

SUMMARY

The extent and development of prostitution in Sweden 2014



Länsstyrelsen
Stockholm

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In December 2013, the County Administrative Board of Stockholm in its role as the National Coordinator against Prostitution and Trafficking was commissioned by the Government to survey and gather knowledge about the extent of prostitution in Sweden. The methods currently available are unable to estimate the exact extent in Sweden. This does not mean that attempts at estimation should be excluded; rather, that methods should be developed.

The methodological challenges include the fact that people in prostitution constitute to some degree a hidden population, which means that we do not know the size of the population, nor do we fully know which people are engaged in it. We also lack a single definition of prostitution and human trafficking, which makes it difficult to draw comparisons between and within countries over time. Despite these challenges, it is still possible given the surveys available to say something about the extent of and trends in prostitution.

Population survey – adults over 18 years old

According to the latest population survey in 2014, the proportion of individuals in Sweden who have bought and sold sexual services is relatively constant over time. Those who have stated that they have bought sexual services are exclusively men. Approximately 7.5 percent of Swedish men between 18 and 65 years of age have bought sexual services at some point in their lives, which is a low figure compared to other Nordic and European countries. The proportion of Swedish men who have stated that they have bought sexual services during this past year is 0.8 percent, a figure which is also relatively constant over time. KAST, units in the three largest cities in Sweden carrying out programmes targeting buyers of sexual services also report that they encounter men solely.

In the latest population study carried out in 2014, 0.7 percent stated that they had sold sexual services at some point. Only men have stated this, which is line with previous surveys where a larger share of men stated that they had had experience of selling sexual services, compared to women. As regards men and women who have had experience of selling sexual

services, the somewhat higher proportion of men in these population studies might be explained by the fact that it is women of non-Swedish origin living in Sweden on a temporary basis who constitute a significant proportion of women in prostitution. Women of non-Swedish origin are not reached by population studies and are therefore not represented in these types of surveys. The same applies to women in institutional care or the penal system or with an intellectual disability, who are not reached either by the population studies.

Support for the Swedish Act prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services as shown by the population studies has remained consistently strong since the first of these recent surveys was carried out: the most recent one in 2014 showed that 72 percent were in favour of it (85 percent of women and 60 percent of men). At the same time, support for criminalising the sale of sexual services is also evident: 48 percent (59 percent of women and 38 percent of men). Greater support has been expressed by women than men both for the Act prohibiting the Purchase of Sexual Services and for criminalising the sale of sexual services.

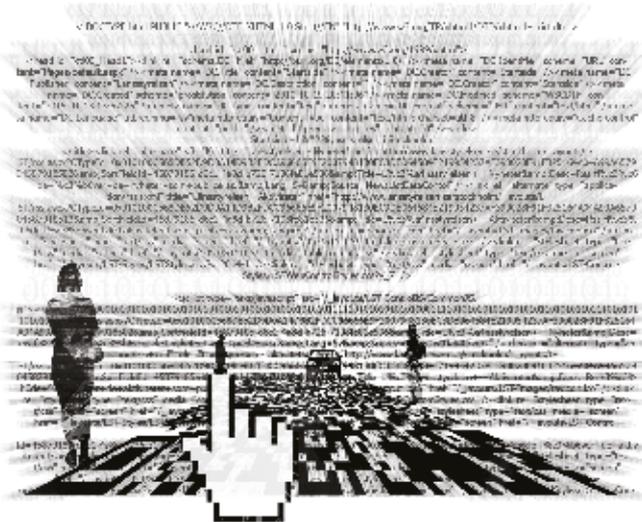


Illustration: Karl Lindstrand

Street prostitution has been cut by more than half since 1995

Street prostitution has been cut by more than half since the estimate made in 1995, which was 650 women at the time. Approximately 200–250 women were engaged in street prostitution in 2014 according to estimates made by the Prostitution Units known as *Mikamottagningarna* in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

A reduction in street prostitution needs to be understood in relation to the digital and technological developments that have occurred during the past 15 years. However, one cannot ignore the fact that in countries where the purchase of sexual services is legal street prostitution is widespread, in the form of *red light districts*, for example, while at the same time illegal prostitution on the internet is a reality in these countries too. The County Administrative Board's overall assessment is that the ban on the purchase of sexual services may have had a normative effect on prospective buyers and thus had an impact on the extent of prostitution in Sweden. More science-based studies are needed in order to assess this effect.

Prostitution on the internet

Two internet surveys commissioned by the County Administrative Board in collaboration with the National Board of Health and Welfare show that the internet plays a central role in the area of prostitution. One way of measuring the extent of prostitution on the internet is to estimate the number of escort ads, yet these estimates too are beset by methodological challenges.

The number of escort ads aimed for men who buy sexual services from women has increased markedly during the past eight years from 304 to 6,965 ads. The number of escort ads primarily targeted at the LGBT community, and consisting almost exclusively of men who buy sexual services from men, has increased from 190 to 702 ads in about four years. Authorities who have studied escort ads in the past have noted that one and the same seller of sexual services is often found in several advertisements. This finding is also indicated by the internet surveys, mainly in the form of the same telephone number cropping up during a search of several advertising sites. The overlap between the number of advertisements and escort sites and the duplication of many ads is shown by both surveys. This is also confirmed by other authorities working the field. Against this background, there is nothing indicating that the actual number of individuals engaging in prostitution has increased. However, the access to and the flow of information about sexual services on the internet has increased.

The number of ads does not correspond to the number of different individuals involved since the number of individuals posting the ads is unknown. One reliable figure for the number of individuals behind the ads can be estimated more precisely with the aid of a method that has been tested in Denmark. As a part of this report, the County Administrative Board has carried out a pilot study which has taken its inspiration from the Danish model and can be repeated and developed in a Swedish context in the future.

Increased knowledge about children and youths

According to youth studies that have been done, the proportion of young men who state that they have experiences of selling sexual services (1.3–3.6 percent) is higher compared to young women (1–4.6 percent). Men defining themselves as homosexual, bisexual and queer constitute a large group of young men who have had experience of offering sex in return for payment, this being one of the findings shown by the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights, RFSL, (14.5 percent of young men, 3.7 percent of girls and 4.2 percent of those who come under neither young man/woman category). Certain groups are not reached by youth studies and are therefore not represented in these types of surveys. Examples here are young people who have a nationality other than Swedish and young people in institutional care where sex in return for payment is more common among young women than young men (13–23 percent compared with 4–8 percent).

Age

Certain difficulties arise in estimating the age of people in prostitution. Based on the picture presented by this scope survey, the County Administrative Board estimates that people in the 18–30 age group constitute the majority of those selling sexual services. The age of the buyers varies, with the exception of men who buy sexual services from men and young men who tend to be older than the sellers.

Nationality

The majority of the sellers of sexual services are foreign nationals. 80 percent of the escort ads on the internet state a nationality other than Swedish, and, according to Mikamottagningarna in Stockholm and Gothenburg, the majority of women engaged in street prostitution are foreign nationals. Romanian and Nigerian women are over-represented among women in street prostitution, which is the case in several other countries in Europe. In the case of internet prostitution, it is more difficult to interpret details about the nationalities stated in the escort ads. For marketing purposes, a nationality is often given that can be intended to attract prospective buyers.

Knowledge gaps

In order to be able to offer support and help to those who need it and target interventions in the right direction, it is important that the extent and development of prostitution are monitored. Scope surveys are necessary but involve many challenges. The County Administrative Board has been able to identify a number of gaps in our knowledge about the extent and forms of prostitution. This primarily concerns vulnerable groups with an overhanging risk of

being subjected to prostitution and newer trends in prostitution:

- unaccompanied minors
- under-represented groups in population and youth surveys
- the extent of and vulnerability among transgender persons
- the significance of the internet and new digital forms of communication
- hidden prostitution, mainly in massage parlours

As regards the carrying out of further assignments and research, the County Administrative Board proposes that:

- systematic follow-up of prostitution and minimum estimates are made in relation to several different arenas:
 - regular surveys of sexual habits (population and youth surveys) take place, every five years
 - internet surveys take place every other year
 - the pilot study for estimating the extent of internet prostitution is repeated
 - an assignment involving the provision of estimates of street prostitution on an ongoing basis is given to a relevant actor
- assignments in the field are coordinated. This would be facilitated by an authority or other actor being commissioned at national level to estimate the extent of prostitution on an ongoing and systematic basis.

Year of publication: 2015
Separate print from report 2015:10 Prostitutionen i Sverige 2014 – En omfattningskartläggning, Länsstyrelsen i Stockholms län, tfn: 010-223 10 00

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