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Attitudes and perceptions about legislation prohibiting the purchase of sexual services in Sweden

Attityder till och uppfattningar om sexköpslagen i Sverige

Jari Kuosmanen

Swedish legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex has, for a long time, been the only one of its kind in the world, in that it only targets the purchase and not the sale of sex. There is great interest in Sweden and other European countries in how this law has been understood and accepted by the Swedes. The purpose of this article is to present and discuss the attitudes of the Swedish people to this law. A survey was carried out during the spring of 2008 with a sample of 2500 individuals aged between 18 and 74. The results show that a large majority of Swedes want to retain the law, even if they do not have strong confidence that the law reduces the supply or demand. It is also shown that the law primarily influenced those who already had a negative attitude towards prostitution. Furthermore the Swedes and foremost Swedish women would even like to criminalise the sale of sex. When it comes to the extent of purchase, the responses indicate that the number of customers has, as a result of the legislation, decreased somewhat.

Keywords: Prostitution; Legislation; Attitudes; Sweden

Den svenska lagen som förbjuder köp av sex har länge varit den enda i sitt slag i världen, eftersom den endast reglerar köp men inte försäljning av sex. I flera europeiska länder finns ett stort intresse för hur lagen har uppfattats och mottagits av svenskarna. Syftet med denna artikel är att presentera och diskutera svenskarnas attityder till denna lag.

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Undersökningen gjordes under våren 2008 genom en enkät riktad mot 2500 personer i åldern 18 till 74 år. Resultaten visar att en stor majoritet av svenskarna vill behålla lagen, även om de inte har så stark tilltro till att lagen minskar på utbudet eller efterfrågan. Det visade sig också att lagens attitydförändrande påverkan var störst bland dem som redan innan lagen var negativa till prostitution. Majoriteten av respondenterna och framförallt kvinnorna ville även kriminalisera försäljning av sex. Studien visar vidare att när det gäller köp av sex har den minskat något som en direkt effekt av lagstiftningen.

Nyckelord: Prostitution; Lagstiftning; Attityder; Sverige

The Swedish legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex, which came into force on 1 January 1999, has for a long time been the only legislation of its kind to be found anywhere in the world, in that it only targets the purchase and not the sale of sex, which remains legal. In Finland the purchase of sex has been a criminal offence since 2006, when it was related to trafficking and living off immoral earnings as a pimp (Marttila, 2008a). On 1 January 2009 Norway enacted legislation which, similar to that in Sweden, prohibits the purchase of sex irrespective of the circumstances in which it is sold. In many other European countries, however, views about prostitution are more liberal. In Germany, for example, as a result of the enactment of legislation that regulates the conditions under which prostitutes can sell sex, which came into force in January 2002, prostitution has become legal (Dodillet, 2009). It is thus apparent that different European countries have arrived at different conclusions in relation to prostitution that takes place in so-called voluntary forms. Where, however, prostitution takes place as a result of coercion, such as for example in cases of trafficking, there is a consensus of disapproval among European nations, which, amongst other things, is evidenced by the collaboration between relevant agencies in the different countries (Visser, 2007).

These examples demonstrate, amongst other things, that even if the fight against trafficking unites many European countries, the same cannot be said for other forms of prostitution. In Sweden the issue of prostitution and the vulnerability of prostitutes have been under discussion for a long time, though here the solution to these problems has, at least from the 1980s onwards, been focused on criminalisation rather than legalisation.

Siring (2008) has shown that, in the years 1983–1993, the Swedish parliament debated in excess of 50 different motions relating to prostitution and that, of these, more than 30 advocated the imposition of criminal sanctions on the purchaser. Moreover, not a single motion contained similar proposals for the seller. This finding is of interest in that, historically, the focus in Sweden has been on the control of the woman who is the seller of sex. This has, amongst other things, taken place in more informal forms in feudal society (Frykman, 1977), as a result of statutory regulations (Lundquist, 1982) and various sections in the vagrancy laws (Söderblom, 1992). In

other countries too controls have primarily been directed towards the woman (Järvinen, 1990; Roberts, 1992).

That criminal sanctions should apply to both partners in prostitution was proposed in the final report (SOU 1995: 15) of the 1993 Working Committee charged with investigating the issue of prostitution in Sweden. Several of the interest groups consulted were, however, opposed to this proposal and were of the opinion that only the purchase of sex should be a criminal offence. This was, amongst other things, related to the fact that prostitution was regarded as an expression of gender inequality and that it was the (often female) prostitute who was the weakest partner in this relationship (Siring, 2008). Based on the Sex Crimes Committee's (SOU 2001: 14) proposal, the legislation was amended in 2005 to read as follows:

Any person who . . . acquires a temporary sexual liaison on the basis of remuneration, shall be guilty of the crime of purchasing a sexual service and can be punished by either the imposition of a fine or a prison sentence of up to six months. This section applies even if the remuneration has been provided or promised by a third party. (SFS 1962: 700, chap. 6, §11)¹

In the debate that preceded the enactment of the above legislation, it was believed by many that the law would be a paper tiger and that, rather than reducing prostitution, it would simply drive it underground. Others, speaking in defence of the changes, argued that the most important consequence of the changes was the norm-building character of the legislation in the effects it could have on public opinion and attitudes towards prostitution (Dodillet, 2009).

As a result of enacting legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex, approaches to prostitution, which after the 1970s had been characterised by what can be regarded as a social-psychological perspective, have been changed. Special social units tasked with the provision of different types of support for women involved in prostitution have, since the 1980s, been operational in the three largest cities in Sweden: Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg. Indeed similar support services for the customers of prostitutes have subsequently been created in all three cities. Among social workers there have been, even prior to the legislation, differing views about the issue of criminalisation. Whilst some viewed it positively as a means of reducing prostitution, others regarded the impact of such measures as being destructive for women selling sex. Others, however, expressed concerns that the law, rather than having a positive effect for women on the street, would push them indoors, thus making contact more difficult to establish. One question concerning many was how the law would impact on those men who, previously, had sought help from dedicated support units. Even if the focus of the current article does not extend to an in-depth examination of these questions, it is nevertheless without doubt the case that the legislation had, even prior to its enactment, created both expectations and concerns among social workers practising in this field.

The purpose of this article is to examine and discuss the attitudes of the general public in Sweden to the law prohibiting the purchase of sex. In particular, questions

relating to the reception of the law, and the question of retention, will be investigated. Furthermore, the extent to which the legislation has affected respondents' attitudes to the purchase of sex, and respondents' beliefs about how the law has affected the supply and demand for sexual services, will also be examined. Finally, respondents will be asked to assess the impact, if any, of the law in terms of their own presumptive purchase of sex.

Previous research

The National Board of Health and Welfare has overall responsibility to monitor the extent and spread of prostitution in Sweden. These duties have, in recent years, led to the production of three reports which, collectively, go under the name of *Knowledge about Prostitution* (Socialstyrelsen, 2000, 2004, 2007). The intention has, amongst other things, been to ascertain the impact of the sex purchase legislation on prostitution in Sweden. In these surveys, the focus has, predominantly, been on the perspective of state authorities. The problem, however, is that, even prior to the enactment of the legislation, a large proportion of all prostitution took place outside of the control of the authorities in places such as, for example, hotels, nightclubs and in the homes of either the buyer or the seller (Borg *et al.*, 1981; Kuosmanen, 1992). It is also the case that the purchase of sex often takes place abroad. In Månsson's (1996) investigation, 78% of all those individuals who had purchased sex had done so outside Sweden.

In Sweden there have, prior to the current investigation, been three surveys conducted with regard to issues relating to prostitution and the sex purchase legislation. The results of these three studies will be more fully presented in conjunction with the presentation of the empirical data in the current study.

The first of these studies, a population-based study, was conducted by Månsson in 1996, that is to say three years prior to the introduction of the legislation, and involved 5250 individuals. Here, questions concerning participants' own experiences of prostitution and attitudes to an eventual criminalisation of the sale and purchase of sex were asked. Following the enactment of the legislation, SIFO (*Svenska Institutet för Opinionsundersökningar, Research International*), commissioned by the tabloid press, also conducted research on the Swedish public's attitude to the legislation. The method in both of these later studies involved telephone interviews with 1000 individuals.

In conclusion it is thus clear that there is an obvious lack of population-based follow-ups of the sex purchase legislation, especially in terms of scientifically-based studies. Indeed, the survey on which this article builds is the first of its kind since 1996.

Method

The questions in the instrument used can be grouped together into three main themes; views about the legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex, attitudes to any eventual criminalisation of the sale of sex and, finally, any personal experiences of the purchase or sale of sex. The instrument, which ran to 12 pages, was comprised of

53 questions in the form of statements and questions with Likert-scale response options and yes or no questions (Befring, 1994).

The collection of the empirical data was carried out during the spring of 2008 by SIFO. The sample consisted of 2500 individuals aged between 18 and 74 who were randomly selected from the National Register of Population (SPAR). Since the content of the questionnaire concerned sensitive issues, an initial letter containing information about the study was sent out to people in the sample. Thereafter, after the instrument itself had been sent out, two subsequent reminders were sent, each after a two-week interval. In the second of these, a further copy of the questionnaire was included. The collection of the data was completely decoded thus guaranteeing total anonymity for the respondents. For this reason, it was deemed unnecessary to obtain ethical approval.

The responses were coded by SIFO and the data were entered into the SPSS programme. These data files provide the basis for all of the subsequent statistical analyses. Of the 2500 questionnaires that were distributed, 1134 were returned, providing a response rate of 45.4% and a missing rate of 54.6% from the entire sample.

An analysis of the missing data revealed that, in relation to gender, there is in the responses an over-representation of women, where 57% of the returned questionnaires were completed by women and 43% by men. This can be compared to the entire population of individuals aged between 18 and 74 for 2007 where women represent 49.4% and men 51.6% (Statistics Sweden, n. d.). It is evident that men were less willing to respond to the questionnaire than women. Whilst it is not easy to speculate about the reason for the under-representation of men, one reason could be that men felt more uncomfortable with the topic of prostitution, and even that there might be an accusatory element in the survey in that prostitution could be understood as linked to the issue of men's violence towards women (SOU 2001: 14).

The only group of men not under-represented in relation to women are those in the age category 69–74, who were marginally over-represented in comparison to women. In a survey of sexual habits (Lewin, 1996) a similar under-representation of older women was registered. Further, in that survey, men aged between 18 and 38 are particularly under-represented in comparison to women. This can be interpreted as meaning that younger women may have perceived the issues contained in the questionnaire as being more important than the younger men.

Comparisons with Statistics Sweden's data on level of educational attainment for 2007 indicate that, whilst the proportion of individuals in the 18–74 age range who did not have an upper secondary level education was 23% of the total population, amongst those who responded to the questionnaire, this group accounted for 18% of the total. The proportion of the total population with a minimum of at least a two- or three-year upper secondary education is 44% of the total population. Among the respondents this group accounted for 40% of the total. Those respondents with a post-upper secondary education accounted for 42% of the total responses, whilst in the total population this group accounts for 31% of all individuals.

In summary, the analysis of missing responses reveals that men are under-represented, particularly so in the youngest age spans. In terms of educational attainment, there is a certain over-representation of individuals with post-upper secondary education.

The responses should be interpreted in the light of a relatively large non-response group and the fact that certain groups are under-represented in the response group. In other words, the results should be interpreted with a degree of caution, particularly as regards questions that concern experiences of the purchase and sale of sex, where there is, in addition, a degree of internally missing data.

In order to enhance and validate the results of this survey, the conduct of a so-called material triangulation, by comparing the current data with those from the previously mentioned investigations from 1996, 1999 and 2002, and with other relevant research results on, for example, the sale and purchase of sex, both in Sweden and in other countries, has been of particular importance.

As a result of this validation, the results of the research are enhanced. At the same time the relationship between attitudes and actions in all of these surveys needs to be problematised. The purpose of so-called 'attitude legislation' is that change is brought about, not only at the mental level, but that an influence is also exerted on what people do. In this type of questionnaire-based study it is, however, difficult to control for the ways in which people's approaches to a phenomenon impact upon their actions. The complex nature of attitudes is indeed something that emerges in an interesting way in the following results. This is because they comprise cognitive, emotional and action-oriented components that are not always readily aligned with one another (Billig, 1991; Einarsson, 2004).

Results²

As discussed previously, few statistical surveys of attitudes to the sex purchase legislation have been conducted in Sweden. Prior to the enactment of the legislation, Månsson (1996) posed questions about the criminalisation of the purchase of sex. One of Månsson's questions read: 'A man pays for sexual relations with a woman. Should the man be regarded as a criminal?'. Of the respondents, 67% believed his actions not to be criminal, with 32% saying that they were. The difference in the responses of men and women to this question was very clear; of the men, 20% believed the acts to be criminal, compared to 44% of the women.

In SIFO's survey from 1999, the same year that the legislation came into force, 76% of the respondents believed that it was right that the purchase of sex should be prohibited whilst 15% believed that it was wrong. Of the respondents, 70% of the men and 81% of the women believed that it was right to forbid the purchase of sexual services. In SIFO's 2002 survey, 76% of respondents believed that it should be illegal to buy sex in Sweden (the relative proportion being males 69% and females 83%). Of the men, 20% believed that it should be legal compared to 7% of the women.

Table 1 The retention of the prohibition on the purchase of sex

	Men, <i>n</i> (%)	Women, <i>n</i> (%)	Total, <i>n</i> (%)
Yes	288 (59.9)	502 (78.8)	790 (70.7)
No	128 (26.6)	73 (11.5)	201 (18.0)
No opinion	65 (13.5)	62 (9.7)	127 (11.3)
Total	481 (100)	637 (100)	1118 (100)

The question in the current survey was formulated as follows: 'Should we retain the law prohibiting the purchase of sex?' As shown in Table 1, an overwhelming majority of the respondents are in favour of retaining the legislation. Primarily, it is women who are most in favour (79%), whilst among men a smaller majority (60%) are in favour of retention. The response rate for this question was almost 90%, indicating that it is a question that is of concern for the general public in Sweden.

Despite the differences in both the method and the formulation of the questions posed between the three aforementioned surveys and the current investigation, thus meaning that caution is required when comparing results, comparisons are nevertheless revealing. As in the current study, the SIFO studies from 1999 and 2002 asked about the purchase of sex in a gender neutral manner, whilst in 1996, the question concerning the purchase of sex was specifically related to men. It was also in this study that the respondents were most critical of the imposition of criminal sanctions. In the 1999 and 2002 investigations, as in the current study, the responses point in a similar direction. Between 71 and 76% of the respondents express support for the Swedish prohibition on the purchase of sex. In each survey there are noticeable differences between men and women. In these three most recent surveys, women's support for the legislation has remained relatively constant at around 80%, whilst amongst men support has dipped somewhat from 70 to 60% between 1999 and 2008.

For or against the sale of sex

Another question of interest, which was also an issue at the time of the debate on the imposition of criminal sanctions, is whether the sale, as well as the purchase, of sex should be similarly illegal (SOU 1995: 15). As outlined above, several of the interest groups consulted were against the imposition of sanctions for those who sell sex.

In the questionnaire the following question was posed: 'Should the sale of sex be prohibited by law?' As is shown in Table 2, nearly 60% of respondents believe that the sale of sex should be prohibited by law. Once again clear gender differences can be discerned. Whilst approximately half of the men were in favour of the prohibition of the sale of sex, two-thirds of the women believed this to be right.

Turning back to Månsson's (1996) study, it is worthwhile looking at the responses to the question: 'A woman receives payment for sexual relations. Should the woman be regarded as a criminal?' Of the men, 19% were prepared to regard the woman as a

Table 2 To prohibit the sale of sex

	Men, <i>n</i> (%)	Women, <i>n</i> (%)	Total, <i>n</i> (%)
Yes	237 (49.4)	418 (66.0)	655 (58.7)
No	172 (35.8)	133 (20.9)	305 (27.4)
No opinion	71 (14.8)	84 (13.2)	155 (13.9)
Total	480 (100)	635 (100)	1115 (100)

criminal whilst, among women, 41% believed that such action was criminal. A similar question was contained in the 1999 SIFO survey. Of the men surveyed, 64% were in favour of a prohibition on the sale of sex whilst for women 78% were in favour.

When taking account of Månsson's (1996) study, it becomes clear that, after the enactment of the legislation, a change in public opinion in the direction of greater support for prohibition, both as regards the sale and purchase of sex, took place.

On the subject of state-run brothels

In order to ascertain the attitudes of the respondents to the issue of prostitution in a wider perspective, the questionnaire contained a number of statements that reflected both a more liberal, as well as a more conservative view on prostitution. One of the statements was formulated as follows: 'State-run brothels ought to be introduced in Sweden.'

In Table 3 it is evident that, of the men, a third (32%) either agree, wholly or in part, with the statement that state-run brothels should be introduced in Sweden. Of the women only a fifth (17%) are of a similar opinion.

When these responses are compared with those in relation to the previous question, on the retention of the prohibition on the purchase of sex, it is found that of the men who wish to retain the legislation, 16% agree, either wholly or in part, with the statement that state-run brothels should be introduced in Sweden. The same proportion among women is 8%. In certain respects, this can be regarded as somewhat of a paradox, in that the same individuals express views in favour of prohibition whilst, at the same time, indicating that they are also in favour of state-run brothels. Whilst it is difficult, based on the information contained in the questionnaire, to draw any far-reaching conclusions or interpretations, one hypothesis is, nevertheless, that the results provide evidence of a desire, in different ways, to create structures for

Table 3 The introduction of state-run brothels in Sweden

	Men, <i>n</i> (%)	Women, <i>n</i> (%)	Total, <i>n</i> (%)
Complete agreement	72 (15.2)	53 (8.4)	125 (11.3)
Partial agreement	79 (16.7)	54 (8.5)	133 (12.0)
Vague agreement	83 (17.5)	85 (13.4)	168 (15.2)
Disagree	240 (50.6)	440 (69.6)	680 (61.5)
Total	474 (100)	632 (100)	1106 (100)

Table 4 Attitudes to men who buy sex, before and after the enactment of the legislation

Attitudes before the legislation	Attitudes after the legislation			Total n (%)
	Unchanged n (%)	More positive n (%)	More negative n (%)	
Neutral	291 (88.7)	2 (0.6)	35 (10.7)	328 (100)
Positive	8 (72.7)	3 (27.3)	0 (0.0)	11 (100)
Negative	516 (67.1)	8 (1.0)	245 (31.9)	769 (100)
Total	815 (73.5)	13 (1.2)	280 (25.3)	1108 (100)

the control of prostitution, either via the imposition of criminal sanctions, or by allowing the state to assume responsibility by institutionalising prostitution.

The impact of the legislation on attitudes

In the previous sections we have, amongst other things, discussed the respondents' attitudes to the legislation. Now it is time to turn to the question of how the law has impacted on attitudes and approaches to the purchase of sex.

Table 4 is based on two specific questions: 'What was your view about men who purchased sex before the law came into force?' and 'What is your view about men who purchase sex now that the law is in force?'³ Before the enactment of the legislation 30% of the respondents had a neutral view about men who purchased sex, 11 individuals (1%) had positive attitudes whilst 69% held negative attitudes.

As shown in Table 4, of those who indicated that, before the enactment of the legislation, they had neutral opinions about men who purchase sex, the majority (89%) were still neutral after the law had come into force. Of those who were negative before the law, two out of three (67%) maintained their views, whilst a third (32%) had become more negative. Of the 11 people who were positive before the law, eight maintained this view, with three indicating that, after the law, they had become more positive.

In conclusion it is apparent that many of the respondents are of the opinion that they have maintained their attitudes in these questions. Of the shifts that do take place however, the largest are among those who, before the legislation, had either positive or negative attitudes to purchasers or sellers of sex. Those who were positive tended to become more positive whilst those who were negative tended to be more negative. It is, however, important to note here that those who were positive are an extremely small group, both in number and as a proportion of the sample.

About others' attitudes

In this section the discussion presented concerns the respondents' views about the impact of the legislation on others than themselves in relation to the purchase and

sale of sexual services in heterosexual prostitution where women are the sellers and men the purchasers of sex.

On the question as to whether, as a consequence of the legislation, the number of sellers of sex had increased, decreased or remained unchanged, 38% answered that they thought that the number of sellers had increased, 13% thought that it had decreased whilst 48% thought that the numbers were unchanged.

On the similar question relating to purchasers, 37% thought that the number had increased, 20% that it had decreased and 43% that it was unchanged.

If we look at these responses from a gender perspective, it can be noted that men (18%) are more inclined than women (10%) to believe that the number of sellers of sex had decreased. Men (26%) are also more inclined than women (17%) to believe that the number of purchasers of sex has similarly declined.

Experiences of the purchase of sex

In order to be able to gain a grasp of the eventual consequences that the legislation might have had in terms of individual practice, questions in the questionnaire enquired about the respondents' own personal experiences of the purchase of sexual services. One question that was posed in the questionnaire was 'Has it happened that, using either money or other means, that you have paid to have sexual contact with someone (sex involving physical contact)?' (see Table 5).

Of the men, 34 individuals (8%) report that they have bought sex that has involved physical contact, whilst just one of the women (0.2%) reports having such an experience. For 88% of the men and 99% of the women, the responses given indicate that they have never purchased, considered purchasing or fantasised about purchasing sex.

In response to subsequent questions on the questionnaire, seven men and two women describe their experiences of paying for sex, even though they had answered in the negative to this direct question (see e.g. Table 6). One individual qualifies the negative response provided by writing that 'It was only that one time'. Similar experiences have been gained in interview studies of young people's sexual habits. Whilst respondents won't, in response to a direct question, say that they have

Table 5 Experiences of paying for sex

	Men, <i>n</i> (%)	Women, <i>n</i> (%)	Total, <i>n</i> (%)
No, this has never happened	392 (87.5)	553 (98.6)	945 (93.7)
No, this has never happened although I have fantasised about it	17 (3.8)	6 (1.1)	23 (2.3)
No, this has never happened but I could consider buying sex	5 (1.1)	1 (0.2)	6 (0.6)
Yes	34 (7.6)	1 (0.2)	35 (3.5)
Total	448 (100)	561 (100)	1009 (100)

purchased sex, they nevertheless, in response to other questions, indicate that they have had such experiences (Abelsson & Hulusjö, 2008).

In SIFO's 1999 survey there was also a question about paying for sex. Of the men, just over 5% indicated that they had experience of this, while the corresponding figure for women was less than 1%.

Another question asked about experiences of paying for sex in countries other than Sweden. In his 1996 study Månsson presented an overview of European studies from the early 1990s: in Holland 14% of men had paid for sex, whilst in Norway it was 11%, Switzerland 19% and Spain 39%.

In a study from 1995 in Finland, Lammi-Taskula (1999) found that 13% of men and 0.7% of women had, at some point in their lives, paid for sex whilst Lautrup (2005) found that 14% of Danish men had similarly paid for sex.

Atchison *et al.* (1998, pp. 183–184) present an overview of international studies that provides a similar picture. In a Canadian survey from 1984, 4% of men reported that, at some time in their lives, they had paid for sex. In studies conducted in the 1990s, 18% of American men reported being customers for sexual services. In the Netherlands, 22% of men had similar experiences. In France, 3% of the men surveyed reported having paid for the services of a prostitute at least once in the preceding five years. Among younger men in northern Thailand, in excess of 80% had paid for sex and 70% of the men had done so in the preceding 12 months. Sanders (2008, pp. 38–39) found that, in Great Britain, the number of men who reported having paid for sex at one point or another in their lives increased from 6% in 1990 to 9% in 2000.

Whilst these data are interesting, carrying out comparisons between different studies conducted in different countries is, however, complicated, not least due to widely differing contexts. There are, of course, also differences in the methods used and the questions asked. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are substantial differences between the situation in countries such as Thailand and Spain and that in Sweden. It is clearly evident that prostitution needs to be seen as a social construction that differs in form and extent as a result of different cultural, social, economic, legal and historical contexts (Månsson, 2004; Dodillet, 2009).

One question that is of particular interest in this respect is how approaches and attitudes are influenced by local surroundings. Put another way, are purchase

Table 6 In which contexts have women and men paid for sex?

	Men, <i>n</i> (%)	Women, <i>n</i> (%)	Total, <i>n</i> (%)
Place of residence in Sweden	5 (12.2)		5 (11.4)
Another place in Sweden	7 (17.1)	1 (33.3)	8 (18.2)
In another country on holiday	18 (43.9)	1 (33.3)	19 (43.2)
In another country on a business/ work-related trip	8 (19.5)		8 (18.2)
When living in another country	3 (7.3)	1 (33.3)	4 (9.1)
Total	41 (100)	3 (100)	44 (100)

behaviours affected when the geographical distances to one's home environment and home country increase? The question in the questionnaire that addressed this issue read as follows: 'In what context did this most recently take place?' In Table 6, 71% of the men report that their most recent purchase of sex took place abroad. In Månsson's 1996 study the proportion was 78%.

The responses to the question indicate that, in the main, Swedish men mostly purchase sex when they are abroad. Similar experiences have been reported from Finland, which, due to its geographical location bordering the Baltic countries, is close to a relatively extensive market for sexual services provided at low prices. In Lammi-Taskula's 1999 study it was found that 76% of Finnish purchasers of sex did so primarily abroad. Further, according to Marttila (2008b), men's purchase of sex abroad is conditioned, in addition to supply and price, by normative motives. Men are not bound in the same way by values, norms and responsibilities that differ from those at home. When abroad, men create for themselves a more carefree lifestyle and can thus act and behave in ways that differ from at home in Finland. These mechanisms are likely to be similar in all of the Nordic countries where views about prostitution have more of a moralistic and restrictive character than in several other European countries. In contrast to the other Nordic countries, there is in Denmark a more liberal view of prostitution, something which is also revealed in patterns of behaviour relating to the purchase of sex. In a Danish web-based study, 42% of the sex-purchasing men surveyed only bought sex at home, whilst the remainder also paid for sex when abroad (Lautrup, 2005).

To conclude, it is clear that the context in which sex is purchased is substantially dependent both on the domestic market, and the extent to which it is regulated by legislation and other norms in the area.

The next question addressed is whether the legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex has impacted on purchasing behaviours? Whilst this is a question to which it is not easy to find answers, in the current study 10 men and one woman report that the legislation had affected their purchase of sex. Five of the 34 men who had paid for sex reported that they had stopped buying sex as a result of the new law, whilst two said that they had reduced the frequency of purchases. One man indicated that, because of the law, he had found more surreptitious ways of buying sex. The sole woman who reported that the legislation had impacted on her purchase of sex did not indicate the way in which she had changed her behaviour.

Conclusion and discussion

When the Swedish legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex first came into force in 1999 it was unique in the world in its exclusive application to demand. Quite a number of those who advocated the need for such legislation, and were instrumental in securing its passage through parliament, believed that, whilst prostitution would not entirely disappear, the law would in any event impact on people's attitudes in a way that increasing numbers would be against prostitution and, in particular, the purchase

of sexual services. It is of interest to note that, when it came to following up the effects of the legislation, both politicians and stage agencies alike have shown little interest in ascertaining its impact on public attitudes. Instead, the focus has been directed more towards how it has impacted on the supply side. These assessments have mainly been accomplished via the National Board of Health and Welfare's follow ups (Socialstyrelsen, 2000, 2004, 2007) with the overarching conclusion being that, first and foremost, since 1999 there has been a reduction in the number of women on the street. Whilst in both Malmö and Stockholm the number of women selling sex on the street has been halved, in Gothenburg two-thirds of women previously selling sex on the streets have ceased to do so. This, it is suggested, provides evidence that the law has had a notable effect in terms of reducing the extent of prostitution. The problem with this focus on the supply side of street prostitution has meant that we have little knowledge about both the demand side, and prostitution that takes place behind closed doors. Nor, indeed, have any studies been conducted concerning public opinion on the legislation. Approximately 10 years have elapsed since the legislation came into force and this study marks the first scientific investigation of the attitudes of the Swedish public to the sex-purchase Act. The responses that emanate from this study indicate that the issue is a complex one and comprises interesting paradoxes.

The results demonstrate that a sizeable majority of the population wishes to retain the legislation. It is somewhat remarkable that support for the law has not changed during the years, but, on the contrary, has remained at the same high level as when the law came into force in 1999. Indeed, when compared with Månsson's 1996 study, in which a majority were opposed to the criminalisation of sex purchase, people have become more positive. One hypothesis is that in 1996 the previous year's enquiry into the question of prostitution had not yet impacted upon public opinion. However, ever since the presentation of the government's bill for the prohibition of the purchase of sex (Regeringens proposition, 1997/98, p. 55), in combination with other proposals to enhance the protection and rights of women, these issues have, as a result of media attention, moved more towards the forefront of public attention. These discussions can very well have impacted upon public opinion in a more positive direction in advance of the criminalisation of the purchase of sex that came into force in 1999. Furthermore, in advance of the 2002 study, the question of trafficking, and all of its negative consequences, had begun ever increasingly to characterise the debate on prostitution.

It is also of interest that, even if in the current study a majority of men and women are in favour of the legislation, more than two-thirds of respondents are of the belief that people's attitudes to prostitution remain unchanged, or are indeed more positive, since the enactment of the legislation. Only one-third believe that the law has had the effect of making attitudes become more negative. When it comes to the purchase of sex, only a fifth of respondents believed that sex purchases had reduced in number, and even fewer thought that the sale of sex had decreased.

When it comes to changes in the respondents' own attitudes, the study shows, even after the legislation's enactment, that most continue to maintain their

views—whether positive, neutral or negative—about men who buy sex. The most substantial changes in attitudes in fact occurred among those who were already negative before the legislation, with this group being even more strongly opposed than previously.

Taken as a whole, it is perhaps the case that the impact of the legislation on public attitudes to prostitution, and indeed as to the supply and demand dimensions of sexual transactions, has been relatively mild. This can, in part, be explained by the fact that a vast majority of the population have no direct contact with this complex field and rely upon media reporting, which primarily concerns the problematic aspects of prostitution, as a means of constructing views on the phenomenon. This can contribute to a form of pessimism that prostitution is an ever-present, inherent problem that cannot be changed. It is interesting that people appear to be prepared to support a law that could change public attitudes and lead to a reduction in prostitution, despite the fact that there is broad scepticism as to its likely effects.

In addition to the defence of the current legislation, a majority of the respondents, in contrast to a number of the interest organisations consulted, are in favour of the criminalisation of the sale of sexual services. Here, it is above all women who express such views. In contrast to many interest organisations, who regard women as a subordinated and vulnerable group, the general public seems to view prostitution in more gender-neutral terms. One plausible explanation is that those who sell sex are not viewed as victims, but more in terms of being equally legally responsible as those who buy sex.

The question of state-licensed brothels is another that illustrates the complexity involved in attitudes to prostitution. Approximately one in six men and every tenth woman indicate that they would not be opposed to state-licensed brothels, whilst at the same time they are in favour of the retention of the anti-sex purchase legislation. As previously indicated, this does not imply a logical paradox, but is perhaps better regarded as an expression of the need, via state intervention, to tighten controls of a field where surveillance is extremely difficult.

The regulation of prostitution in Sweden between 1859 and 1918 can be regarded as an historical example of societal control of prostitution (Lundquist, 1982). This type of strategy provides a reminder that not all of the responses to the questionnaire can uniformly be interpreted as either categorical support or opposition to the law, and that attitudes can emerge from a contradictory mesh of cognitions, emotions and actions (Billig, 1991; Einarsson, 2004). Of the many and sometimes rather inflammatory written comments in the questionnaire, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the issue of prostitution can have a strong effect on the emotions. Heightened emotions as regards prostitution can mean that, even though there may be a lack of factual knowledge, people are, in any event, strongly motivated to express their opinion.

Has the legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex had any impact on the demand for sexual services? In the study, 8% of men reported that they had paid for sex. This, compared to Månsson's 1996 study where the corresponding figure was 13.6%,

indicates a reduction. However, when comparing these figures, it is important to bear in mind that in 1996, the purchase of sex was viewed more as an immoral act rather than, after 1999, one that is also illegal. This may have had the effect of inhibiting the willingness of respondents in the current study to report their purchases of sex. In the current study there is, in addition, a stronger focus on physical sexual contact as it is defined in the legislation.

In other words it is difficult, with any degree of certainty, to say how ordinary people's purchasing behaviours have been affected by the legislation. However, in response to a direct question, five (15%) of the 34 men who had paid for sex, indicated that they had stopped doing so. Two reported that the frequency of buying sex had reduced, whilst one stated that he now bought sex in a more surreptitious manner than previously. If one considers the entire population in Sweden in the age span between 18 and 74, this would mean that, as a result of the legislation, approximately 50,000 men were no longer in the habit of paying for sexual services, whilst 20,000 did so less frequently. This would indicate that, to some degree, the legislation has reduced the demand side of prostitution. However, further study is required in order to substantiate and validate these findings.

At the same time that the legislation came into force, the Swedish police received additional resources to work with prostitution and, above all, trafficking. Social services, however, did not benefit from a similar increase in resource allocation. In Sweden's three largest cities—Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg—there have, since the 1980s, been special units dealing with prostitution that have been tasked with identifying and thereafter supporting vulnerable women, particularly those who work on the street. There have also, although on a more limited scale, been therapeutic support services offered to buyers of sex in these three cities.

As previously mentioned, the extent of street prostitution reduced dramatically as a result of police work in targeted areas. Whilst this reduction can be traced back to the legislation, other factors are also at play, not least new technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones that provide less conspicuous channels for establishing contact between the supply and demand sides. These changes have, not surprisingly, had consequences for social work. Compared to the environment of the street, it is not as simple, on the Internet, to establish contact with those who are selling sex. Social workers have thus been forced to develop new ways of getting into contact with individuals involved in prostitution's surreptitious forms in cyberspace. This work will continue to be of importance, even in the future, in that, as this study confirms, even if demand has decreased somewhat, a large proportion of the market remains and customers are still there, even if they don't act as openly as they did before the enactment of the legislation.

The Swedish legislation is no longer, as it once was a decade ago, unique. Today, Norway, Finland and Iceland all have legislation targeted towards the demand side of prostitution. In the rest of Europe, however, a more liberal approach is adopted where, for example, Germany has legalised prostitution and enhanced the rights of those who sell sex (Dodillet, 2009). Thus it is clear that European countries have

different historical and cultural points of departure, perspectives and indeed strategies for tackling prostitution. Indeed, prostitution is probably one of the issues where consensus within the European Union is least likely to be reached, at least within the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, irrespective of the ways that different countries shape interventions, the issues at stake provide both an interesting and important field of future research in Europe.

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Notes

- [1] An important question in this context is how sexual contact is defined. The legislation prohibiting the purchase of sex only covers the purchase of sexual services where physical contact with a sexual purpose occurs (SOU 2001: 14, §296). For example, private posing at sex clubs is not covered by the law since posing does not by definition involve physical contact. The same is the case for Internet and telephone services. The purchase of sex has, in the survey upon which this article is based, been defined on the basis of the legal definition and involves services where physical contact occurs.
- [2] It is important for the reader to note that, in the tables of data, decimals are used in the reporting of percentages. In the text these have been rounded off. A large proportion of the results will be presented on the basis of comparisons between men and women since gender-related differences have been shown to be decisive within several thematic areas.
- [3] These questions were explicitly directed to heterosexual prostitution where men are the purchasers and women the sellers of sex, since it is this particular form of prostitution that is primarily covered in different media and thus the population has the greatest knowledge and number of opinions.

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