

Masculinities & Social Change
Online First – First Published on 27th March 2024
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<http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/msc.12595>

Perception of Sex Buyers by Young Spaniards

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to broaden the knowledge on the social perception of people who pay for commercial sex. An online questionnaire was distributed to 3126 young people in Spain. Respondents did not have a common perception about people who pay for sex, although several considered that a *rich-buyer* is associated with “partner”, “money”, “education” and “Spanish”; a *risky-buyer* meets the variables of “satisfying their domination needs”, “reaffirm masculinity”, “is violent” and “do not want to use preservative”; a *low-status buyer* has “limited money”, “is an immigrant” and “has a low level of education”; an *insecure-buyer* presents variables indicating that he is “insecure with the opposite sex” and “dissatisfied with their partner”; and a *single-buyer* “has no couple” and “is single”. These perceptions help to improve awareness campaigns against human trafficking and sexual exploitation and increase the visibility of the responsible parties who pay and encourage these crimes.

Keywords

Sex payers, perception, youth, prostitution, commercial sex

To cite this article: Rúa-Vieites, A., Meneses-Falcon, C., & García-Vazquez, O. (2024). Perception of sex buyers by young Spaniards. *Masculinities & Social Change*, Online First – First Published on 27th March 2024 <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/msc.12595>

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Masculinities & Social Change
Online First – Primera publicación el 27 de marzo de 2024
© Autor(s) 2024
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/mse.12595>

Percepción de los Compradores de Sexo por parte de los Jóvenes Españoles

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Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación es ampliar el conocimiento sobre la percepción social de las personas que pagan por sexo comercial. Se distribuyó un cuestionario online a 3126 jóvenes en España. Los encuestados no tenían una percepción común sobre las personas que pagan por sexo. Detectándose los siguientes tipos: un *rich-buyer* se asocia con "pareja", "dinero", "educación" y "español"; un pagador *risky-buyer* está asociado con "satisfacer sus necesidades de dominación", "reafirmar la masculinidad", "es violento" y "no quiere usar preservativo"; un *low-status buyer* tiene "dinero limitado", "es inmigrante" y "tiene un bajo nivel de educación"; un *insecure-buyer* está relacionado con "inseguro con el sexo opuesto" e "insatisfecho con su pareja"; y un *single-buyer* "no tiene pareja" y "es soltero". Estas percepciones permitirán mejorar las campañas de sensibilización contra la trata de personas y la explotación sexual y aumentan la visibilidad de las partes responsables que pagan y fomentan estos delitos.

Palabras clave

Comprador de sexo, percepción, juventud, prostitución, sexo comercial

Cómo citar este artículo: Rua-Vieites, A., Meneses-Falcon, C., y García-Vazquez, O. (2024). Percepción de los compradores de sexo por parte de los jóvenes españoles. *Masculinities & Social Change*, Online First – Primera publicación el 27 de marzo de 2024 <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/mse.12595>

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In the past few years, Spain has been holding a huge debate about prostitution. Similar to many other countries, Spain is in legal ambiguity because prostitution is neither illegal nor legal. However, pimping, the coercion and induction to prostitution, was penalized in articles 187 and 188 of the Spanish Penal Code. With the Citizen Security Law of 2015 (*Ley de Seguridad Ciudadana del 2015*), punishment was introduced for paying for or offering commercial sex on the street. Regarding this new sanction, it has been pointed out that in general, women who sell sex are punished while men who pay for sex are not (Villacampa, 2017).

An international survey has suggested that Spain has one of the highest rates of commercial sex consumption (UNODC, 2012). Despite this reference being old, and the data for Spain having been collected in the 1990s, it is still frequently used in Spain. One recent study pointed out that the higher consumption of prostitution in Spain could be related to the inadequate use of the data to justify restrictive and prohibitionist politics (Meneses & Urío, 2021).

The demand for sexual services has always been invisible in relation to offerings, and it has not been until recent decades that greater empirical research attention has focused on this issue (Marttila, 2003). While the offering of commercial sex has been related to several social problems, namely, drug dependency, health, violence, migration, the demand for commercial sex has not been seen as blameworthy but as a “male” activity (Della et al., 2009). It has also been pointed out that the willingness to risk, religious beliefs and desire to satisfy needs are related to commercial sex in men (Cameron & Collins, 2003).

The prevalence of payment for sexual services is variable in Europe, with a value of 10% in the United Kingdom (Groom & Nandwani, 2006), 11.3% in Danish men (Buttmann et al., 2011), 13% in Norwegians (Schei & Stigum, 2010), and from 20% any time in life to 15% in the last year in Spain (Meneses, Rúa et al., 2018).

However, the characteristics of the people who pay for commercial sex were inconsistent. Della et al. (2009) differentiated two groups of men who pay for commercial sex: experimenters, with a negative vision of sex work and sex workers, and regulars, with a liberal vision of sex work who considered sex as a commodity and desirable. Meneses, Rúa & Uroz (2018) pointed out five types of men who pay for commercial sex: Funners, who are seeking leisure and entertainment; Thingers, who want sex with no involvement or commitment; the Couple Seekers, who are trying to find a partner; the Riskers, who are attracted by sex and by the associated risk behaviours; and the Personalizers who want sex with intimacy and companionship. Furthermore, commercial sex has also been associated more with single men, directive or professional occupation, weekly alcohol and drug consumption, or having had several partners, especially outside of their country (Jones et al., 2014).

In relation to paying for sex, it has also been demonstrated that discourses about commercial sex contribute to the construction of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (Huysamen, 2015). The author explained that this is because commercial sex is more related to the reaffirmation of masculinity, male sexual ability and sexual attraction, and hypermasculinity than a necessity for natural impulses. Moreover, the statements “have frequent sex”, “multiple couples” and “lack of commitment” have been associated with hegemonic masculinity.

In this way, in traditional Mediterranean societies, paying for sex was something normal to start sexual activities for men and to manage the several years of sexual abstinence or virginity until marriage (Guereña, 2003). Furthermore, it has been pointed out that experienced clients

use the internet and new consumers are socialized online, thus creating a subculture of men who pay for sex (Horswill & Weitzer, 2018). It was also highlighted that prostitution spaces maintain traditional gender roles, where power and control persist in humans (Martila, 2003).

However, the relevance of men who pay for sex in trafficking and forced prostitution situations was highlighted by some studies, and clients were seen as responsible for human trafficking and coerced prostitution because their demand creates the offer (Farley, 2006); moreover, commercial sex objectifies women's bodies and contributes to gender inequalities (De Miguel, 2012). In relation to these previous perspectives, prostitution should not exist. Due to this concept, in 1990, Sweden legally introduced prostitution demander punishment. Thus, by controlling the offer and demand, prostitution and human trafficking were seen to be vanquished, which was considered to promote gender equality in Swedish society. Other countries have followed this path, such as France and some Nordic countries. However, criminalizing prostitution demand – but not the offer – has created a huge debate worldwide. Accordingly, Vanwesenbeeck (2017) has pointed out how criminalization of either the offer or demand creates more social, health and security problems for sex workers than more tolerant politics.

Previous research has suggested that women in prostitution are affected by multiple axes of inequality and intersectionality (gender, nationality, ethnicity, family responsibilities, immigration status, language, level of prostitution, or location of work) that determine their situation within the sex industry, providing them with varying degrees of protection against violence from clients, partners, pimps, society, and police (Meneses-Falcón & García-Vázquez, 2023).

Regarding violence, sex workers have suffered from physical and sexual violence, especially when negotiating services and the use of condoms (Decker et al., 2013). However, few clients are violent, particularly clients of indoor prostitution, which is safer than outdoor prostitution (Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Sanders, 2004). Conversely, clients are the first ones who get in touch with human trafficking victims, and they could play an important role in the detection of coerced women; however, this requires a noncriminalized context that facilitates cooperation (Meneses, Uroz et al., 2018).

The current literature has pointed out male identities in relation to prostitution (Gómez-Suarez et al., 2015; Gómez-Suarez et al., 2016). However, the social perception of sex buyers in society and in youth is relatively unstudied (Costa-Lopez, et al., 2021; García-Vázquez, 2023).

Similar to previous studies (Gómez-San Luis & Almanza-Avenidaño, 2015), actors related to prostitution and sex trafficking can be summarized at three main levels: (i) the first level includes the people who sell or pay for sex, pimps or traffickers; (ii) the second level includes indirect people who are related to the sex industry, such as security guards, service providers, hotel managers, and dating house managers; and (iii) the last level includes the general society, who observes such activity in their daily lives in the streets, in the mass media and in their homes.

The present study was focused on third-level actors, especially in the young population, and how they perceive prostitution. The objective was to explore the perceptions of people who pay for sex (first level) to better understand the social representations of commercial sex demand. Thus, it was pointed out that social representations emerge from accumulated cultural

understanding in societies over time, and they are related to economic, social, cultural, historical and political backgrounds (Gómez-San Luis & Almanza-Avenidaño, 2015).

Previous literature in Spain (Torrado et al., 2018) highlighted the perception of women in prostitution on the Canary Islands: 23% of the population indicated that prostitution should be prohibited and there were no difference in the gender of the respondents; married or individuals in couples were more prone to abolished prostitution than single, divorced or widowed people; of the people who wanted to prohibit, 38% thought that everyone should be punished (pimps, sex worker and clients), 32% thought that only pimps should receive a punishment and 11% were prone to only punish the clients. Among the clients, women and men had the same insights. In the same study, it was shown that married men or men in couples were considered the most frequent clients, followed by single men and then young men. Moreover, many people believe that the same number of men and women pay for commercial sex.

Continuing with the abovementioned factors, another study (Costa-Lopez et al., 2021) researched the beliefs and attitudes towards prostitution and sexual violence in 211 teenagers and found that 50% said that paying for prostitution is more related to fulfilling necessities than trying different practices; among girls, it was thought that men who pay for sex were looking to satisfy a feeling of superiority; and the majority of the sample did not relate prostitution with cheating or objectifying women.

Due to the abovementioned factors, the aim of this research was to explore the perceptions of Spanish youth in this field. Accordingly, the research questions were as follows: (i) What is the perception of youth in relation to people who pay for commercial sex? (ii) What is the position of young Spaniards regarding criminalization of prostitution? (iii) What are the characteristics associated with the different perceptions of paying for sex?

Method

Design

This is a cross-sectional study using an online sociological survey. The questionnaire was open for one month, from 30/11/2020 to 30/12/2020. In addition, the possibility of answering the questionnaire from any technological device with internet access (mobile, computer, tablet) was considered.

Procedure

A survey was carried out among young Spaniards using social networks for dissemination (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram). Several youth entities with different purposes, ages, and demographic characteristics helped with the dissemination of the survey. The questionnaire consisted of 10 sociodemographic and control questions (sex, country of birth, city of residence, size of the township, age, finished education...); questions focused on the perception of people who pay for sex (nationality, education, money, partner, violence, use of condoms...) or the reasons for paying (single, insecurity, satisfaction, domination, reaffirmation); and questions about whether they have been charged or paid in exchange for

sex or whether they know someone who has charged or paid. Before that, 35 people were pretested to verify that the questionnaire was understood and adjusted to the target population. The estimated time to complete the questionnaire was 5 minutes.

Participants

A total sample of 3330 young people of Spanish nationality responded to the questionnaire, of which 3126 met the specified criteria of age between 16 and 30. This is because, in the current moment, Spanish consideration of young people is extended until 30 years. Most of the sample came from the six Spanish provinces of Madrid, Asturias, Granada, Barcelona, Salamanca, and Valencia.

A descriptive analysis and bivariate analysis were performed, followed by the multivariate analyses needed to fulfil the objectives of the study. SPSS v. 24 for Windows was used. A factor analysis was carried out on the variables showing how people who exchange sex for money were perceived, and principal components with Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization were used to fulfil the requirements demanded by this type of analysis (KMO=0.740; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-square= 7070.6, P value=0.000). Five sociologically significant dimensions or factors were obtained regarding respondents' perceptions of people paying for sexual services.

Analysis

To obtain a perception typology based on the men paying sexual services, the set was segmented into different groups through a nonhierarchical K-means cluster analysis. Using this multivariate technique, it is possible to obtain groups, segments or clusters that differ from each other but are homogeneous internally, thus yielding a specific behavioural typology, e.g., about images of men paying sexual services. The cluster analysis was carried out on the factors obtained from a factorial analysis previously performed on the initial set of variables, which gathered information on the different motivations behind perceptions about men. Finally, through multiple correspondence analyses, the five cluster profiles found were related to the fundamental sociodemographic variables (gender, age and education) and to the legal position variables.

Results

The average age of the sample was 23 years old ($s=3.51$), of which 28.3% ($n=884$) were male and the rest were female ($n=2242$). Among the completed studies, the education level was as follows: 5.4% secondary education ($n=169$), 33.4% high school ($n=1043$), 7.6% vocational training ($n=238$), 27.8% undergraduate university education/bachelor's degree ($n=870$), 24.6% postgraduate or master's degree ($n=768$) and 1.2% doctoral education ($n=38$). The majority of respondents (98.7%) were born in Spain. Only 1.3% of the sample had ever offered commercial sex, whereas 18.2% knew someone who did it. Moreover, only 1.5% had ever paid for commercial sex, whereas 48% knew someone who did it.

For the question “What do you think it is the most common profile of people who pay for sexual services?”, the possible answers were 1: Rare, 2: Uncommon, 3: Common, 4: Very common, a factorial analysis was performed (Table 1). Based on this analysis, 56.7% of the variance could be explained. Five dimensions or factors can be highlighted by offering an image of the people who pay for these services. The first factor is the *rich-buyer*, who is associated with an image of *having a partner, having money, achieving university education, and being Spanish*. All the factorial loads are positive. The second factor includes the variables involved in *satisfying domination needs, reaffirming his masculinity, being violent, and not wanting to use a condom*. All the factorial loads are positive except for the variable *not wanting to use a condom*, which is termed *risky-buyer*. The third factor is composed of the variables *having little money, being an immigrant, having a low level of education*. This sex buyer is called *low-status-buyer*. The fourth factor, which is called *insecure-buyer*, presents the variables being insecure with the opposite sex and *being dissatisfied with his partner*. Finally, the fifth factor, the sex buyer named *single-buyer*, was composed of variables referring to not having a partner or being single.

Table 1

Factors associated with prostitution clients' perception

Variables	F1-rich	F2-risk	F3-low-status	F4-insecure	F5-single
Have university education	0.799				
Have a partner	0.714				
Have many money	0.687				
Is Spanish	0.626				
Satisfy feeling of domination		0.720			
Reaffirm masculinity		0.717			
Is violent		0.624			
Uses condom		-0.593			
Have limited money			0.814		
Is an immigrant			0.690		
Have a low level of education			0.687		
Is insecure with the opposite sex				0.750	
Not satisfying their desires with the partner				0.640	
Not having a partner					0.762
Is single				0.443	0.532
Total Variance: 56.7%	19.5%	12.9%	10%	7.2%	7%

With these factors used as variables, a cluster analysis was carried out to cluster these perceptions of the respondents into possible social groups. In the first instance, a two-stage cluster is made. With this, the optimal number of groups into which the sample can be divided is estimated to be five. Subsequently, a K-means cluster analysis led to the corresponding partitioning of the sample into five groups, segments or types. Figure 1 and Table 2 show the average score of each factor in the five clusters obtained. Factors are typified variables, that is, they present zero average and standard deviation values of one. First, considering the behaviour of the factors in the five groups, these are characterized by the following.

The first group, made up of 16.6% of the sample, only presents scores above the average in the single buyer factor. The other remaining factors are below, especially the risk buyer factor, followed by the factor with low status. This group is made up of people who perceive sex buyers as not liking risk, not having a low status, are rich or frequent customers or are insecure, on average. Above all, they do not have a partner. For all these reasons, we will call this segment the *need perception* group.

The second group, which is made up of 24.1% of the sample, presents values slightly above the average in the frequent buyer factor, risky and insecure. The other two factors are below the average, standing out among these last two the buyer factor without a partner. This group is made up of people who are perceived as paying for sex even though they have a partner, without being of low status, and with values slightly above the average in terms of frequency, risk and insecurity. This group represents the most traditional image of the person who pays for sex. For this reason, we call this group the *traditional perception*.

The third group, which is made up of 18.6% of the surveyed sample, presents values above the average in all factors, but above all, in that corresponding to the insecure buyer factor, followed by the single buyer and the risk buyer. The other two factors are very slightly above average. According to this, the people who make up this group are perceived as people who pay for sex because they are insecure with the opposite sex or they are not satisfying their wishes with the partner. For this reason, we will call this group the *unsatisfied perception*.

The fourth and largest group, with 32% of the sample, is characterized by the fact that almost all the factors present average values higher than the mean, especially the risk buyer factor, except the unsafe buyer factor. The group of people who make up this profile is perceived by young people as people who pay for sex because of the risk, satisfying their feeling of domination, reaffirming their masculinity, using violence or trying not to use a condom. For all these reasons, we will call this group *risk perception*.

Finally, the fifth and smallest group, with only 8.6% of the sample, is characterized by presenting a clear value above the average in the low status buyer factor and well below the average in the frequent customer and rich buyer factor. Clearly, in this group are those people who are perceived by young people as buyers are a marginal person, with little money, immigrant or with low level of education. Therefore, this group will be called the *marginality perception*.

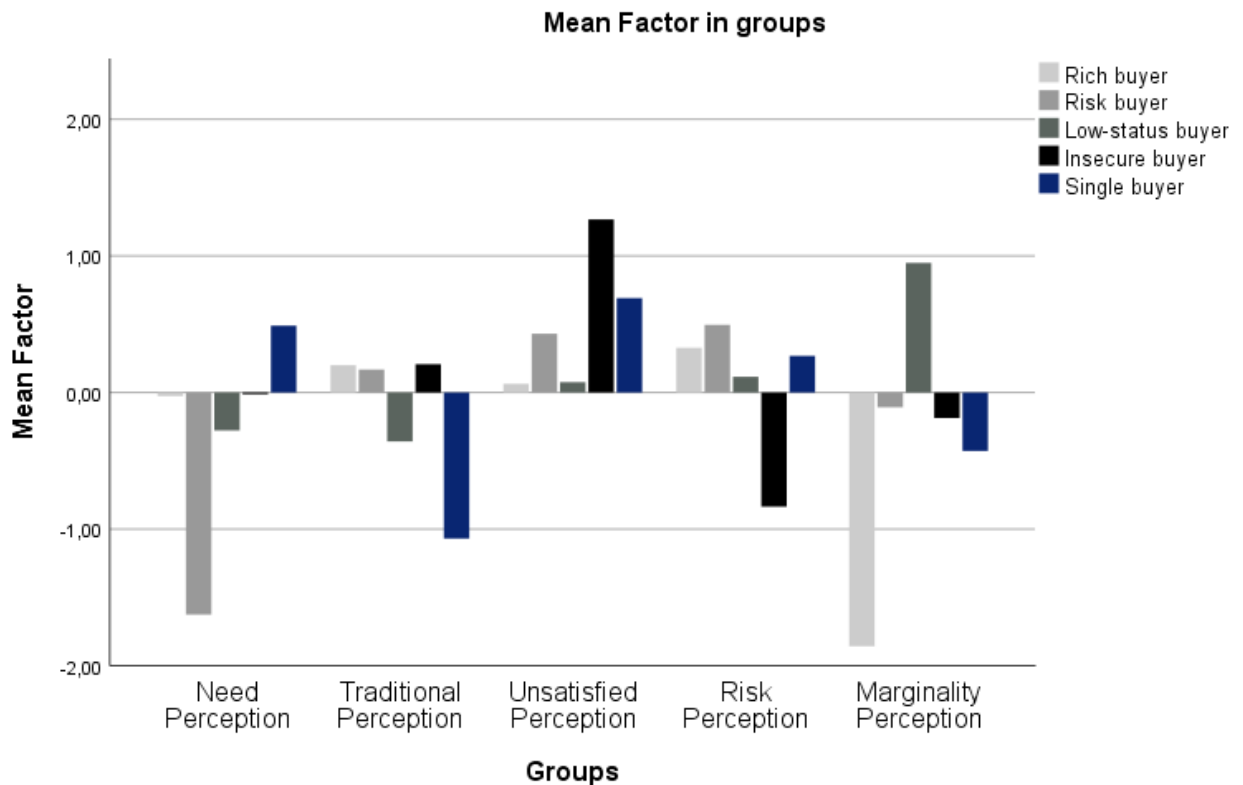
Figure 1*Mean factors in each group or cluster*

Table 2 shows a detailed comparative analysis of the rest of the variables of the survey. It studies the significant differences between the five types perceived by the sample on the people who pay for sex. Thus, the p value corresponds to the ANOVA findings for a factor where the equality between the five groups is verified. If the hypothesis was rejected, then post hoc tests were carried out. This reflects the differences between the five groups according to the shading in the table cells. All variables show significant differences with a confidence degree of 99%. The results corresponding to the analysis of each group separately suggest the following:

- The *Need perception group* is where there is a greater percentage of men (49%), a greater percentage of people with secondary education (7.3%) and postgraduate or master's degrees (28.6%), a higher percentage of respondents knowing people who offer sex for money (20.8%), a higher percentage of respondents who have ever offered sex for money (2.7%) and a higher percentage that considers prostitution to be a normal job (18.7%) and likes sex (10.2%). It is also the group that gives the least importance to the fact that they pay to satisfying the domination needs or reaffirm their masculinity and the frequent use of condoms, among others.
- The *Traditional perception group* has a greater perception of clients as having a partner, not being immigrant, not having a low level of education, and not having little money.
- The *Unsatisfied perception group* considers clients insecure people who do not have a partner and who need to satisfy their feeling of domination and reaffirm their masculinity (similar to the next group). In addition, the people who make up this group think that the

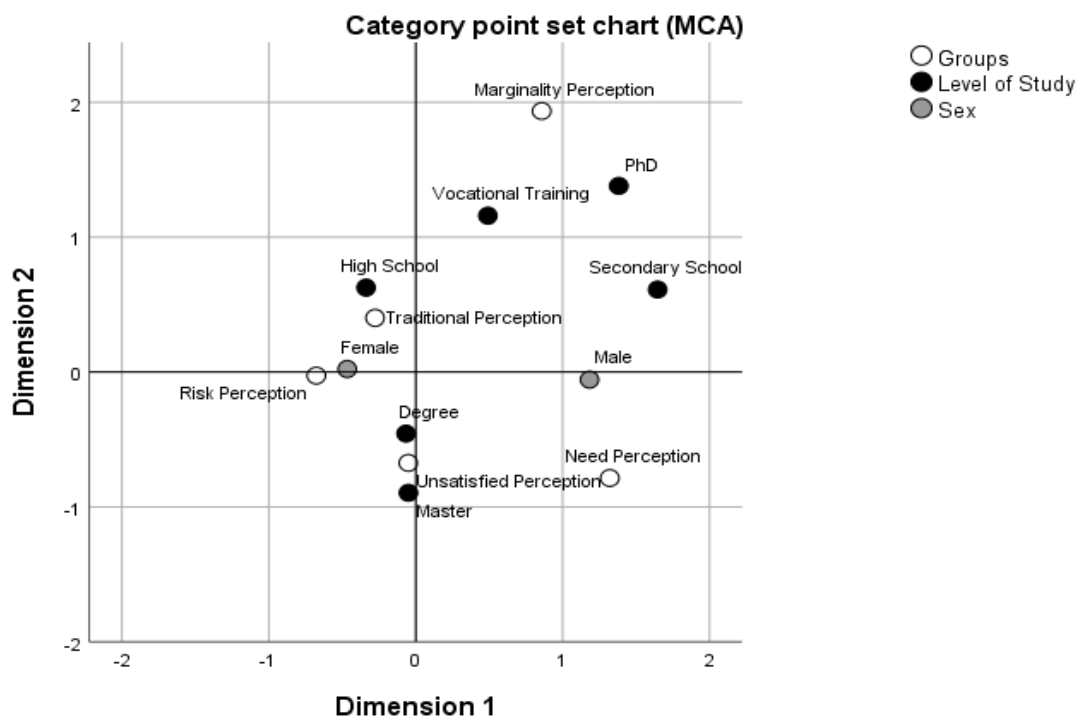
		AL	C1 (Ne ed)	C2 (Tradi tional)	C3 (Unsat isfied)	C4 (Ri sk)	C5 (Margi nality)	P val ue
Most common profile of clients: 1: Rare; 4: Very common								
Have a partner	Mean	2.96	2.71	3.18	3.01	3.11	2.17	0.00
	SD	0.68	0.64	0.55	0.64	0.65	0.61	
Not have a partner	Mean	3.40	3.48	2.87	3.62	3.66	3.26	0.00
	SD	0.59	0.54	0.43	0.48	0.47	0.64	
Spanish	Mean	3.51	3.35	3.50	3.63	3.76	2.68	0.00
	SD	0.60	0.54	0.54	0.51	0.45	0.69	
Immigrant	Mean	2.66	2.68	2.43	2.74	2.65	3.07	0.00
	SD	0.72	0.68	0.66	0.74	0.72	0.74	
Low level of education	Mean	2.88	2.77	2.57	3.00	2.99	3.26	0.00
	SD	0.66	0.64	0.62	0.61	0.64	0.63	
University education	Mean	2.84	2.78	2.96	2.87	2.99	1.93	0.00
	SD	0.69	0.63	0.58	0.67	0.64	0.61	
Have lot of money	Mean	3.32	3.35	3.31	3.45	3.58	2.07	0.00
	SD	0.70	0.58	0.59	0.56	0.52	0.76	
Have little money	Mean	2.52	2.37	2.34	2.58	2.56	3.09	0.00
	SD	0.75	0.71	0.67	0.73	0.77	0.74	
Condom use	Mean	2.10	2.58	2.09	2.07	1.84	2.21	0.00
	SD	0.72	0.75	0.67	0.71	0.60	0.80	
Is violent	Mean	3.02	2.32	2.99	3.20	3.43	2.57	0.00
	SD	0.79	0.71	0.68	0.70	0.61	0.82	

Most common reasons to pay for sex		All	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	P value
Singleness	YES	0.34	0.68	0.07	0.80	0.11	0.33	0.00
Insecurity with the opposite sex	YES	0.37	0.33	0.36	0.84	0.13	0.32	0.00
Not satisfy desires with the partner	YES	0.52	0.65	0.69	0.83	0.17	0.48	0.00
Satisfy feeling of domination	YES	0.80	0.22	0.93	0.94	0.96	0.72	0.00
Reaffirm masculinity	YES	0.71	0.13	0.82	0.87	0.88	0.57	0.00
Level of education (Column profiles (%))	Secondary school	5.40%	7.30%	4.00%	5.50%	4.10%	10.40%	0.00
	High school	33.40%	28.60%	35.10%	29.60%	20.36%	35.60%	0.06
	Vocational training	7.60%	7.10%	7.50%	7.60%	6.80%	11.90%	0.91
	Degree	27.80%	26.80%	28.20%	30.20%	20.20%	22.20%	0.179
	Masters	24.60%	28.60%	23.40%	26.10%	24.10%	18.50%	0.024
	PhD	1.20%	1.50%	1.70%	1.00%	0.70%	1.50%	0.28
Know a person who offers paid sex	YES (%)	18.2%	20.8%	18.9%	19.8%	17.3%	11.1%	0.10
Have you ever offered paid sex	YES (%)	1.3%	2.7%	1.3%	1.2%	0.8%	0.4%	0.18
Reasons to engage in prostitution (Column profiles (%))	Love of sex (YES (%))	5.5%	10.2%	4.4%	9.8%	0.9%	7%	0.00
	Normal job (YES (%))	9.1%	18.7%	8.2%	13.1%	1.9%	10.7%	0.00
	Economic need (YES (%))	93.8%	92.3%	95.1%	97.1%	91.7%	93.3%	0.00
	Dependent relatives (YES (%))	58.9%	44.2%	60.5%	71.8%	2%	45.6%	0.00
	Human trafficking victims (YES (%))	82.6%	61.6%	85.7%	91.6%	4%	69.6%	0.00
	Debt for coming to Spain (YES (%))	59.6%	36.1%	61.7%	75.4%	1%	43.7%	0.00
Have you ever offered paid sex	YES (%)	1.3%	2.7%	1.3%	1.2%	0.8%	0.4%	0.18

Education level and gender were related to the different client perceptions that emerged from the cluster. Figure 2 shows how the perception of need (in clients) is associated with a high level of education and with being men. Traditional and risk perception groups are associated with being a woman and having completed high school. Single and unsatisfied perception groups are associated with respondents having completed degree or master studies. Last, marginality perception is related to those surveyed who have completed secondary or high school.

Figure 2

Multiple correspondence analyses with the five clusters, gender and education



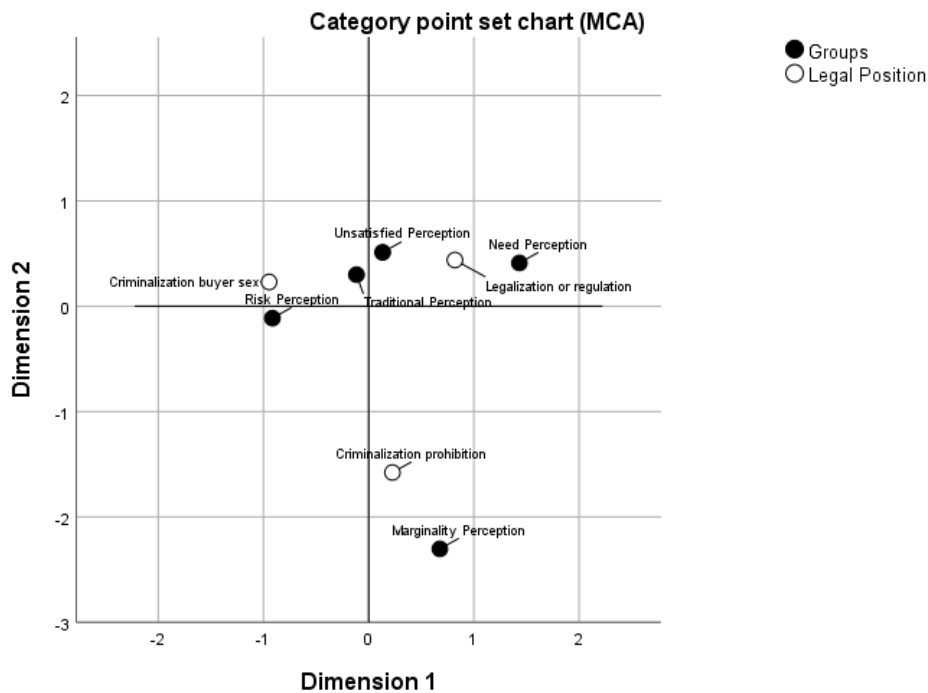
Regarding the legal position adopted by the sample (see Table 3), we find that prohibition on both the sex buyer and the seller is supported by only 17.5% (n=548) without differences between the sex of the respondents; among those who were in favour of penalizing only the client (40.5%), there were more women (45.3%, n = 1014) than men (28.5%, n = 252). Finally, regarding the legalization or regulation of prostitution (41.9%) it was more supported by men (52.3%, n = 471) than women (37.5%, n = 839), with statistically significant differences (Chi-square = 82.11; p = 0.000). In relation to age, there was a difference in means in the three prostitution positions (F = 18.30; p = 0.000): younger average age supported the prohibition (mean= 22.15; S.D. = 3.5), compared to those of older average age (mean = 23.23; S.D. = 3.5). There was also a significant association between educational level and legal position: the higher the level of education, the higher the tolerance towards legalization or regulation (chi-square = 44.60; p = 0.000). There was also a clear and significant association between the legal position and the perception groups (graph 3): those who had a marginal perception (of the client) were closer to a position of criminalization or prohibition of prostitution; those who had need and

unsatisfied perception were more prone to the regularization of prostitution; and those who had a traditional and risk perception would be in favour of penalizing only the customer.

Table 3
Legal position of the different types of perception

Variable	AL L	C1 (Nee d)	C2 (Tradit ional)	C3 (Unsati sfied)	C4 (Ri sk)	C5 (Mar ginali ty)	P va lu e
What should be done legally with prostitution in Spain?	Prohibit. Penalize buyers and offers	17. 50 %	18.1 0%	15.90% 15.10%	16. 40 %	30.40 %	0. 00 0
	Prohibit. Penalize buyers	40. 50 %	15.4 0%	43.00% 39.10%	56. 80 %	24.40 %	0. 00 0
	Legalize. Regulate where and how it is done	41. 90 %	66.4 0%	41.10% 45.80%	26. 80 %	45.20 %	0. 00 0

Figure 3
Multiple correspondence analyses with the five cluster and legal position variables



Discussion

The aim of this research is to explore perceptions among youths about people who pay for sex and legal positions (legalize, penalize all or penalize only sex buyers). The youth perception of

prostitution is relatively unstudied, even though they may be future consumers or clients (Costa-Lopez et al., 2021). This research is done to better understand and classify the social representations of prostitution demand and the people who pay for sexual services. Furthermore, human trafficking and prostitution debates have created different visions about men who pay for sex; at the beginning, clients were almost invisible, but currently, they are considered responsible for coerced women in the sex industry (Martilla, 2003).

Further studies (Torrado et al., 2018; Costa-Lopez et al., 2021) have pointed out gender differences in client perceptions. While males had a wider consideration of sex needs, females perceived clients as taking advantage of women's vulnerability (Gómez-San Luis & Almanza-Avenidaño, 2015). In the same study, it was explained that females agreed that men who sought prostitution were seeking to reaffirm their masculinity and have sex with women not accessible normally for them. Another study (Costa-Lopez et al., 2021) highlighted that woman thought more about coerced or fraudulent situations in prostitution than men. In this current research, the obtained results showed a greater diversity of perceptions than in previous works (De Miguel, 2012). In this way, this sample was divided into five types of people who pay for sex based on need perception, traditional perception, unsatisfied perception, risk perception, and marginality perception. Some of the results were consistent with previous investigations with clients (Meneses, Rúa et al., 2018).

Recent studies about clients have related buying sex with drug consumption (Jones et al., 2014) or risk behaviours for sexual health (Suryawanshi et al., 2013). In the results of the current study, this perception is reflected in the risk buyer category, while the rest of the perceptions show more social characteristics than health characteristics. Such perceptions were previously associated with the view that paying for sex is a cheaper option than casual sex or engagement, with men having a higher economic level (Huysamen & Boonzaier, 2015). However, it was also noted that paying for sex was more efficient and faster (Meneses, Rúa, et al., 2018).

In relation to our results, some sex buyer profiles were more associated with a greater stigma than others. For example, (i) for respondents who do not agree to pay for sex, the stigma is associated with human trafficking situations, with penalising the sex buyers, with abolitionist position, and with the perception of clients as "traditional" or "risk-buyer"; (ii) for respondents who agree that sex work is legitimate for "need" or "single-buyers", they have a favourable view of the regulation of prostitution and the stigma is associated with sex work situations by choice; (iii) for respondents who are less representative, the stigma is frequent in young people and in people who do not know anybody who has offered paid sex because such individuals are prone to the prohibition of prostitution, whereas they seem related to "marginality" and "low-status-buyers" perceptions.

In this way, it has been highlighted that young males are more in favour of regulating prostitution than young females (García-Vázquez, 2023; Meneses, Rúa et al., 2018); therefore, penalising sex buyers was in line with the buyers' perception from the sample. Other studies with young samples in Spain suggested that 83'8% affirmed that clients must have compulsory medical check-ups and 63'6% of other simple would break up the relationship if their partner paid for sex (García et al., 2010). In the same study, 37'9% of young people considered trafficking nets-pimps responsible for prostitution, 28'8% considered sex buyers and sellers

responsible for prostitution, 22% considered only buyers responsible and 31.8% considered only sellers responsible.

Meneses, Uroz & Rúa (2018) pointed out that 50.1% of male sex buyers consider prostitution as a form of violence and 89.4% have heard about human trafficking; however, many of their indicators are not proper indicators for human trafficking or forced prostitution. This is partly explained because mass media defund stereotyping and sensationalist images of human trafficking, which sometimes do not correspond to reality (Anderson & Andrijasevic, 2008).

The national study conducted by the Sociological Research Centre (CIS, 2008) found that 81.8% of men and 73.6% of women agreed that "prostitution is inevitable and therefore should be legalized". The same study pointed out age differences, so the cohort of 18 to 24 years is less in favour of legalization (56.4%) than other age cohorts (76% - 85.4%). An association with age was also found in the present work, with younger respondents being associated with prohibition compared to older respondents being more associated with regulation. Therefore, there may already be a generational change in the perception of prostitution.

Previous studies (García et al. 2010; CIS, 2009) have reflected the need for more information about prostitution, especially among young people. Commercial sex is a youth concern, and they may be willing to work to eradicate human trafficking and forced prostitution. Particularly, the group of young people who consider clients dissatisfied consumers are the ones who have most marked trafficking as one of the reasons for the exercise of prostitution.

Nonetheless, certain limitations apply to this work. The questionnaire was voluntary through social networks, and the sample was neither representative nor random. This would be the reason for the higher number of female responses, which is a limitation. Another explanation might be that women are more concerned about the prostitution debate; therefore, they are more prone to participate in this research. Whatever the reason, it would be interesting for future research to replicate the study with a larger male sample, random sample and with other ages to truly understand what the generational differences are.

Despite the limitations, this study contributes to further investigating a group that has not been thoroughly queried about their social perceptions, especially on controversial issues and issues that indirectly affect their future. On the one hand, the categorization of youth perceptions allows us to improve prevention campaigns of sexual exploitation. On the other hand, awareness against human trafficking has yet to be developed, and efforts should be made in the youth population. We must empower young people attitudes and beliefs that avoid "justification" and "tolerance" towards behaviours that involve the objectification of people. Gender stereotyping, inequalities and subordination values should be avoided.

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