



Short Article

# Factors associated with attitudes towards sexuality in Venezuelan migrants in Pamplona, Colombia

## Factores asociados a las actitudes hacia la sexualidad en migrantes venezolanos en Pamplona, Colombia

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Sexuality is an essential dimension in human beings. Migrants become a vulnerable population in situations that affect their sexual and reproductive rights. **Objective:** This study aimed to identify the factors associated with attitudes towards sexuality in Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. **Method:** A cross-sectional study was conducted with a sample of Venezuelan migrants over 18 years of age, selected at convenience. Sociodemographic characteristics were evaluated, and the Trueblood Sexual Attitudes Questionnaire (TSAQ) scale was applied, which evaluates attitudes towards one's sexuality (self) and others. **Results:** Participated 369 adults. The study group's average TASQ score was  $5.81 \pm 0.65$ . By subscale, the highest average occurred in homosexuality (8.39), followed by sexual variation (6.37), autoeroticism (4.93), commercial sex (4.70), and heterosexuality (4.27). **Conclusions:** Sociodemographic factors such as schooling, having children, occupation, level of study, social stratum, and sexual orientation influence attitudes toward sexuality in migrants.

**Keywords:** Attitude; Sexuality; Migrants; Cross-sectional studies.

### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** la sexualidad es una dimensión importante en el ser humano. Los migrantes se convierten en una población vulnerable ante situaciones que afectan sus derechos sexuales y reproductivos. **Objetivo:** identificar los factores asociados a las actitudes hacia la sexualidad en migrantes venezolanos en Colombia. **Método:** estudio correlacional transversal, con una muestra de 369 migrantes venezolanos, mayores de 18 años, seleccionados a conveniencia. Se evaluaron características sociodemográficas y se aplicó la escala *Trueblood Sexual Attitudes Questionnaire* (TSAQ), que evalúa las actitudes hacia la sexualidad propia (propia) y la de los demás. **Resultados:** el puntaje promedio del grupo de estudio para el TASQ fue de  $5,81 \pm 0,65$ . Por subescala, el promedio más alto se presentó en homosexualidad (8,39), seguido de variación sexual (6,37), autoerotismo (4,93), sexo comercial (4,70) y heterosexuality (4,27). **Conclusiones:** factores sociodemográficos como escolaridad, tener hijos, ocupación, nivel de estudios, estrato social y orientación sexual influyen en las actitudes hacia la sexualidad en los migrantes.

**Palabras clave:** actitud; sexualidad; migrantes; estudios transversales.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexuality constitutes an important dimension of the human condition expressed through thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and attitudes.<sup>1,2</sup> Sexual attitude is the personal interpretation of sexuality, which can influence risk behaviors for health.<sup>3-5</sup>

The migratory situation, along with the lack of legal protection and administrative and legal barriers to accessing information and healthcare, fosters risk attitudes and behaviors related to sexuality,<sup>6</sup> resulting in unmet needs in sexual and reproductive health during their migratory trajectories or even in their usual places of residence.<sup>7</sup>

In Colombia, there are 2,875,743 Venezuelan migrants;<sup>8</sup> In Norte de Santander, there are an estimated 337,666 Venezuelans who intend to remain in the territory, 62% of this population is not affiliated with the health system.<sup>9</sup> The municipality of Pamplona has approximately 8533 Venezuelan migrants, being a city close to the border area, which facilitates the continuous transit of this population.<sup>10</sup>

A recent study showed that the need for information on sexual and reproductive health rights precedes risk behaviors associated with sexual attitudes, encouraging atypical sexual practices, due to greater vulnerability and exposure to unsafe spaces for self-care, personal hygiene and privacy, needs for care and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, among other practices.<sup>11</sup>

In effect, the migrant population, when they see their sexual and reproductive health compromised, is forced to attend the Colombian health system, which assumes an additional cost for these services in the context of the current large migration phenomenon.<sup>12</sup>

In Colombia, studies evaluating factors associated with attitudes towards sexuality in migrants are scarce. Therefore, this research aims to identify the factors associated with attitudes towards sexuality in Venezuelan migrants in Colombia.

## METHOD

### Research design

Attitudes Questionnaire (TSAQ), which assesses attitudes towards one's own sexuality. The sample was calculated based on a population of 8533 estimated by Colombian migration for Pamplona, Colombia, in March 2022,<sup>10</sup> with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, resulting in 369 migrants residing in Pamplona, Colombia, during the second half of 2022

The study included migrants aged 18 to 49 from Venezuela, excluding those with cognitive limitations and those who had engaged in sex work before migrating to Colombia. A cluster sampling method was used to identify participants in foundations and humanitarian organizations assisting migrants in Pamplona.

Before the anonymous self-administered digital survey on social and demographic information, participants signed informed consent. The TSAQ scale includes five subscales: autoerotism, heterosexuality, homosexuality, sexual variation, and sexual commerce, each with 6 to 8 items. Response options range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater liberalism in sexual attitudes. In Colombia, the instrument demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96 for personal attitudes and 0.95 for attitudes towards others.

The magnitude of attitude towards sexuality for the scale and subscales was assumed considering their average scores as follows: 1-3 = low; 4-7 = moderate; and 8-9 = high.<sup>13</sup>

The survey team received two weeks of training on questionnaire administration techniques for surveys in populations experiencing social vulnerability.

## Data analysis

SPSS Version 25.0 was used for statistical data processing. For variables taken at the ratio level, the average with its respective standard deviation was estimated. Associations were explored by categorizing the overall score of the scale and comparing it with the explanatory variables. The chi-square test with a significance level below 0.05 was used.

## Ethics statement

The research adhered to the standards set by Resolution #8430 of 1993 from the Colombian Ministry of Health.<sup>14</sup> It received approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pamplona, as noted in minutes no. 04 from April 12, 2023. All participants provided written consent prior to the interviews and application of the instrument.

## RESULTS

The study surveyed 369 adult migrants in Pamplona, with an average age of 31.18 years (SD = 8.3). Of the total, 53.4% were women, 28.7% had no formal education, and 68.6% had completed high school. Additionally, 61.8% were living in common-law partnerships, 78.0% were employed, and 89.7% had regular migratory status in Colombia. In terms of sexuality, 81.0% reported having a partner, 97% identified as heterosexual, and there was consistency between the sex and gender declared by the participants (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Attitude towards own sexuality according to personal characteristics of the migrant population.

Variable	Sociodemographic characteristics	Attitude towards own sexuality								Total	p- value
		Low		Moderate		High					
		f	%	f	%	f	%				
Sex	Female	197	53.4	3.0	1.5	193	98.0	1.0	0.5	197	0.30
	Male	172	46.6	6.0	3.5	166	96.5	0.0	0.0	172	
Do you have children?	No	143	38.8	7.0	4.9	136	95.1	0.0	0.0	143	0.03
	Yes	226	61.2	2.0	0.9	223	98.7	1.0	0.4	226	
Social stratum	Low	366	99.1	9.0	2.5	357	97.5	0.0	0.0	366	0.01
	Medium	3	0.09	0.0	0.0	2	66.7	1.0	33.3	3	
Migratory status	Irregular	38	10.3	1.0	2.6	37	97.4	0.0	0.0	38	0.94
	Regular	331	89.7	8.0	2.4	322.0	97.3	1.0	0.3	331	
Marital status	Married	18	4.9	0.0	0.0	18.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	18	0.03
	Single	123	33.3	7.0	5.7	115.0	93.5	1.0	0.8	123	
	Common-law Partnershi	228	61.8	2.0	0.9	226.0	99.1	0.0	0.0	228	
	High School	253	68.6	7.0	2.8	246.0	97.2	0.0	0.0	253	

<b>Level of education</b>	None	106	28.7	1.0	0.9	105.0	99.1	0.0	0.0	106	
	Professional	4	1.1	0.0	0.0	3.0	75.0	1.0	25.0	4	
	Technical	5	1.4	1.0	20.0	4.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	5	
	Tecnological	1	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	1	
<b>Economic Activity</b>	Unemployed	40	10.8	1.0	2.5	39.0	97.5	0.0	0.0	40	
	Homemaker	20	5.4	1.0	5.0	19.0	95.0	0.0	0.0	20	0.01
	Self-employed	21	5.7	0.0	0.0	20.0	95.2	1.0	4.8	21	
	Employed	288	78	7.0	2.4	281.0	97.6	0.0	0.0	288	
<b>Sexual orientation?</b>	Bisexual	3	0.8	1.0	33.3	2.0	66.7	0.0	0.0	3	
	Heterosexual	358	97	6.0	1.7	351.0	98.0	1.0	0.3	358	0.01
	Homosexual	8	2.2	2.0	25.0	6.0	75.0	0.0	0.0	8	

The average score of the study group for the TASQ was  $5.81 \pm 0.65$ . By subscale, the highest average was in homosexuality (8.39), followed by sexual variation (6.37), autoerotism (4.93), sexual commerce (4.70), and heterosexuality (4.27) (Table 1).

The attitude towards autoerotism was classified as moderately liberal. The items with the highest and lowest scores were, respectively: "In a sexual relationship, people can fantasize about someone else (7.94)" and "Masturbation releases sexual energy when one is single (1.23)."

Regarding heterosexuality, the attitude was moderate (4.27). In this dimension, attitudes showed heterogeneous scores: "Engaging in anal sex with a partner of the opposite sex scored 8.11, compared to lower scores reflecting disagreement with statements such as 'Having sex with a partner before marriage (1.05)' and expressions like 'Participating in sexual relations is for reproduction, not for pleasure (1.29).'"

Concerning homosexuality, a highly liberal attitude was found (8.39), especially in items such as: "It is acceptable to get involved with people of both sexes (8.92)" and "It would be acceptable to accept sexual advances from a person of the same sex (8.78)."

As for sexual variations, the attitude of liberalism is high (8.39). Participants consider it acceptable to engage in group sex (8.86).

In the sexual commerce subscale, participants reported moderate liberalism (4.70); it is notable how acceptable the use of pornography is considered ("I would practice sex more frequently if I watched pornography 6.36"), and a moderate attitude towards sexual commerce practices such as prostitution: "It is acceptable to sell sexual services for money (4.38). (Tabla 2)

**Table 2.** Subscales/items of the Scale of Attitudes towards One's Own Sexuality in Venezuelan migrants

Subscale / Item or Question	Average	Standard Deviation
Autoerotism	4.9	1.1
Recording sexual activity with a partner is acceptable if it excites you	5.7	3.7
It is acceptable to think or daydream about sexual activity	1.7	1.4

Fantasizing about someone else during sex with a partner is acceptable	7.9	2.0
In marriage, masturbation is acceptable as a sexual outlet	5.7	3.7
Using pornography to stimulate one's arousal	3.6	3.2
Masturbation releases sexual energy when a single	1.2	1.1
In a sexual relationship, people can fantasize about someone else	8.5	1.5
<b>Heterosexuality</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Having sex with a partner before marriage	1.0	0.5
Using sexual activity for own pleasure	1.1	0.9
Having sex with the opposite sex on the day of the meeting	8.1	2.4
Engaging in oral sex with the opposite sex	1.1	0.9
Engaging in anal sex with the opposite sex	8.4	1.9
Sexual relations are for reproduction, not pleasure	1.2	1.3
Sexual relations are only with affectionate partner	6.6	3.5
Sexual relations are only with a loved partner	6.0	3.4
<b>Homosexuality</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>1.2</b>
Would engage in oral sex with a same-sex partner	8.7	1.3
It is acceptable to be involved with people of both sexes	8.9	0.7
It is acceptable to be attractive to same-sex as well as opposite-sex members	5.6	3.9
It would be acceptable to accept sexual advances from a same-sex person	8.7	1.2
Would engage in sexual relations with a same-sex partner	8.7	1.3
Would engage in mutual caresses with a same-sex person	8.7	1.3
It is acceptable to share sexuality with same-sex members	8.7	1.3
It is acceptable to be attracted to same-sex members	8.7	1.4
<b>Sexual variations</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Could be involved in more than one sexual relationship at the same time	8.3	2.0
It is acceptable to wear clothes of the opposite sex if found exciting	8.3	1.5
It is acceptable to inflict pain on another person with consent	6.3	3.4
It is acceptable to watch other people during their sexual activity	6.6	3.6
It is acceptable to enjoy being dominated in a sexual relationship	5.6	3.7
It is acceptable to enjoy being the dominator in a sexual relationship	3.0	3.4
It is acceptable to receive an obscene call if it is exciting	3.6	3.5
It is acceptable to engage in group sex	8.8	1.0
<b>Sexual commerce</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Watching pornography with a partner to learn new sexual techniques	2.7	3.1
There should be no censorship of pornography to enjoy it	3.1	3.4
Would engage in sexual activity more frequently if watching pornography	6.3	3.6
It is acceptable to sell sexual services for money	4.3	3.9
It is acceptable to engage in prostitution	4.3	3.9
Is watching pornography bad?	2.8	3.3
<b>Total scale score</b>	<b>214.8</b>	<b>24.17</b>

The overall score of the scale was correlated with the sociodemographic and personal characteristics of the participants, in this regard, females, those with children, individuals with a low socioeconomic status, those in a stable

marital union, those with a secondary education, and heterosexuals have a more liberal attitude toward their own sexuality (Table 1).

## DISCUSSION

The present study reports that the migrant population presents relatively homogeneous attitudes towards sexuality, specifically with “moderate” results in the dimensions of autoeroticism, heterosexuality, sexual variations, sexual commerce and a high liberal attitude in the dimension of homosexuality.

To enrich the theoretical framework of discussion, the researchers contrasted theoretical references and studies carried out in young or university populations, due to the limited evidence in the Venezuelan migrant population. The results presented in nursing students from Spain<sup>15</sup> are similar to the present study, in relation to the exposition of positive values towards liberalism and positive sexual attitudes.

The present study indicates that Venezuelan women with a secondary school education, low socioeconomic status, and regular migratory status have more liberal sexual attitudes, similar to the study by Leal *et al.*,<sup>16</sup> which reports social vulnerability as a risk factor for sexual health.

Regarding the sex trade subscale, participants showed greater liberalism in the item “selling sexual services for money.” This behavior, combined with conditions of social, economic, and legal vulnerability, creates conditions for the exponential increase in human trafficking for exploitation, especially among Venezuelans in Colombia, represented by a difference in the rates of sexual exploitation in this population of 18 per 100 vs. 3 cases per million inhabitants in the Colombian population.<sup>17</sup>

For this same subscale, in items related to pornography, our results show low liberalism towards its use as a resource to learn new sexual techniques. In contrast, Merlyn *et al.*<sup>18</sup> report that young people habitually consume pornography and agree that it does not represent real sexual life. In addition, they add that it is part of personal or couple sexual life, teaches interesting things, and improves sexual life. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that sociodemographic characteristics influence attitudes towards sexuality. Regarding the variable Sex and its relationship with attitude towards sexuality, it was not statistically significant. These results differ from the research carried out in Mexico,<sup>19</sup> which reports more favorable attitudes with higher scores in women than in men.

Regarding the relationships between socioeconomic characteristics and attitudes towards sexuality in the migrant population of this study, it was marked by a significant association with variables describing living conditions, such as social stratum, educational level and occupation. Along the same lines, a study carried out in China,<sup>20</sup> reports consistent results, whose theoretical basis may be that the socioeconomic level conditioned by education, income, among others, affects the cultural imaginaries and constructs about sexuality, and also, the possibility of accessing quality information on sexual health.

In conclusion, sociodemographic factors such as educational level, having children, occupation, social class and sexual orientation favor a more liberal attitude towards one's own sexuality in migrants. The main limitation of our study was the access to information collected from migrant users who are part of a health institution, which may make it difficult to be representative of the entire migrant population.

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## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

**KDEV** participated in normal analysis, method, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, and writing – review and editing.

**MABL** conducted data curation, conceptualization, resources, supervision, validation, writing – original draft, and writing – review and editing.

**JLEB** participated in data curation, conceptualization, and writing – review and editing.

**CMRL** participated in data curation, conceptualization, and writing – review and editing.

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