



Human trafficking is most commonly known for the severe forms of violence it entails, such as incarceration, rape, torture and sexual enslavement. But human trafficking does not stop with human beings. All over the world, the organs of human beings are being trafficked, sometimes with, and sometimes without, the consent of those to whom they belong. People are directly, or indirectly, being forced to sell their own organs for a low price, often to middlemen, who make thousands of Euros from poor vulnerable persons.

Organized crime groups lure people abroad with false promises and convince or force them to sell their organs for a low price. The recipients of the organs pay a much higher price than the donors receive. This part benefits the traffickers who are part of an organized criminal network. The trafficked organs can be acquired in many different and terrible ways. People may be kidnapped, killed and sold, especially children, for their organs. Other ways for the brokers to procure the organs are through deception or coercion. There have been cases where a victim will go to a doctor or hospital for an unrelated illness or accident, but in the hospital, the person's kidney is removed without their knowledge or consent.

Organ trafficking can be distinguished from other forms of trafficking, since the traffickers and organ 'brokers' involved are often from decent and respected industry sectors. Doctors and other health-care practitioners, ambulance drivers and mortuary workers are often involved in organ trafficking in addition to those involved in other human trafficking networks.

There was recently a case in China where a group of 16 people, including doctors, were selling kidneys illegally. The kidneys were bought from young or poor people, who received approximately 3,000 Euros for their organ, while the doctors sold it for 24,000.

The organs commonly transplanted include kidney, liver, heart, lung and pancreas. The organ most frequently given by a living donor is kidney as humans have two kidneys and you can live easily with only one. But also parts of other organs including liver, lung and pancreas can be

transplanted from living donors. And a variety of tissues and cells are routinely implanted for a wide range of procedures.

The incidence of trafficking in organs versus trafficking in persons for the purpose of removal of organs is not known. However, as it is often not possible to preserve organs for long periods, trafficking in persons for the purpose of removal of organs can be assumed to constitute a considerable portion of cases.

Exploitation of the poor

The question of whether or not it is okay to buy the kidney of someone, who will then be able to start a business, feed the family and so on is an ethical question. However, trafficking in persons for the purpose of removal of organs thrives from a shortage of organs for transplantation purposes. This demand is coupled with supply, often artificially created by organ “brokers”, recruiting donors from among vulnerable populations. Such donors often consent to the removal of their organs, and may in some cases even receive the agreed payment for them. However, as is common in situations of trafficking for any exploitative purpose, the provision of the “service” is often driven by poverty. Victims may agree to sell their organ and enter into a formal or informal contract to do so, but they are often not paid at all, or in full.

- At its 59th Session, the General Assembly discussed the trafficking of human organs in the context of transnational organized crime. Within the resolution that emerged from discussions, the General Assembly “Urged Member States to adopt measures to prevent, combat and punish the illicit removal of, and trafficking in, human organs.”

Given that organ-related trafficking can be a transnational crime, with suppliers of organs sometimes originating in different continents to the recipients of those organs, and that organs traffickers often locate their operation bases in third countries so as to avoid detection from law enforcement, it is evident that international law enforcers must cooperate across borders in order to address organ-related crimes.

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