

## **ATTITUDES TOWARDS PROSTITUTION: DO BELIEF IN A JUST WORLD AND PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE AS A CLIENT OF PROSTITUTION MATTER?**

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**Abstract:** Attitudes towards prostitution are related to stereotypes that normalize the phenomenon and justify violence against women in the sex industry. The present study explored attitudes towards prostitution in Greece by investigating their relation to beliefs in a just world, previous experience as a client of prostitution and key demographic characteristics in a sample of 624 Greek female and male client and non-client participants. The results indicated that most of the participants perceived prostitution as a socially harmful phenomenon, whereas low belief in immanent justice and high belief in ultimate justice were significantly correlated to negative attitudes towards prostitution. Gender differences were also revealed, with male participants showing more positive attitudes towards prostitution. Previous experience as a client of prostitution was also found to predict positive attitudes, with clients (as compared to non-clients) adopting more positive attitudes towards prostitution.

**Key words:** Attitudes, Client of prostitution, Just world theory, Prostitution

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## INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is generally defined as the act of providing sexual services in exchange for money (Valor-Segura, Exp sito, & Moya, 2011). Despite the simplicity of this definition, prostitution is a much broader social phenomenon impacting many layers of the society, including the legal system and legislation, social welfare systems (Levin & Peled, 2011) and individual behavior. It also raises deep-seated moral and philosophical questions. Perceptions of prostitution vary widely from that of a public health concern, a legal issue or a personal career choice, to that of a violation of basic human rights (Monta és & Moyano, 2006).

Until recently, prostitution was considered a victimless crime, as perceptions and attitudes towards prostitution minimized the harm against the women involved (Farley et al., 2003) and justified their exploitation (Cotton, Farley, & Baron, 2002). Most previous research on prostitution has focused on sex workers, their life choices (Basow & Campanile, 1990; Cotton et al., 2002), and their exploiters, rather than on the factors that shape public attitudes towards this social phenomenon. Similarly, relevant research into prostitution in Greece the country addressed in the present study has mainly focused on a theoretical scrutiny of the phenomenon, its transformation over time, and its theoretical link to the phenomenon of sex trafficking (Λάζος, 2002a, 2002b).

In this context, the present study aimed to explore attitudes towards prostitution in Greece and to examine the extent to which previous experience as clients of prostitution, just world beliefs, and several key demographic characteristics, such as gender and level of education correlate with attitudes and reinforce or justify violence against women in the sex industry.

### *Perspectives of prostitution*

Over the years, adequately reflecting the evolving definition and understanding of sex procurement (Monta és & Moyano, 2006), prostitution has been considered from different perspectives. One such perspective views prostitution as the result of a woman's deviation from socially desirable sexual behavior, due to the woman's personal disorders or social difficulties (Gouseti, 2007). Consequently, this approach attributes all responsibility and culpability to women, thereby stigmatizing them and dismissing economic, political, cultural, or social factors as valid or relevant for the creation or exacerbation of the phenomenon. In this view, a woman working in the sex industry is characterized as a hypersexual individual who genuinely enjoys and derives pleasure from offering sexual services. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the woman

adopts this behavior unconsciously by trying to develop, through sexual encounters, a relationship that she never had with her father (the so-called Electra's syndrome). The neo-positivist perspective looks to signs of sexual abuse in childhood as key factors for the genesis of such behavior (Davis, 1937). From a psychopathological perspective, addiction to alcohol and drugs are also seen as factors for this deviation from socially acceptable behavior (Della Giusta, Tommaso, & Strøm, 2004; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996).

Alternatively, the "sex-work" perspective considers prostitution as a legitimate profession (Oude Breuil, Siegel, Reenen, van Beijer, & Roos, 2011), or simply as an employment choice (Pateman, 1988) and is thus not perceived as a social problem. Women involved in prostitution are defined as employees engaging in commercial activities in the free market and are therefore not different in their status from other sellers of services (Pateman, 1988), or in terms of psychopathology. Under the "sex-work" view, prostitution is a rational employment choice (Esselstyn, 1972) particularly, for the economically impoverished (Plange, 1990; Sinclair, 1992). Thus, prostitution does not violate women's rights, as a woman sells neither her body nor her soul, but only her services, albeit of a sexual nature (O'Connell Davidson, 2002). Only under certain labor conditions specifically, those involving coercion, deception, and force prostitution becomes a form of labor exploitation (Oude Breuil et al., 2011). In line with this, the "sex work" perspective has provided the main arguments in favor of the legalization of prostitution. If these women have consciously chosen their profession based on the conviction that it is more profitable than other professions (Ferrer, 2001), then legalization of prostitution ensures their protection and helps to provide them with better working conditions. Based on this perspective, many countries, including Greece, have legalized prostitution, holding that it is a matter of free will and should be considered a profession accepted by the society (Outshoorn, 2005).

However, the feminist movement and, particularly, radical feminism, assume a different perspective of prostitution specifically, that of the most extreme form of female sexual exploitation and a critical factor in the continued oppression of women. According to this feminist view, through the commercialization of women as consumable sexual products, the sexual act itself becomes a method of control and oppression (Musheno & Seeley, 1986). Prostitution can then be considered a crime against women that violates their fundamental rights and is thus a form of sexual slavery (Kempadoo, 2005; Segrave, Milivojevic, & Pickering, 2009) that perpetuates traditional power structures in the oppression of women by men (Della Giusta et al., 2004). Proponents of this perspective content that sex cannot be legally bought or sold (Weitzer, 2010), implying that prostitution should be decriminalized and that the women of prostitution should be treated as victims (Ekberg, 2004), while the

clients who procure their services should be penalized (Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Moya, 2011).

### ***Research on attitudes towards prostitution***

Numerous studies have explored various attitudes towards prostitution and women involved in the sex industry in a number of different countries, including Sweden, Norway, Finland, and USA (Basow & Campanile, 1990; Cotton et al., 2002; Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009; Miller & Schwartz, 1995; Peracca, Knodel, & Saengtienchai, 1998; Räsänen & Wilska, 2007). Many of these studies have focused on the association of demographic characteristics with individuals' attitudes towards prostitution. Gender, age, and educational level have been demonstrated to be important factors in the prediction of attitudes towards the phenomenon. Previous research has shown that women are more likely to oppose prostitution than men (Basow & Campanile, 1990; Kuosmanen, 2008), as males tend to be more liberal than females regarding prostitution (Boyle, 2000; Evans-DeCicco & Cowan, 2001). Previous research has also indicated that, compared to younger men, their older counterparts have a greater desire for sexual services from sex workers (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009; Jensen 1998; Kuosmanen, 2008; Räsänen & Wilska, 2007; Sawyer, Metz, Hinds, & Brucker, 2001; Sørensen & Knudsen, 2006). Furthermore, other studies demonstrated that people with higher educational level were more likely to consider prostitution a form of exploitation of women and have negative attitudes towards it (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009). Previous research has also linked attitudes towards prostitution with other factors, such as legislation, rape myth acceptance, as well as beliefs about gender equality. According to recent research, in those countries where prostitution is illegal, people are more likely to consider the phenomenon as a form of exploitation (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009). By contrast, in the communities where prostitution is legalized, consciously acceptable, and even promoted by the media, people are more likely to have positive attitudes towards prostitution and see it as an employment choice, rather than a form of exploitation (Brehman, 2008). The legal promotion of prostitution by the media, alongside with the existence of strip shows and the consumption of pornography, make the idea of buying and selling sex more acceptable (Wu & McCaghy, 1993) and encourage the public to consider women in the sex trade more as workers than as potential victims.

Regarding the impact of the rape myth acceptance, previous findings have demonstrated that those who endorse or accept rape myths are more likely to have positive attitudes towards prostitution and justify violence towards women (Cotton et al., 2002; Klein, Kennedy, & Gorzalka, 2009). Finally, studies exploring the relationship

between gender equality beliefs and attitudes towards prostitution have demonstrated that the higher the belief in gender equality, the more negative the attitudes towards prostitution, portraying the phenomenon as a violation of women's rights and a form of oppression (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009, 2011).

In this context, it is only recently that relevant research started to focus on demand of sexual services as a driving factor in the supply of prostitution and, specifically, on the role of the client. According to previous research on the beliefs of arrested male clients, in the countries where prostitution is prohibited, these males' perceptions of gender violence and sex workers predicted their attitudes towards prostitution and their motivation to seek out sexual services. Most of these men believed that prostitution was a voluntary employment choice and that prostitutes enjoyed their work (Della Giusta, Di Tommaso, & Strøm, 2009). However, much of the research has focused on the developed countries (with the established legal frameworks regarding the prohibition of prostitution) and less so on Southern European, Latin American, and Asian countries. Additionally, available empirical research only partially reflects the complexity of the phenomenon and the breadth and range of the factors that predict attitudes towards it (Levin & Peled, 2011). Therefore, vehement debates and concerns continue to revolve around the legalization or regulation of prostitution, the link between women's rights and prostitution, as well as the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking (Brooks-Gordon, 2006; Sanders, O'Neill, & Pitcher, 2009). These debates, in turn, are also shaped by public attitudes towards the phenomenon of prostitution (Burstein, 1998). As suggested by recent research on sex trafficking, the way the general public perceives prostitution is linked to the way it conceptualizes the victim and the client of sex trafficking. Specifically, positive attitudes towards prostitution have been shown to lead to higher attributions of blame towards the victims of sex trafficking, while negative attitudes towards prostitution have been reported to lead to higher attributions of blame towards the client and perceiving the women of sex trafficking as victims of the sex trade (Digidiki, Dikaiou, & Baka, 2016). In this context, a better understanding of attitudes towards prostitution can be reasonably expected to elucidate the factors at play that normalize and promote the phenomenon. In light of the above, the present study introduces a socio-psychological and multi-dimensional construct of the Just World Theory (JWT) in the investigation of attitudes towards prostitution due to its prevalent use in research on rape (Carli, 1999), poverty (Harper, Wagstaff, Newton, & Harrison, 1990), illness (Gruman & Sloan, 1983), and bullying (Fox, Elder, Gater, & Johnson, 2010).

***The just world theory***

When confronted with inequality or injustice, people attempt to restore justice through the ways they choose to react or interpret the facts (Dalbert, 2009). The most prominent theory that explains these justice-driven reactions is the just world theory. According to this theory, people assume that they live in a just world where everyone gets what s/he deserves and deserves what s/he gets (Lerner, 1970). When this belief is questioned or threatened by actual events, people tend to simply ignore or downplay the perceived or experienced injustice itself (Lipkus & Siegler, 1993), reframe the facts so that the latter remain consistent with people's personal beliefs (Maes, 1998), or place blame on the victim (Strelan, 2007). By assuming that the victim is a "bad person" (characterological attribution) or that a victim's own willful actions or desires brought about the victimization (behavioral attribution), people manage to reconcile unjust and unfair situations with the existence of justice in the world while never having to adjust their own set of values or beliefs (Dalbert, 2009; Maes, 1998). This tendency to seek justice in the events that have already taken place and to consider them as direct and fair consequences of a victim's behavior is called "belief in immanent justice" (Maes, 1998), a dimension within JWT.

If reconciling the injustice proves more difficult, then cognitive processes termed 'assimilations of injustice' are implemented (Dalbert, 2009). Specifically, when a situation is perceived as unfair, people tend to think that justice will be restored at another time or in another domain of life. In this case, where there are signs that justice will be restored, the victim and his/ her responsibility are treated differently and the victim is no longer held responsible (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). This belief is referred to as a "belief in ultimate justice", another component of JWT, and allows people to accept injustice without giving up the belief in a just world. On the other hand, a failure to see the world as a safe and predictable place leads to the belief in an unjust world. People who adopt this belief embody a strong external locus of control, assuming that "life just happens" and that fate is random. Relevant studies exploring these beliefs conclude that those with greater beliefs in immanent justice place a greater blame and responsibility on victims, while those with a greater belief in ultimate justice or in an unjust world place lesser responsibility on victims (Maes, 1998; Montada & Lerner, 1998). Although there has been considerable research regarding the JWT and its role in the blame assigned to victims, its predictive role on attitudes towards prostitution remains understudied.

### ***The present study***

As part of a broader research project exploring the attitudes towards the victims and clients of sex trafficking (see also Digidiki et al., 2016, for further detail), the present study aimed to investigate attitudes towards prostitution and the micro- and macro-social factors that relate to how prostitution is understood, justified, and normalized in Greece, a country where prostitution is legal and culturally acceptable, with a particular focus on the clients of prostitution.

Specifically, the following four hypotheses were formulated:

Considering that in the countries where prostitution is legalized citizens tend to hold more positive attitudes towards the phenomenon, perceiving it as an employment choice (Brehman, 2008), participants would be generally positive towards prostitution, considering it a choice of employment rather than as a violation of women's rights (Hypothesis 1).

In line with previous research showing that clients of prostitution perceive it as an enjoyable employment choice for sex workers (Della Giusta et al., 2009), participants with previous client experience would be more likely to adopt more positive attitudes towards prostitution than participants without such experience (Hypothesis 2).

Demographic characteristics, such as gender and education, would be associated with attitudes towards prostitution. Specifically, based on the previous findings on the role of gender in the formation of attitudes (Basow & Campanile, 1990; Boyle, 2000; Evans-DeCicco & Cowan, 2001; Kuosmanen, 2008), we hypothesized that female participants would be more likely to have negative attitudes towards prostitution than male participants. Furthermore, in line with previous research on the role of education (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009), participants with lower levels of education would be more likely to adopt positive attitudes towards sex work than those with higher levels of education (Hypothesis 3).

Belief in a just world, demographic characteristics, and previous experience as a client would predict attitudes towards prostitution. Though the association between the belief in a just world and attitudes towards prostitution has not been previously explored, it was hypothesized that participants with a strong belief in immanent justice would be more likely to adopt positive attitudes towards prostitution. Perceiving prostitution more as a personal choice, beneficial for both the women of the sex industry and the society, rather than as a form of exploitation with negative outcomes for both women and the society, strong believers in a just world are able to maintain their belief system by employing "rational" and "defensive" strategies (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1976). Such strategies could be attributing the phenomenon of prostitution to personal choices and focusing on the beneficial outcomes of it for

the women involved and the society, denying, at the same time, the existence of injustice, suffering, and discrimination (Dalbert & Yamauchi, 1994) (Hypothesis 4).

## METHOD

### *Sampling and participants*

This study capitalized on the sample and research measures used in Digidiki et al. (2016), to test new hypotheses through different statistical analyses. The sample consisted of 900 people from urban, rural, and island areas of Greece. The convenience sampling method was used and the participants were recruited through their workplace (police stations, public services, schools, and local businesses). For confidentiality reasons, the data were collected by the researchers in anonymous, sealed envelopes, while a consent form was signed by the participants before getting engaged in the study. The response rate based on the returned questionnaires was 77.8% (700). Time constraints and the length of the questionnaires were the main reasons cited by the participants for being unable to participate. Of the 700 returned questionnaires, 76 were incomplete and thus were excluded from further analysis. Though it is not clear why some participants did not fully complete the questionnaires, time constraints were assumed to have played a role here. The final sample consisted of 624 participants.

Of the final sample of 624 participants, 364 (58.3%) were women and 260 (41.7%) were men. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 59 years old, with a mean age of 34.54 years ( $SD = 10.87$ ). Most of the participants had a Bachelor's degree ( $N = 378$ , 60.6%), while 23.6% ( $N = 147$ ) graduated from high school, 12.8% ( $N = 80$ ) completed a Master's degree, and 3% ( $N = 19$ ) completed only primary school. Of the total number of male participants, 43.5% ( $N = 113$ ) reported to have paid for sexual services in legal or illegal settings.

### *Measures*

#### *Attitudes Towards Prostitution Scale*

For the purposes of the broader research project (Digidiki et al., 2016) a new measure was designed based on questionnaires previously developed to measure attitudes towards prostitution. These questionnaires were: the Attitudes Towards Prostitution Scale (ATPS) (Levin & Peled, 2011), the Prostitution Behavior Questionnaire (PBQ), and the re-designed ATPS (Sawyer & Metz, 2009). To adjust this measure to the Greek context, 20 Greek experts (10 male and 10 female) in the field of prostitution were interviewed. Three of them identified themselves as clients of prostitution in legal and

illegal settings and the rest had previous experience working with sex workers and other marginalized populations. A 40-item version was pilot-tested in a small-sized sample of academic experts in the field. The final version consisted of 15 items that equally represented positive and negative attitudes towards prostitution and reflected the three perspectives constituting the conceptual framework of prostitution. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”).

A Principal Components factor analysis was performed on the data. It yielded two factors accounting for 37.37% of the total variance. The first factor comprised five items representing negative attitudes towards prostitution (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .62$ ) and included the items that present prostitution mainly as a socially negative phenomenon, a form of female sexual exploitation that is harmful to the society. The second factor comprised ten items representing positive attitudes towards prostitution. They included the items that presented prostitution as a work choice, harmless, or even beneficiary for the community and the city, as well as for the clients and sex workers (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ) (see Digidiki et al., 2016 for more details). The factors were rendered acceptable due to their acceptable internal consistencies (Wasserman & Bracken, 2003).

#### *Just World Scale*

This 14-item questionnaire combined two scales that measure just world beliefs; the Rubin and Peplau (1975) and the Maes (1998) scale. A Principal Component analysis with Varimax rotation was performed for this scale, resulting in three factors accounting for 41.39% of the total variance. The first factor comprised five items that measured Belief in Immanent Justice (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ); the second factor, consisting of five items, measured Belief in Ultimate Justice and had acceptable internal consistency, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ , while the third factor (four items) measured Belief in an Unjust World (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .67$ ) (see Digidiki et al., 2016 for more details).

A demographic questionnaire queried age, gender, professional occupation, level of education, and previous experience as a male client in the female sex industry, as well as the places where the participants received sexual services.

## RESULTS

### *Attitudes towards prostitution: Descriptives*

Since prostitution in Greece is legal, Hypothesis 1 predicted that the participants would adopt more positive attitudes towards prostitution, considering it a form of

employment, rather than a violation of women's rights. However, the data indicated moderate negative attitudes towards prostitution, viewing it as having negative and harmful effects on society ( $M = 3.8$ ,  $SD = .72$ , on a scale from 1 to 5 where the score of 4 and 5 indicated high levels of negative attitude). The negative attitude significantly differed from positive attitudes towards prostitution ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = .084$ ),  $t(623) = 15.947$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.013$ . A Pearson correlation coefficient indicated that there was low negative correlation between these two variables,  $r(622) = -.273$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### ***The effect of gender and previous client experience on attitudes towards prostitution***

Hypotheses 2 and 3, concerned with the differences between clients and non-clients, and male and female participants, posited that the participants' previous experience as clients of the sex industry, as well as their gender, would have a significant effect on attitudes towards prostitution. As only male participants of the present research indicated previous experience as clients of the sex industry, it was considered interesting to examine the differences not only between the male and female participants, but also between the female, the male client, and the male non-client participants. To test this hypothesis, a MANOVA was conducted using previous experience as a client with the sex industry and gender as a three-level independent variable (male client, male non-client, and female participants) and the attitudes towards prostitution as the two dependent variables.

A nonsignificant Box's M test ( $p = .411$ ) indicated homogeneity of covariance matrices of the dependent variables across the levels of the independent variable. The analysis showed statistically significant differences between client male, non-client male, and female participants for the combined dependent variables,  $F(4, 1240) = 24.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Wilks' L = .857, partial  $\eta^2 = .074$ . The follow-up univariate analyses demonstrated that there were significant differences across the three levels of the independent variable on both positive attitudes towards prostitution,  $F(2, 621) = 36.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .106$ , and negative attitudes towards prostitution,  $F(2, 621) = 21.92$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .066$ .

Tukey HSD post hoc tests indicated that male client participants ( $M = 17.77$ ,  $SD = 4.05$ ) had more positive attitudes towards prostitution than male non-client participants and female participants, while non-client male participants ( $M = 15.30$ ,  $SD = 3.95$ ) had more positive attitudes than female participants ( $M = 14.13$ ,  $SD = 3.95$ ), ( $p = .008$ ). Furthermore, post hoc tests showed that female participants ( $M = 39.50$ ,  $SD = 6.74$ ) adopted more negative attitudes towards prostitution than male participants, regardless of their previous experience with the sex industry ( $p < .001$ ). On the other hand, male client ( $M = 35.35$ ,  $SD = 7.69$ ) and male non-client

participants ( $M = 36.14$ ,  $SD = 6.89$ ) did not significantly differ on negative attitudes towards prostitution ( $p = .63$ ), indicating that previous experience with the sex industry did not have a significant effect on negative attitudes towards prostitution. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of positive and negative attitudes as a function of previous experience with the sex industry, gender, and level of education**

	Previous experience						Level of education							
	Male client		Male non-client		Female non-client		Secondary School		High School		Bachelor		Master/PhD	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive attitudes	17.77	4.05	15.30	3.95	14.13	3.95	18.63	4.02	15.64	4.30	14.66	4.09	15.09	3.98
Negative attitudes	35.35	7.69	36.14	6.89	39.50	6.74	40.95	4.91	37.61	7.65	38.23	7.01	36.61	7.37

### ***The effect of educational level on attitudes towards prostitution***

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the participants' educational level would have a significant effect on attitudes towards prostitution. To test this hypothesis, a MANOVA was conducted with education as a four-level independent variable and the positive attitudes and negative attitudes towards prostitution as dependent variables: A nonsignificant Box's M test ( $= .422$ ) indicated that the assumption of homogeneity had not been violated. The analysis showed significant differences among the different levels of education for the combined variables,  $F(6, 1238) = 5.273$ ,  $p < .001$ , Wilks'  $L = .951$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .025$ . Statistically significant differences emerged among the different levels of education only for the positive attitudes towards prostitution,  $F(3, 620) = 6.899$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .032$ , but not for negative attitudes towards prostitution,  $F(3, 620) = 2.341$ ,  $p = .072$ . Given the size of the samples representing each of the levels of the independent variable, a Hochberg's GT2 post hoc analysis was performed (Field, 2005). It revealed that the higher the level of education of the participants, the less likely they were to adopt positive attitudes towards prostitution. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

### ***Predictors of attitudes towards prostitution***

Finally, in order to determine the predictive power of gender, previous experience as a client, level of education of the participants, and just world beliefs, two hierarchical linear regressions were performed. The results of the preliminary analysis ensured that

that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity.

The first analysis explored the variables that predicted positive attitudes towards prostitution. In Step 1, the analysis revealed that gender of the participants explained only 7% of the variance in positive attitudes towards prostitution,  $F(1, 622) = 46.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . Previous experience with the sex industry was added in Step 2, increasing the total variance explained to 10.6%,  $F(2, 621) = 36.63$ ,  $p < .001$ . Adding level of education in Step 3, the total variance explained was increased to 12.9%,  $F(5, 618) = 18.29$ ,  $p < .001$ . Finally, the beliefs in just world were added in Step 4, slightly increasing the total variance explained to 13.6%,  $F(8, 615) = 12.13$ ,  $p < .001$ . The best-fitting model for predicting positive attitudes towards prostitution was a linear combination of gender, previous experience with the sex industry, and level of education. This model indicated that female participants tended to adopt less positive attitudes towards prostitution ( $\beta = -.147$ ,  $p = .001$ ), while the participants with previous experience as clients were more likely to adopt positive attitudes ( $\beta = .210$ ,

**Table 2. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting positive attitudes towards prostitution**

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$sr^2$	$R$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>				.264	.07	.070
Female participants	-.264	-6.831***	-.07			
<b>Step 2</b>				.325	.106	.036
Female participants	-.138	-3.013**	-.013			
Male participants with previous experience	.227	4.980***	.036			
<b>Step 3</b>				.359	.129	.023
Female participants	-.138	-3.046**	-.013			
Male participants with previous experience	.214	4.711**	.031			
Secondary school	.117	2.827**	.011			
High school	.021	.372	.001			
University degree	-.068	-1.195	-.002			
<b>Step 4</b>				.369	.136	.007
Female participants	-.147	-3.208***	-.014			
Male participants with previous experience	.210	4.622***	.03			
Secondary school	.100	2.380	.007			
High school	-.007	-.115	-.001			
University degree	-.078	-1.383	-.002			
Belief in immanent justice	-.008	-.201	-.001			
Belief in ultimate justice	.074	1.855	.005			
Belief in an unjust world	.059	1.509	.003			

Note:  $N = 624$ , \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

$p < .001$ ). Additionally, the model demonstrated that participants with lower education level tended to be more positive towards prostitution ( $\beta = .103, p = .009$ ). Beliefs in a just world did not significantly contribute to predicting positive attitudes towards prostitution (see Table 2).

The second analysis brought to light the factors that predict negative attitudes towards prostitution. In Step 1, gender of the participants explained 6.5% of the variance,  $F(1, 622) = 43.01, p < .001$ . Client experience in the sex industry was added in Step 2, slightly increasing the total variance explained to 6.6%,  $F(2, 621) = 21.92, p < .001$ . Adding the level of education of the participants in Step 3, the total variance explained was increased to 7.1%,  $F(5, 618) = 10.56, p < .001$ . Finally, the beliefs in a just world were added in Step 4, increasing the total variance explained to 12.7%,  $F(8, 615) = 11.19, p < .001$ . The best-fitting model for predicting negative attitudes towards prostitution was a linear combination of gender and the just world beliefs. This model of the analysis indicated that female participants were more likely to adopt negative attitudes towards prostitution ( $\beta = .198, p < .001$ ). Moreover, belief in ultimate justice

**Table 3. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting negative attitudes towards prostitution**

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$sr^2$	$R$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>				.254	.065	.065
Female participants	.254	6.558***	.064			
<b>Step 2</b>				.257	.066	.001
Female participants	.230	4.938***	.037			
Male participants with previous experience	-.043	-.917	-.001			
<b>Step 3</b>				.281	.079	.013
Female participants	.225	4.827***	.035			
Male participants with previous experience	-.057	-1.220	-.022			
Secondary school	.117	2.749**	.011			
High school	.082	1.445*	.003			
University degree	.016	2.002	.005			
<b>Step 4</b>				.356	.127	.048
Female participants	.198	4.297***	.026			
Male participants with previous experience	-.068	-1.481	-.003			
Secondary school	.076	1.788	.004			
High school	.016	.280	.001			
University degree	.090	1.575	.003			
Belief in immanent justice	-.052	-1.291	-.002			
Belief in ultimate justice	.181	4.538***	.029			
Belief in an unjust world	.166	4.225***	.025			

Note:  $N = 624$ , \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

( $\beta = .181, p < .001$ ) and in an unjust world ( $\beta = .166, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted negative attitudes towards prostitution. On the other hand, previous experience as a client of the sex industry and level of education did not significantly contribute to predicting negative attitudes towards prostitution (see Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate attitudes towards prostitution in a Greek sample, while identifying some of the socio-psychological factors that relate to and predict these attitudes. Specifically, by examining the attitudes of Greek female and male participants, clients and non-clients of sexual services, this research sought to explore the association between beliefs in a just world, previous experience, as well as of demographic factors with attitudes towards prostitution.

Overall, the results demonstrated that most participants adopted negative attitudes towards prostitution. Consistently with the results of previous studies (Bromberg, 1997; Della Giusta et al., 2004), prostitution in our study was perceived mainly as a socially negative phenomenon, a form of female sexual exploitation that is harmful to the community. Of particular interest is the fact that these results contradict Hypothesis 1, according to which the participants living in a country with legalized prostitution were expected to adopt positive attitudes towards prostitution, likely seeing it more as a useful social phenomenon. However, in the present research, the majority of the participants, though aware of the existence of brothels and women offering sexual services in legal and illegal settings, adopted more negative and less positive attitudes towards prostitution. An explanation for this finding may lie in the fact that the Greek society, as a whole, tends to adopt more liberal views towards femininity and masculinity, gradually rejecting deeply rooted perceptions of and attitudes towards traditional gender roles (Leondari & Gonida, 2008). Furthermore, our results also suggest that men with previous experience as clients of the sex industry, as compared to their non-client counterparts, were more likely to adopt positive attitudes towards prostitution, viewing prostitution as socially desirable and harmless. This allowed the sex industry clients in our dataset to justify their demand for sexual services while consciously normalizing and perpetuating the phenomenon of prostitution. Interestingly, previous experience did not affect negative attitudes towards prostitution, indicating that male clients and non-clients did not differ when forming negative attitudes to prostitution. Obviously, further research using previous experience as a predictive factor of attitudes towards prostitution is needed.

Contrary to Hypothesis 4, the adoption of just world beliefs was a significant factor in predicting negative, rather than positive, attitudes towards prostitution. Specifically, beliefs in ultimate justice and in an unjust world proved to be relevant predictors of negative attitudes towards prostitution. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that believers in ultimate justice assign blame to societal and criminal factors for suffering and injustice, rather than to the victim (Maes, 1998; Montada & Lerner, 1998). Therefore, since this worldview does not consider victims responsible for their fate, it appears reasonable to assume that those who ascribe to this worldview would perceive prostitution as responsible for any harm or injustice suffered by sex workers, adopting negative attitudes towards prostitution.

An interesting finding of the present study was the effect of gender on attitudes towards prostitution. Specifically, while most of our female participants adopted negative attitudes towards prostitution, male participants tended to adopt more positive attitudes towards it, perceiving prostitution as an employment choice that helps men fulfill their sexual desires. When viewed in this way, prostitution is not considered to be a violation of women's rights (O'Connell Davidson, 2002) and is assumed to have positive consequences for both women and the society by helping to reduce instances of sexual crimes. This perspective on prostitution is the underlying premise of the legalization approach implemented in Greece; prostitution is considered outcome of the exercise of free will and women of prostitution are viewed as sex workers that should enjoy the same rights as other workers. These findings are in line with both Hypothesis 2 and previous research carried out in the European region, concluding that men, more so than women, are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards prostitution (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009; Kuosmanen, 2008).

Furthermore, the impact of the level of education on attitudes towards prostitution yielded contradicting results. While some previous studies indicated that the level of education does not relate to the way people perceive prostitution (Luht, 2005), others showed that the level of education does correlate with attitudes towards it (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2009; Kuosmanen, 2008). Our results demonstrated that the level of education correlates and can predict the way people perceive prostitution: specifically, the participants who had graduated from high school or received tertiary education were more likely to adopt negative attitudes towards prostitution, as compared to the participants who have completed the basic education. One potential explanation for this is that a higher level of education implies greater belief in or acceptance of gender equality. The greater the exposure to such a belief, the easier it is to perceive prostitution as a violation of human rights

and as a means of female exploitation and oppression. However, these results should be interpreted with caution, as our sample was biased towards people with higher levels of education.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

The present study investigated attitudes towards prostitution and identified key factors that relate to these attitudes by introducing the socio-psychological construct of the just world beliefs and by designing a tool for assessing public attitudes towards prostitution. However, as our research is preliminary in its development and design, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the scale that was used focused only on a Greek sample, so its applicability across cultures remains to be tested. Additionally, reliability was tested only with respect to internal consistency; therefore, further assessment of the psychometric properties is necessary. Next, as in the sample higher levels of education were overrepresented, future research with a more representative Greek sample should be conducted to test the generalizability of our findings.

Furthermore, the present study explored and identified some of the factors that are associated with positive and negative attitudes towards prostitution. Of course, we did not explore any causal relationship between these factors and attitudes, and this is probably impossible to do when dealing with a phenomenon such as prostitution. Prostitution is a complex social condition and multiple factors might interact and impact it. Further research is needed to examine other factors that may be at play, such as sexism, racism, sexuality theories, social stigma, as well as other stereotypes and attitudes (Cunningham & Cromer, 2016).

Despite the limitations outlined above, to the best of our knowledge our study is the first to empirically examine attitudes towards prostitution in Greece with a specific focus on the attitudes of clients of the sex industry. Given the pivotal role of public opinion and social attitudes on shaping and guiding decisions made in democratic societies, a better understanding of relevant factors that are associated with, predict, and drive these attitudes is critical for the society to fully understand the complex and controversial societal issue of prostitution. Consequently, our findings are relevant in terms of providing protection and assistance to the victims of the sex industry, protecting and upholding basic human rights, and combating social stigmatization of women in both legal and illegal sex industry settings.

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