

Patterns in Groups' Perceptions of Sex Work

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Introduction

- Sex work in society
 - Consistently exists in human history
 - Today, majority of governments criminalize buying or selling sex
- Criminalization
 - Sex work and sex trafficking are difficult to differentiate between
 - Paints sex workers as criminals and the community holds negative views toward them
- Significance?
 - Sex workers are a vulnerable population at risk to being victimized
 - Understanding realities in sex work and identifying those who view sex work negatively could assist in advocacy and education efforts

Literature Review

What Experiences Do Sex Workers have:

- At work?
 - Studies show working in this industry can have a harmful impact on the well-being of sex workers
 - e.g., sex workers report a need for a home or safe place, job training, treatment for drug or alcohol abuse, and being physically assaulted during work (Farley & Barkan, 1998)

2) With the Criminal Justice System?

- Sex workers fear police interactions and are less likely to seek legal assistance (Sloss & Harper, 2010).
- Sex workers more likely to be arrested than people who buy sex (e.g., Flowers, 1998)

How does Religiosity Interact with:

- Views of Sex?
 - Negative views of sex outside of marriage (e.g., Petersen & Donnenwerth, 1997)
- Attitudes Towards the Criminal Justice System?
 - More likely to endorse harsh punishment and support retribution (e.g., Applegate et al., 2000).
 - Are more likely to be conservative (Hirsh et al., 2013), thus may be more likely to support the police (Ekins, 2016)

Research Questions

Do religious people differ from non-religious people in their:

- perceptions of sex work and sex workers?
- perceptions of the criminal justice system's treatment of sex workers?

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables

	Mean or %	SD	Min	Max	n =
<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
Pathways to Sex Work	8.57	1.37	5	12	111
Consequences of Sex Work	13.17	1.62	8	16	111
Trust in the Criminal Justice System	9.80	2.59	5	16	111
Misconceptions about Sex Work	5.80	2.21	7	20	111
Moral Judgements about Sex Work	14.09	2.34	4	16	111
Legalizing Sex Work	10.18	2.34	4	16	111
<i>Independent Variables</i>					
Age	19.11	1.29	18	26	108
Racial or Ethnic Minority	12.60%	-	0	1	14
Caucasian / White	87.40%	-	0	1	97
Heterosexual	48.72%	-	0	1	101
Religious	45.00%	-	0	1	50
Female	57.70%	-	0	1	64
Business-Related Major	78.40%	-	0	1	87

Table 2 Religion Group Comparison

Dependent Variable	Religious?	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	T-test
Pathways to Sex Work	Yes	50	8.70	1.460	.920
	No	61	8.46	1.298	
Consequences of Sex Work	Yes	50	12.98	1.545	.909
	No	61	13.33	1.671	
Trust in the Criminal Justice	Yes	50	10.62	2.381	-1.129**
	No	61	9.13	2.585	
Risks of Being Sex Trafficked	Yes	50	15.84	2.486	-.806
	No	61	16.18	1.962	
Misconceptions	Yes	50	6.00	1.370	1.505
	No	61	5.64	1.155	
Moral Judgements	Yes	50	14.66	2.616	2.093*
	No	61	13.62	2.583	
Legalizing Sex Work	Yes	50	9.8200	2.78985	-1.284
	No	61	10.4754	2.57945	

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .000

Data and Methods

- Surveyed undergraduate students from a public university
- 111 students were questioned regarding their views of sex work, sex workers, and sex trafficking
- All questions were Likert scale responses. Questions reflected one's knowledge about sex workers' experiences and characteristics, one's knowledge about sex trafficking, and one's perceptions surrounding sex work
- Data were analyzed using T-tests in SPSS looking at differences in responses based on religiosity

Results

Those who indicated that they were religious were found to have a statically significant difference in:

- Their levels of moral judgments of sex work and sex workers compared to those who were not religious.
- Their beliefs that the criminal justice system will appropriately and fairly work with sex workers compared to those who were not religious.

There were no significant differences between religious and non-religious individuals in their understanding of pathways that lead to sex work and the consequences of sex work.

Discussion

Findings support outside literature:

- Religious individuals associate sex workers with criminality and immorality
- Religious individuals trust that the criminal justice system's conduct is appropriate with sex workers

Conclusion:

- Religious views impact one's moral judgements which would influence their trust in police if a crime is involved
- Introducing religious individuals to alternative reform practices for sex workers may waiver the support for the largely ineffective methods of today that punish those who are vulnerable to victimization and poor-quality of life