

# A Survey of Men's Understanding of the Sex Trade Industry

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## *Abstract:*

The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE) created and conducted a survey to gain further knowledge about how men understand issues of prostitution and sexual exploitation. This report represents the key findings from the survey.

## *Introduction:*

The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE) works to end sexual assault and sexual exploitation through policy reform, legal services, prevention, and community engagement. Key to ending the demand for the sex trade industry is gaining an in-depth understanding of men's reasons for purchasing sex as well as their understanding of the realities of prostitution and human trafficking, since this knowledge helps advocates craft meaningful and effective deterrence campaigns. To obtain insight into the way men understand prostitution, CAASE created an online anonymous survey composed of both multiple choice and free response questions.

## *Methods:*

The survey was distributed to men through social media, email, or various other internet related sites such as Plentyofish.com, Facebook, Twitter, and Meetup.com. Paper copies were not available for the survey. Outreach information about the survey was also sent out to other local organizations such as professional groups, sports teams, college student organizations, church groups, various coalitions, high school alumni groups, department of corrections employees, and various club members. Complete anonymity was maintained for all survey participants. Demographic data, such as gender, age, race, marital status, and education was obtained. Men throughout the country filled out the survey, though it is impossible to assess its exact geographic scope due to its electronic distribution and the use of broad social media venues used for promotion. Men who received the link to participate in the survey were encouraged to send the survey on to other men in their social groups to expand the number of participants.

Completion of the survey generally necessitated only four or five minutes. Participants were assured that by clicking on the link to begin the survey, they would not be entered onto any type of list that would use their information (i.e. email address) for alternative purposes. They were additionally informed that the information gathered from the survey would not be used for any type of advertisement services, and that their contact information would remain anonymous.

At the end of the survey, participants were given the option to fill out their contact information if they wanted to be contacted by CAASE to become further involved in the movement to end

sexual exploitation. Once the men completed the survey, they were thanked for taking the time to complete the survey and were reminded that their answers would remain anonymous.

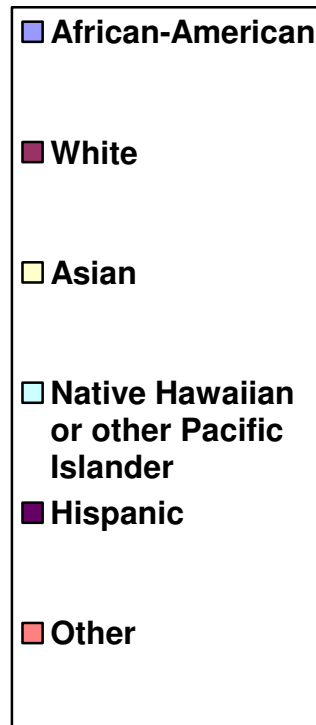
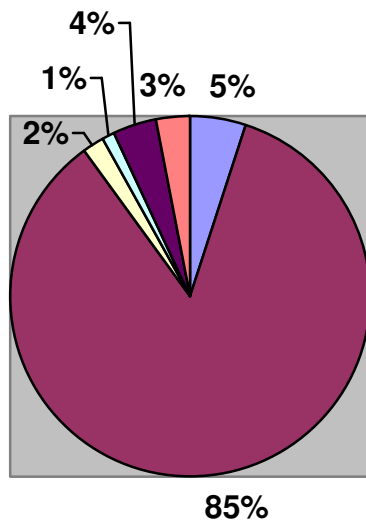
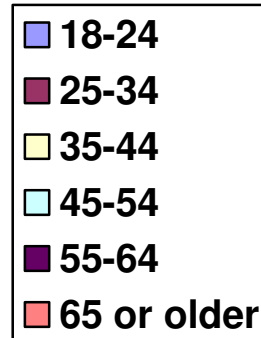
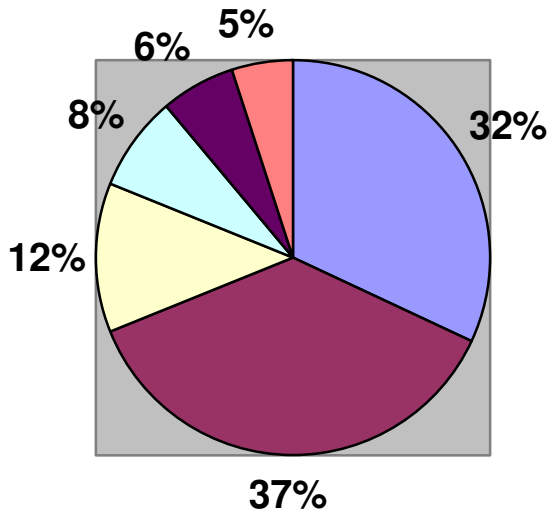
After the survey was closed to the public, fluidsurveys.com analyzed the information and recorded the multiple choice questions into a bar graph format. The free response questions were provided in list form and were grouped into various categories, which were coded by the lead researcher on the project for analysis. When all free response items were coded, the free responses were transformed into a bar graph format.

*Results:*

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

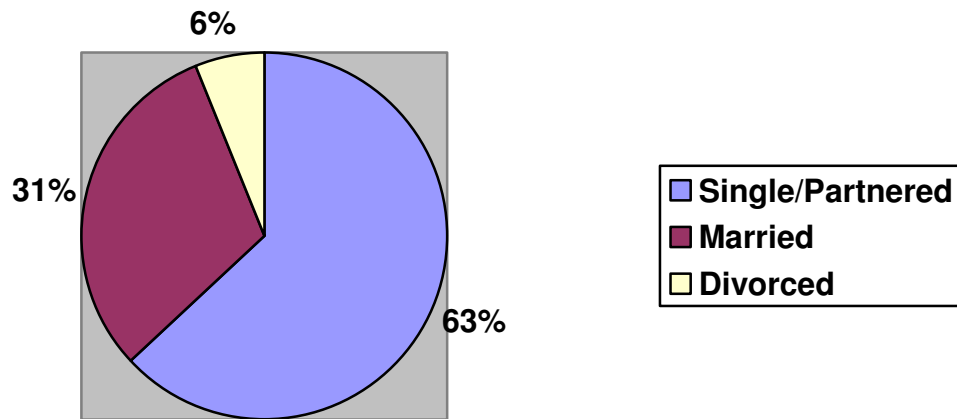
More than 400 men participated in this study, the vast majority of whom identified as white men with an average age range of 18-34. The majority of participants reported that their highest level of education was college, and they identified as single/ or partnered but not married individuals. The following information provides the demographic information for the men who participated in this survey:

### **AGE**

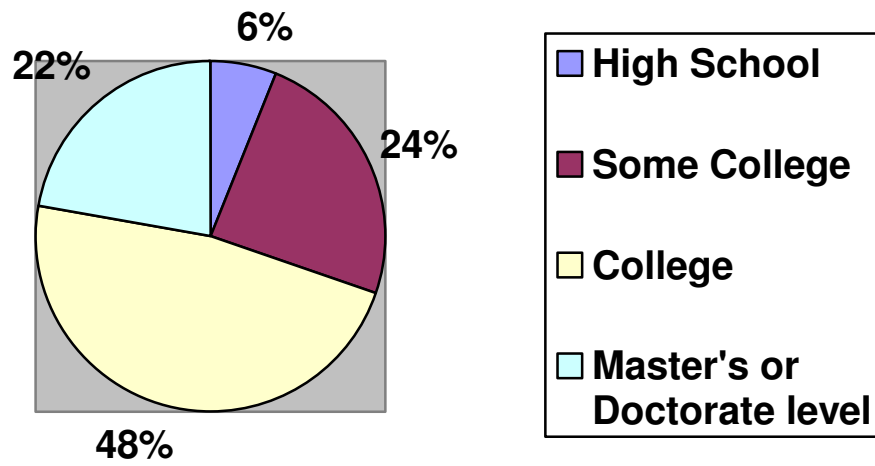


**RACE**

**MARITAL STATUS**



**EDUCATION**



## ROLE OF DEMAND

We asked participants to answer questions on the role of demand versus in supply in terms of which is responsible for the existence of prostitution. Fifty-seven percent of participants identified demand as the driving factor in the existence of the sex trade. Thirty-five percent stated that both supply and demand play an equal role in the existence of the sex trade. Only 8% of responses stated that sex trade was supply driven.

## DEFINING PROSTITUTION

When asked to define prostitution in a free response question, the majority of men, 59%, provided definitions that referenced the act of prostitution as exchanging sex for something of value, such as food, shelter, or money. Sixteen percent of men referenced “demand” when defining prostitution, as evidenced by responses that defined prostitution as “paying for sex.” Eight percent of participants were able to recognize prostitution as being a product of force, fraud, or coercion, as evidenced by the response, “Using force, fraud, or coercion to sell someone for sex, and personally profiting.” In other definitions, a few participants identified the vulnerabilities experienced by some individuals in prostitution, as exemplified by this participant’s response to the question: “The sale of sex through the manipulation and control of young or vulnerable victims.” Another individual defined prostitution as, “Degradation and objectification of females by selling their bodies to men.” Yet another individual was able to recognize the brutality that women and children face in prostitution. One man identified prostitution as, “The exploitation of people for the hedonistic pleasure of others.”

Contradictory to understanding prostitution as harmful, 7% of participants indicated that there were no or limited negative elements to the sex trade industry, as evidenced by a response that stated, “[Prostitution is] consensual engagement in sex for money.”

## SEX TRAFFICKING

Participants were asked if they believed sex trafficking in the United States was a more significant problem for foreign born individuals or domestic born individuals. Thirty-eight percent of respondents believed that sex trafficking in the United States is a more significant problem for foreign born victims, while 54% said sex trafficking was a significant problem in the United States for both foreign born and domestic born victims. Four percent said it was a more significant problem for domestic victims, and four percent thought it was not a significant problem for either group.

## WITNESSING PROSTITUTION

When participants were asked if they had ever witnessed prostitution, 40% of respondents stated “yes.” Those who had witnessed prostitution were asked where they had seen it. Answers ranged from strip clubs, military bases, massage parlors, street prostitution, and overseas. The

percentages below include in all places that the participants who had witnessed prostitution stated in a free response answer where they had witnessed it, with some participants having witnessed prostitution in more than one location.

- 42 % of participants witnessed prostitution on the street.
- 14% of participants reported being approached to purchase sex.
- 12% of participants reported witnessing prostitution while overseas.
- 8% of participant reported witnessing prostitution through the media (i.e. pornography, videogame, magazines, etc).
- 6% of participants reported purchasing sex themselves.
- 5% of participants were involved in prostitution or knew someone in prostitution.
- 4% of participants knew a family member who has paid for prostitution.
- 4% of participants reported witnessing prostitution in a strip club.
- 3% of participants reported witnessing prostitution in a restaurant or a bar.
- 2% of participants reported being involved in social services and meeting individuals in the sex trade in that capacity (i.e. case worker).
- 2% of participants reported witnessing prostitution while in the military.
- 1% of participants reported witnessing prostituted youth.
- 1% of participants reported witnessing prostitution at a private party.
- 1% of participants witnessed prostitution in a brothel.
- 1% of participants witnessed prostitution on internet sites (i.e. Craigslist, Backpage).

#### IDENTIFYING THE ROLE OF DEMAND IN THE SEX TRADE

The majority of individuals who participated in this study were able to identify the key role that demand plays in the existence of the sex trade. From a series of multiple choice answers:.

- 57% of participants said that demand played the most significant role in the existence of the sex trade.
- 35% of participants said that both supply (the person selling sex) and demand (the person buying sex) played an equal role in contributing to the existence in the sex trade.
- 8% of participants believed supply played a higher role in the existence in the sex trade.

## ROLE OF POP CULTURE IN THE EXISTENCE OF THE SEX TRADE

Eighty-three participants acknowledged seeing cultural messages that encourage the purchase of sex through magazine advertisements, bachelor parties, “pimp culture,” media, music, pornography, and strip clubs. Eight percent of participants stated that the media has a negative effect toward women, such as promoting the degradation of women and “misuse of sex appeal in everyday society.” Five percent of participants did not believe that popular culture glamorized the sex trade or encouraged sex trade patronage. One participant understood the cultural portrayal of purchasing sex as a rite of passage when he stated, “Prostitution is often connected to examples of male’s rite of passage (bachelor parties, birthdays, etc) in popular culture.” Another individual recognized the glorification of prostitution that music and the media frequently portray when he commented on depictions of the sex trade in popular culture by pointing out the examples of “Glorification of the ‘high end’ prostitute, glorification of the ‘pimp’ in the hip-hop slang, the expectation that men should be having as much sex as they want.” The following represents the percentages of participants who believed that popular culture plays a role in encouraging men to purchase sex:

- 45% of participants believed the media encourages men to purchase sex.
- 15% of participants believed popular music contributes to men’s desires to purchase sex.
- 14% of participants believed that women and men’s portrayal in magazine advertisements adds to the desire to purchase a woman for sex.
- 13% of participants identified pornography as a factor influencing men to purchase sex.
- 8% of participants indicated that popular culture encourages the idea that men have an insatiable sexual desire.
- 8% of participants believed that popular culture is demeaning and objectifying to women.
- 7% of participants believed that promoting strip clubs in popular culture encourages men to purchase sex.
- 7% of participants believed that popular culture promotes the idea that “sex is cool,” which in turn can promote men to purchase sex.
- 5% of participants did not believe that the popular culture influences men to purchase sex.
- 3% of participants believed that women, themselves, encourage men to purchase sex.
- 3% of participants believed that popular culture normalizes purchasing sex, but did not specify how.

- 2% of participants believed that celebrities normalize purchasing sex.
- 2% of participants believed that bachelor parties promoted purchasing sex.
- 1% of participants believed that glamorizing pimps in popular culture promotes others to purchase sex.

## WHY DO MEN PURCHASE SEX

When the participants in this survey were asked why they believed men purchased sex, there was a wide range of answers.

- 53% of participants responded that men buy sex because they are addicted to it.
- 44% of participants responded that men buy sex because their sexual partner or significant other will not perform certain acts the man desires.
- 43% of participants responded that that men buy sex because they are seeking companionship with women in prostitution.
- 37% participants responded that that men buy sex because they do not want the commitment of a relationship.
- 32% of participants responded that men buy sex because it makes them feel masculine.
- 30% of participants responded that buying sex was a way to “live on the wild side.”
- 28% of participants responded that that buying sex would allow a man to re-enact scenes he had seen in pornography.
- 18% of participants responded that men purchase sex since it is something without negative consequences.

## POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE SEX TRADE INDUSTRY

Participants were asked if they believed there were any benefits or positive aspects of the sex trade. Though over 415 individuals completed the survey, 255 individuals responded to items that indicated there were positive aspects of the sex trade (61%). The following are positive aspects of the sex trade identified by participants:

- 52% of participants stated that the sex trade offered positive benefits by providing employment opportunities.
- 37% of participants believed that the sex trade provided men with a way to have their sexual needs met.



- 36% of participants believed that the sex trade offered support and shelter to the individuals involved.
- 33% of participants believed that the sex trade is a choice that is made by women as something that they want to do.
- 16% of participants believed that the existence of prostitution prevents the existence of rape.

## HARMFUL ASPECTS OF THE SEX TRADE INDUSTRY

Participants were then asked to indicate if they believed there were any harmful or negative aspects of the sex trade. Though 61% identified positive aspects of the sex trade, 98% of participants identified harmful aspects of the sex trade.

- 93% of participants stated that the women involved in the sex trade are frequently victims of violence by the hands of their customers or their pimp.
- 81% of participants believed that a harmful aspect of the sex trade was that the women involved frequently contract sexually transmitted diseases.
- 73% of participants reported that women in the sex trade have limited economic survival options.
- 68% of participants acknowledged that customers purchasing sex often contract sexually transmitted diseases.
- 67% of participants reported that the sex trade draws crime and drugs into the community.
- 51% of participants believed the sex trade negatively impacts property values within communities.

## WAYS TO END THE SEX TRADE INDUSTRY

Participants were asked to identify ways to reduce men's patronage of the sex trade:

- 78% of participants stated that educating men about the harms of the sex trade could reduce sex trade patronage.
- 39% of participants reported that the use of individuals in the sex trade could be reduced by having famous men speak out against the sex trade.
- 35% of participants believed that a marketing campaign could reduce demand for sex trade.

- 12% of participants believed that there is nothing that can be done to reduce the use of individuals in the sex trade.
- 6% of participants believed that a way to end the sex trade industry would be to legalize prostitution.

## THE ROLE OF MEN IN ENDING SEXUAL HARM

When asked “What could men do to end the sex trade?” answers ranged from working to legalize prostitution, doing nothing at all, educating other men on the importance of the issue, to eliminating the demand for prostitution. As demonstrated by one individual’s statement, “Educating others who are in the position to create demand for the services about the negative effects of commercial sex would be the first step.” Although many men had positive ideas on how to take responsibility to end men’s patronage of the sex trade, others believed that prostitution is “the oldest profession” and nothing can be done to end it. Eleven percent of men believed in working to end the sex trade in a more micro sense by encouraging their own circle of friends to not buy sex. One man stated, “[Do not] buy sex and encourage other men to do the same.” Another man stated, “Stop approving of [prostitution] when discussed or joked about.” Some individuals who answered this question item had multiple ideas regarding the roles men can play in ending sexual harm: Individuals recognized the following:

- 31% of participants stated that by ending demand, the sex trade would cease to exist.
- 14% of participants indicated that educating themselves and other men who currently buy sex about the harms of prostitution would help end prostitution.
- 14% of participants believed that by becoming advocates in the movement to end sexual exploitation, fewer men would purchase sex.
- 7% of participants believed that the existence of more healthy relationships would be effective in the sex trade.
- 6% of participants believed that by legalizing prostitution, the harm in the sex trade would end.
- 6% of participants believed that by controlling sexual desires, sex trade patronage would end.
- 5% of participants believed that law enforcement should be more strict in prosecuting those who are involved in the sex trade, but did not specify if they were referring to the johns, traffickers, or women in prostitution.
- 5% of participants stated that issues of the sex trade and its harms should be discussed with women.

- 5% of participants stated that nothing can be done by men to end sexual harm.
- 4% of participants stated that they were unsure what could be done to end sexual harm
- 4% of participants believed that individuals should take on more traditional values.
- 1% of participants believed by not having sex at all will end sexual harm

*Limitations and Nature of the Data:*

There are several limitations to this survey, with the largest challenge being that the sample is not representative. Outreach for survey participation was conducted originally through the personal networks of the staff at the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation. This survey was also only accessible to those who were able to access the internet. Some survey participants shared feedback that they were concerned that by taking the survey they would be put onto lists to receive spam mail or that their personal email addresses would be stored for other purposes. Once we received this feedback, potential participants were briefed in introductory emails and Facebook posts that none of their personal information (i.e. email addresses) would be stored. There was also concern on dating websites and social networks that the survey was a virus, which prevented some individuals from participating.

Although 491 participants began the survey, only 415 completed it in its entirety. Of the 76 participants who did not complete the survey, 30 of those individuals had opened the survey page, but did not answer any of the questions, and two participants only answered the demographic questions. It was brought to the researcher's attention during the collecting of data that some participants did not realize that there was a second page to the survey or did not wish to fill out the second page. The five other remaining participants who did not complete the survey in its entirety did not respond to some of the survey questions.

*Conclusion:*

As evidenced by the responses to this survey, many men understand that the demand for the sex trade is the fuel behind the existence of prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. Since the majority of interviewees identified harmful aspects to the sex trade, it is apparent that many of the men who responded to the survey were able to identify that the sex trade as damaging to both individuals and society. For those working to end sexual exploitation, it is encouraging that 31% of participants were able to recognize that by ending the demand for the sex trade, we could end sexual exploitation. Still, results also point to the need for more education since 52% of individuals believed that people in the sex trade benefited from prostitution. Survey results also demonstrated a commonly held misconception which is that men have sexual needs which must be met, and the sex trade helps meet those needs. It is encouraging that the majority of the individuals recognized that those in prostitution are often times the victims of violence that is perpetrated by their pimps and customers. Participants also demonstrated understanding that

victims of the sex trade have limited ways to access economic survival options outside of prostitution.