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The Demand for Prostitution in Israel Based on Google Search Data Following the Law Prohibiting Prostitution Consumption and the Israel-Hamas War

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The study was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice.

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Jerusalem | September 2025

Abstract

Background

The Prohibition on Consumption of Prostitution Services Law, passed on December 31, 2018, was designed to reduce prostitution by making its purchase illegal. Under the legislation, anyone who engages in consuming prostitution, or is present in a location where prostitution takes place with the intent of consuming prostitution, commits an offense punishable by a fine of 2,000 NIS.

The legislation was enacted as a five-year temporary order and was accompanied by a study conducted by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to evaluate its implementation and impact. The Institute carried out additional research analyzing Google search trends for terms related to prostitution, to track changes in demand. Early findings suggested that demand fell after the legislation took effect. A follow-up study was conducted to assess long-term trends, understand the connection between the law's enforcement and demand for prostitution, and explore the impact of the Israel– Hamas war on the demand for prostitution.

Research Goals and Questions

This study builds on previous work by Levi-Zohar et al. (2023), offering a broader look at trends through to 2025. It addresses the following questions:

1. How did search volumes for terms linked to prostitution demand in Israel change between 2013, before the bill was introduced, and 2025?
2. What happened to search volumes after the legislation came into effect?
3. What patterns exist between search volumes and enforcement activity?
4. How did search volumes change in the months surrounding the outbreak of the Israel– Hamas war in October 2023?

Methodology

Researchers analyzed Google Trends data for three common prostitution-related search terms: “prostitutes,” “call girls,” and “discreet apartments.” The data covered January 2013 to April 2025 and was processed using SPSS (version 28). Both raw and seasonally adjusted trend charts were produced.

Changes following the Israel– Hamas war were examined using joinpoint regression. Linear regression was used to compare pre-legislation search volumes with various post-legislation periods. To explore links between search activity and enforcement, Pearson correlations were calculated between monthly search volumes and the number of fines issued up to three months before and after each search period. The results were also presented visually by comparing search and enforcement trends side by side.

Key Findings

- **Post-legislation decline:** Searches for all three terms dropped after the legislation came into effect.
- **Partial rebound:** From mid-2022, searches for “prostitutes” and “call girls” began rising again but remained below pre-legislation levels.
- **Enforcement and demand:** Increased numbers of fines were followed by drops in searches in subsequent months, while lower enforcement levels were followed by an increase in searches.
- **Impact of the war:** The Israel– Hamas war did not produce consistent or clear shifts in search trends.

Conclusion and Discussion

The evidence suggests that the legislation contributed to a reduction in demand for prostitution, with levels remaining lower than before its introduction. However, the law’s effect appears to have weakened after 2022, coinciding with a decline in enforcement.

The findings indicate that the law has the potential to reduce demand – both by deterring consumers and by reinforcing social norms – but its long-term success depends on consistent enforcement, which not only discourages violations but also raises public awareness of the legislation.