social sciences

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# How Hoteliers Act in the Form of Organized Crime in Human Trafficking: A Case Study from Turkey

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**Abstract:** Because of supply and demand factors, human trafficking for sexual exploitation has always been a profitable industry. Turkey, as a host country for immigrants from both former Soviet countries and the Middle East, combines supply and demand together, attracting illicit business. Few studies have been conducted in the previous two decades to investigate the organized criminal element of human trafficking in this region. This research is based on ethnographic research in which trafficking victims (N = 11) were interviewed, and on-site observations were made. Our findings revealed that the trafficking industry in our study area was carried out by persons who were only loosely related to one another. There was no sophisticated, long-lasting sex trafficking organization. Membership was not severely limited, and individuals did not identify themselves as members of a well-known criminal organization. We provided policy recommendations and proposals for future research to address female trafficking for sexual exploitation.

**Keywords:** human trafficking; sex trafficking; victims; corruption; money laundering; Turkey



**Citation:** Cengiz, Mahmut, and Oguzhan Omer Demir. 2022. How Hoteliers Act in the Form of Organized Crime in Human Trafficking: A Case Study from Turkey. *Social Sciences* 11: 511. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11110511

Academic Editors: James O. Finckenauer and Georgios Antonopoulos

Received: 28 July 2022
Accepted: 8 November 2022
Published: 11 November 2022



## 1. Introduction

The study of the nature of human trafficking and how to combat it is a vital and worthy endeavor. Human trafficking attracts criminals, exacerbates irregular migration, disrupts labor markets, and is related to other illegal activities (U.S. Department of State 2017). Sex trafficking is the most prevalent kind of human trafficking. Although exploitation of labor is a growing concern, according to the most recent United Nations Office for Drugs and Organized Crime report on human trafficking, half of all cases globally were sex trafficking, while 38% of cases were forced labor, and remaining 12% cases included forced criminal activity, coercion into begging, forced marriage, and organ removals (UNODC 2020). Sex trafficking includes "the range of activities involved when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to compel another person to engage in a commercial sex act or causes a child to engage in a commercial sex act" (U.S. Department of State 2021, p. 26). Trafficking victims are primarily from impoverished societies and conflict zones (UNODC 2018). Global economic problems, such as the present inflationary bubble, add to this phenomenon. More dramatically, in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war and the Russian Ukrainian conflict, millions of migrants were largely vulnerable women and children. Some of these individuals were victims of human trafficking in various host nations (Hughes 2022; UNICEF 2022; Human Rights Watch 2022; ICMPD 2016).

Aside from wars, various other advancements in the international arena, such as information and communication technology, particularly social media, may have led to the growth and expansion of sex trafficking (UNODC 2020). The Internet is claimed to facilitate the recruitment of potential victims. Online employment advertising that is deceptive is commonly used to attract women for sexual exploitation (Volodko et al. 2020). The 'loving boy' recruiting approach is greatly aided by social media, dating websites, and applications. The dark web is claimed to be used for marketing sexual services and the

selling of counterfeit papers (Kunz et al. 2018; Sykiotou 2017; Di Nicola et al. 2017). A recent UNODC report (2020, p. 120) based on court cases showed evidence of human trafficking cases perpetrated by internet technologies. According to several reports, despite the pandemic lockdown, sex trafficking did not halt or reduce. Instead, traffickers adapted to the new normal, made better use of social media and internet technologies, and relocated to private houses and apartments in response to the closure of entertainment venues and hotels (UNODC 2021; U.S. Department of State 2021).

Even though sex trafficking is an old crime, it has never lost favor among criminals. In the sex industry, there is a finite supply and an infinite demand. In the supply part, there are ready persons with lower socio-economic status all around the world who can be easily duped and recruited as sex workers, as they aim to have a better lifestyle and cooperate with those who offer them what they want. On the other side, there are sex buyers who obtain sexual activity in exchange for a monetary payment (Martin 2017). Human traffickers play a role by bringing these two sides together. As a result, many girls and women are forced or duped into being transported from their homes to trans-border places, where they are subsequently abducted for sex work (Demir and Finckenauer 2010; Kelly 2002).

From recruiting to transportation and abuse, all stages of human trafficking need intricate planning and coordination. However, the extent of the organization, or the nature of the criminal organization, is a contentious question. Understanding how traffickers conduct their offenses through strategies and networks can help us better understand the scale of organized crime. Therefore, in this paper, we investigate how sex trafficking crimes are structured among diverse participants through a case study undertaken in Igdir, an eastern border province of Turkey where there is a continuous movement of people and goods across the borders of Iran, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. We hope to add to our body of knowledge on the subject of organized crime, with a focus on sex trafficking, because the question of how perpetrators get involved in this business under what capacity and organization will help academics and policymakers enlighten their views about the role of organized crime in sex trafficking. This introduction is followed by a methods and materials section. The literature related to the nexus between organized crime and human trafficking and the methods of trafficking are then reviewed. Our findings are presented and discussed in the next section. At the end, we propose some policy implications as well as ideas for future research.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study uses ethnographic research that is a qualitative method. We used three sources of data. The first data were collected through interviews and then analyzed to draw conclusions. The initial portion of our qualitative data came from 11 open-ended ethnographic interviews with victims in Turkey's Igdir province. Snowball sampling was used to pick interview subjects since it was thought to be the best approach to locate potential participants. The respondents consented to participate in the study on the condition that their names remained anonymous. They were not subjected to harm in any ways, and their protection of privacy was ensured. The interviews avoided any deception or exaggeration about the aims and objectives of the research. Affiliations, sources of funding, and any conflicts of interests were declared to the respondents. All communications were done with honesty and transparency. Finally, any type of misleading information and use of data in a biased way were avoided. Each interview lasted roughly 1.5 h and was conducted in person. When doing data analysis, we used data transcription, which converted the interviews into text before analyzing any recorded audio. We identified themes, patterns, and relationships, and prepared and organized the data for analysis. Finally, we explored and coded the data. For example, respondents were coded using letters and numbers to preserve participant confidentiality. For example, V1 refers to the first victim. We used tables when coding to build descriptions and themes and placed quotes from the interviews under each table. The repetitions in each interview proved the finding's validity and accuracy.

The second section of the qualitative data is based on the field experiences of the lead author who served as the chief of the organized crime department in the province of Igdir from September 2011 to March 2014, and who conducted research on human trafficking concerns in Turkey and in the area. His previous contacts assisted him in locating these individuals. Thirdly, we benefited from reports from international organizations and governments which are directly or indirectly related to the study of human trafficking, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Organized Crime (UNODC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the US Department of State, the Financial Action Task Force, and Turkish governmental sources, such as the Anti-Smuggling and Organized Crime Department (ASOD) and the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM).

The research included several limitations: First, this study shed light on a period in the last decade on how hoteliers acted in the form of organized crime. Anti-corruption scandals in late 2013 that implicated government officials and brought about the purging of almost all human trafficking units created obstacles to doing the most updated research. It has been rare to see research that uses ethnographic interviews with the victims since the whole human trafficking units were purged. Second, the lead author's field experience was used in this study, giving maximum attention to ethical considerations. This field experience also involved the findings from undercover agents. Considering how hoteliers acted in the form of an organized crime group and used sophisticated methods to hinder any police investigation, it was the only criminal investigation technique to learn about criminal networks and how the victims were transferred and forced into the sex sector. Third, the sample size could have included more interviews with the victims; however, we believe that this sample represents how hoteliers would act in the form of organized crime, because the interviews presented repetitive responses from the victims. Fourth, the research findings are generalizable for the human trafficking sectors in border cities of Turkey where the hoteliers act like organized crime groups, but are not generalizable for the whole country.

## 3. Literature Review

### *3.1. Traffickers, Crime Networks, and Organized Crime*

Human trafficking is frequently presented in the media as a mafia-style illegal enterprise with a tight hierarchy and links to other sorts of crimes and criminal networks (e.g., The Guardian 2018; BBC 2010; VOA 2009). International and national governments and nonprofit groups highlight the "organized criminal dimension of human trafficking" to demonstrate how ruthless traffickers can be and how vulnerable their victims are (e.g., Interpol 2022; UN Women 2020). Furthermore, to obtain greater control and influence, government authorities prefer to treat the situation as a sophisticated organized crime issue (e.g., PMM 2022). There may also be misconceptions about the true nature of organized crime (Jahic and Finckenauer 2005).

The literature on organized crime identifies many typologies that are presented below. According to the economic analysis by Schloenhardt (1999), there are two sorts of criminal organizations that differ in size and structure. The corporate model refers to a centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic framework. Activities are strictly managed and directed by a boss. Several unlawful marketplaces are also under control. The network model, on the other hand, is organized horizontally. They appreciate being self-sufficient and adaptable enough to respond quickly to requests or law enforcement activity.

Another classification of the organized crime groups was made by Finckenauer (2007). He discusses the nature of organized crime by distinguishing the specifications of "organized crime" and "crime that is organized." He contends that "real" organized crime is highly structured and sophisticated, as well as stable over time; participants self-identify with the organization; membership is usually restricted; violence and threats are common; and there is a well-known and respected reputation for violence and ruthlessness. Organized crime involves a wide range of offenses. In the case of "crime that is organized crime",

none of these qualities are present. Instead, there is a group of people who have banded together to seek a specific, typically single illegal opportunity. This model is distinguished by the exchange of specialties among the many players in the various networks to cope with any requirements or issues that one section of the network cannot overcome on its own. This is an opportunistic conduct.

Much of the research, some of which is linked below, pertains to groups of persons that arrange, accompany, and direct potential victims to aid human trafficking, but who do not qualify as organized crime organizations. They require ad hoc structured involvement and a division of work, but they lack the ties and features of typical organized criminal organizations (Finckenauer 2001). These networks are the coordinated activity of several people. These individuals may engage in both licit and criminal areas, and they assist in keeping the underground organization running. Lengthy travel necessitates coordinated activities among agents with very sophisticated arrangements, and partnerships may last for a long period until the mission is completed (Finckenauer 1998). Legitimate partners play a vital role in these networks. Even if non-traffickers or lawful partners are not directly involved in operational processes, their contribution to smuggling and trafficking is critical (Morselli and Giguere 2006). Some private sectors, such as travel and marriage agencies operating as legitimate businesses, can also support trafficking groups (OECD 2016). Bouché (2017, p. 62) also noted that "there are several ways that sex trafficking businesses worked to evade law enforcement detection. One way is simply to feign operating as a legitimate business." Similar to the above discussions by Schloenhardt and Finckenauer, Shelley (2010, p. 136) argues about various models applicable to human trafficking organizations: "Human trafficking organizations have grown faster than most other transnational firms because they have successfully merged the features of illegal businesses with the procedures of successful multinational corporations". She contends that the human trafficking industry cannot be explained by a single model and suggests six alternative models that fit into various cultural and geographical contexts (Shelley 2003). The "trade and development model" describes how Chinese traffickers took use of trafficked males in destination nations. People were compelled to work to repay their debts to the smugglers. The "natural resource model" envisioned a huge number of women and girls transported to existing markets as natural resources, such as fur and wood, from post-Soviet nations and other regions. Girls and women were sold to middlemen, who subsequently sold them to a nearby "trading partner." They behaved like a company with a certain division of work. "The violent entrepreneur model" primarily targeted Balkan criminal organizations. They recruited women from post-conflict areas and generated an early profit by providing women to Kosovo-based troops. Women were then sold to overseas partners in Western European countries. The fourth paradigm, known as the "American pimp model," describes traffickers born in the United States who operated in a loose network of people. Victims were recruited from low-income neighborhoods by making bogus employment or marriage proposals. Pimps used psychological tactics, narcotics, and violence to gain control of their victims. The "supermarket model" explains the strategies used by Hispanic trafficking groups operating at the US-Mexico border. Victims were compelled to serve up to 30 clients each day without regard for quality of service. They laundered their funds in Mexico, where they bought farms and land. The last paradigm, "conventional slavery with contemporary technologies," explains the operations of Nigerian trafficking networks in Italy. Many of these networks' female recruiters were victims of human trafficking before they signed first contracts with victims.

From the theoretical standpoint, the lifestyle (Hindelang et al. 1978) and routine activity (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and Boba 2010) theories help us establish a compact basis to explain the motivations of the hoteliers and the victimizations of the trafficked women. Lifestyle theory underlines how individuals may be victimized when they are exposed to "high-risk times, places, and people." Risky lifestyles can end up with personal victimization (Hindelang et al. 1978, p. 245). This theory also emphasizes how bad judgment, being in a vulnerable situation, or not securing a property may victimize a

person. Human trafficking victims in this study work in hotels and know how hoteliers force them to have sexual affairs with customers. They know well that they are in a vulnerable environment to be beaten, extorted, and put under debt bondage. The second theory used in this study is the routine activities theory, which discusses the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians. This theory posits that "the lack of any one of these elements is sufficient to prevent the successful completion of a direct-contact predatory crime." (Cohen and Felson 1979, p. 589). As discussed in this study, the hoteliers are highly motivated to exploit victims who are vulnerable targets and take advantage of corrupt officials who turn a blind eye to the trafficking activities in Igdir city.

### 3.2. Profiles of Victims

According to research on trafficking victims, the average sex trafficking victim is "young, female, unmarried, not well-educated, a foreign country national, and from a low socioeconomic background" (Cengiz and Roth 2019; ICMPD 2016). These characteristics make a potential victim of human trafficking more vulnerable than others. Many of the previous research findings imply that victims have similar life experiences (e.g., having a family with alcohol or drug addiction, or authoritarian parents) (Özer 2011; Demir and Finckenauer 2010). In addition to these push factors that shape the profile of trafficking victims, one should note that conflicts may also pave the way for victimization. Millions of individuals are forced to flee their nations as a result of wars and conflicts, sometimes without the protection of their parents or family. According to studies, the majority of migrants fleeing conflict zones are girls and women (see, for example, UNICEF 2022). They are seldom established in safe refugee camps, and the majority must care for their own bodily and psychological needs. Therefore, they are vulnerable to poverty, abduction, deception, and other types of exploitation (Wolter 2004). They can be subject to forced labor, sexual slavery, and exposed to criminal activities. So, displaced persons of conflict areas become potential victims of trafficking (Nagle 2013). Traffickers may simply recruit these vulnerable persons in need into the trafficking industry without having to expend any effort or money to transport them from their home nations (Hughes 2022).

### 3.3. Human Trafficking Methods

Sex trafficking organizations use several recruitment, transportation, control, and exploitation methods. The majority of victims of human trafficking are recruited in a country that is different from their destination (UNODC 2020). Victims are recruited by trafficking organizations through their intimate acquaintances (boyfriends and girlfriends, family members, and neighbors). Female recruiters are more persuasive than male recruiters. They try to recruit girls and women in some areas by posting alluring employment adverts, making trip promises, and making fraudulent marriage proposals (Özer 2011). Recruiters use shallow life tales of women who live in luxury and money to entice potential victims. The use of social media as a recruitment tool has been cited as an effective method in a recent report that suggests that traffickers employ "two distinct types of strategies: one in which traffickers proactively look for a specific type of victims ('hunting'), and the other in which traffickers attract potential victims ('fishing')" (UNODC 2020, p. 119–28). This report claims that the share of social media tools among other internet tools, such as classified or free-standing webpages for recruiting victims, have increased over time. While its share was 32% between 2009 and 2011, it increased to 52% between 2015–2018. Although traffickers do not prefer using violence during the recruitment stage, a few traffickers abduct women and girls. Overall, it is a stage where traffickers use excessive effort and money (Demir 2010).

Victims are recruited and then taken to the site of exploitation (Demir 2010). Victims are typically accompanied by recruiters or intermediaries during the travel. It is a vital stage in trafficking since most victims are unaware that they are being trafficked. "It is especially important for a potential trafficking victim who lives in a small village, has no

idea about how to obtain a passport, and has no means to buy a ticket to go abroad" (Demir 2010, p. 317). The traffickers provide and cover travel expenses, such as passports and tickets. If there are severe border laws, one method of transporting victims across borders is to use illicit border crossings by enlisting the assistance of smugglers or paying corrupt border authorities (Shelley 2010).

Victims are delivered to exploitation sites after safe transit. Most victims become aware that they are being trafficked at this stage (Demir and Finckenauer 2010). Victims are strictly controlled by traffickers. Common techniques include debt bondage, confinement, and confiscation of travel papers (Cengiz and Roth 2019). Victims are forced to return the sum made available to them by traffickers (travel tickets, clothing, etc.) under debt bondage. However, this sum always grows with ongoing costs, extending the term of exploitation and rendering the debt unpayable. Victims are placed in a location (for example, an apartment building, a hotel, or a brothel) and are not permitted to leave. Traffickers use methods of "verbal threats, displays of violence, threats of police, threats of deportation, threats to harm the victim's family, sexual abuse, and rape" during that process (Demir 2010, p. 318).

### 3.4. How Corruption Facilitates Trafficking

Corruption appears to be an essential instrument for a trafficking ring's secure operation, as it is in practically all other forms of organized crime (Cengiz and Şen 2013). It is also a vital facilitator at nearly every step of sex trafficking. Corruption is rampant in states with poor governance. According to an OECD research, corruption benefits traffickers in four ways:

(1) to allow the crime to be invisible,
(2) to facilitate the impunity once a case of trafficking in persons is detected,
(3) to facilitate the execution of the crime, and
(4) to assure the re-victimization of the trafficked victims (OECD 2016, p. 36)

Corrupt authorities can help with border crossings if circumventing border restrictions is required. Corrupt consular employees can help get fake or forged passports and visas. Furthermore, corrupt law enforcement officers might assist traffickers by giving information about ongoing operations, through general protection, or by denying complaints about traffickers (Fouladvand 2019). Traffickers benefit from the support of officials since they are not at risk of being probed and jailed. They also assist traffickers in demonstrating to their victims that they have close contacts with the police. Obtaining aid from court authorities can also help traffickers escape prosecution. Furthermore, having good ties with bank personnel may assist traffickers in laundering their dirty money. Apart from government, private sector personnel such as employment, travel, and marriage services assist traffickers in their operations (OECD 2016).

### 3.5. Human Trafficking, Money Transfer, and Laundering

Like corruption, money laundering is also a necessary stage in human trafficking business. "Human trafficking is an offence with diverse financial flows, and where proceeds are realized differently across the world, and across the various types of human trafficking" (FATF 2018, p. 47). As a result, money laundering is a critical activity in sex trafficking. Traffickers must launder their unlawful revenue in various ways before it may enter the legal financial system. In a recent joint operation carried out by the UK and Romanian authorities, a sex trafficking network that had been recruiting women in Romania and forcing them to sex work in the UK since 2012 was disclosed. The authorities declared that the network generated over €3 million, and the income was first laundered in UK banks, and then transferred to Romanian bank accounts (Eurojust 2022).

Traffickers suffer tremendous costs, particularly during the recruiting stage (travel offers, tickets, passport fees, and so on), and later when they hold victims under control (accommodation expenses, clothing, transportation, etc.) (Demir 2010). Simultaneously, when they generate huge sums of money from illegal operations, it becomes a financial source for more investments and other needs. A Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

report (2018) exhibits examples of current money laundering methods, including bitcoin exchanges, internet gambling, sports collectible stores, and email money transfers. Many well-known ancient methods, such as the hawala type system, remain popular. However, because most money transfers are performed in cash, it is difficult to discover assets obtained by human trafficking.

FATF (2022) examines a number of signs of financial activity in organized crime that might assist us in making inferences regarding human trafficking transactions. Front companies are essential instruments for posing as legitimate enterprises, including restaurants, pubs, and massage parlors. Under the "suspicious activity thresholds," human traffickers might get funds from a variety of sources. It is known as "funneling." Alternative payment mechanisms, such as those described above, can be utilized instead of direct payments. Transactions in unusually large quantities provide hints. "Remittance" is another key financial activity associated with victims of human trafficking. A large sum of money may be moved to another country using internet payment systems with no logical rationale.

### *3.6. Human Trafficking in Turkey*

Turkey, as a destination for immigrants from both former Soviet nations and the Middle East that combines supply and demand together, attracts both local and international criminal networks (UNODC 2018). Following the fall of the Soviet Union, primarily Russian, Ukrainian, and Moldovan girls and women were taken to and exploited in Turkey. Traffickers eventually shifted their focus to Central Asian countries and even Northern African populations (DGMM 2020; Cengiz and Roth 2019; Kaya and Erez 2017; Coşkun 2015; Özer 2011; Erder and Kaska 2003; Gülçür and İlkkaracan 2002). Nevertheless, after the Syrian civil war, almost 4 million Syrians, half of whom were children, moved to Turkey. This new foreign population also attracted traffickers' attention (ICMPD 2016). The Turkish government's response to human trafficking can be categorized in three sections: prevention, protection, and prosecution. Turkey has been a party of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and its supplementing Protocol Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children since their ratifications in 2003 (PMM 2022). There are units specifically designed to combat human trafficking within the Ministry of the Interior. Prevention efforts include several initiatives, such as awareness-raising campaigns among relevant institutions and individuals. However, these efforts are not regular or widespread. In order to protect existing human trafficking victims, governmental and non-governmental institutions play important roles. There are only two shelters for protecting and rehabilitating detected victims of human trafficking with limited capacity as of 2022. In addition, there is an ongoing victim protection program which provides security, safety, and health support to victims. Victims are provided a "human trafficking victim residence permit" which allows them to stay in Turkey until they recover. Moreover, victims can be voluntarily returned to either their homelands or a third country with a special program. In terms of prosecution, human trafficking was categorized as a severe offense in the Turkish Penal Code in 2005, with penalties ranging from 8 to 12 years in prison and a fine of up to ten thousand days (MFA 2022). Despite the development of a few legislative and administrative measures, as well as institutional capacity and capacity-building activities, Turkey's attempts to combat human trafficking have been deemed ineffectual in the international arena (see US Department of State TIP reports; European Commission's Turkey Progress Reports). The major issues that were found ineffective in such reports include but are not limited to the inadequate investigation of human trafficking cases, a lack of trained and experienced judicial and law enforcement personnel, a lack of an adequate budget to be spent on victim protection, and a lack of necessary public campaigns to discourage exploitation.

In 2020, 282 victims of human trafficking in Turkey were discovered, according to the most recent reports (U.S. Department of State 2021, 2022; DGMM 2020). The majority of them were victims of female sex trafficking, while some were victims of forced labor and begging. The great majority of victims were not Turkish citizens. Among them, 165

were children, while 41 were young women between the ages of 18 and 25. Except for 11 victims, the others were all foreign nationals. The bulk of victims (159) were Syrians, with Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Afghan, and Moroccan nationals at the top of the list (Figure 1). In 2021, 403 victims were identified, mostly from Syria, and followed by Uzbek, Afghan, and Kyrgyz nationals.

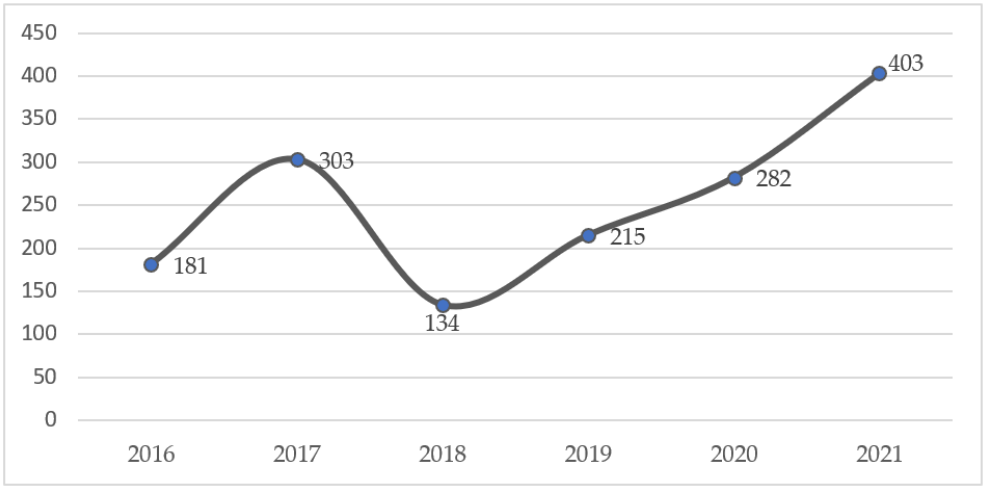


**Figure 1.** The number of detected victims of trafficking per year in Turkey. Source: PMM (2022), Available online https://en.goc.gov.tr/victims-of-human-trafficking2019 (accessed on 6 October 2022).

The number of victims of human trafficking among Syrian refugees is shown on Table 1. A total of 333 Syrian victims were saved between 2016 and 2020. As of 2020, this figure represented 33% of all victims of human trafficking protected in Turkey. Half of the victims were under the age of 25, and one-third were under the age of 18. Sexual exploitation was the most common kind of trafficking, accounting for 65% of all cases, followed by labor exploitation (22%). Lower amounts were followed by forced begging and forced marriages (DGMM 2020). A new report claims that "some refugee camp officials and volunteers collaborate with criminal networks to recruit girls with false job offers into sex trafficking" (U.S. Department of State 2022, p. 555). Rare incidents, such as child sales and organ trafficking, were also discovered.

**Table 1.** The Number of Detected Syrian Victims of Trafficking per Year in Turkey.

| Year | #Of Syrian Victims |
|---|---|
| 2016 | 36 |
| 2017 | 86 |
| 2018 | 15 |
| 2019 | 37 |
| 2020 | 159 |
| TOTAL | 333 |

Source: PMM (2022).

In order to combat traffickers, the judiciary prosecuted 68 new cases and 347 defendants in 2020. During that year, 30 traffickers were convicted, while 177 suspects were acquitted. During the year 2021, 408 new cases with 591 suspects were investigated. Investigation from previous years continued with 314 cases with 1808 defendants. Courts convicted 72 traffickers. All of them were sentenced with imprisonment, and 61 traffickers were given an additional fine (U.S. Department of State 2021, 2022).

Human trafficking could only dominate the agendas of policymakers and scholars in Turkey in the new millennium (Baykotan 2014; Atauz et al. 2009). However, there are few studies regarding the criminological perspective of human trafficking. Kaya and

Erez (2017) investigated the structure of the Turkish sex market and the factors that bring foreign women to work in this market. Karakuş and McGarrell (2012) examined the impact of demand for the services of traffickers on the distribution of women trafficking markets. Akbaş (2009) investigated ways to combat human trafficking organizations using opportunity reduction strategies, such as altering traffickers' perceived risks, efforts, and justifications. However, organized crime's involvement in the human trafficking sector in Turkey is not thoroughly documented or examined. According to one research (Demir 2014) that explored the business of human trafficking in Turkey, it was carried out by various agents with unique roles and functions inside the network. Positions and responsibilities were seldom connected, and they were not necessarily part of a larger structure. Typically, the businesses were carried out through loose networks with transient and mutually advantageous partnerships. Trafficking was certainly transnational. Despite its multinational nature, there was no proof that trafficking was run by mafia-like institutions or well-known organized crime organizations. Instead, the different steps of trafficking, recruiting, transporting, advertising, and selling were often operated by a variety of players (usually one or two people) who were not naturally but rather tangentially related to one another.

## 4. Case Study: Hoteliers and Organized Crime in Igdir Province

Igdir is a city of about 571 square miles in the eastern part of Turkey. It is a border city which has borders with Armenia, Iran, and even Nakhchivan (an autonomous region of Azerbaijan). It has a high potential for human trafficking despite its relatively small population of around 203,000 people (Igdir Municipality 2022). Many of the police investigations conducted in Igdir between 2011 and 2014 involved human trafficking (ASOD 2014). More than half of the country's 14 human trafficking investigations that were treated as organized crime in 2013 occurred in the Igdir province. Investigations included wiretapping and surveillance, as well as the deployment of undercover agents, because human trafficking groups are considered to be criminal organizations. Five of the nine human trafficking investigations across the country in 2014 also took place in the Igdir province (ASOD 2013, 2014). These statistics do not mean that Igdir is more prone to human trafficking than other parts of the country or that Igdir province represents more than half of the country's human trafficking incidents. Rather, the investigations were the result of the Igdir province being selected as the pilot region for developing a national and regional model to combat human trafficking. The article uses some findings from this model.

Igdir province has a mixed population divided almost equally between Turks of Azeri origin and Kurds. Azeri traffickers have opened hotels in the city and brought victims from Azerbaijan to work at the nightclubs of these hotels (Atauz et al. 2009). International reports confirm that Turkey is one of the target countries for the exploitation of Azeri women in the sex sector (U.S. Department of State 2017). In this small city, more than 20 hotels have been linked to sex trafficking. Some victims have become leaders in the sex sector, helping to coordinate efforts to bring victims from Azerbaijan. Azeri hotel owners—the traffickers—have contacts with other Turkish traffickers who have transferred Kyrgyz victims to Igdir. When some of these victims have worked in the sex sector in other cities, they have met victims from different countries and invited them to work in Igdir. As a result, Igdir has become a trafficking hotbed for predominantly Azeri and Kyrgyz victims, in addition to victims from Morocco, Armenia, Russia, and Uzbekistan (YeşilIgdir 2012).

The police deployed separate pairs of undercover agents to other hotels for the same purpose. After collecting all of the evidence, the police raided the hotels and arrested the suspects. Agents discovered many details about the complicated human trafficking crime sector, as well as links between human trafficking and other types of crime. Agents discovered that the human trafficking was committed by an organized crime group comprised of the hotel owners and their accomplices. Additionally, they found secret cameras in several hotel rooms, with video recordings intended to be used to blackmail wealthy businessmen and state officials when necessary.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Demographics of Victims

According to the police reports, Igdir hotels served as high-risk places and recorded several hundred victims that had various origins. Most of the victims were either divorced or single. Their families did not know that they were involved in the Turkish sex sector, believing instead that the women were working in Turkey as housekeepers. The average age of the Igdir victims was in the range of 21 to 35 years old. Older victims left the hotels and opened houses in Igdir to earn money from prostitution in the city. A significant number of them were transferred from Azerbaijan, followed by Uzbekistan, Russia, Morocco, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. This study interviewed 11 victims: 6 Azeri, 3 Kyrgyz, and 2 Armenian (see Table 1). According to the demographics of data, the older they were, the more countries they had worked in the sex sector, where they worked at hotels and night clubs. The victims predominantly worked in Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, and the UAE.

### 5.2. Who Are the Traffickers? Organized Crime Networks or Individual Networks through Victims

In Igdir city, the hoteliers acted in the form of organized crime. Most victims said that the hoteliers acted like motivated offenders to generate more revenue and a boss of a criminal organizations (see Table 2). It is evident from the Table 2 that the longer the victims were in the sex sector, the more likely they would be exposed to the exploitations of the hoteliers. Therefore, most of them pointed out the hoteliers as the traffickers. Those who spent long years in this sector were the victims of being forced to have sexual affairs with customers to paid off the debt. The younger respondents did not experience any act of organized crime from the hoteliers. They used victim networks to travel to Turkey (see responses from V8).

**Table 2.** Demographics of victims interviewed in this study.

| | Nationality | Age | Marital Status | Education | Legal Status in Turkey | Years at Sex Sector | Countries Worked at Sex Sector |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| V1 | Azerbaijan | 28 | Divorced | Middle school | Illegal | 6 | 2 (Turkey, Russia) |
| V2 | Azerbaijan | 31 | Married | High school | Illegal | 9 | 3 (Turkey, Russia, UAE) |
| V3 | Azerbaijan | 33 | Married | High school | Illegal | 11 | 4 (Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, UAE) |
| V4 | Azerbaijan | 29 | Divorced | Middle school | Illegal | 10 | 3 (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan) |
| V5 | Azerbaijan | 32 | Divorced | Elementary | Illegal | 13 | 4 (Turkey, Russia, UAE, Kazakhstan) |
| V6 | Azerbaijan | 35 | Divorced | Elementary | Illegal | 15 | 4 (Turkey, Russia, UAE, Germany) |
| V7 | Kyrgyzstan | 21 | Single | High school | Legal | 7 | 2 (Turkey, Russia) |
| V8 | Kyrgyzstan | 21 | Single | High school | Legal | 3 | 2 (Turkey, Russia) |
| V9 | Kyrgyzstan | 23 | Single | High school | Legal | 3 | 3 (Turkey, Russia, UAE) |
| V10 | Armenia | 32 | Divorced | High school | Illegal | 11 | 5 (Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Germany) |
| V11 | Armenia | 27 | Divorced | Middle school | Illegal | 8 | 3 (Turkey, Russia, Germany) |

The investigations also revealed that some female workers at the hotels transitioned to become motivated offenders and traffickers. After working in the sex sector in Igdir, they attempted to bring new victims from Azerbaijan and provided the victims with accommodations and connections to the hotel owners (Cengiz and Roth 2019, p. 109).

Putting the victims in debt bondage, the female traffickers extorted large sums of money from the newcomers, in much the same way that victims are extorted by perpetrators in the transportation, recruitment, and sale of trafficked victims (U.S. Department of State 2017). According to findings from the investigations, each victim was earning 100 Turkish liras, approximately 30 USD dollars, from each customer. The customer also paid for the hotel room, which cost 50 Turkish liras for one hour. Considering that the monthly average salary for an Azeri victim was around $200 in her home country, the victims had the opportunity make more than that amount in one night. The prospect of losing that income explains why victims did not want to be caught by the police. In some cases, when the victims were captured, they wept and pleaded not to be deported, saying that they had to come back into the country and that their deportation would only put them in debt bondage because they needed to get help from the hotel owners to pay the debt (see Table 3). Some hotel owners earned up to $50,000 just in one month (Cengiz and Roth 2019, p. 109).

**Table 3.** The traffickers pointed out by the respondents.

| Traffickers | Forced to Sex Work | Debt Bondage |
|---|---|---|
| V1 | Yes | Yes |
| V2 | Yes | Yes |
| V3 | Yes | Yes |
| V4 | Yes | Yes |
| V5 | Yes | Yes |
| V6 | Yes | Yes |
| V7 | No | No |
| V8 | No | No |
| V9 | Yes | Yes |
| V10 | Yes | Yes |
| V11 | Yes | Yes |

Our subjects described the way of traffickers doing business from recruitment to exploitation as follows:

> V1: One of my friends who worked at a hotel with a night club invited me to Turkey. I knew that she was working as a sex worker. When I began to work, the hoteliers did not interfere with me and force me to do anything else. However, when I told the hotelier I wanted to work in a different hotel, he told me I could not. I did not understand what was wrong with leaving the hotel. He told me that other hoteliers would not allow me to work. Then I realized the monopolistic system and personal controls over the hotels. Then I was forced to stay at the hotel. He threatened to give me to the police because he knew my legal status in Turkey.

> V6: I came to Turkey two months ago, after I got deported. I cannot legally enter Turkey, so hoteliers would be a contact to help my illegally crossing of the border. I would say hoteliers and former victims are the traffickers. They are hoteliers because they force us to work only in one hotel and put bans developing personal and private relationships with the customers. Hoteliers pay less because they knew our illegal status. I also got forced by a former victim who worked long years in sex sectors. She was beating and torturing us when we had declined her requests to have sexual affairs with customers. She forced us to take medicines to delay our monthly periods. She was not the only one doing all these things, but had connections with the police and other hoteliers. Two of her accomplices were responsible for transferring victims from abroad to Turkey, and another one was tasked with illegal border crossings.

Two of our subjects explained how she could get back to work in Turkey after being deported:

V7: I worked in nightclubs in Moscow before I traveled to Turkey. My friend invited me to work in a hotel nightclub. The hotelier did not force me to have sex with the customers, since we had already agreed on how much money I should have paid him. Since I was not deported yet, I did not experience paying off a loan to the hoteliers. However, I knew that some victims had to pay loans to the hoteliers because they, after being deported, were sponsored by the hoteliers to return to Turkey.

V8: My cousin told us that she would work in Turkey and make good money. Everyone in our family knew that she had a decent job in Turkey. However, after asking first to keep it confidential, she called me and asked if I would come to Turkey. I didn't know that my cousin was working in a hotel as a sex worker until I arrived Igdir city. She explained to me what she was doing and how much she was making in a month, which was around $2000. It looked very profitable for me when I considered someone, with my age and job skills, could only make $200 in a month. Then I accepted it. So far, no one has forced me to have sex with anyone. I then learned that my cousin received a $1000 commission from the hotelier who was getting other victims to work.

V11: I worked in nightclubs in Antalya and Istanbul, in Turkey. Then one of my friends called me to invite me to Igdir. She told me that the customers were ambitious enough to have sexual affairs with an Armenian woman. I knew about Igdir city, that it had a big Azeri population who were hateful against Armenians, and the Azeris had hotels with nightclubs. After coming to Igdir, I began to work in a hotel downtown, located around 10 km away in the rural area. I was forced by the hotelier to have a sexual affair more than 10 times in a day. I was beaten when I declined his request, and I was also told that I could not leave the hotel and talk with anyone outside of it.

### *5.3. Criminal Networks and Organized Crime Methods*

Human trafficking was also linked to extortion practices, as hotel owners coerced money from victims. The investigation uncovered networks between human traffickers and smugglers (see Table 4 below). When trafficked victims were deported, smugglers immediately brought them back into the country. Each deported victim paid the smugglers around $1500 to reenter the country. Victims who were smuggled back into the country through the uncontrolled parts of the border had to walk for up to 10 hours on steep and rocky terrain. There have been reports of victims being stopped and raped by PKK militants. Another detail uncovered in the Igdir operation was the practice of counterfeiting. Some victims, especially those from Kyrgyzstan, used fake travel documents, as well as genuine passports with a different name.

**Table 4.** The Traffickers Pointed Out by the Respondents.

| | Deported | Reentry with Illegal Crossing Border | Reentry with a Counterfeit Passport though Border Gate |
|---|---|---|---|
| V1 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| V2 | Yes | Yes | No |
| V3 | Yes | Yes | No |
| V4 | Yes | Yes | No |
| V5 | Yes | Yes | No |
| V6 | Yes | Yes | No |
| V7 | No | No | No |
| V8 | No | No | No |
| V9 | Yes | No | Yes |
| V10 | Yes | Yes | No |
| V11 | Yes | Yes | No |

Some victims captured in the Igdir province in 2013 were deported many times but returned thanks to established connections between traffickers with smugglers operating in Turkey's border regions, which again confirmed the results of research conducted in 2010. According to the research, one-fifth of the victims in the sample reported that they would seek opportunities to reenter Turkey to work again in the sex sector (Demir and Finckenauer 2010). It should be emphasized, however, that victims who return voluntarily to work in the sex sector are still considered to be victims. Interviews with victims in 2012 and 2013 indicated that victims were caught in a tricky situation: they voluntarily returned to Turkey after deportation, but continued to work in the sex sector when they arrived. According to the interviewees, they regretted working in the sex sector but felt pressured to provide financial assistance to their families and children in their home countries. Many, if not most of the victims, have asserted that they cannot have sex with the customers without drinking alcohol first. As pointed out by Zhidkova and Demir (2016):

> "Exposure to sexual harassment, abuse, and racist and sexist attitudes can become a source of a deep psychological trauma in migrant women, and the discrimination and social stigmatization of women who have been sexually assaulted lead to the feelings of guilt and hopelessness, making the women think that they do not deserve anything else but being in prostitution." (p. 228)

According to the Table 4 below, almost all victims were deported because of their involvement in sex working, and they all made attempts to reenter Turkey either using their counterfeit passports or by illegally crossing borders.

Two of our subjects explained how they could get back to work in Turkey after being deported:

> V1: It has been a common practice to deport victims after arresting them in hotels in Turkey. I got deported three times, and each time I paid the smuggler who networked to the hoteliers. I also used a counterfeit Azeri passport provided by the hotelier. The passport was a real one and only changed one letter in my name.

> V10: I got deported three times but reentered illegally in about two or three days. The police believed that their operations were aimed at saving us from the hands of the hoteliers. However, I had to come back to the hotel because I had to make monthly payments in Armenia and did not have a chance to generate revenues that I made from my job at the hotel. It was also a waste of time and money. I had to pay around $2000 to the hotelier.

Another victim specified how she reacted to the difficult situations she came across and avoided:

> V6: This is a hard job to do. I never liked being forced to have a sexual affair with someone I had never met before. Therefore, I was always getting some alcohol before starting to work in the nightclub. Additionally, there was always the risk of being deported by the police. It was the reason some of my friends aimed to be friends with the police but were exploited by them. These officers invited them to have sexual affairs whenever they wanted to. It was like torture to cross the border, walking through swamped areas and rocky terrain. Also, some borderlands were controlled by the Kurdish PKK members, and I heard some stories about how PKK members exploited and raped some victims while they were attempting to cross the borders.

The following victims described the strategies they could develop to get rid of potential legal problems when they worked by force:

> V4: I hated being arrested by the police. Therefore, I was ready to do everything just to stay in Igdir. I had to work in this sector, because it was the only job where I could make money and help my children. After being deported, it took several days to come back to Igdir. It was taking 10–12 hours to walk across rocky terrain

of the border. Also, there was a risk of being raped by human smugglers. More importantly, I was losing money and forced to get loans from the hoteliers.

V9: I knew that you could have been issued several counterfeit passports just by changing one letter in them. I also knew from my friends that it was possible to get deported and re-enter with a passport. Therefore, I got three passports with me before I left Kyrgyzstan and used one of them in my first reentry attempt.

One victim from Kyrgyzstan underlined how she was ready to reenter Turkey if she was deported.

V7: I knew that the police deported the victims if they were caught in the hotels. Therefore, I had three legal passports with me. My friend in Bishkek connected me to two officials in the government who were issuing passports. I would have used one of these passports if I had been deported. By the way, they were all legal passports with a letter change in my last name.

### 5.4. Revictimization of the Victims

In Igdir, human trafficking often involved the exploitation of the women involved in the sex sector. The lifestyles of the victims brought about their victimization. According to findings from the Igdir investigations, some victims were beaten by hoteliers, and some others were raped by police officers (see Table 5). The agents also found that most Azeri victims used a route through the Nakchivan Autonomous Region to reach Turkey. After taking an airline flight that landed late at night in the Nakchivan Autonomous Region, the Azeri victims boarded a shuttle bus for transportation to Turkey. When the bus arrived at the customs checkpoint on the Turkish border, police officers checking passports ordered some victims off the bus for trivial reasons and then raped them. Fearful of being deported, the victims did not report the crimes to the police; instead, they kept secret what they had experienced at the customs checkpoint. In their statements to the police, shuttle bus drivers confirmed the removals and rapes of women by police officers. Drivers also said that they told the women they should wear head scarves like Iranian women and warned them not to wear makeup. One of the bus drivers related an incident in which the victim was hospitalized because she was forced to have anal intercourse by several police officers. Police investigators found the victim and confirmed the bus driver's story.

**Table 5.** Violence against victims.

| | Beaten | Raped |
|---|---|---|
| V1 | Yes | Yes |
| V2 | Yes | Yes |
| V3 | Yes | Yes |
| V4 | Yes | Yes |
| V5 | Yes | Yes |
| V6 | Yes | Yes |
| V7 | No | No |
| V8 | No | No |
| V9 | Yes | Yes |
| V10 | Yes | Yes |
| V11 | Yes | Yes |

Our subjects explained how they were exposed to different types of violence in the following statements:

V1: I was beaten by the hoteliers when I objected to lower payments, but not raped. However, I heard many stories, in which the police used ungrounded and unlawful reasons and forced women to have sex with them, when they were crossing the border through the border gates.

> V3: I was raped several times by the hoteliers. One of the hoteliers called me when I was not working and invited me to his home. He told me that he would meet me with some of his friends. When I was at home, he wanted to have a sexual affair with me. I rejected but was beaten and raped. The same hotelier continued to rape me when I wanted to leave the hotel. It was also a punishment method for the hoteliers. Whoever wanted to leave the hotel was simultaneously raped by a group of men directed by the hoteliers.
>
> V5: I was raped by a police officer who I met in the night club of the hotel. We were friends in the beginning, and I gave him my cell number. Then he began to invite me to his home and raped me. I was afraid of being deported, so I did not resist the officer. On two occasions, he raped me in his car.

Other two victims detailed how they had to obey a local law enforcement personnel and hoteliers and suffered from their violence as follows:

> V9: One of my friends called me and invited me to Turkey. I knew that she was working in the sex sector. I also began to work in a hotel's night club. In the meantime, I met with one of the customers who was working with the national military police [gendarme in Turkey]. I thought that she could help me if I had any risk of being deported because I knew that Turkish police would deport if you were caught when you were having sex with a customer or there were accusations from someone else that you were a sex worker in a night club. This military person fell in love with me. I also had the same feelings in the beginning, but then I quit with him. He invited me to his car, threatening me that he could get me deported. Then he raped me in his car.
>
> V11: I got raped by the hotelier. He was actually very helpful for me in crossing the border illegally. After beginning to work in his hotel, he invited me to his office, where I saw his two friends. He forced me to have sexual affairs with his friends, but I declined. Then he used a very humiliating tone and said, "This is your job. You cannot decline my directive. Whomever I want you to sleep with, you must do it." I got raped by him and his two friends in his office.

### *5.5. Corruption and Money Laundering Practices of Hoteliers and Victims*

Crime occurs in the absence of guardians. Examples of guardians include the law enforcement, surveillance, and social networks (Martin 2017, p. 52). Guardians play a facilitating role in the emergence and development of human trafficking networks. It is common for corrupt government officials, such as border and customs officials, and law enforcement officers to help human traffickers operate unimpeded (Shelley 2009). This human trafficking operation could not have flourished without corruption. In some cases, hotel owners bribed law enforcement officials to get information in advance about pending police raids. For example, hotel owners and cooperating police officers might use cryptic language to communicate with each other, such as "What does the weather look like today?", "Did you see the keys?", and "I have a stomachache today." When the police officers used these codes in their communication with the hotel owners, it meant that the police would make a raid. The owners therefore let victims leave the hotels or hid them in secret places within the hotel.

The money flowing through the sex sector in Igdir was handled in diverse ways by traffickers and victims. The traffickers, for example, put part of their cash into the construction and car dealership sectors in Igdir and transferred some of the remaining cash to Baku, the capital and commercial hub of Azerbaijan. Victims, however, use underground money transfer systems, such as the trust-based hawala system that allows for the transfer of money without the actual movement of any funds. Several exchange offices and jewelry stores that had contacts with hawaladars in Azerbaijan were used by the victims. Also, state banks with branches in Central Asia were used by Central Asian victims. The victims deposited small amounts of money that their relatives could then withdraw with a debit

card. Table 6 shows the responses of victims on corruption practices and the money transfer systems of the victims.

**Table 6.** Corruption and money transfer systems.

| | Bribing Law Enforcement | Transferring Money to Home Countries | Methods of Transfer |
|---|---|---|---|
| V1 | Yes | Yes | Cash and hawala (Exchange office and Jewelry store) |
| V2 | Yes | Yes | Cash and hawala (Exchange office and Jewelry store) |
| V3 | Yes | Yes | Cash and hawala (Exchange office and Jewelry store) |
| V4 | Yes | Yes | Cash and hawala (Exchange office and Jewelry store) |
| V5 | Yes | Yes | Cash and hawala (Exchange office and Jewelry store) |
| V6 | Yes | Yes | Cash and hawala (Exchange office and Jewelry store) |
| V7 | No | No | No |
| V8 | No | No | No |
| V9 | Yes | Yes | Cash and banking |
| V10 | Yes | Yes | Cash |
| V11 | Yes | Yes | Cash |

The practices of victims regarding their earnings and transfers differred from each other. The following are the accounts of some of our subjects about their strategies:

> V1: I was working at least 20 days a month. The weekend times were the busiest, and there was a chance of earning a high amount of money. I was making an average of $2000 a month and was transferring money with the help of an exchange office and jewelry store. Both owners were of Azeri origin and had strong contacts in Azerbaijan. The exchange office was getting a 10 percent commission for every dollar I was transferring to my family, who were actually thinking that I was a nurse in Turkey. I did not want to keep my money at the hotel, because there was a risk of theft.

> V3: I knew that the hoteliers were bribing the police. There were some secret places in the hotels, and we were told to hide there before a police car arrived at the hotel. I knew that some police officers were texting or calling the hoteliers, and it was a message about a police raid. Most Azeri victims used two exchange offices and a jewelry store. It was very easy and there was no risk. They were getting a 10 percent commission and were calling another exchange office to give money to my family. It happened only in seconds to transfer my money. It was a secure way because there was a risk of seizing money by hoteliers and stealing money from hotel workers.

> V8: I was quite sure about how the hoteliers and police collaborated. The police were turning a blind eye and getting bribes. I saw two officers meeting with the hoteliers. I was depositing money in small amounts, and my mom was withdrawing it with a debit card. She never knew that the money was coming from my sex work.

> V10: I was making frequent visits to Armenia and transferring money with me in cash. I did not have any chance to transfer it like the Azeri victims, although I heard that they were using an exchange office.

## 6. Discussion

This case study attempted to understand the nature of organized crime in the sex trafficking business. As was found in past research, we confirmed that sex trafficking is a highly profitable illicit business, when considering its demand and supply dimensions. Due to the high volume of demand for exotic "foreign" women in sex work, the business is predominantly transnational. The profiles of the trafficking victims in Igdir explain much about why they kept working in the sex sector and corroborate the results of previous

research in Turkey (e.g., Özer 2011; Demir and Finckenauer 2010). The research concluded that most victims were single or divorced women, and one-third of them had children. Their incomes were low when compared with the incomes of women in Turkey. The situation in Igdir was similar. The average age to start sex work was 19, and ranged from 14 to 23. Years of sex work experience ranged from three to fifteen.

The majority of victims were recruited by female sex workers. They were lured to Turkey through fraud or enticing offers of money from post-Soviet nations. As in previous studies, traffickers employed violent acts such as beatings, rapes, and threats to control or frighten the victims. Victims were compelled to repay their whole debt, and their wages were then either taken or partially seized by traffickers. Because they had previously been deported and their admission into Turkey was prohibited, a number of them had to enter illegally. In addition, the great majority were undocumented. In other words, they lacked the necessary travel permits and visas to remain or work in Turkey. So, their statuses were always abused by traffickers whenever victims didn't cooperate with hoteliers. It was clear that when the victims fell into the sex business sector, willingly or not, they came across an environment where they had limits (e.g., communication, travel). They could not hold their possessions as they wished, they had no private lives, and they had no guardians against maltreatment. That sort of lifestyle that they somehow fall into turns into a vicious cycle and results in continuous victimization as theorized by Hindelang et al. (1978).

Despite the fact that our research region was on a tiny scale, the profits from sex trafficking were considerable. Several techniques, including the trust-based hawala system, were utilized to transmit money to cross-border destinations. Traffickers put their money into construction and car dealerships, as well as transnational commercial areas. Hoteliers have traditionally attempted to improve their connection with the city's law enforcement officials by bribing them (e.g., police, gendarme, border, and customs control authorities). As a result of this endeavor, they were alerted of forthcoming police operations. When the absence of capable guardians who are bribed and unalerted merges with motivated traffickers who make enormous profits, in addition to easily deceivable victims who have limited job opportunities at home, then the sex business becomes a profitable and easy-to-perform business. Our findings are also parallel with the past research examining the relevance of routine activities theory (see for example, Parasvekas and Brookes 2018; Kenyon and Schanz 2014).

The highest position was occupied by "the hotelier," who oversaw the overall business by employing previously victimized female sex workers as intermediaries and enlisting facilitators, such as drivers and other hotel personnel, as accomplices. However, we couldn't find any relationship between traffickers with other crimes and criminal groups. The only exception was the symbiotic relationship with human smugglers who assisted deported victims in returning to Turkey while also providing counterfeited travel documents.

Regarding the networks and magnitude of the organized crime, we found that the trafficking business in our study area was perpetrated by individuals who were loosely connected to each other. There was no sophisticated criminal organization that was stable over time, membership was not strictly restricted, and members were not identifying themselves as part of a well-known criminal entity. People involved in this business usually acted in a mutually beneficial relationship. These features of the sex trafficking business in Igdir can be associated with the models offered in the literature, such as "the network model" of Schloenhardt (1999), Shelley's "natural resource model," and the "American pimp model" (2010), as well as what Finckenauer (2007) refers to as "crime that is organized," rather than organized crime.

## 7. Conclusions

Human trafficking flourishes in environments where female workers are victimized because of their lifestyles. They aim to generate revenue in high-risk places. The hotels in Igdir lured female workers and force them to work in the sex sector. These victims

were suitable targets for motivated traffickers operating in the absence or absence of guardians/law enforcement.

Several issues surrounding sex trafficking, such as demand reduction and protecting victims, can be discussed in length and require the attention of scholars and professionals. They are, however, outside the scope of this study. What conclusions can we draw from this study's findings in terms of combating sex trafficking and organized crime? Despite having loose ties among sex trafficking criminals, it is obvious that there is a high degree of specialization. Traffickers figure out how to run a sex business, from recruiting victims to moving them, and from bribing corrupt officials to rallying demand. As a result, authorities dealing with these illegal companies must be well-equipped and skilled. As commented in the last US TIP report (2022, p. 555) regarding Turkey, "many judges and prosecutors lacked experience and resources to prosecute complex cases and lacked efforts to encourage victims to voluntarily cooperate in investigations, resulting in the government dropping, acquitting, or reclassifying cases to lesser crimes." Despite the recent development of dedicated divisions to combat trafficking in the police and gendarmerie, as well as migration management authorities, the specialization of these professionals, as well as the judiciary, have remained substandard. Ford (2022) examined the issue of professionalization in an article about cocaine trafficking from Venezuela to Turkey. The regular change of bureaucrats and professionals, which causes institutional memory to disappear, was cited as one of the reasons. The issue of expertise is even more critical when it comes to the trafficking of women and girls among large groups of vulnerable refugees and displaced people. As was the case in the aftermath of refugee crises, it required extraordinary attention and advanced effort both to detect, and then to respond to this precarious situation in policy and practice. Consequently, understanding the correct nature of sex trafficking can lead authorities to take a better position. Only then can policymakers, law enforcement, and judicial authorities disentangle these networks and respond more effectively to traffickers.

Future research should focus on the changing relationships and new trends between venue owners, such as hoteliers and human traffickers. It should address why venue owners act like organized crime and why law enforcement has failed to counter human traffickers. New research should focus the lens on how victims have been lured by traffickers and have been part of a lifestyle that puts them in a vulnerable situation. Even though it is extremely difficult to reach perpetrators of human trafficking as well as victims as research subjects, more ethnographic studies are necessary to examine the state of relationships between these two groups. Additional research might be conducted on why Turkey uses a poor practice of deporting victims and lacks sufficient rehabilitation programs, as well as what efforts are needed to protect these victims.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, M.C. and O.O.D.; methodology, M.C.; formal analysis, M.C.; investigation, M.C.; resources, O.O.D.; data curation, M.C.; writing—original draft preparation, M.C. and O.O.D.; writing—review and editing, M.C. and O.O.D.; visualization, O.O.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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