

Prostitution and trafficking in the Spanish digital press: comparative analysis of news production

Prostitución y trata con fines de explotación sexual en la prensa digital española: análisis comparativo de la producción informativa

Prostituição e tráfico para fins de exploração sexual na imprensa digital espanhola: análise comparativa da produção informativa

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ABSTRACT | In this paper we propose the comparative analysis of the information published on prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation in Spanish media in two periods, 2013-2014 and 2018, with samples of 491 and 1,122 pieces, respectively. The intention is to identify, through a methodological triangulation that includes ethnographic mapping, content analysis and discourse, the indications and trends that make up the media agenda on prostitution and trafficking, the patterns of representation, the dominant stories, and the importance that significant events they regarding legislative, moral and political regulation of this phenomenon. We conclude that there are continuities in the themes, stories and actors, maintaining the priority of the police and judicial actions. Quantitatively, the importance of the information generated by controversial issues is not very relevant, but some issues mark a change in the trend and a break with the information continuity that allows the appearance of new actors and stories, such as the perspective of sex work, which previously received anecdotal coverage.

KEYWORDS: prostitution; trafficking; digital media; sex work; abolitionism; social representations.

HOW TO CITE

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RESUMEN | Este trabajo propone el análisis comparativo de la información publicada sobre prostitución y trata con fines de explotación sexual en medios españoles en dos períodos, 2013-2014 y 2018, con muestras de 491 y 1122 piezas, respectivamente. La intención es identificar, mediante una triangulación metodológica que incluye el mapeo etnográfico, el análisis de contenido y el discursivo, los indicios y tendencias de la agenda mediática sobre prostitución y trata, los patrones de representación, los relatos dominantes y la importancia que adquieren acontecimientos que atañen a la regulación normativa, moral y política del fenómeno. Se concluye que se detectan continuidades en las temáticas, los relatos y los actores, manteniéndose la prioridad de las acciones policiales y judiciales. Cuantitativamente, la importancia de la información generada por asuntos polémicos es poco relevante, pero algunos de ellos marcan un cambio de tendencia y una ruptura con la continuidad informativa que permite la aparición de nuevos actores y relatos, como la perspectiva del trabajo sexual, que anteriormente recibía una cobertura anecdótica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: prostitución; trata con fines de explotación sexual; prensa digital; trabajo sexual; abolicionismo; representaciones sociales.

RESUMO | Este trabalho propõe a análise comparativa da informação publicada sobre prostituição e tráfico com fins de exploração sexual na mídia espanhola em dois períodos, 2013-2014 e 2018, com amostras de 491 e 1.122 peças respectivamente. O objetivo é identificar, através de uma triangulação de metodologia que contém o mapeamento etnográfico, a análise de conteúdo e discursivo, os indícios e tendências da agenda midiática sobre prostituição e tráfico, os padrões de representação, os relatos dominantes e a importância que adquirem os fatos que tem relação com a regulação normativa, moral e política do fenômeno. Conclui-se que são detetadas continuidades nas temáticas, os relatos e os atores, mantendo a prioridade das ações policiais e judiciais. De forma quantitativa, a importância da informação gerada por assuntos polêmicos é pouco relevante, mas alguns deles marcam uma mudança de tendência e uma ruptura com a continuidade informativa que permite aparecimento de novos atores e relatos, bem como a perspectiva do trabalho sexual, que antes recebia uma cobertura anecdótica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: prostituição; tráfico com fins de exploração sexual; imprensa digital; trabalho sexual; abolicionismo; representações sociais.

DISCURSIVE EXPLOSION OF THE CONTROVERSY OVER PROSTITUTION AND ITS RELATION TO TRAFFICKING

Conceptually, prostitution is nowadays approached from multiple perspectives, in relation to various objects of study: the sex/gender system, the socio-sexual order (Justo von Lurzer, 2014; Sabsay, 2016), the economic one (Zelizer, 2011; Fraser, 2012) or human rights (Heim, 2012; Kempadoo, 2003; Kempadoo et al., 2005). A subfield of research seems to emerge that offers “opportunities for productive interdisciplinary collaborations that explain (not excuse) the ways media, broadly construed, are implicated in *all* facets of human trafficking”, including sexual exploitation (Friedman & Johnston, 2018, p. 2).

From a political perspective, this issue is cyclically articulated as an agenda problem on which institutions call for action, strongly conditioned by the emergence of a transnational policy on trafficking and by the growing concern about this crime. The shift towards this issue recovers and transforms the sex wars, confronting neo-abolitionism and the pro-sex work movement with the fight against trafficking as a backdrop (Kempadoo et al., 2005).

The media have echoed the actions generated by the different actors involved: the feminist movement, academic, social, and political institutions, government agencies, and women’s groups (Bernstein, 2007).

Media controversy and public policy in recent Spain

Since the approval of the Palermo Protocol (2000), international media interest in trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation has increased. In Spain, since 2008, it has become the focus of coverage on prostitution. The first systematic study was Calvo’s (2001); in 2010, Álvarez and colleagues analyzed Galician print newspapers; the first longitudinal study addresses *El País* and *ABC* between 1977 and 2012 (Puñal, 2015). Since then, case studies with smaller samples have appeared (Gutiérrez García, 2013; Brosa & Medina, 2012).

Research prior to 2015 coincides in the scarce presence of the topic on the agenda and in the traditional approach characterized by stereotyping, and the objectifying, sensationalist, morbid, and disrespectful language towards women, the ambivalent representation of women as deceived victims or criminals, a moral and stigmatizing approach, anchored in the logic of events, and the absence of actors (clients and pimps) and structural approaches.

The move to online and the emergence of trafficking as a public problem increase news production and academic interest. Circa 2015 there is a turning point as a result of the following studies: Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2014), Ayuntamiento de Barcelona and Asociación de Mujeres periodistas de Cataluña (2015), Clua (2015),

Puñal Rama and Tamarit (2017), Benítez-Eyzaguirre, (2017) or Saiz Echezarreta and Martínez Pérez (2018). Some changes in representations are noted due to the prioritization of trafficking as an institutional and media agenda issue, which partly displaces the hegemonic discourse (Núñez Puente & Fernández Romero, 2015; Saiz Echezarreta et al., 2018). From the framework of deviance and threat, it has evolved to one more focused on criminalization.

The incorporation into the media agenda of the controversy over prostitution is almost always linked to events of a legal, political, and social nature. The Citizen Security Law¹ and the approval of municipal ordinances that included measures to prevent street prostitution caused a controversy that was picked up by the media. Prostitution is not regulated in Spain, but these regulations opened the possibility of sanctioning those seeking prostitution and were questioned for not avoiding fines for potential victims of trafficking forced to work in the streets. The issue appears cyclically on the agenda, also linked to proposals from political actors. In an unprecedented way, the Ciudadanos party defended legalization in its program for the general elections (Piña, 2015). Legislative proposals and government action are opportunities for media coverage and public discussion of the issue, such as the bill to abolish prostitution and the failed attempt to pass a comprehensive anti-trafficking law by the socialist government in 2018.

This came in response to an action by the movement in defense of sex work, which in August 2018 succeeded in getting the Ministry of Labor² to approve the union Organization of Sex Workers (OTRAS, by its Spanish acronym), authorized in the Official State Gazette. Days later, the government intervened to ban it. The situation generated a strong controversy, in which multiple actors took positions through the media. In June 2021, the courts annulled this decision, recognizing the right to create the union, although they warned that this did not imply legalizing the activity in Spain.

Recent academic studies (Saiz Echezarreta & Martínez Pérez, 2018; Alvarado & Von Luzer, 2019) show how these actions allow incorporating people who identify themselves as sex workers and movement collectives, such as the OTRAS Union, into the media agenda.

From the political point of view, more emphasis has been placed on designing and implementing plans to combat trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation at the national and regional levels. The Second Comprehensive Plan against trafficking

1. Organic Law 4/2015 of March 30.

2. <https://www.sindicatootras.org/>

for sexual exploitation (2015-2018) includes as an objective “the elimination of stereotyped images and sexist content (...) that justify, trivialize, or incite violence against women, specifically in relation to the incidence of the solicitation for sexual services in the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation” (Delegación del Gobierno Contra la Violencia de Género, 2015, p. 85). This measure provides a justificatory framework for the analysis.

Recent international studies

The most recent international studies analyze how media representations play a role in the design, approval, and implementation of regulations, national or local, and attitudes and values in relation to trafficking and human trade. The aim is to understand –within the framework of mediatization (Hepp, 2020)– the interdependence of media institutions with the rest of the entities involved in sex markets and in the phenomenon of trafficking (Saiz-Echezarreta, 2019).

Comparative analyses are numerous: Krsmanovic (2018) links English, Dutch, and Serbian media, while Snow (2017) contrasts coverage in *The Guardian*, *The New Times* and *CNN*. Others focus on the representation of sex work, where it is legalized or decriminalized, such as in Greece (Sagredos, 2017) or New Zealand (Easterbrook-Smith, 2018), although most address the representation of trafficking or prostitution as a more general framework. Some approaches come from the Russian Federation and Balkan states (Sobel, 2016; Bozorova, 2019; Rusnac, 2019), Italy (Di Ronco, 2017), France (Devillard & Le Saulnier, 2015), Canada (Strega et al., 2014), South Africa (Hunt & Hubbard, 2015), or United Kingdom (Papadouka et al., 2016; Gregoriou & Ras, 2018). In the United States we find the work of Austin and Farrell (2017) or the longitudinal analysis of Sanford and colleagues (2016), comparing a sample of *The New Times* and *Washington Post* from 2012-2013, with another from 1980-2006.

These investigations point out the reductionist and sensationalist nature of the coverage and the focus on women. This reinforces their stigmatization, with rhetorical strategies such as criminalization and revictimization. In addition, exoticization and hyper-sexualization are usually a transversal representation strategy, linked to the marginal and transgressive nature of non-heteronormative sexualities. Media logics circulate in classic stigmatizing representations that mainly link prostitution with public order, indecency, and hygienist metaphors, by overrepresenting street prostitution.

The studies reflect the emergence of the movement in defense of sex work and the consequent re-politicization of the issue, as well as the persistence of the explanatory framework of prostitution as a *problem* linked especially to immigration, and the framing of the debate about *solutions* around the abolitionism/

pro-rights axis. This is combined with some indeterminacy and confusion in the use of terms related to prostitution, sex work, and trafficking (Papadouka et al., 2016). Nevertheless, an improvement is perceived in the journalistic coverage by specifying the concepts and explaining the phenomena, although the stories have excessive reliance on official sources and exaggeratedly prioritize the criminological, police, and judicial approach, and those associated with rescue and revictimization.

Although these works highlight that prostitution and anti-trafficking have entered the media agenda and capture public attention (Austin & Farrell, 2017), the issue is still overly dependent on the political agenda (Krsmanovic, 2018). Thus, it can be ignored and invisibilized, if there is interest in doing so, or its presence downgraded, to suit policy and regulatory design and implementation processes at different levels, as Allwood (2018) points out for the European Union.

HYPOTHESIS AND OBJECTIVES

Aligning ourselves with the international context and aware of the influence that the media sphere has on society, it is considered necessary to monitor the journalistic discourse on prostitution and to propose a longitudinal contrastive study. It is of interest to know if the media maintain a trend in time in the Spanish sociohistorical context.

As a hypothesis, it is proposed that the introduction in the media of trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, assumed as a public and political issue, is affecting the representation of prostitution in two aspects: polarizing the issue and biasing it towards mostly abolitionist ideological positions, in which trafficking and prostitution are identified or assimilated, and building a new story about the crime of trafficking, but without leaving aside the classic cliché about prostitution.

The main objective is to analyze and contrast the content published in the Spanish digital press on prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation in two periods. We will study and compare the news of a research conducted for the Madrid City Council from October 15, 2013 to March 15, 2014 to probe the involvement of the media during the validity of the Second Municipal Plan against sexual exploitation and attention to prostitution (2013-2016). On the other hand, the news published between June 1 and December 31, 2018, when the Second State Comprehensive Plan against trafficking (2015-2018) ends and the OTRAS Union is approved will be analyzed and contrasted.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- To identify which issues make up the media agenda on prostitution and trafficking in Spain. To observe the importance in quantitative and qualitative terms of

the information about the controversy and debate on prostitution generated through controversial issues (approval of the OTRAS Union), as opposed to the rest of the daily information and continuity on the subject (campaigns, police, and judicial actions, political demonstrations, citizen discussion, etc.).

- To explore qualitatively the patterns of representation, the thematic axes, the voices that prevail, the imaginaries, and the dominant discursive lines at the national, regional, and local levels.
- Describe the significant variations in this regard in both periods.

METHODOLOGY

This study is part of a broader longitudinal research, focusing on the mediatization of the prostitution controversy in the public space between 2014 and 2020. It is based on ethnographic approaches to different public arenas in which this debate takes place, especially digital media, and is recognized in the public controversy mapping proposal (Guerrero Bernal et al., 2018; Venturini, 2012; Marres, 2015, 2017).

Based on various case studies, we confirm that media logics performatively affect the dynamics of deliberation, the definition of the legal framework, the design of public policies, and the knowledge and beliefs shared on the subject.

In this context, the media are spaces for discussion and interested actors, with their own voice in the debate. Analyzing recent news discourse gives access to the processes in which the actors involved are confirmed and legitimized.

We resort to methodological triangulation, “a process of contrast between research techniques that allows to compare and complete the results of each of them on a common object of study, to improve the validity and reliability of the work” (Vicente Mariño, 2009, p. 5). If the ethnographic mapping of the controversy makes it possible to identify actors, scenarios, and perspectives in the process of publicizing the issue (Cefaï, 2016), combining content and discourse analysis facilitates the identification of representational patterns in the informative discourse.

To obtain the data, we applied a quantitative content analysis of the journalistic production, interpreted with qualitative techniques derived from discourse analysis with a semiotic perspective, to analyze its formal aspects, sources and themes, implementation at national and regional level, and its evolution.

However, the quantitative stage does not seek statistical representativeness, but to reconstruct a productive indexicality (Souza & Carvalho, 2012). Quantifying is a guide to deepen into complexity through an exploratory visualization, which is identified as a

content analysis that includes an inductive definition of the categories system from the readings and interpretation of the material (Kohlbacher, 2006; Souza & Carvalho, 2012).

We performed a comparative analysis of two samples. The first includes information published in the Spanish digital press between June and December 2018: 1122 news pieces from 108 media from 17 autonomous communities. It comprises the newspapers of the main Spanish media groups and those of greatest relevance in each autonomous community according to the indexes of the Office of Justification of Diffusion (OJD)³ and was compiled by a team of 28 researchers under a grant from the Instituto de la Mujer⁴.

3. The media analyzed are: Andalusia: *Diario Sur*; *Ideal de Almería*; *Ideal de Granada*; *Ideal de Jaén*; *Ideal de Sevilla*; *Ideal de Andalucía*; *La voz de Almería*; *Viva Jaén – Andalucía Información*; *Diario Córdoba*, *Diario Jaén*; *Huelva Ya*; *Diario de Sevilla*; *Málaga Hoy*; *Diario de Almería*; *Huelva Información*; *Granada Hoy*; *Diario de Cádiz* (17). Aragon: *El diario de Alto Aragón*, *Diario de Teruel*, *Aragón Digital*, *Heraldo* (4). Asturias: *El Comercio (Diario de Asturias)* (1). Cantabria: *El Faradio*; *Diario de Cantabria*; *El Diario Montañés* (3). Castilla-La Mancha: *El digital de Albacete*; *El digital Castilla-La Mancha*; *Voces de Cuenca*; *Lanza Digital*; *Guadalajara Diario*; *La Tribuna de Cuenca* (6). Castilla y León: *Diario de Ávila*; *Diario Palentino Digital*; *El Heraldo de Soria*, *El Día de Segovia*, *El Adelantado de Segovia*, *Diario de Burgos.es*, *Burgosconecta.es*, *Burgosnoticias*, *Zamora24horas*, *ZamoraneWS*, *La Opinión de Zamora*, *El Día de Valladolid*, *El Diario de Valladolid*, *Tribuna de Valladolid*, *Diario de León*, *León noticias*, *ileon.com*, *Digitalleón.com*, *Ahora León*, *salamanca24horas.com*, *lagacetadesalamanca.es*, *La Crónica de Salamanca*, *salamancartvealdia.es*, *Noticias cyl salamanca*, *Noticias cyl Valladolid*, *El Norte de Castilla* (26). Catalonia: *La Vanguardia*, *El Periódico*; *Naciodigital*, *Catalunyadiari*; *Ara. cat*; *Vilaweb*; *Elnacional.cat*; *El mon*; *Diari de Girona*; *El Punt Avui*; *Grup Raco Català*; *Regió 7*; *Segre. com*; *El 9 NOU*; *Diari Mes*; *Diari La Veü*; *Eixdiari*; *Emporda*; *El Critic*; *Ebre Digital*; *Lleida.com* (21). Valencian Community: *Levante*, *Las Provincias*, *Diario Información*, *La Veü* (4). Extremadura: *El Periódico Extremadura*; *La Crónica Badajoz*; *Hoy* (3). Galicia: *La Voz de Galicia*, *Faro de Vigo*. (2). Balearic Islands: *Ara Baleares*, *Diario de Mallorca*, *Última Hora* (3). Canary Islands: *Canarias 7* (1). La Rioja: *Rioja2*, *Noticias de la Rioja*, *Nuevecuatrouno* (3). Madrid / general-interest newspapers: *ABC*, *El diario.es*, *El País*, *El Confidencial*, *El Español*, *El Mundo* (6). Navarra: *Diario de Navarra*, *Diario de noticias* (2). Basque Country-Euskadi: *Berria*; *Deia*; *El Correo*; *Gara* (4). Murcia Region: *La Opinión*, *La Verdad* (2).

4. Project Simposio. La representación de la trata con fines de explotación sexual en el espacio público (Symposium. The representation of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the public space). PAC18 exp.:29/2ACT/18. Competitive call IMIO: grants to conduct postgraduate courses in gender studies and activities in the university field related to equal opportunities between women and men (2018). Institute for Women's Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with the Courts and Equality, Spain.

Identification categories	Indexes
Autonomous community	
Date	
Media	
Relevance	Very/ pretty related
URL	
Headline	
Subheading	
Journalistic genre	Short news piece, news piece, report, chronicle, interview, editorial, videos.
Authorship	Male, female, agency, media, other.
No. of comments	
Facebook	
Twitter	
Hashtags	
Section	Society, politics, economy, events, culture, local/regional, sports, others.
Thematic categories	Indexes
Topic	Actions by specialized NGOs, judicial, legal, police, awareness-raising, abolitionist activism, sex work activism, institutional declarations, sociocultural information, statistical information and reports, first-person testimonies, other contexts, and others.
OTRAS Union	Alludes or not to the union.
Solicitation as the center	It places solicitation at the center.
Pimping as the center	It places pimping at the center.
Survivor	It places women at the center as survivors.
Distinction of the phenomenon	Trafficking and prostitution are approached as different or similar phenomena.
Other prostitutions	Other types are contemplated.
Sources	Sources quoted and order of importance.
Migratory group mentioned	
Visual analysis categories	Indexes
Pictures	Pixelated women, women's collectives, prostitution seekers, prosecuted detainees, institutional agents, law enforcement agencies, illustrations.
Videos	Video news, video interview, police video, video campaign, others.
Other elements	

Table 1. Grid to identify the units of analysis and their verbal and visual content

Source: Own elaboration.

The search was conducted in digital media libraries with the keyword prostitution, a suitable concept for covering information published on both prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation, given that previous studies have shown the connection made by the media between the two.

On the other hand, we resorted to the work promoted by the Madrid City Council (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2014) which compiled 491 news items with the keyword prostitution between October 15, 2013 and March 15, 2014 in nine Spanish media⁵.

The second sample (2018) adapted a pre-existing quantitative content analysis grid, tested in two previous investigations (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2014), which gave rise to the previous contrast sample and the one used in a work by the Barcelona City Council and the Association of Women Journalists of Catalonia (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona y la Asociación de Mujeres Periodistas de Cataluña, 2016).

Twenty-five categories were used, 14 to identify each unit of analysis and the rest were thematic in nature, referring to their verbal and visual content.

In each autonomous community, a researcher coordinated the information collected. Subsequently, a team of four people conducted a general review to homogenize the general data. The records underwent a double review, which eliminated repeated news items and polished the coding results.

RESULTS

The most relevant results of the comparative analysis between the patterns of representation of prostitution and trafficking by national, regional and local media in the years 2013-2014 and 2018, according to news content, narratives and actors, and patterns of visual representation are offered.

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Informative contents

The study of the 2013-2014 sample (491 pieces) concludes that the nine analyzed media outlets assiduously include news about cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation and related to prostitution. The collection of 1122 pieces between June

5. Newspapers: *ABC*, *El País*, *El Mundo*, *20 Minutos*, *Público*, *Marca*; television networks: *RTVE*, *Telemadrid*, and *Interviú* magazine.

and December 2018 in 108 media throughout the national territory allows inferring a similar trend, with nuances. We can conclude that, although the topic has been consolidated in the national agenda, this has not been the case at the regional and local level, because the information is still very dependent on the agencies.

In the 2014 study, the percentages of agency news items ranged from 78.18% in *20 Minutos* to 5% in *El País*, with an average of 26.28%. The pieces signed by the newsroom account for 10.71%.

The 2018 sample accounted for 23.98% of the pieces signed by an agency and 16.04%, by the medium. A similar trend is observed regarding the homogeneity derived from the low specialization and the use of stories provided by agencies.

The data in both samples indicate that there is almost a balance between the news pieces signed by men and women. In the 2014 study, those that present greater specialization and depth are mostly signed by women, who sometimes adopt a gender perspective. In the 2018 sample there is a slightly higher percentage of news pieces, 24.51%, signed by male journalists, compared to 21.93% signed by women. Although one would expect a usual gender bias in the field of opinion due to the lower visibility of women's news pieces, participation is very similar: of the 17.74% of published opinion pieces, 4.46% correspond to men and 4.28% to women. In the reportages, there is a greater presence of women: 2.58% versus 1.87%. In both samples, local and regional information is prioritized: 52% of the news pieces in 2013-2014 belong to the local information section, 22% to national, and 26% to international. Local chronicles predominate over national and international news, which reveals the scarce transcendence attributed to both issues in the political public agenda, beyond the specific events reported as local events.

Due to the specific characteristics of the 2018 sample, 38.41% falls into the local/regional sections. The following sections where more news pieces are placed are Society (20.14%), Others (14.53%), Events (9.8%), and Opinion (9.27%). These data provide only an approximation of the framework in which the pieces are included, considering the loss of relevance of the sections in the digital press. More interesting is that most of both samples correspond to short and medium-length news items. In the 2013-2014 pieces, 7% is part of the Opinion section (33 articles) and 5% (26) can be categorized as reportages or news of greater length. In the selected months, there was an important debate on prostitution in Spain due to the reform of the Penal Code, which modified the conceptualization and assumptions about pimping, and the new Citizen Security Law, which contemplated an increase in penalties for the exercise of street prostitution, including fines for solicitation. This caused opinion articles to proliferate more than at other times, which allows us to compare with the 2018 period selected because of the OTRAS Union.

What was surprising then was the very scarce presence of reportages or longer pieces and interviews. Official information, indirect discourse and mention predominated over first-person testimonies, a trend that changed from 2015 with the presence of the legitimized voice of the pro-sex work movement (Saiz Echezarreta & Martínez Pérez, 2018).

In 2018, we found 61.41% of news pieces and 17.74% of short news items published. At that time, 8.9% of opinion columns (100 in total) and 0.45% of editorials (five in total) were disseminated, in addition to 4.9% of reportages (55), 3.65% of interviews (41) and 1.78% of chronicles (20). The high number of interviews and reports is striking compared to the other period.

The approval of the OTRAS Union in August 2018 and its illegalization in November increased the debate in the media sphere. The media were loudspeakers of the two seemingly irreconcilable positions: abolitionism and pro-sex work movement. Since virtual navigation is more flexible, we classified the news pieces thematically to consider their content. In the 2013-2014 sample, 33% corresponds to news about police operations and criminality, 19% deals with legislation and regulations, 9% are chronicles about famous clients and trials, and contextualization stories account for 13%. The least frequent topics are trials (5%), culture and variety (6%), and opinion (7%).

In the 2018 sample, there was 22.46% of information on police actions, followed by 16.4% on judicial actions, 10.7% on legal actions, 11.76% on awareness-raising actions, 8.91% on sociocultural information and 8.56% on institutional statements. Thus, police and judicial actions and legal actions stand out above the rest, in a context in which the Citizen Security Law is in force. However, there is evidence of the presence of topics inserted in the agenda in an area marked by actions against trafficking and the debate on the OTRAS Union, which provide a framework oriented to politics and the action of social movements. Thus, there are pieces on awareness-raising actions, sociocultural information, institutional declarations, as well as abolitionist activism and sex work (linked to the controversy over the union). To a lesser extent, statistical information, first-person testimonies, and actions of specialized NGOs were published. It is worth noting the importance of both the publication of data and its absence and quality, both in the approach to the crime and in the prostitution controversy itself⁶.

6. See problems arising from the lack of data and how they weigh down the debate at the international level (Raphael, 2017).

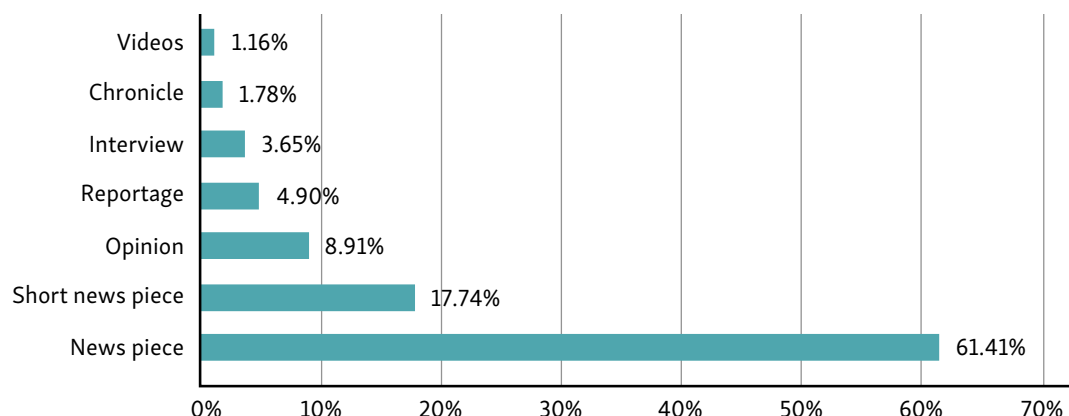


Figure 1. Percentage of journalistic genres (n=1122)

Source: Own elaboration.

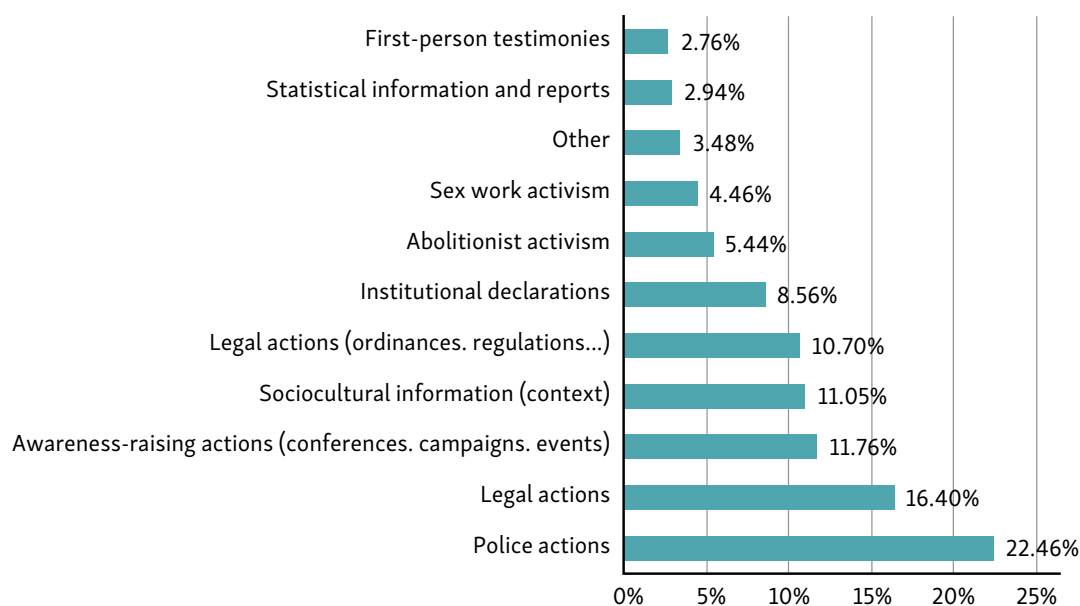


Figure 2. Percentage of topics (n=1122)

Source: Own elaboration.

The presence of first-person testimonies, although a minority, marks a clear shift with respect to the previous period and follows a trend that began in 2015. It is significant that 18.98% of the information is linked to the OTRAS Union. The third most commented news item (757 publications)⁷ addresses in its headline the relief of the director of Labor “for approving a prostitutes’ union” (Cué, 2018). The fifth news item in relevance by number of comments collects the statements of the spokeswomen of OTRAS in its headline, “The prostitutes’ union: ‘We are constituted and working’” (Álvarez, 2018). In the 2013-2014 sample, it was the debate on the regulation of prostitution that produced the greatest impact and controversy.

7. September 3, 2018 in *elpais.com*.

Stories and actors

One of the trends observed is the main story of the prosecution of the crime of trafficking that for years has been building the media imaginary on prostitution. It is a topical story articulated in the form of a news item or brief narrative that details a police action based on resources provided mainly by the State Law Enforcement Forces⁸. In fact, their communication cabinets are the main source in the 2018 sample (20.59%). That hegemonic narrative is built, in both cases, around women called *prostitutes*, many of them minors, who are freed from sexual exploitation by law enforcement. In the word cloud that emerges, the term *prostitution* predominates, and, around it, *women*, *sexual*, *prostitutes*, *trafficking*, and *syndicate*. This gives us the guideline of the narratives and actors fundamental on this occasion as a continuity and as a disruption regarding the previous sample⁹. In 2013-2014, the topical narrative of police liberation is joined by the networks, as main actors and as undefined referents vis-à-vis women or the police. In 2018, pimping takes center stage at 38.95%. Pimps are presented, as in the preceding sample, as an *evil* actor, immigrant, pursued by the police and, in many cases, prosecuted, or as a local businessman, owner of brothels, more *honest*. This represents a displacement that responds to the recommendations of the guidelines about not focusing on women.

Customers are much less visible actors in both samples, although the coincidence with a Madrid City Council campaign gave them greater visibility in the 2014 study. Solicitation accounted for 18.36% of the pieces in 2018. Some address who the customers are, their motivations, or give them a voice as a source in the debate¹⁰. Clients are also, in both studies, one of the focuses of the sanctioning measures. Whether they are immigrants or not, or their socioeconomic class, mark the construction of a *nice* or *deplorable* imaginary of these actors.

In 2018, 12.12% pieces do not cite any source, 68.36% resort to one and only 2.5% incorporate four. Of all the sources collected (1320), local and regional institutions (14.85%), the judiciary and the legal profession (11.14%), national institutions (9.39%) and, above all, the police and civil guard (19.09%) were relevant. This fact contributes to maintaining the public order narrative identified in the previous study, in addition to the narrative of legislation: legislative measures, ordinances, judgments, sentences.

8. See studies that identify this rhetorical strategy or type of framing in the international arena (Gregoriou, 2018).

9. Another finding of international studies is the feminization of reporting and the stereotypical representation of males, as traffickers and clients (Gregoriou, 2018).

10. Such as the report in *El Mundo*, which presents different profiles under the umbrella of this headline: "I pay for sex, but I am not a beast" (Domínguez, 2018).

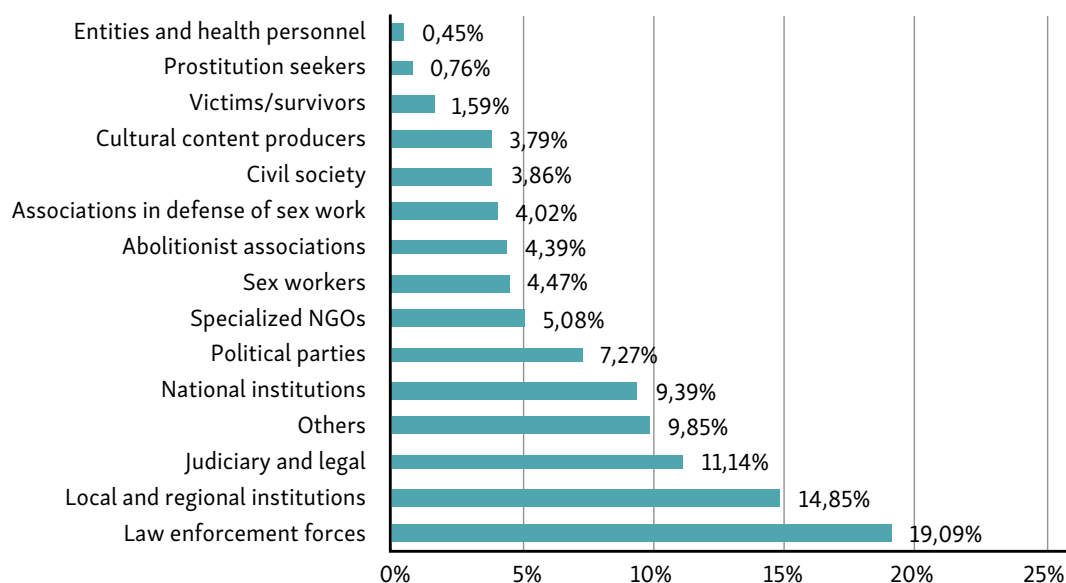


Figure 3. Sources percentage (n=1122)

Source: Own elaboration.

The fact that 213 of the 1122 pieces in the 2018 sample correspond to the OTRAS Union indicates a significant trend change. Female figures marked –especially in national and international narratives of trafficking– by the inexorable story of poverty and the violation of the human rights of women and girls also take on the character of sex workers claiming their rights. We can identify as female figures, on the one hand, victims of trafficking, enslaved by clandestine foreign networks and rescued by national law enforcement agents in narratives lacking context; on the other hand, immigrant prostitutes, who work in a transgressive way in contexts of poverty, offering their bodies on the street or in brothels. In this scenario, the representatives of the OTRAS Union burst into the scene, presenting themselves as empowered figures and as sex workers outraged when their rights are not recognized. They encourage debate on sex work and alter the monotonous and unspecialized media agendas on these issues. Faced with them, the voices of abolitionist women are revitalized to repeal the union and return to the channels of debate: women associated with the socialist government, which approves and then bans the union; columnists, actresses, former prostitutes. The sources lean towards balance: 53 pieces mention associations defending sex work and 58, abolitionist entities.

Visual representation patterns

Most of the information in the 2018 study, 73.62%, incorporates at least one picture. Only 8.13% of the pieces are accompanied by video.

The representation patterns are similar to those of 2013-2014. Images of State security forces and bodies, agents, vehicles, or resources disseminated by communication agencies are predominant. These representations feedback the hegemonic narratives and reinforce the visual imaginaries of prostitution as a universe marked by exclusion and social conflict. They are complemented by pictures of women with their backs turned or pixelated, which activate the public's knowledge and beliefs about crime and clandestinity. The female bodies are found in the intervened premises, in dismantled apartments, and are objectified by being half-hidden, half-naked. Above all, they are women alone or in groups, generally racialized, who are imagined as migrants and poor; those *other overexposed women*, whose bodies are fragmented in photographs that are often stolen and where their privacy and anonymity are not always respected.

The news are hardly illustrated with photos of prostitution seekers. Clients were not the object of attention in the previous sample either, although in this one there is a little more presence to put a face to the male actors of the sex markets. Another male agent is the figure of the pimp, also residual, since the judicial and legal actions in which they participate are more often represented by images of buildings and streets.

We find, as a more relevant trend in 2018, images of public acts, press conferences, conferences, etc. Among them, the presence of sex workers as spokespersons of protest groups stands out as a novelty. If they were presented in a minority way in the 2013-2014 study, linked to a non-criminalized or glamorous profession, in 2018 they appear in events related to the OTRAS Union. This could be considered the main discursive transformation between the two periods, while the pieces that relate to the police or prostitution maintain the same trends. The recourse to illustrations and figures associated with statistical information continues to be totally minority.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the two samples are diverse in terms of the number of media and news items, and therefore difficult to contrast in some aspects, their general comparison allows us to extract the trends of news production in the Spanish media on prostitution and trafficking.

Much of the information is homogeneous in both periods, since the media do not usually produce their own content, but rather reproduce or expand on agency materials, which in turn drink from the press releases of the State security forces, as corroborated by international studies (Krsmanovic, 2018; Gregoriou, 2018).

Labor precariousness, lack of specialization, and the classic thematization focused on political or economic issues entail a scarce development of investigative journalism, which would imply deeper approaches (Fernández-Romero & Simón-Carrasco, 2019).

The local media have not incorporated the prostitution story as their own, although they are beginning to publish their own information. This tendency is greater in the national media, which schedule pieces on trafficking, such as *El País*, or prostitution, such as *El Confidencial*, with a certain level of depth. As a result of the OTRAS Union controversy, exceptional pieces were published, such as coverage of press conferences or interviews with sex workers.

In the 2018 sample, reporting on trafficking and sexual exploitation is increasingly prevalent. In the debate on prostitution, activism and governmental position are sometimes mixed, a discussion that favors a greater distinction between prostitution and trafficking than five years ago. As Clua (2015) points out, the emergence of the new actor, sex workers claiming their rights, could not have existed without the mediatization process.

Regarding the patterns of representation, thematic axes, voices and discursive lines, there are continuities and displacements. The assimilation of the issues of trafficking and prostitution and the abolitionist bias detected in the contrastive sample persist. Although the emergence of a new narrative on trafficking based on the survivors-crime axis is noticeable, a cliché based on the victims-raid axis, traditionally linked to the treatment of prostitution (as a synonym of trafficking), persists both verbally and visually.

In terms of transformations, the issue of clients and solicitation is addressed more, something that had appeared in the awareness campaigns, when the demand for sexual services was mentioned in the State and municipal plans as part of the problem. As for the informative recommendations established in the Second Comprehensive Plan for an adequate approach to the reality of trafficking, respecting the image of women and the reality of the victims, some progress can be observed. The types of news pieces, more inclined to opinion, in-depth reportages and first-person interviews mark the main change: to make women's testimonies visible. The topics remain the same, although the controversy of the OTRAS Union is strong, which implies going deeper into the arguments of the debate. The media increasingly cover activism, and therefore abolitionist and pro-rights activists are an actor and a stable source in the story, especially in local and regional information.

In both periods, there is no critical discourse in the media, nor information that questions the scope of public policies on trafficking or prostitution. There is not any analysis of quality data, as sources are often repeated and figures are not questioned.

As Krsmanovic (2018) notes, media frames depend on and shape political will about how to address this issue. The dominance of frames about criminal justice attests to societal and State anxieties about borders, race and ethnicity, gender, and morality, and departs from the key recommendations of the Second Comprehensive Plan. Giving voice to these fears makes for great headlines, but affects those who are vulnerable, because it serves to relegate the human rights approach to those of security and migration control. The study of national, regional, and local information on prostitution and trafficking in Spain invites to a comprehensive understanding of both issues and to give more space to testimonies as a guarantee of activation of a social transformation from the involvement of the public in them as part of their responsibility.

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