said, take me back to my

country, keep the money, I don't want anything, I only want to go back to my country. But he said no, that he would kill my son. I asked people for help, that man that I met. And he helped me."  
 (Albanian victim, 23 years old)

Some of the victims had received help on specific occasions from some clients, but none of them was rescued by any of them. It was the NGO professionals or the police who most often mentioned this kind of help coming from clients.

**Men who Pay for Sexual Services and their Response to Sex Trafficking**

The interviewed men were between 29 and 55 years old, with different levels of education and, with the exception of four of them, all were born and were resident in Spain. Around 25% were still paying for sexual services at the time of the interview. Table 2 presents the collected socio-demographic data.

Table 2  
*Clients of Prostitution*

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Type of relationship*</b>
Client 1	39	Spain	Baccalaureate	Without partner
Client 2	30	Spain	Baccalaureate	Stable partner
Client 3	50	Spain	University	Stable partner
Client 4	38	Spain		Stable partner
Client 5	29	Spain	Baccalaureate	Stable partner
Client 6	30	Spain	Baccalaureate	Stable partner
Client 7	32	Spain	Primary	
Client 8	42	Spain	Baccalaureate	Without partner
Client 9	39	Spain	Secondary	Casual partner
Client 10	45	Colombia	Baccalaureate	Stable partner
Client 11	38	Spain	University	Casual partner
Client 12	45	Spain	Primary	Without partner
Client 13	24	Morocco	Secondary	Stable partner
Client 14	50	Ecuador	University	Stable partner
Client 15	55	Spain	No education	Without partner

(continued)

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Type of relationship*</b>
Client 16	53	Spain	Primary	Stable partne
Client 17	50	Peru	Baccalaureate	Stable partner

*Note.* \*In the moment of interview

### ***Initiation***

The first times that men paid for sexual services were usually group experiences, and these served as an initiation into the practice, exploring adult resources and trying them out.

I did it because of my friends, to give it a try. The first time I went with my gang of friends, to have fun; the typical thing, one person does it so everyone does. (Client 4)

I had to show my friends whether or not I was macho and that was it. It was a way of measuring my manhood. (Client 10)

The turn on of having immediate sex. I went with friends. Normally this is something we do on a stag night, or with a few friends. (Client 16)

The majority of men went for the first time when they were young, when they didn't have frequent sexual relations or, even if they did, because they liked trying sex with many different women, or accessing a type of woman with a physical appearance they thought they could only get by paying. On other occasions, paying for sexual services came up as a continuation of a night of fun, especially if they hadn't picked anyone up. These adult clubs have very flexible, long opening hours so they can make their offer at any time, and it was the only place open to have a final drink.

Now more young men go, who arrive after a night of partying and don't have the ability to... who haven't picked anyone up, and it's like, come on, let's go. (NGO)



Once a brothel is being visited, even if only with the intention of having a last drink, the opportunity to pay for sexual services can arise. A sort of apprenticeship takes place, almost as if it were a rite of passage, an instrument to publicly prove masculinity, virility and heterosexuality to the rest of the group of male friends. It is later on, after being initiated, that the client goes alone.

On stag nights nothing much happens, because the group pressure is really strong..., 'what should I do... they'll tell everyone...how will they look at me...', but you have already opened the door. Any man who goes into a place like that, the first thing he does is look at doors, girls, opening hours, how everything is laid out... It's an apprenticeship. Then they try it alone, or they go with someone else who has already been and... 'you take me...'. In fact, the women know, they'll tell you, Friday and Saturday we don't work much, because lots and lots of men come, but they don't show up for that. Then they come back. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday... it's the same ones who came at the weekend. (NGO)

Going to an adult club and paying for sexual services forms part of masculine socialization among some Spanish men. It is a ritual gesture that functions as group cohesion and consolidates relationships between men, where the men earn respect and status among their peers because of the public demonstration of their heterosexuality (Vasquez del Aguila, 2013).

### ***Motivations***

The reasons for paying for sexual services are closely tied to the processes of initiation and continuation, mentioned above. Among the motivations can be found curiosity and excitement at visiting an unknown, socially prohibited place that is only open to men. There are motivations that are common to all men interviewed, such as having sex with different women, uncommon sexual practices, or taking drugs in company.

Well for curiosity, arousal, I don't know... because I felt like having sexual relations right then. (Client 11)

It was someone's birthday, you go out with your friends... you go to party and to experiment.(Client 12)

It's part of going out at night, and then in the morning you go whoring, that's where we end up, where else were we going to go? (Client 13)

Because I liked the girls, they were hot. (Client 14)

Other motivations seemed to be related to age. So the younger men might be attracted by sex with no commitment. In spite of the fact that relations between young people have become freer than those of earlier generations, women expect a certain reciprocity, even if merely sexual. Paying for sex means the man only has to think about himself, and doesn't have to respond to his partner, or one-night stand. Many of them thought that going whoring was cheaper than picking women who aren't prostitutes up in a disco or pub.

Sometimes it might be more expensive to go to a normal disco, or pick someone up in a pub. (Client 7)

We were looking for the easiest way to have sex. (Client 17)

The more mature men, and even older men, might be looking for a partner, affection, company or someone to talk to, whether or not they already had a stable partner.

Lots go whoring because they can't get at home what they can get on the street, it's as simple as that. That's why the lady is at home and the whore on the street. (Client 10)

I was living alone and that's what the woman did for a living and she came to my house. At that time, she came round more than once, the chance arose, and we even became friends. (Client 3)

In spite of having established a friendly relationship, he continued to pay her for her services.

One thing has got nothing to do with the other, we have to know how to separate them. One thing is friendship, another is sex. (Client 3)

For some clients, their view of the people who practise prostitution was of sex professionals who offered a service for which they paid in a voluntary relationship between adults. In other words, just one more service in a consumer society.

### ***Knowledge of Sex Trafficking***

Practically all people interviewed had heard about the trafficking and smuggling of women for sexual exploitation, mostly in the media, whenever a trafficking network was broken up. But their knowledge was superficial and they did not distinguish between trafficking and smuggling. The majority said that they had not met women who were coerced or trafficked. They thought that all women who practised prostitution did so because they wanted to and because of the money they could earn.

It's not seen. The clients who use the services of the women who do this work or who are forced, never see it. They don't see anyone like that, and if you ask the women or get close to them, they never tell you. I have spent a lot of money on women because I started work when I was very young and had good jobs in which I earned a lot of money, and I have never seen people who are being forced with a gun held to their head, or who are being forced to..., and when I have got close to the women, they have never said that anyone was forcing them. I have heard about it on TV, I've read about it in the press, but I have never seen it as a user. And I have been a user more than 200 times. (Client 8)

In general clients won't be able to think that the people who offer the services to them are doing it against their will, and a certain sector didn't want to think about it, and even less find themselves involved.

Because if you use this kind of service of female companionship, in the first place you don't ask yourself whether the women are forced, if they have economic needs... you only think about yourself. It's very selfish, but often sex for men, like for me, was like that. I used these services because I had no

relations with women and it seemed really quick to use these services.  
(Client 9)

### ***Detecting and Reporting***

In some of the clients' speeches, it said situations of coercion, abuse and the presence of possible minors in the place where they paid for sexual services were detected (prostitution of minors is an offence in Spain). This knowledge came about because in some cases there was a degree of relationship, closeness or trust with the person who offered the sexual services and she admitted what her situation was.

#### **Have you ever come across a woman who was forced to practise prostitution?**

Yes, I came across one out there.

#### **How did you find out?**

Because I went upstairs with her and she told me, she said she was forced and trying to escape, but she couldn't escape. (Client 12)

In the girls' clubs there is a daily tariff and the owners keep a percentage of what they are paid... There were a lot of young girls, and even some minors. All of them were foreigners, from the East (Europe) most of them, there were very few Latin Americans. (Client 1)

In others, it was the regularity of their visits to the same place to buy sexual services with different women that led them to discover the living conditions of the women in the club, just as referred to by the police officers.

But I think that the client who reports it is someone who is a habitual client and who develops a certain trust with the girls, because until they trust you their lips are sealed. There is no way they will speak to you, they won't tell you a thing..." (Police officer)

Young women who are minors will never say they are under-age because of fears of reprisal from the owners of the clubs or of police intervention. From the data obtained in the interviews with the police, it seems that girls and adolescents are hidden and are only offered at a much higher price to clients who ask for them, above all those who requested young girls.

It is rare that the occasional client, or one who is not frequent, whose aim was simply to obtain a sexual service, would recognise, or even think about, possible situations of coercion, sex trafficking or exploitation of the women who practise prostitution in the places they visit.

The fact is that they don't see it, because they are not looking for it. They don't want to see it... So a man who enters a club, his attitude changes immediately, he says, they're here because they want to be... you never find one who has been harmed, nor one who looks unhappy.... They're fantastic! So, for the men to change, they'd have to go into a club and meet a different situation. (NGO)

When interviewees were asked about the possibility of collaboration, two positions towards sex trafficking were found: firstly, that of helping the victim and even reporting the situation to the police; and secondly that of not getting involved because of fear, lack of knowledge or keeping anonymity. Both positions can be associated with the two client profiles mentioned at the beginning.

It is unlikely that they will detect it, and in cases where it has been detected, it is probable that the collaboration is limited to giving the girl their phone number. Well, there are cases when it's true that they have taken the girl with them and collaborated, but there's not many. (Police officer)

I think so. In fact, I have come across more than one case in which it is the client who has helped the girl to get out of certain situations... Normally they are clients with certain bonds, a special client, right? There are the worst bastards in the world, who treat them like dogs, and there are clients who are not like that, and who have a relationship... (NGO)

If I came across a girl who was forced, I would probably look the other way to avoid getting involved in trouble. (Client 6)

On occasions special habitual clients fall in love with the women who provide them with services, looking for a partner among them, as has already been mentioned. In these cases, the men wanted to establish a relationship outside the club and it was then that they discovered the sex trafficking or forced prostitution.

Many women end up marrying their client, they end up having an affectionate relationship with him; her soul mate, it turns out, was a client." (NGO)

The only one to call us is the client who falls in love. The rest of the clients, forget it. (Police officer)

In some cases they have reported it, very sporadically, when a client has more or less become infatuated with a girl, he has got a bit involved, and she has opened up a little saying 'I can't leave...' In these cases, we have been told, either anonymously, or by means of... (Police officer)

It happens more with foreign women. I was married to a foreign woman, and she was involved in that, and I got her out. (Client 12)

## **Discussion**

The question that motivated this study is not an easy one to answer. The results from the interviews carried out highlight two positions or extremes among clients of prostitution. Those who have been and continue to be a help for breaking up trafficking networks by reporting when they find someone who is practising prostitution against their will. And those who will not get involved under any circumstances for various reasons. Between these two extremes it is possible that there are intermediate positions and behaviours, given the large variation in clients (Sanders, 2008). In spite of clients interviewed having heard of sex trafficking, they did not show enough information and knowledge about it.

In an exploratory way it seems that there may be a relationship between the motives that lead clients to pay for sexual services and the possible detection and involvement in combating the offence of sex trafficking: a) if the motivations are not focused exclusively on sex it is easier to achieve a

greater intimacy and knowledge of the people who offer sexual services, encouraging the possibility of support and help; b) if the motivations are focused exclusively on obtaining pleasure and the people who offer it are merely instruments to achieve this, in other words, if it is merely an economic transaction or exchange without personal involvement, it will be difficult to achieve any kind of involvement, as it is a strictly commercial relationship.

Attitudes towards and perception of the women who practise prostitution are also important. If clients think that the women who practise prostitution like being prostitutes and enjoy the activity, they will have a different attitude than if they think that they are victims of their traffickers (Weitzer, 2005), and these very different perceptions may give rise to different levels of involvement by the clients. If they were to perceive prostitution as an exploitative activity, it is possible that a wide variety of men, knowing this, would not participate (Prasad, 1999). Lastly, an important aspect with regard to answering our original question was that in the Spanish legal and judicial context it wasn't, and for the moment still isn't, an offence.

Studies on clients of prostitution are recent and clients have not been investigated as thoroughly as the people offering sexual services. Men who pay for sex have not been the focus of interest because they were seen to be participating in a man's game (Della et al., 2007), as this behaviour was considered more masculine than feminine. It is precisely because of this hegemony and their central role as the target market of the sex industry that one can appeal to the clients to take responsibility and avoid contributing to the crimes that are related to prostitution.

If paying for sexual services is considered just another local or global product in late capitalism (Bernstein, 2001), then it is possible that a large group of men does not want to participate in a crime and would be prepared to report cases they find of a woman trafficked and forced to practise prostitution. We could hypothesize that they do not want to participate in the trafficking of human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation and that they may be willing to collaborate in the detection of victims; but that does not mean that they are willing to give up paying for sex because they do not consider this action a crime.

Clients do not want to perceive a purely commercial transaction when they pay for sex, but rather they want a certain amount of quality in the relationship they establish, even when they are conscious of the fact that this is a mere

show (Sanders, 2008). This space of intimacy with the person who provides them with pleasure and company may encourage a greater awareness of the living conditions of these people, which allows for a new dimension of civic responsibility. However, if paying for sexual services is simply the reflection of an unequal patriarchal society and if prostitution highlights the most obvious aspects of the oppression of women, then it is possible that these clients will distance themselves from the problems of the people who practise prostitution and will not care about their situation at all. Although the market for sexual services is just another capitalist industry, the reality is that it is still not seen entirely in this way, and this leads to many negative repercussions for the actors involved (stigma, rejection, persecution, etc.) (Weitzer, 2005; Sanders, 2008; Di Nicola et al, 2009).

However, in some studies (Cauduro et al., 2009) in which clients have been asked about sex trafficking, they have minimized the possible situations of coercion, believing that prostitutes practise their occupation with complete freedom. These same attitudes and statements have also been found in this study among Spanish clients interviewed, principally in the type of client we have called Thingers. These clients are not interested in the living conditions of the women who supply their sexual services, because they are only focused on the sexual practices they provide. This kind of client would not be the type to detect and help to identify and rescue the victims of sex trafficking, because they are pleasure seekers, on occasions with few feelings of guilt or compassion towards the women who offer them their services (Zaitch & Staring, 2009). Trafficked women are more vulnerable than those who exercise prostitution freely, and whether they can choose the number and type of client they want, or whether they are exposed to violent clients will depend on the level of coercion and abuse that they suffer (Raymond, 2004). Clients who are Thingers, because they are only looking for a product of sexual satisfaction, reject those women who practise prostitution without much motivation and energy, given that a woman who is a victim of sex trafficking will not exercise prostitution with the same determination as those who do so freely, whose performance must be the most authentic show possible (Huysamen & Boonzaier, 2015). This kind of client may find the conditions in which women exercise prostitution irrelevant as long as the women are enthusiastic about the service they offer. To this fact we must also add that



the majority of trafficked women are foreigners and find themselves in a country that is unknown to them.

However, those clients who are looking for something more than sex (company, intimacy, friendship, a partner...) may be excellent collaborators in the fight against sex trafficking. With these clients there may only be one thing that paralyses them when thinking about reporting: fear of stigma or of their family finding out. Guaranteeing anonymity and normalizing sexual services may help to minimize these fears.

In summary, it is possible that a sector of prostitution clients can be a help and report against trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and this type of client would be one that establishes a more intimate relationship with the women who practices prostitution because they look for something more than sex. It would be those customers that we have called Personalisers.

The sex market and industry needs to be studied in greater depth to enable us to differentiate more clearly between forced and voluntary prostitution. There are two extreme visions that make it difficult to combat crimes against persons that are committed within the practice of prostitution. On the one hand, the perceptions that minimize the number and conditions of people who are victims of sex trafficking involved in prostitution, many of these supported by ideologies that commodify sexual services (Weitzer, 2005). On the other hand, the perception that all prostitution is violence against women and an involuntary forced activity from which all women must be freed (Farley & Barkan 1998). Prostitution is not exclusively practised by women, although they are in the majority; men and transsexuals are also involved. We must overcome dichotomised ideologies and put people in the central position. In this sense a policy and vision of reducing risks, or a more pragmatic vision, could be the most viable, and key to fighting sex trafficking. In this sense, providing information and raising awareness of the men who pay for sexual services without calling into question their behaviour allows us to recruit allies against sex trafficking, unlike more condemnatory postures.

This study has some limitations, which means that the results cannot be generalised to all Spanish clients. In the first place, the sample of clients does not cover all the diversity of socio-demographic characteristics that could be obtained, and although new types of clients have been tracked with regard to the selected criteria, it is possible that there are positions towards sex

trafficking and smuggling of women that are more nuanced than those found in this study. Secondly, the majority of men are secretive about paying for sexual services, and when they are asked about this behaviour, even when they recognise it, they do not usually give much detail about their motivations and actions with the women, omitting some aspects. Thirdly, this research has been directed at female heterosexual prostitution, and the results may not coincide outside this group of clients.

In spite of the described limitations, this study has gathered an important number of interviews – with clients of prostitution, professionals who work in the context of prostitution and women who are victims of sex trafficking – which allows for data saturation and triangulation between informants, giving rigour and validity to the qualitative research itself. Our results show that the relationship that exists between the motivation for paying for sexual services and the detection and cooperation of clients in the rescue or help of victims of sex trafficking is a central aspect when considering men as allies against the crime of sex trafficking.

A greater awareness must be raised in men who pay for sexual services, and this can be achieved by means of campaigns or awareness-raising programmes against coercive prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. Firstly, this must be aimed at clients of sexual services or prostitution, offering them information about the indicators that would enable them to identify victims and routes for reporting the situations of these people, in a non-punitive context and with no negative consequences arising from their collaboration. Secondly, this must be aimed at young men who are the possible future clients, informing them about sex trafficking, rethinking gender relations and the central role that masculine sexuality plays as a part of this commercial relationship, with no need for any lack of respect, abuse, mistreatment or other similar behaviours.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Palermo Protocols, Article 3. Use of terms, United Nations, 2000.

*"Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum,*

*the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs...*

*The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth [above] shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth [above] have been used. In:* [https://www.unodc.org/documents/middleeastandnorthafrica/organised-crime/UNITED\\_NATIONS\\_CONVENTION\\_AGAINST\\_TRANSNATIONAL\\_ORGANIZED\\_CRIME\\_AND\\_THE\\_PROTOCOLS\\_THERETO.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/middleeastandnorthafrica/organised-crime/UNITED_NATIONS_CONVENTION_AGAINST_TRANSNATIONAL_ORGANIZED_CRIME_AND_THE_PROTOCOLS_THERETO.pdf)

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