

Organized crimes: organ trafficking on a global scale

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



Crime is the act of going against rules and regulations instilled in a society. Globalization is the connection of people, organizations and governments across countries through advanced technology. It includes “ the opening of international borders...and the changes in institutions and policies at national and international levels”, to accommodate the exchange of information, goods and services. Global crime, essentially, is the result of increased connections among criminals whereby acts of deviance are conducted on an international level. With these connections, criminals establish organized crimes, in which there are hierarchy and specialization, to increase chances of succeeding in their illegal activities. Organ trafficking is an example of organized crimes which will be discussed in this paper.

Globalization has brought about massive improvements in communication and transportation systems, leading to abuse of the accessibility of organ transplant procedures, heightened with transplant tourism. Transplant tourism is the ability for patients in need of an organ to travel abroad for organ transplant procedures, involving the commercialization of organs. Commercialization of organs enhances organ trafficking, that involves the exploitation of patients and donors, for the benefit of organ traffickers. This essay argues that power is abused to influence the poor to engage in organized crimes like organ trafficking to further elevate income for people with higher socio-economic status, and that Globalization has accommodated the reaping of profits through widening access for commercialization of organs.

The type of organ trafficking that will be focused on is kidney trafficking. Kidney trafficking is most prominent amongst other types of organ trafficking, taking up 66.7% of illegal organ transplants per year. This is because removing one kidney does not have major impacts on the health of a donor. There is also a high demand for kidneys worldwide, driving the supply to accommodate for this shortage. Costa Rica will be used as an example of a country that provides organs illegally.

Case Study

Costa Rica is placed under Tier 2 Watch List, meaning that the absolute number of victims of trafficking is significant and significantly increasing (US Department of State, 2015)[footnoteRef: 6]. The specific incident that will be addressed in this study is the arrests of people involved in a kidney trafficking ring that happened in 2013. The trafficking ring involves Dr Francisco José Mora Palma (who acts as a ringleader and is also head of nephrology unit in a public hospital), Dr Fabian Fonseca Guzmán, Dr Massimiliano Anunzia Mauro Stamati, Dr Victor Hugo Monge and Dismosthenis Katsigiannis Karkasi (acts as a recruiter of organ donors). The three other doctors assist the ringleader in his transplant operation procedures.

The recruiter, Karkasi, owns a pizza restaurant located across the street from the public hospital, Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia Hospital. This pizza restaurant is used as a meeting point, in which donors, usually with financial problems, are identified. The recruiter proceeds to further convince the donors to donate their organ in exchange for money. The donor would be

taken to a nearby location where they will be put in contact with the doctors. The illegal transplants would be carried out either at the public hospital or a private clinic, Clinic Biblica, in San José. Hence, the trafficking ring earns USD \$80, 000 per kidney transplant. They have carried out 14 illegal kidney transplants from 2009 to 2013, in which most of the organ recipients are Israelis.

Sociological Concepts

Conflict Theory by William Bonger argues that the unequal distribution of wealth and power in society is due to the competition that exists in a capitalist system. In a capitalist system, there are two classes, the bourgeoisies and the proletariats. The bourgeoisies are people who own the means of production whereas the proletariats are people who belong to the working class. There is a competition amongst these two classes for monetary gains that will eventually lead to a better life. The bourgeoisies have the capability to control businesses, as a result controlling the wealth distribution as well. In the case study above, the trafficking ring are the people in the bourgeoisie class whereas donors are in the proletariat class. The trafficking ring recognizes that they have a higher socio-economic status compared to majority of the society. They acknowledge and take advantage of the power they have on financial aspects of the kidney sale business. The manipulation of wealth distribution occurs when the illegal kidney transplants are structured in a way such that commercial transactions benefit the trafficking ring the most. The donors are made to believe that the amount of money received is sufficient to ease their financial circumstances

in the long term. The lack of power that the donors possess makes it impossible for them to negotiate in their own favor.

According to Marx's version of this theory, the reason why the donors do not doubt the wealth distribution is because there exists false consciousness amongst the proletariat (in this case, the donors), in which they do not fully comprehend their position in society and do not question what is given to them. The abuse of power by the trafficking ring is supported by Containment Theory by Walter Reckless, in which it suggests that criminals are unable to resist the temptations that surround them due to the limited extent of internal control. The limited extent of internal control that is possessed by people of the trafficking ring makes them go against their own morals and integrity, in pursuit of profits, that they are not able to resist. This means that the trafficking ring has acknowledged that kidney trafficking is illegal and that the amount of money given to donors are not going to help them escape the poverty cycle, yet they still carry out the kidney transplants and encourage people with financial problems to sell their kidney. The trafficking ring has thus gone against their own ideas of right and wrong, all for profit maximization.

Globalization Aspect

Globalization has worsened organ trafficking due to its ability to widen access to commercialization of organs. The developed communication system all around the globe has allowed people to interact online, connecting people from different countries and of different social statuses, through the Internet. The Internet allows various types of exchange,

including health related needs. It is now possible to purchase an organ through advertisements posted online. The advertisements on sale of organs can be put up almost everywhere on the Internet, ranging from personal social media posts to online shopping websites. A mere word such as 'health' or 'organ' on a search engine on the internet can lead the user to price offerings in which the user in need of an organ can further negotiate a price he is willing to pay. This means that the Internet enables the exchange of money for an organ, enhancing organ trafficking and illegal organ transplants. The following is an example of an organ advertisement online: 'Must sell kidney. Blood group A. My financial situation is very difficult. I lost my job, and I need money for school for my two children', by Pavle Mircov, Serbia. The desperation of Mircov drove him to use the Internet to commercialize his own organ.

The advertisements online are visited by patients in dire need of an organ. If interested, the patient can contact the donor directly or through a middleman. Negotiation of prices will then come forth, and when both the donor and the patient come to an agreement, arrangements will be made. The donor and the patient would travel out of their own country to a third world country, where the kidney transplant procedure would take place. To minimize the chances of getting caught, purpose of travelling out of own's country is disguised as "medical value travel", that is the obtaining health care out of national borders

Internet, that is the core of Globalization, has made commercializing and purchasing of organs much easier. This calls for people of vulnerable groups,

such as people of poverty, to take selling of organs as an option to escape their financial burden even if it is just for the short run. Thus, Globalization has increased organ trafficking because of the possibility to commercialize organs.

Conclusion

Power is abused to influence the poor to engage in organ trafficking to further elevate income for people of higher socio-economic status and Globalization has worsened organ trafficking through widening access to commercialization of organs. In the case of Costa Rica, the doctors and the recruiter have abused their power in order to gain maximum profit from illegal kidney transplantations. They also have poor internal control that makes them forgo the law and their own morals to seek monetary gains. The use of Social Conflict Theory by William Bonger and Containment Theory by Walter Reckless have supported the argument behind organ trafficking. Globalization has increased the chances of organ trafficking through platforms on the Internet that allows commercializing of organs. Although organ trafficking cannot be eliminated overnight, efforts should be made to eliminate illegal organ transplantations. A possible way of solving this issue is looking at causes of voluntary selling of own organ, that is usually due to poverty. Governments could work to better the ways of providing public goods and subsidies for people of lower income so as not to let them resort to selling their organs.