



Eesti Avatud Ühiskonna Instituut



EQUAL



EQUAL Community Initiative project of the European Union

“Integration of Women Involved in Prostitution, Including Victims of Human Trafficking into the Legal Labour Market”

The Meaning of Prostitution in Estonian Society: Internal Security or Economic Benefit.

Results of a sociological survey

Compiled by

Iris Pettai

Helve Kase

Ivi Proos



Eesti Avatud Ühiskonna Instituut



EQUAL Community Initiative project of the European Union

“Integration of Women Involved in Prostitution, Including Victims of Human Trafficking into the Legal Labour Market”

The Meaning of Prostitution in Estonian Society: Internal Security or Economic Benefit.

Results of a sociological survey

Compiled by

Iris Pettai

Helve Kase

Ivi Proos

Translated by **Riina Kütt**

Partners of the
Estonian Institute for Open
Society Research in the
EQUAL
Community Initiative project

“Integration of Women
Involved in Prostitution,
Including Victims of Human
Trafficking into the Legal
Labour Market”



Tervise Arengu Instituut

Eluliin
M T Ü

MTÜ Eluliin



MTÜ Sigmund



MTÜ Eesti Naisuurimus- ja Teabekeskus

Table of contents

Introduction	4
1. Prostitution in Sweden and Finland	7
2. The number of prostitutes and clients in Estonia and Europe	8
3. Awareness of the population of prostitution and human trafficking	10
4. Prostitution as a threat	12
5. Actors interested in the sex business	13
6. Attitudes of the population toward brothels	14
7. Reasons why women become prostitutes	17
8. Images of the prostitute	18
9. Attitudes toward actors involved in prostitution	19
10. Willingness to work together with representatives of risk groups	22
11. The pressure of the sex business: finding new prostitutes and clients	23
12. Buyers of sex and their motives	25
13. Buyers of sex in Estonia	28
14. Estonia's options: to legalise brothels or penalise actors involved in prostitution	30
15. Assessment of punishment for drug dealing and mediation in prostitution	32
16. The reaction of the population toward Estonia's image as a sex paradise	33
17. Expectations toward government interference in the sex business	34
18. Expectations toward government support for former prostitutes	36

Introduction

In December 2005, the Estonian Institute for Open Society Research conducted under the Equal¹ project “Integration of Women Involved in Prostitution, Including Victims of Human Trafficking into the Legal Labour Market” a social survey to identify the attitudes of Estonia’s adult population toward prostitution and women involved in prostitution. The first similar survey to explore Estonian society’s attitudes toward prostitution was made by the Institute in 2005.

According to estimates, Estonia has currently about 3,000 prostitutes, i.e. women selling their body for money. The figure is far too high for a small country like Estonia. The ratio of prostitutes to the overall population in Estonia exceeds nearly twice the European average, eight times the levels reported for Sweden and three times the levels reported for Finland and Norway.

Prostitution is until today not directly prohibited in Estonia. Like in many other countries (in Finland till 1999; also in Sweden, Norway, France, the UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain, etc) pimping, luring of minors into prostitution and renting premises for the practice of prostitution are criminalised. The prosecution of pimps has, however, failed to significantly curb prostitution. The business continues thriving regardless of penal sanctions, police raids or media disclosures.

The situation is not different from that in other countries with similar jurisdictions where mediation in prostitution is prohibited and penalised. It is obvious that existing laws and their enforcement mechanisms have exercised no major impact on the spread of prostitution, frequently so because the selling of sex is often disguised as “services” such as hotels and catering, strip-tease, massage, sauna, etc.

The expanding sex business necessitates that the government introduce more efficient measures to combat prostitution. On the one hand, it should consider adopting a prostitution policy similar to that of Sweden where it is the buyer of sex who is prosecuted. On the other hand, however, the government should seriously think of the ways to involve prostituted women in the rehabilitation programmes and provide them assistance in entering the legal labour market. Several European countries have designed reintegration programmes for former female prostitutes. Their practice has clearly demonstrated that the majority of prostituted women find it hard to return to normal life and the legitimate labour market without outside help. What is most needed are medical help (incl treatment of alcoholism, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS), specialised rehabilitation centres, psychological advice, etc.

¹ The European Community Initiative EQUAL, co-financed by the European Social Fund, supports and promotes international cooperation to eliminate inequalities and discrimination in the labour market.

To launch this critically important and costly for Estonia rehabilitation programme, we need to analyse and take into consideration the attitudes toward and opinions of prostitution prevailing in Estonian society. We further need to determine the willingness of the population to rehabilitate prostituted women, to employ them, to work together with them and treat them as human beings equal to us.

We intend to develop, based on the survey done and the research to be undertaken within the Equal project in the future, a comprehensive awareness-raising programme targeted at the general public. The programme would explain the positive effect of rehabilitating and reintegrating prostituted women in the labour market. On the other hand, however, it would address the threats which might arise if we decide to ignore the problem of rehabilitation and (re-)entry into the labour market of former prostitutes.

The present survey seeks to identify the adult population's opinions and attitudes toward the following aspects of prostitution:

- the role of prostitution in Estonian society; brothel users;
- dangers of prostitution to society;
- high-risk groups;
- awareness of the situation of prostitution and human trafficking in Estonia;
- attitudes towards prostitutes and male purchasers of sex;
- personal experience with prostitution; i.e. concerning the attempts to recruit as a potential prostitute or encounters with offers to buy sex in return for money;
- opinion of reasons why women engage in prostitution;
- willingness to work together with former prostitutes, treat them as equal human beings;
- willingness to rehabilitate and provide assistance to former prostitutes and to reintegrate them in society and in the legitimate labour market;
- opinion of laws regulating prostitution.

The report was prepared by Iris Pettai, Helve Kase and Ivi Proos. Section 12 of the report entitled "Buyers of sex and their motives", which summarises results of several sociological surveys, was compiled by Katri Eespere from the Estonian Institute of Humanities at Tallinn University.

The survey

The concept and methodology of the survey were developed by Iris Pettai, Ivi Proos and Helve Kase. The survey was executed by the social and market research company Saar Poll. One thousand and thirteen persons aged 15-64 were interviewed in total. A representative random sample was used. The results of the survey can be interpreted as reflecting the correlations and trends characteristic of Estonian society in general.

The sample included respondents from all counties, both from among rural as well as urban residents according to their relative share in the population. After the entry of the data, the empirical sample was weighted so as to correspond to the sex and age distribution of the population. This rendered us the following socio-demographic picture:

Sex:

women	53 %
men	47 %

Age:

15 – 19	10 %
20 – 29	19 %
30 – 39	17 %
40 – 49	18 %
50 - 59	16 %
60 - 74	20 %

Education:

primary and basic education	31 %
secondary and vocational secondary education	54 %
higher education	15 %

Nationality:

Estonian	66 %
Russian	27 %
other	7 %

Residence:

Tallinn	31%
bigger towns	18%
other towns	20%
rural settlements	32%

1. Prostitution in Sweden and Finland

The lowest levels of prostitution are reported in Sweden whose laws criminalise mediation in prostitution and the buying of sex and where prostitution is considered an aspect of male violence against women. The number of prostitutes in Sweden is twice smaller than in the neighbouring countries Norway and Finland. In 1999, Sweden passed groundbreaking legislation that criminalises the buying of sex. The government followed through with ample social services funds which provide assistance to women wanting to get out of the sex business. Former prostitutes have access to specialised rehabilitation programmes and specially trained social workers that provide assistance to former prostitutes and help find new income generation opportunities. The law was adopted after twenty years of preparatory work involving a range of studies, mapping of the situation, analyses by experts, public debates, training of relevant personnel, etc.

The Swedish society favours the legislative initiative to curb prostitution in Sweden. The public opinion polls conducted in 2001 and 2002 demonstrated that 80% of the population supported the legislation passed which prohibits prostitution and whose enforcement mechanism focuses on the criminalisation of the buyer of sexual services. After prohibition of the purchase of sex, street prostitution and the number of women offering sex acts for money declined twice.

Finland introduced in 2003 a law that bans the sale or purchase of sexual services in public places. The Finnish government is currently considering criminalisation of the purchase of sex following the Swedish model. One of the main arguments in favour of criminalising the buyer of sex is the need to fight against organised crime that controls the sex business. The draft law criminalising the purchase of sex has been approved by the Finnish Government and has been submitted to the Parliament for adoption. The punishment for this offence is to be fines or imprisonment for up to six months. According to the 2002 public opinion poll, 55% of the population expressed support to the law that would punish the buyer of prostitutes' services.

The proposed Finnish legislation that outlaws prostitution and penalises the buyer of sex, i.e. the client, similarly to Sweden will in all likelihood result in increasing numbers of sex tourists coming from Finland to Estonia. This will boost Estonia's sex business and stimulate economic interest in its continuity and expansion.

One of the most crucial problems associated with prostitution is internal security. The unlimited growth and expansion of prostitution can at some point turn into a major issue jeopardising internal security. The experience of other countries shows that the growing sex business results in reduced levels of security and increased levels of organised crime. Criminal activity can sharply increase, in particular in areas close to brothels which become increasingly attractive for pickpockets and drug dealers contributing to growing numbers of

other social woes. In the opinion of Mr Jaanus Rahumägi, member of the Riigikogu, the prostitution business in Estonia is intertwined with corruption, money laundering, drug dealing, blackmailing and other forms of illegal business.²

2. The number of prostitutes and clients in Estonia and Europe

In Europe, the figures given for prostitution vary from country to country and feature substantial differences. Based on the number of prostitutes, the leading position among countries is held by Germany, Austria, Belgium and Holland where the ratio of prostitutes per 10,000 population ranges from 24 to 50.

TABLE 1.
Supply of sex services: the number of prostitutes in Estonia and Europe.³

	Population (million)	Total number of prostitutes	Number of prostitutes per 10,000 population
%			
I Leaders			
Germany	80	400 000	50
Vienna (Austria)	2	6 000	30
Belgium	10	30 000	30
Holland	16	38 000	24
Eesti	1.3	3 000	23
II Average level			
Czech Republic	10	18 000 ⁴	18
UK	60	80 000	13
Greece	11	14 000	13
Denmark	5	6 000	12
Italy	58	60 000	10
III Low level			
France	60	40 000	7
Norway	4.5	3 000	7
Finland	6	4 000	7
Switzerland	7.5	4 800	6
Sweden	8.5	2 500	3

² Jaanus Rahumägi, Prostituudi ost tuleb keelustada. Postimees, 03.03.2004.

³ Donna M. Hughes, Laura Joy Sporcic and Nadine Z. Mendelsohn. Factbook on Global Sexual Exploitation Internet publication. www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/factbook.htm

⁴ www.mvcr.cz/prevence/priority/prostituice2/opatreni

Source: The Czech Statistical Office – Prostitution in the Czech Republic

According to expert opinion, Estonia has nearly 3,000 prostitutes.⁵ The ratio of prostitutes in the population - 23 per 10,000 inhabitants - positions Estonia among the top ranking countries in terms of the spread of prostitution. The ratio of prostitutes to the overall population in Estonia exceeds nearly twice the European average, eight times the levels reported for Sweden and three times the levels reported for Finland and Norway, i.e. the countries with low levels of prostitution.

The countries where prostitution is less spread include contrary to popular belief France, and also three biggest Nordic countries. Lower levels are reported for Sweden where all three, i.e. pimping, selling and buying of sex are forbidden and prostitution is qualified as an aspect of male violence against women. In Sweden, the relative share of prostitutes in the population is twice lower than in the neighbouring countries Finland and Norway.

In Europe, the figures given for clients of prostitution (the proportion of men having visited brothels during their lifetime) range from 7% in the United Kingdom to 45% in Italy.

TABLE 2.
The proportion of men having visited brothels.⁶

	%	Year
Italy	45	1999
Spain	39	1992
Holland	14	1989
Switzerland	13	2001
Sweden	13	1996
Estonia	13⁷	2005
Finland	10	1992
Norway	11	1992
UK	7	1991

The numbers reported for brothel clients are much lower in Estonia than the corresponding indicators for Italy and Spain and position Estonia among the Nordic countries.

⁵ I.Pettai ja H.Kase. prostitutsioon ja naistega kauplemine kui lahendamata probleem Eestis. Eesti Avatud Ühiskonna Instituut 2002.

⁶ Sven-Axel Månsson. Men's Practices in Prostitution: The Case of Sweden. 1998. Prostitution. Collection of the articles and materials. Oslo. Library of Criminology. 2002.

⁷ Eesti Avatud Ühiskonna Instituudi uurimus 2005

3. Awareness of the population of prostitution and human trafficking

Prostitution has recently become a popular media topic and focus of public debate. The press has featured a number of articles on the topic, several radio and TV programmes have been broadcast. The opinions expressed, however, are wildly diverse. There are advocates of total legalisation of prostitution and those claiming prostitution is a form of trafficking in human beings.

Even though prostitution has become a popular topic for debate, people confess they know little about the real situation of prostitutes. Only 8% of the population note they are well-informed. This suggests that access to prostitution-related information has been limited. The situation is partly due to controversial information provided about prostitution which rather than clarifying the phenomenon has created a certain degree of confusion.

TABLE 3.

Question: How well are you informed of the situation of prostitutes in Estonia?

	All respondents	Sex		Nationality	
		Men	Women	Estonian	Non-Estonian
I know nothing about it + hard to say	35	38	33	32	42
To a small degree	57	54	59	58	53
Pretty well-informed in general	8	8	8	10	5
TOTAL:	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

Relative to the knowledge of prostitution considerable differences can be observed between Estonians and non-Estonians. One-third of the Estonians maintain they know practically nothing about the situation of prostitutes whereas the corresponding figure for non-Estonians is 42%. Moreover, while every tenth Estonian said s/he was informed of the situation of prostitutes, the respective percentage among non-Estonians was only 5%. At the same time, it is non-Estonians that can be considered a high-risk group when it comes to recruitment into prostitution.

The survey demonstrated that the knowledge of prostitution among Estonia's population is extremely limited. Only 8% of the respondents maintain they are pretty well-informed of problems relating to prostitution.

TABLE 4.

Question: How well are you informed of trafficking in human beings, including trafficking in women in Estonia?

	All respondents	Sex		Nationality	
		Men	Women	Estonian	Non-Estonian
I know nothing about it + hard to say	42	45	39	39	47
To a small degree	54	51	56	55	51
Generally pretty well-informed	4	4	5	6	2
TOTAL:	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

Women rate their knowledge somewhat higher than men and Estonians tend to be slightly better informed compared to non-Estonians. Further, inhabitants of small rural settlements claim to be better informed of both prostitution as well as the problems associated with trafficking in human beings.

The results seem to be somewhat surprising since over the past 4-5 years there have been numerous efforts to prevent human trafficking. Two campaigns have been conducted to fight against trafficking in women (supported by the International Organisation for Migration and the Nordic Council of Ministers). Fifty training courses have been run for different target groups, among them students, youth workers, journalists, police workers. Several TV and radio programmes have been broadcast, the writing media have featured a series of prostitution-related articles.

Irrespective of numerous information events the lack of information about prostitution remains critical.

4. Prostitution as a threat

TABLE 5.

Question: How big a threat are for Estonia the following factors?

	All respondents %	
	High rate of threat	No threat at all
Drug addiction	81	-
HIV/ AIDS	76	1
Crime	61	1
Alcoholism	58	3
Declining health of the population	50	5
Unemployment	47	7
Sexual abuse of minors	26	14
Advertising sex and pornography in the media and on the internet	26	22
Bird flu outbreak in Estonia	25	22
Human trafficking, selling Estonian women to foreign brothels	20	15
Female prostitution	20	16
Domestic violence	19	19

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

The survey showed that Estonia's population considers the biggest threat drug addiction and HIV/AIDS which are claimed to pose a serious threat to the welfare of the Estonian community by over three-fourths of the population. The next group of high-risk factors concern in the opinion of over half the population crime and alcoholism.

The same group of high-risk factors included somewhat surprisingly the fear of declining health. Unemployment which has been regarded the biggest risk factor for Estonia for a long period of time came sixth. Less threatening are claimed to be the outbreak of bird flu as well as trafficking in human beings and domestic violence.

Judging by its position in the ranking, prostitution is not considered a significant risk factor. One may well presume that the members of Estonian society do not perceive the full range of dangers involved in prostitution. People have no contact with prostitutes in daily life. Prostitution is something that is practiced somewhere else, in a secluded world, which constitutes no real threat to the security of ordinary people who neither visit brothels nor mix with prostitutes.

TABLE 6.**Question: What sort of problems accompany prostitution?**

Response falling under the category: "of serious threat" (all respondents %)

	Women	Men
Spread of HIV/ AIDS	82	76
Spread of sexually transmitted diseases	75	68
Spread of drug addiction	66	57
Spread of crime	46	43
Spread of alcoholism	43	41

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

Even though prostitution appears to be a relatively harmless social phenomenon, people seem to be highly aware of the accompanying risks. Of greatest concern are HIV/AIDS, venereal diseases and drug addiction. It is further presumed that prostitution contributes to increasing crime levels and alcoholism.

Surprisingly enough, even if people perceive the risks involved with prostitution, it is given a relatively low priority among other social problems confronting Estonian society.

5. Actors interested in the sex business

TABLE 7.**Question: Who in your opinion are most interested in the prostitution practice in Estonia?**

	All respondents %
Brothel-owners living off the proceeds of the sex business	77
Men interested in buying sex	61
Women (prostitutes) selling their body in return for money	44
Taxi-drivers who benefit from driving clients to brothels	23
Tourist agencies, ferry operators, airline companies, etc taking sex tourists to Estonia	22
Producers of pornographic and erotic films	14
Telephone companies offering sex services	14
Internet portals providing on-line access to erotic and pornographic materials	10
Media – TV, newspapers, magazines advertising sex services	8

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

People living in Estonia believe the actors interested in the sex business are brothel-keepers and men buying sexual services. Third come prostitutes themselves.

According to public opinion, the prostitution business is mostly run by pimps (brothel-owners) who determine the demand and the supply of prostitution. Men, buyers of sex (the demand side) are attributed a greater role in shaping the supply and demand framework than prostitutes (the supply side) themselves. Taxi-drivers, tourist agencies, ferry and airline operators are likewise held responsible for the burgeoning sex business in Estonia. Producers of erotic and pornographic films, providers of telephone sex services as well as internet portals providing access to erotic and pornographic materials are considered less important players on the prostitution arena.

6. Attitudes of the population toward brothels

TABLE 8.

Question: Estonia has brothels where the client can buy sexual services. In your opinion, if and to what extent Estonia brothels are necessary in Estonia?

	Women		Men	
	2003	2005	2003	2005
Absolutely necessary	7	6	19	11
Might be necessary	35	40	41	52
Not necessary	30	43	18	24
Hard to say	28	11	22	13
TOTAL:	100	100	100	100

%

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

The figures demonstrate that the attitudes of the Estonian adult population toward prostitution are generally favourable. Passive acceptance of prostitution is prevailing.

Men seem to be clearly in favour of brothels: whereas in 2003, 60% of the adult male population considered brothels necessary, by 2005 the figure had risen to 63%. Clearly negative attitudes (“Brothels are not necessary”) were held in 2003 by 18%, and in 2005 by 24% of men.

Women are generally supportive of brothels: the 2003 data demonstrate that 42% of women claimed brothels were necessary; by 2005 the figure had even gone up like in case of men: 46% of adult female population gave a positive answer to the necessity of brothels, 43% were against.

In the past two years Estonia's population has developed a more clear and firm understanding of the necessity of brothels: in 2003, 22% of men and 28% of women chose the response "Hard to say" when asked about the necessity of brothels, in 2005, the respective percentages were 13% for men and 11% for women. A clear stand taken on the issue of brothels can in principle be considered positive: whether the attitude is positive or negative, it is an indication that people have given the topic some thought.

The results of 2003 and 2005 surveys suggest that Estonia's adult population is relatively favourably disposed towards prostitution. The provision of sexual services which is concentrated in brothels is considered as any other commercial transaction where one can buy and sell virtually anything, including intimate services, and they do so quite publicly.

Estonia's very liberal economic policy is definitely one of the factors responsible for the population's liberal attitudes toward paid sex. Brothels are first and foremost considered business ventures, not prostitution venues with their devastating effects on the health, physical and mental conditions of prostitutes.

We can address the problem from two angles. First, based on popular perceptions of prostitution there is a clear demand for sexual services. This approach is used by the media to promote the social dimension of prostitution.

A few examples of how prostitution is explained by the media (commonsense approach): "Prostitution is the world's most ancient profession. The representatives of the profession have existed throughout ages, consequently prostitutes are not going to disappear. There is a demand for prostitution, so it is inevitable, also in Estonia."

Or another typical explanation: "Some men are by nature more aggressive, possess a greater lust for sex and need to go to prostitutes. Prostitutes who offer sex for money help maintain relationships in the family allowing males to act out their aggressive wishes in brothels and lead a balanced life at home."

Our survey demonstrated that the myth about "usefulness of prostitution" for men is widespread. 54% of Estonia's adult population find that "prostitution helps ease men's sexual tensions and stress". Men's belief in the usefulness of prostitution is stronger than that of women. 63% of men and 46% of women are convinced that prostitution helps men cope with stress (see Table 8).

TABLE 9.

Question: Do you agree/disagree with the following statements about prostitution?

	Women		Men	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Prostitution is a lucrative business for actors, among them tourist agencies, hotels, taxi-drivers, strip-tease bars, etc	89	7	91	3
Prostitution attracts sex tourists to Estonia	80	9	84	8
Prostitution generates jobs and provides a source of income for women	59	34	68	28
Prostitution helps ease men's sexual tensions and stress	46	37	63	27

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

The myth about the benefit of prostitution for women is likewise widespread. Two-thirds of the population are of the opinion that prostitution creates jobs and is a source of income for women. This myth is more strongly upheld by men. 68% of men and 59% of women state that prostitution contributes to women's economic well-being.

The other approach concerns the freedom to engage in business activity. The attitudes of the Estonian population towards brothels are liberal. For the majority, brothels as business ventures seem to be as inevitable as any other business operating in a free-market economy. Members of Estonian society believe several actors have a strong interest in mediation in prostitution (brothel-keepers) or in being part of it (tourist agencies, taxi-drivers). Prostitution is a profit-making operation, which, however, involves risks, since pimping is criminal. The existence of brothels and possibility to call prostitutes to provide their services in hotel rooms is so common and widespread that people regard running a prostitution business as any other liberty granted under a market economy.

The attitude toward prostitution as a form of business takes shape when analysing people's responses to the questions posed. According to the survey, 90% of the adult population believe that prostitution brings a nice profit to a range of business undertakings like tourist agencies, hotels, taxi-drivers, etc. 82% of the population are confident that prostitution attracts sex tourists to Estonia (Table 8). There are no conspicuous differences between attitudes found among women and men. It is commonly believed that sex trade is a profit-making business.

7. Reasons why women become prostitutes

TABLE 11.

Question: What are the reasons why women enter prostitution?

Response falling under the category: Yes, definitely (All respondents %)

	All respondents	Sex		Nationality	
		Men	Women	Estonian	Non-Estonian
Desire to earn a decent income	47	45	48	48	44
Economic hardships	44	42	45	48	37
Drug addiction	43	40	45	48	33
Limited experience and knowledge of the life prostitutes lead	35	32	37	38	28
Unemployment	34	33	34	37	27
Low level of education	30	28	31	35	19
Cheating or use of force by recruiters	30	27	32	33	22
Limited competitiveness in the labour market; inability to find a job	24	23	25	27	17
Lack of support by the family and close friends	16	15	17	18	14

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

In the opinion of the population, there are three major reasons why women engage in prostitution: desire to earn a decent income, financial hardships and drug abuse. These factors are attributed more or less equal weight by roughly half of the population (43-47%).

The other group of factors relates to limited experience and knowledge of what the life of a prostitute really entails, unemployment, low levels of education and cheating or use of force by recruiters. These factors are considered relevant by approximately one-third of the population. Much less significance is attached to factors like limited competitiveness in the labour market, inability to find a job as well as lack of support by the family and close friends.

No major differences were observed in women's and men's attitudes. Men lightly less than women believe that young inexperienced women are trapped into prostitution by recruiters who use or beguile them with images of exciting lives.

Substantial difference can, however, be noticed when comparing the responses of Estonian and non-Estonian population. Non-Estonians give all

the above factors (except for the desire to earn a nice living) much lower ratings compared to Estonians. The greatest difference can be found in assessing the role of drug abuse and low levels of education.

In addition to this, dissimilarities can be observed between the responses given by urban versus rural population. Whereas Tallinners believe women predominantly take up prostitution to earn a decent living, the residents of smaller urban settlements suggest the two main reasons for becoming a prostitute are lack of good education and drug abuse. Estonia's rural population, more so than Tallinn residents, blame the pimps who entice women and trap them into prostitution by force.

8. Images of the prostitute

The images constructed by the media, movies and other sources let us identify five distinct groups of prostitutes⁸:

Happy Hooker. Prostitution is treated as a way of living just like any other. Almost any women facing financial difficulties can join the profession and take control of her life. After a few years these women, if they choose to do so, can return to "ordinary" life. The lucky ones might even end up marrying a former client of theirs.

Dirty Whore and personification of immorality. The prostitutes are evil and they find enjoyment in their evil deeds. Therefore, the woman who has chosen prostitution has of her own free will stepped on the margins of society and has renounced practically all her legitimate rights. She deserves the violence committed against her by pimps and clients, or, what is even worse, has provoked them to use violence.

A Girl from Poverty-Stricken East. When offering sexual services in Finland she is from Russia or the Baltic States, being involved in the prostitution practice in Estonia she is non-Estonian coming from North-East Estonia. She has been abused in childhood, has little education and probably consumes some narcotic drugs. She has practically lost any hope of a better life and her greatest wish is to earn money. People neither resent nor condemn her, just pity her. Opinion-holders make a point of stressing the distance between "us" and "them", i.e. ordinary people and foreign whores and criminals. This makes it easy to ignore the problem and believe

⁸ The typology is based on the publication by Anne-Maria Marttila, *Consuming Sex – Finnish Male Clients and Russian and Baltic Prostitution* 2003 (presentation at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference, 20-24 August 2003, Lund University, Sweden); Iivi Masso, *Soomlased seksioistu keelustamisest*, manuscript at the Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2006; Johanna Ross, *Prostituudid ja kliendid*, essayist research, Tallinn University, 2004

prostitution is practiced somewhere else. It helps treat prostitution as something which has nothing to do with “ordinary people”.

Social Worker and Healer. This image is often promoted to justify the need for prostitution. The men who go to prostitutes are often portrayed as being distressed and miserable who flee from their nagging passionless wives or the disabled who are unable to engage in sexual contact in any other way. Apart from sex they want to be understood and listened to. The prostitute acts largely as a social worker who helps to stabilise the clients marriage and softens male aggression which, in turn, helps prevent men’s violent behaviour towards other women.

VIP Escort. Image of the prostitute who offers sexual services in a high-class brothel or is a paid mistress of wealthy clients. She enjoys what she is doing. High-class prostitutes are much happier compared to regular street prostitutes.

The images of the prostitute are varied and diverse. They are complemented by fragmented portrayals of prostitutes in police news which together make the social environment where attitudes are shaped complex and somewhat disorienting. This is one of the reasons why the attitudes about prostitution are so wide-ranging and controversial. The positive depiction of female prostitute characters in literature and happy-end (for prostitutes) representations of female prostitution in world cinema are in sharp contrast with reality, i.e. images transmitted by the media which associate prostitution with HIV and drugs.

9. Attitudes toward actors involved in prostitution

TABLE 12.

Question: What is your attitude toward professional prostitutes in Estonia who sell sexual services for money and men who visit brothels?

%

	Attitude toward prostitutes		Attitude toward brothel clients	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Tolerant	19	30	8	26
Indifferent	21	31	38	46
Intolerant	56	35	51	23

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

There are not many who suggest they approve of actors participating in prostitution. Men more so than women: 30% of male clients claim they understand prostitutes; 26% maintain they have sympathy for clients. Women, by contrast, are inclined to disapprove of the prostitution business: 19% of female respondents say they can accept prostitutes and only 8% maintain they understand why men visit brothels. More than 50% of women and every third-fourth man have negative feelings toward prostitutes. Women, in general, tend to condemn prostitutes; men, however, are mostly indifferent or approving.

TABLE 13.

Question: Imagine a situation In Ida-Viru County where a young divorced woman with children who has failed to find a job over a longer period of time decides to earn a living offering sex services. What is your attitude toward her?

	%	
	Women	Men
I understand her, it's inevitable	19	28
I'm indifferent, I don't care	12	18
I would disapprove	65	48

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research. 2005

The Estonian population would not approve of the behaviour of women who engage in prostitution because of financial hardships. Earning a living as a prostitute would not be accepted even when the woman is in an emergency situation. Estonian society would refuse to understand a woman who chooses to sell her body due to long-term unemployment or economic constraints. Two-thirds of women and half of men condemn such behaviour. It is only every fifth woman and 28% of men that would have sympathy for the woman.

Negative attitudes are more typical among

- persons with higher education
- Estonian men in the age bracket 60 years and up
- 60-years and up Russian women of whom 88% condemn prostitutes.

The group of the tolerant is composed of

- persons with basic education
- 20-39-year-old Russian women
- 30-59-year-old Russian men
- 50-59-year-old Estonian men

TABLE 14.**Question: What is your attitude toward the following situation?**

	All respondents %		
	I would not mind	I would be indifferent to	I would definitely mind
working closely together with a former prostitute	25	50	19
working closely together with a man who frequents brothels	22	55	19
having a prostitute's child studying in the same class as my child	28	38	24
a woman in my circle of friends becoming a prostitute	9	21	63
a man in my circle of friends becoming a brothel customer	12	38	42

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research. 2005

Actors involved in prostitution are not desirable companions. People tend to be cautious of and would rather stay away from prostitutes than tolerate them in Estonian society. Only every fourth respondent would agree to work closely together with prostitutes. Nearly half of women and two-thirds of men are indifferent. People are also cautious about and try to avoid situations where their child would study in the same class with a prostitute's child

Limited tolerance and indifference turn into outright rejection in case a woman in the circle of friends should enter prostitution. Hostile feelings toward such women are expressed by two-thirds of women and more than half of men. Men who start frequenting brothels fall into disrepute. Every second woman and third man disapproves of such behaviour.

Given the above, we may well presume that contacts with prostitutes and their clients are not desired. And even if every fourth respondent would agree to work together with them, there are practically no chances for prostitutes and brothel customers to make friends with "ordinary" people. One of the underlying reasons are risks and dangers associated with prostitution.

10. Willingness to work together with representatives of risk groups

TABLE 15.

Question: How would you react if the company/organisation you are working in would add to the staff ...

%

	Estonians		Non-Estonians	
	I would not mind	I'd rather not have	I would not mind	I'd rather not have
people with physical disability	64	11	49	26
homosexuals	24	48	8	67
former prostitutes	18	51	10	62
HIV-positive and AIDS patients	11	68	7	77
former prisoners	8	75	9	69
drug addicts	3	88	2	93

Source: Monitoring of ethnic relations 2005⁹

The results of the 2005 monitoring of ethnic relations demonstrate that the willingness of the Estonian population to work side by side with representatives of different risk groups is very limited. The only exception would be persons with physical disability: two-thirds of Estonians and half of non-Estonians would not have anything against working together with them. Drug addicts, on the other hand, would constitute the risk group that people are least willing to work together with: barely 2-3% would consent to do so. People also have highly negative feelings towards former prostitutes: only 18% of Estonians and 10% of non-Estonians would agree to work together with them.

The results of both, the present survey as well as of the monitoring of ethnic relations suggest that prostitutes as a risk group are a threat to Estonian society and national security and they should be kept at a safe distance.

⁹ One thousand people in the age group 15-74 were interviewed in total; 540 women and 460 men. The survey used random sampling which was representative of the population. The results of the survey can be interpreted as reflecting the correlations and trends characteristic of Estonian society. The methodology was developed by a team of experts including representatives from the Estonian Institute for Open Society Research.

11. The pressure of the sex business: finding new prostitutes and clients

TABLE 16.

Question: Who belong to high-risk groups?

	Responses "mostly them" %			
	Sex		Nationality	
	Men	Women	Estonian	Non-Estonian
young Russian women	50	53	59	38
unemployed women	42	42	40	45
underage girls	24	32	20	42
young Estonian women	26	25	32	12
men, potential customers of brothels	11	13	15	7
underage boys	10	12	8	19

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

In the opinion of the adult population, the highest-risk group for prostitution are young Russian women. Non-Estonians themselves express a different opinion and identify as two main risk groups unemployed women and underage girls. Further, while there are only 8% of adult Estonians who believe underage boys might be the target for recruiters, the corresponding indicator for non-Estonians is twice higher, i.e. 19%. People generally believe that women and underage girls are three to five times more likely to be tricked or coercively trafficked into prostitution compared to underage boys and men.

TABLE 17.

Question: In the past five years, have you been in situations where someone has attempted to lure you into prostitution?

Age	Response "yes" %	
	Estonian women	Non-Estonian women
15 - 19	9	31
20 - 29	21	36
30 - 39	6	26
40 - 49	11	9
50 - 59	5	3
60 - 74	-	7

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research 2005

13% of women report they have been the target of attempts to recruit them into prostitution. In absolute terms this means 73,000 women aged 15-74, i.e. on average 14,000-15,000 women a year. The data suggest that non-Estonian women are targeted twice as often compared to Estonian women, the prime target being 15-29-year-old Russian women. Every third of them have been proposed to engage in prostitution. The most attractive age group for recruiters among Estonian women seem to be 20-29-year-olds.

TABLE 18.

Question: Have you been in situations where prostitutes or pimps have attempted to offer you sexual services?

Responses “once in a while + “often” %

Age	Estonian men	Non-Estonian men
15 - 19	4	9
20 - 29	18	8
30 - 39	15	18
40 - 49	21	29
50 - 59	20	24
60 - 74	6	6

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

Estonia has an aggressive sex market where 15% men report they have been offered to buy sex; non-Estonian men more frequently than Estonian men. The supply side of sexual services is particularly well-developed in Tallinn and bigger towns where every fifth man has been proposed to buy sex whilst the indicator for men living in rural settlements stands at 11%. The most popular target group is 40-59-year-old men; those in the age group 15-19 and 60 years and up have been propositioned less frequently.

The results of the survey suggest that the risk for women to be tricked into prostitution is 4-5 times higher than that for men.

12. Buyers of sex and their motives¹⁰

What sort of persons buy sex?

Buyers of sex are mostly men. In order to understand why men visit prostitutes we need to analyse male sexuality as well as gender relations in society. Both, sexuality and gender are socially constructed categories which change over time. It is most probable that buying a prostitute's services today and a hundred years back are essentially different both at the societal as well as individual levels. The prostitution activity carries different meanings in different cultural contexts.¹¹

For the sake of clarity, we need to note that since the 1960s a tendency has been observable in the western world where women have increasingly started to arrive on the prostitution scene as customers. The purchase of sex mostly takes place further away from home. The typical buyer is a wealthy (white) woman who buys sexual services from a black man from a poverty-stricken community. In Barbados, for instance, female sex tourism is a branch of economy where the consumers are wealthy western women. This business is by its very nature not different from "traditional" prostitution.¹²

How many men in the world buy women for sex is difficult to estimate. The surveys performed suggest that the number of men buying sex varies substantially across countries and cultures. The figures reported for Europe range from 7% in the United Kingdom to 39% in Spain¹³ and 11%-13% in the Nordic countries.¹⁴

Customers' motives.

In 1985 Hannele Varsa made 30 interviews with male clients of prostitution in Finland to identify their motives and experiences with prostitution.¹⁵ Men regularly visiting prostitutes considered it an easy way to satisfy their sexual needs without any obligations or emotional attachment. For some men it was an opportunity to have more variation in their sex life. Males expecting a relationship from a prostitute belonged to the category of "disappointed" men.

The survey conducted by Sven-Axel Månsson's in 1996 concluded that men buying sex are mostly males with multiple sexual partners.¹⁶ Men purchasing prostitutes' services often have difficulty finding a woman for a conventional relationship; the ranks of customers have a high proportion of divorced and separated men. Månsson divides male clients proceeding from their motives into two groups:

¹⁰ The overview "Buyers of sex and their motives" has been compiled by Katri Eespere from the Estonian Institute of Humanities at Tallinn University using results of different sociological surveys

¹¹ Månsson (2001); p 139.

¹² Phillips (2005)

¹³ Hughes (2004), p 6.

¹⁴ Månsson (2004)

¹⁵ Varsa

¹⁶ Månsson (1998)

1. men who maintain a more or less stable relationship with a woman, but seek something more (“I buy what I want”)
2. men not having a relationship and/or those with difficulties of social interaction with women (“But there are no other kinds of women”).

The survey concluded that there were few men that stated their primary motive for using prostitutes was the need for sex. One may presume, consequently, that it is a craving for intimacy, companionship and affection rather than sexual urge that makes males seek the services of a prostitute.¹⁷

Male clients often entertain a fantasy of practising “some special kind of sex” which is rarely or not possible with non-prostitute women. This is a highly subjective evaluation since a large part of clients think oral sex is something that you can only receive from a prostitute. For many, the image of a “whore” is sexually stirring.

While male fantasies about prostitution often involve meeting a sexually experienced woman, in reality they would wish to assume a more passive role compared to the one they have in their regular sex life. This means that the man literally buys himself the right to be passive and be seduced by a sexually aggressive “whore”.¹⁸

Men abandon the societal norms that support male superiority and assume the role that allows them to relax and ignore the standards of sexual performance. The client uses his power to create a situation where the traditional gender roles have been reversed.¹⁹

The other group of motives includes problems related to contact-making and feelings of loneliness. These motives are found among men having no regular relationships with women or who experience difficulties making contact with women.

Sociologist Jari Kuosmanen and others studied the buyers of sex in Sweden.²⁰ They found five distinct groups of clients:

1. Super clients (allkonsumenterna).

Super clients engage apart from paid sex also in numerous so-called unpaid sex relations. Using prostitutes’ services is part of their lifestyle; the buying of sex is considered equal to any other commercial transactions, like, for instance, going to the hairdresser’s.

2. Intimacy-avoiders (relationsundvikarna)

Intimacy-avoiders have no intimate relationships since they want to avoid emotional and intimate contacts with women. They thus prefer to use paid sexual services due to the reason that these involve neither any obligations nor emotions.

¹⁷ Månsson (2001)

¹⁸ idid: p 141.

¹⁹ Månsson (2001), p 142.

²⁰ Sandell, Petterson, Larsson, Kuosmanen (1996)

3. Supplementers (kompletteringsköparna)

Supplementers' main motive in the purchase of sex is the wish to enrich and diversify their sex life. The supplementers are found in a permanent relationship (e.g. have a wife) which they claim to value highly. What they want is to have some variety in their sex life. Choosing paid sex is in their opinion safer and fairer than getting involved with a mistress. They do not qualify buying sex from a prostitute as being unfaithful to their intimate partner.

4. Intimacy piners (relationssökarna)

Intimacy piners have a very low self-esteem and they experience difficulties with social interaction with women. What they buy from prostitutes is the feeling of intimacy rather than sex. Some of them would even be willing to marry a prostitute. Engagement in an intimate relationship means an end to using prostitutes. They have idyllic and unrealistic conceptions of marriage.

5. Rejected (refuserade)

The rejected have also low self-esteem. They lack any previous experience of sex except for with prostitutes. The rejected are inclined to think women would not like to mix with them unless paid. Visiting prostitutes means being realistic because there is not any hope of having sex with "ordinary" women.

Similarly to Jari Kuosmanen and others, attempt to classify male clients of prostitutes have also been made by American researchers Sawyer, Metz, Hinds and Brucker. Based on their research, clients fall into four main groups:

1. Negative Compulsive Type Men

The group is composed on men who claim they do not enjoy sex with prostitutes, but go to prostitutes anyway.

2. Positive Compulsive Type Men

These men say that they enjoy sex with a prostitute, but have attempted to stop buying it.

3. Positive Accepting Type Men

Men belonging to this group say they enjoy sex with prostitutes, do not try to stop and support legalization of prostitution.

4. Socially Inadequate Type Men

The group consists of men who exhibit characteristics of shyness, social discomfort, and introversion.²¹

The doctoral thesis of Anne-Maria Marttila focuses on the ways male Finnish clients of prostitution construct and identify themselves as sexual and ethnic subjects.²² Marttila maintains that sex buyers are not a homogeneous group, they come from different social classes, age groups and educational

²¹ Sawyer, Metz, Hinds, Brucker (2001-2002)

²² Marttila (2004)

backgrounds. Most of them are married and approximately 50% of them have children.

Prostitution is sort of ethnic space where millions of western sex tourists travel with the ultimate aim of meeting “exotic” women. For many, sex for money is an opportunity to escape reality filled with daily roles and obligations. Prostitution constitutes a space with the strong presence of masculine hegemony and absence of gender equality. Finnish clients of prostitution describe Russia as a sex paradise and consider Baltic and Russian prostitutes “more sexy, feminine and skilled”.

New technologies have made buying of sex easier, anonymous and uncontrolled. The Internet helps clients make contact, engage in exchange of experience and act out fantasies. Virtual sex tourists do not even have to leave home to satisfy their lust.

Internet forums have enabled to construct social bonds and a certain collective identity among the clients of prostitution. Internet forums offer “virtual homosocial spaces” where traditional masculine hegemony prevails. The needs of the clients are socially constructed, masculine sexuality is presented as uncontrollable and instinctual which inevitably requires satisfaction. This “biologism” is prevalent among Finnish buyers of sex.

The clients of prostitution tend to regard commercial sex as a service. The purchase of sex is interpreted in diverse ways ranging from “a relaxing moment” to “a feeling of power”. The clients do not buy the body of a woman, but the service offered by the seller – the prostitute.²³

13. Buyers of sex in Estonia

TABLE 19.

Question: Have you ever bought sex or visited brothels?

	Men %			
	In Estonia		Abroad	
	2003	2005	2003	2005
Yes, at least a couple of times a year	2	2	-	1
Yes, a few times during my lifetime	8	10	3	3
No, never	89	87	97	94

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2003 and 2005

²³ Marttila (2003)

13% of Estonian men have bought sexual services. In 2003, the percentage of men who had purchased sex was practically the same – 12%. Only 2% of men fall into the category of regular customers of brothels who visit prostitutes at least a few times a year. 4% of Estonian men have visited brothels abroad.

Every second client has bought sex services 1-2 times during his lifetime; the ranks of the more experienced customers who have bought sex at least 10 times include 10% of men. One man has visited brothels 2,9 times on average.

Similar frequencies are reported for Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland) where the percentage of men visiting brothels ranges between 10% and 13%.

The portrait of the sex buyer

We can point out the following characteristics typical of buyers of sex:

Nationality

The structure of the community of sex buyers corresponds to Estonia's ethnic structure, 2/3 Estonian men and 1/3 non-Estonian men.

TABLE 20.

Age.

Percentage of buyers of sex %

	All men	Estonian men	Non-Estonian men
20 – 29	23	27	17
30 – 39	23	18	33
40 – 49	26	22	33
50 – 59	16	20	9
60 – 74	12	13	8
TOTAL:	100	100	100

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

Even though the clientele of prostitution is composed of men from different age groups, the basic part of clients, i.e. 75%, are from the age group 20-49. Estonian men tend to visit brothels primarily at the age of 20-29; non-Estonian men at the age of 30-39.

TABLE 21.

Education.

Percentage of buyers of sex %

Basic education	34
Secondary or vocational secondary vocational	55
Higher	11
TOTAL:	100

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

The typical buyer of sex has secondary or vocational secondary education; every third of them has basic education. Only a tenth of men with higher education use prostitutes' services.

TABLE 22.
Marital status.

Percentage of buyers of sex %	
Married	44
Cohabiting	24
Single	13
Divorced	13
With a stable partner	5
Widower	1
TOTAL:	100

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research 2005

The basic part of clients (68%) are married or cohabit. Only every fourth client (26%) is single or divorced.

Attitudes toward brothels

There are three times more men among clients who consider brothels necessary compared to men on average. Clients also feature a higher degree of interest in other sex products and services.

Attitudes toward the legalisation of prostitution

Clients are more supportive of legalisation of prostitution compared to men on average. Brothel customers favour to a lesser degree than men on average penalisation of prostitutes or clients.

14. Estonia's options: to legalise brothels or penalise the actors involved in prostitution

The respondents of the survey were asked some fundamental questions concerning the legal regulation of prostitution in Estonia. First, the respondents were inquired whether prostitution was to be allowed (legalised) or on the contrary, prohibited.

Men's attitudes toward brothels were more decided than those of women. The 2003 data demonstrate that nearly half of the adult male population (48%) expressed their support to legalising the prostitution business in Estonia. By 2005, the respective percentage had fallen to 41. Further, in 2003, the proportion of men suggesting prostitution be outlawed equalled 23%; by 2005, however, the figure had risen to 36%. A quarter of men failed to give any definite answer to the question whether to legalise or criminalise prostitution.

Women's attitudes toward legalisation or criminalisation of prostitution have over the past two years changed even more drastically compared to men. In 2003, female respondents fell into three groups, which were roughly equal in size. One-third of females would legalise prostitution, one-third would criminalise it and one-third expressed no clear stand concerning the regulation of prostitution. By 2005, the distribution had changed whereby 30% of women stated prostitution should be legally allowed, 50% said it should be prohibited (compared to 34% in 2003) and 20% had not formed an opinion about whether to make it legal or punishable (compared to 32% in 2003).

Prohibition of prostitution: who to penalise?

There are three different regulations available when it comes to criminalisation of prostitution, the basic question being who exactly to penalise. The first choice would be to prosecute pimps (brothel-owners), which is what Estonia is currently doing (see Table 23). The police and court practice, however, demonstrate that it is extremely difficult to bring criminal charges against pimps and that the relevant law enforcement mechanisms are weak. Criminalisation of mediation as a means to fight prostitution has proved inefficient.

TABLE 23.
Opinions of legal regulation of prostitution.

	Average		Women		Men	
	2005	2003	2005	2003	2005	2003
These are brothel-owners that should be penalised						
- yes	82	60	89	63	74	56
- no	10	16	6	11	15	21
- don't know	8	24	5	26	11	23
These are prostitutes that sell their body who should be penalised						
- yes	55	39	63	46	47	31
- no	29	32	23	24	36	42
- don't know	16	29	14	30	17	27
These are men that buy prostitutes' services						
- yes	46	32	55	38	35	26
- no	40	39	32	29	50	50
- don't know	14	29	13	33	15	24
Prostitution and brothels should be legally allowed						
- yes	35	40	30	34	41	48
- no	44	29	50	34	36	23
- don't know	21	31	20	32	23	29

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2003 and 2005

Punishing prostitutes, sex-service providers comes right after penalisation of pimps. Particularly aggressive and hostile towards women in prostitution are female respondents. Quite widespread among women is the attitude that the root of all evil is women themselves, i.e. the providers of sexual services.

The preferred option for Nordic countries which has been legalised in Sweden and is being discussed in Finland, i.e. prosecution of the buyer of the sex service, the man, seems to be the least understood and accepted in Estonia.

The most conspicuous change in the past years relates to the harshening of the attitudes towards the sex business. Members of Estonian society, women and men alike, increasingly suggest actors of the sex business be penalised. It would therefore not be wrong to assume that in case Estonia decides in the near future to penalise the actors involved in prostitution, its efforts would be undermined by the unwillingness of the population to accept the victim status of prostitutes.

15. Assessment of punishment for drug dealing and mediation in prostitution

It is important to analyse and identify the attitudes of the Estonian adult population toward criminal offences linked to prostitution. The fact that pimping is punishable by Estonian laws has made mediation in prostitution the focus of current debate. How dangerous criminal activities associated with prostitution are can be judged comparing the ratings given to different types of crime.

The respondents, understandably, are familiar neither with the specifics nor the types of punishments. However, their attitudes (“too mild”, “too severe” or “just”) are an indication of the severity of the type of crime. The response “too mild” means that more severe punishment should be introduced and that the crime itself poses a serious threat to society (see table 24).

TABLE 24.

Ratings given to punishments, i.e. whether the punishments are considered “too mild”, “too severe” or “just”

%

	Punishments are ...		
	... too mild	... fair	... too severe
Drug trafficking	68	19	2
Rape	66	19	1
Purchase and consumption of drugs	56	25	4
Mediation in prostitution and brothel-keeping	55	17	2
Accepting a bribe	52	26	3
Drunk driving	48	36	7
Committing a traffic offence	38	40	5
Theft without physical attack	38	37	7

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

The results of the survey show that drug trafficking is considered the most grave and the most threatening crime. Equally dangerous is violence against women or rape.

The most meaningful fact for the society is that mediation in prostitution is considered a much more serious form of crime than, for instance, theft, traffic offence or drunk driving. This shows that crime associated with prostitution (pimping being a criminal offence in Estonia) is deemed a phenomenon relatively dangerous for the society. The sympathy- and threat-related perceptions among Estonia’s adult population are the factors that facilitate the introduction of more strict legal measures and punishments for prostitution activities. This in particular concerns the proposed legislative initiative, i.e. criminalisation of the purchase of sex.

16. The reaction of the population toward Estonia’s image as a sex paradise

The results of the survey are a reflection of the current quite liberal attitudes of Estonia’s adult population towards prostitution as well as brothels: they are neutral and approving rather than negative and disapproving. When, however, the general reputation of the country is at stake and has to be weighed against the profits generated by the sex business, it is the reputation of the country that has priority over profits.

TABLE 25.

Question: In some countries like in Finland and the United Kingdom, Estonia is advertised as a country with a booming sex business which has a generous supply of cheap prostitutes. How would you rate the fact that Estonia has an image of a country with a booming sex business. Please state which of the two statements you would support more:

- A. Some think it is profitable for Estonia to be a popular destination for sex travellers because it helps attract tourists and is beneficial for the Estonian economy.**
- B. Others think that advertising Estonia as a popular destination for sex travellers causes irreparable damage to its international reputation.**

	Average	Women	Men
Agree with statement A	12	9	15
Agree with statement B	75	80	68
Hard to say	13	11	17
TOTAL:	100	100	100

%

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

Three-fourths of the population fear that promoting the country as an attractive venue for sex tourists can do a lot of harm to Estonia's international reputation. This view is expressed more often by women than men: 80% of the female respondents state such an image would have serious consequences for Estonia's image on the international arena. This fear in particular makes the Estonian population doubt the usefulness and rationality of the prostitution business. The potential damage caused by the expanding sex business to the country's reputation is equally frightening to all social groups: the young and the old, the urban and the rural populations, the high-paid and the low-paid, Estonians and non-Estonians.

17. Expectations toward government interference in the sex business

The Estonian society is mostly tolerant of prostitution and would support government control of the business. This view is held by 47% of the adult population: 41% of women and 53% of men, respectively. Government interference is not interpreted as government's participation in the business. Rather, it is expected that the government exercise control over the businesses involved in prostitution.

	%		
	All respondents	Women	Men
The government should not interfere with prostitution because we need sex tourists	3	2	3
The government should allow prostitution; in doing so, it should, however, exercise strict control over the business	47	41	53
The government should put a decisive stop to (eliminate) prostitution	30	38	21
It is all the same to me	12	11	15
Hard to say	8	8	8
TOTAL:	100	100	100

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research, 2005

Such opinions suggest, first, that when interpreting the concept of prostitution, people in Estonia associate it mostly with soft values and positive feelings. In today's Estonia, prostitution rather than being condemned is considered necessary and worthy of "protection", i.e. it should be wisely controlled by the government.

Only a small proportion of adult males in Estonia have some experience with prostitution: 2% of them are regular customers of brothels and 10% of males have visited some Estonian brothel at least once. The latter can also be called "the curious" not going to brothels regularly, but wanting to try it out once. The opinions of the majority of respondents have been shaped by the media, books, movies and other sources of information, i.e. are based on mediated experience.

Further, the conflicting expectations, i.e. that the government allow prostitution, but keep it under strict state control, suggest that the Estonian population has no clear understanding of prostitution and its far-reaching consequences.

Estonian laws prohibit and criminalise mediation in prostitution. The opinions expressed by half the respondents, representatives of the adult population relative to giving prostitution a green light conflict laws. In other words, nearly half of Estonia's population would sort of support illicit business activity; which is nonsense, naturally. What is shown, however, is that the images of prostitution promoted by the media and the arts are mostly positive, not negative.

Another conclusion is that people generally fear the side-effects of prostitution like the spread of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse and alcoholism (see Section 5).

When proposing changes in the legislative framework and working to bring prostitutes back to the legal labour market it is critically important to thoroughly analyse the practice of prostitution in Estonia. Equally important is to engage the media in explaining the legal provisions introduced in neighbouring countries, i.e. Sweden, Finland, but also Latvia that have chosen, based on a political decision, a different legal regime for the regulation of the prostitution business.

18. Expectations toward government support for former prostitutes

TABLE 27.

Question: Women, former prostitutes, who exit the sex business are often confronted by a range of problems like unemployment, failing health and absence of residence. Not everybody succeeds finding solutions on her own. Should prostituted women be provided help and support on preferential terms in comparison with the unemployed?

	All respondents %
Former prostitutes should receive more assistance than other unemployed	5
Former prostitutes should be treated equally with other unemployed	62
Former prostitutes should receive less assistance compared to other unemployed	9
Former prostitutes should not be given any assistance at all	12
Hard to say	12
TOTAL:	100

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research 2005

Three-fourths of the Estonian adult population are willing to help former prostitutes. Only 12% of the respondents note they would not provide assistance to prostituted women. At the same time, people would not consent to grant them preferential treatment compared to other unemployed: the overwhelming majority of respondents (62%) state they be treated equally with other jobless persons.

We further attempted to identify what kind of assistance and services would be relevant to provide to former prostitutes. The three preferred kinds of assistance were:

TABLE 28.

Question: In case you are supportive of the assistance to be given to former prostitutes, which type of services the government should provide:

I Critically important - supported by over 50% of respondents:

Responses "Yes, definitely" (all respondents, %)

Treatment of HIV/AIDS	65
Treatment of drug abuse	60
Treatment of alcoholism	54
Consultations by psychologists	52

II Important - supported by one-third and up to half of the respondents

Responses "Yes, definitely" (all respondents, %)

Assistance and support to raise children	49
Assistance to find a job	40
Assistance to resume studies and learn a trade	38

III Less important – supported by one-fourth of respondents

Responses "Yes, definitely" (all respondents, %)

Provision of shelter	25
Provision of temporary living space	24

Source: Estonian Institute for Open Society Research 2005

Over half of all respondents suggest that the government should provide former prostitutes assistance in the form of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and alcoholism treatment. These are the phenomena creating tensions for the whole society. Prostitutes are believed to be a major reservoir of sexually transmitted diseases, therefore, it is but natural that people support fast elimination of threats they are confronted by. It is quite surprising, though, that more than half of all respondents consent to provide prostituted women psychological advice. Respondents have a less favourable attitude toward helping prostitutes to find a job, resume studies and learn a trade. The respondents are least supportive of the need to provide shelter or temporary living space.