

# Interviews with Human Traffickers: Perceptions of Sex and Violence

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## Abstract

Many who study human trafficking acknowledge gaps in the literature. We have yet to understand the phenomenon of human trafficking from the perspective of the human trafficker. This chapter analyzes perceptions of trafficking for the international sex trade industry as articulated by human traffickers who traffic women and girls. This chapter presents an analysis of interviews with human traffickers that will highlight personalized accounts of sex and violence. Further enhancing our limited knowledge of the human trafficking phenomenon, these narratives will help fill in the gaps of previous research, while also complementing current research on sex trafficking specifically. Discussions with human traffickers will promote an understanding of sex trafficking as embedded within a patriarchal world system that both thrives on and sustains the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation.

## Introduction

What is commonly referred to as “sex trafficking”<sup>1</sup> is a topic that has attracted considerable academic, political, and popular interest. Recently, public awareness has increased alongside political responsiveness to the growth of the international sex trade so much so that the amount of publications has

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1. The term, “sex trafficking” has been described as the trafficking of women for the international sex industry (Goodey, 2003, 2008). Sex trafficking is further elaborated as, “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (Office of Violence Against Women [OVAW], 2000, p. 5; Schauer and Wheaton, 2006).

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also accelerated. Much has been written elsewhere about sex trafficking,<sup>2</sup> trafficking in women for prostitution,<sup>3</sup> for sex work,<sup>4</sup> and trafficking as modern-day slavery.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the chosen phrase used to describe the occurrence, the trafficking of women and girls for the international sex industry is widely considered an ever-increasing problem due, in part, to the “low-risk-high-profit” reality that, unlike drugs, girls and women can be sold repeatedly (Shelley, 2007, p. 117; Turner and Kelley, 2009, p. 185).

In researching sex trafficking, what academic scholarship we have ranges from the empirical, political, and legal (Bosworth, Hoyle, and Dempsey, 2011; Chapkis, 2003; Goodey, 2003, 2008; Gozdzik and Collett, 2003, 2005; Lee, 2007, 2011; Munro, 2006; Troshynski, 2011). For example, current research includes governmental data on rates (broadly defined and inconsistently collected), investigative reporting on the issue (primarily from news/media sources that are often fragmented), accounts from victims and survivors, and testimony during legal hearings.

However, despite continued growth in sex trafficking research, there remains a lack of qualitative analysis dedicated to the lived experiences of human traffickers themselves as well as a scarcity of ethnographic studies dedicated to survivors (Bosworth et al., 2011; Hoyle, Bosworth, and Dempsey, 2011). Such research would provide information pertaining to similar and divergent characteristics associated with human traffickers and of trafficking victims and survivors alike.

Due to inconsistencies of studies completed and lack of qualitative research rooted in local industries, several posit that we still have much to learn about the reality of human trafficking generally as well as sex trafficking specifically. Consequently, many have discussed the danger in creating policies based off of such limited findings (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Jordan, 2002; Kelly, 2002; Srikantiah, 2007; Troshynski, 2011). In response to these critiques, this research offers new data that will add to our understanding of sex trafficking.

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2. See Farr (2005), Kara (2009), Munro (2006), Shah (2004), Shlyk (2007) and Weitzer (2007).

3. See Brunovskis and Tyldum (2004), Raymond (1998, 2001, 2004), and Thorbek (2002).

4. See Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002), Freedman (2003) and Kempadoo (1999, 2000, 2005).

5. See Bales (1999, 2005), Bales and Robbins (2001), Kara (2006), Ruggiero (1997), Sage and Kasten (2006), Stone and Vanderberg (1999), Wijers and Lap-Chew (1997), and Williams (1999).

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The current research project is one of the first academic studies to interview non-incarcerated human traffickers who traffic women and girls for the international sex industry. Before discussing the methods of the study and documenting important findings from interviews, a review of previous scholarship will highlight what we know about the experiences of trafficked women and girls for the international sex industry. Then, qualitative analysis of several in-depth interviews will highlight why these participants become human traffickers, their acumens of those women and girls they traffic, and their unique insights into how and why sex trafficking continues to thrive. Through these analyses, it is anticipated that the current study will help fill in gaps of previous research and give voice to a very clandestine population.

### Research on Sex Trafficking

While the international sex trade continues to grow, so too does human trafficking and sex trafficking on a universal scale (Aronowitz, 2008; Freedman, 2003; Kelly, 2005; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik, 2005). Even though international human trafficking estimates vary in size and scope, available data on the prevalence of sex trafficking is still considered to be “questionable” due to “methodological weaknesses,” gaps in the data, and “numerical discrepancies” (Brennan, 2005; Goodey, 2008; Laczko and Gozdziaik, 2005; Troshynski, 2011; Weitzer, 2007). However, what we can ascertain from these estimates is that human trafficking is a very real problem effecting millions annually.

First, it is important to understand the size of this international trend, even if such information includes rough estimates, at best. In a report published in 2005 and 2009, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2005, 2009) approximates that between 1995 and 2004, roughly 12.3 million individuals were forced laborers worldwide and that—at any given moment—2.45 million were trafficked internationally and internally. Of these individuals, the ILO estimates that 43% of them were exploited for sex work. Then, in 2012, the ILO provided updated figures: At any given time, over the years 2002 to 2011, there were 20.9 million forced labor victims and that, out of these, 9.1 million were trafficked internationally and internally for sex work (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2012, p. 67).

Similarly, the United Nations (UN, 2003, 2008, 2009) estimates that as many as four million women and children are trafficked worldwide on an annual basis where approximately 81% are victims of forced sex work (Department of Justice [DOJ], 2006). Additionally, recent international evaluations

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by academic sources suggest that there are “between 500,000 and 600,000 new sex trafficking victims a year” (Kara, 2009).<sup>6</sup> While these numbers are estimates (at best), they still confirm that human trafficking and sex trafficking are serious global problems affecting a range of individuals (Bales, 1999). However, these reports often do not pinpoint the background and lived experiences of women and girls trafficked for the sex industry.

Many suggest that the majority of trafficked persons are women and girls, characterized as being “vulnerable” to the “lure” of human trafficking because of a greater susceptibility to poverty (Blank, 2013, Giampolo, 2007; Kelly, 2002, 2005; Kelly and Regan, 2000). In fact, recent figures reveal that, between 2007 and 2010, roughly 55 to 60 percent of all detected victims of human trafficking were women and that girls consisted of an additional 15 to 20 percent of the total number (UNODC, 2012, p. 1–3).

Several reports also suggest that human traffickers target women and girls who are disproportionately affected by causative socioeconomic factors, including lack of access to education, unemployment, discrimination, and lack of economic opportunities in countries of origin. These reports further observe that women and girls are generally trafficked “from poorer countries to richer countries” oftentimes either physically coerced into traveling or deceived through promises of gainful employment abroad (Bales, 2005; Blank, 2013; Goodey, 2003; Sage and Kasten, 2006; Shelly, 2007; Watts and Zimmerman, 2002).

Patterns of global inequality associated with the trafficking of women and girls from poor, underdeveloped “source” countries to more economically developed “destination” countries helps create a context in which human traffickers are able to manipulate their victims (Jordan, 2002; Zhang, Chin, and Miller, 2007). When they arrive at their destination, women and girls trafficked for the sex industry experience added exploitation. Research dedicated to survivors of sex trafficking suggest that the experience is correctly portrayed to include kidnapping, threats, assault, sexual abuse, rape, starvation, and torture.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Due to a range of inferences based on limited data, methodologies used to calculate such numbers are not always the best predictors. Limitations have led to a call for the improvement of research methods used to study human trafficking (Anderson and O’Connell Davidson, 2002, 2003, 2004; Laczko and Gozdzik, 2005).

7. For accounts of victimization, see Aronowitz (2008), Giampolo (2007), Kelly (2002, 2005), McMahon and Stanger (2002), Raymond, D’Cunha, Dzuhayatin, Hynes, Rodriguez, and Santos (2004), and Srikantiah (2007), as well as research by Wijers and Lap-Chew (1997). See Farley (2004) for studies documenting rates of abuse experienced.

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Trafficking for the international sex industry involves physical violence and psychological coercion as well. Examples include cases where victims are made to believe that they or their relatives will be harmed if they try to escape (Bales, 2005; Farr, 2005; Sage and Kasten, 2006; Srikantiah, 2007; Watts and Zimmerman, 2002). Those who disobey their recruiter, trafficker, and/or pimp, undergo what Farr (2005, p. 41–43) calls, “specific deterrence violence” which includes additional beatings, threats to the individual and her family, and other gross sexual assaults. Women and girls are starved; they are charged monetary fines owed for such “violations” and endure other forms of abuse such as confinement and being drugged.

If a trafficked woman or girl escapes, the recruiter, trafficker, and/or pimp spend time trying to find them. If found, these women undergo further extreme punishment—they could either be sold back into the illegal trafficking business or to some other location “worse” than the previous one, and/or they could be murdered. Farr (2005, p. 43–45) notes that “general deterrence violence,” such as this, is utilized as a broad punishment scheme for future rule-violating women and girls who have a desire to escape.

As noted, limitations to trafficking research are vast and discussed elsewhere. It is our overarching goal to provide a distinct perspective to the study of sex trafficking. To help understand sex trafficking from the unique standpoint of those individuals who support, reproduce, and actively work to sustain it, we draw heavily from in-depth interviews with human traffickers residing in London, England.

## Method

Serendipity is a researcher’s best friend. We have written elsewhere about our fortuitous experience meeting a human trafficker, how we were able to gain access to others, and the steps taken to successfully interview them (Blank, 2012, 2013; Troshynski and Blank, 2008; Troshynski, 2011). The following qualitative data is still one of the only academic studies to successfully interview human traffickers outside of an incarcerated setting and within their lived environment.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, while the following quotes are derived from a small, non-representative sample of human traffickers, there is much to learn from them.

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8. See research by Sheldon Zhang and colleagues (Zhang and Gaylord, 1996; Zhang and Chin, 2003; Zhang, Chin, and Miller, 2007).

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### *Access and Interviews*

Access to human traffickers was made available through the use of a lead contact or “gatekeeper” (Blank, 2012, 2013; Troshynski and Blank, 2008; Troshynski, 2011). This individual helped facilitate a snowball-sampling framework used to meet with participants and schedule interviews. All traffickers were interviewed separately and independently of one another.

It should be noted that each participant chose the date, location, and time of their interview. All interviews occurred in public venues during off-hours and varied in length from a little under an hour to well over three hours. Research participants were informed of the identity of the interviewers. The authors, two women completing their graduate degrees, in their mid twenties, conducted the research.<sup>9</sup> Research was conducted as face-to-face, semi-formal interviews with one researcher asking questions and one researcher documenting answers to each question. Due to anonymity and safety issues, interviews were not recorded with a tape recorder, and identifying information (legal name, common name, place of residence, location of work, etc.) was never requested, discussed, or collected.

At the time of this study, both researchers were trained and had experience in conducting qualitative research methods including interview procedures (formal, semi-formal, and conversational), observational note taking, recording, interview transcription, and follow-up. The transcriber was well trained in note taking and short hand, wrote fast and legible, and utilized mechanisms to increase the integrity of each transcript. For example, a follow-up conversation would occur at the end of each interview. At this time, the interview transcriber would review the entire transcript with the participant (and with the research interviewer), ask questions if something was unclear, and clarify any confusions.

This mechanism further allowed the participant the opportunity to review what was said/discussed throughout the interview, thus increasing rapport. It was at these moments where additional information was collected, and no deception was used. All participants were aware of our interest in the topic (human trafficking) and they knew that their participation was strictly voluntary and for academic purposes only.

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9. We were and remain aware of the potential limitations due to gender effects. Steps taken to minimize such effects, as well as a description of research methodology utilized, discussion of privacy, rapport, contributions and limitations as well as thematic questions asked, can be found in Troshynski and Blank (2008).

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### *“Trafficker” — How Participants Identified*

While some academics may group a range of traffickers and trafficking behavior under one definition—typically inclusive of those actions as outlined within earlier legislation (i.e. United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto), herein we define the “trafficker” as the person who specifically transports people for the purpose of sex.

The reason for highlighting this definition is primarily due to our conversations with human traffickers. For example, one of the participants was very clear to inform us that there are four (4) distinct positions involved in the trafficking process (Blank, 2013). These include, the recruiter: the person responsible for recruiting women and girls into the sex industry; the pimp: the person responsible for harboring and controlling women and girls once they arrive at their destination; the trafficker: the person responsible for transporting women and girls to and from their destinations; and the middle man: the person who has the connections to all those involved in the business to make sure it runs smoothly.

It should neither be implied that we believe all trafficking networks operate this way, nor do we believe that a human trafficker is just (and only just) the “trafficker” as defined by our participants. Still, we use “trafficker” as how it was explained to us via our participants “business structure” which was what we were exposed to throughout this research. Therefore, when discussing participants’ roles (i.e. trafficker, middle man, pimp) we mean the aforementioned. To be clear: All participants, at some point, worked as a “trafficker.”

### *Participants*

In 2003, interviews took place in numerous public locations throughout London, England. In total, the authors spent three months conducting interviews. During this time, we spent approximately fifteen (15) hours having face-to-face conversations with three human traffickers. In addition, we also spent approximately 100 hours performing initial research, documenting correspondence with the gatekeeper and participants, and creating transcripts.<sup>10</sup> Names of participants quoted here have been changed to maintain confidentiality and are therefore noted as Ahmet, Dmitri, and Cyril throughout.

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10. During this time, and for several months following, the authors would meet every Friday at a local research library. This location was used for conversations, debriefing, and researching documents within their extensive library.

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All participants worked in the local sex industry in and around London. Ahmet was in his early twenties, married, and was working on obtaining his British citizenship. He spent the last seven years living in London where he met his wife, a British citizen. From Albania, he was also a part-time student working full-time as a security guard. For roughly ten years, he was a trafficker of illegal goods, drugs, arms, refugees, including women and girls for the sex industry. During the time of this research, Ahmet worked several part-time jobs in the entertainment industry where, “for extra money,” he trafficked women and girls.

Throughout conversations with Ahmet, we discovered that he had experience trafficking within England, Europe, the United Kingdom, and from Europe to the United Kingdom, Russia to Southern Europe, and Southern Europe to the United Kingdom. He explained to us that, in the past, he recruited and trafficked women and girls “across borders and seas,” but that currently, he only transported women and girls to, “pickup, drive, deliver” them from one location to the next.<sup>11</sup> Because of his extant knowledge of the trafficking industry, Ahmet was interviewed on more than one occasion.

Dmitri was a part-time cabaret bouncer who occasionally trafficked girls and women for the sex industry. From Bulgaria, he was in his early thirties, and held a graduate degree in Economics from Poland. He was not married and was not in a serious relationship. During the time of the interview, he was in the process of obtaining his British citizenship and had lived in London for, “less than five years.” From our conversations with Dmitri, he never talked about recruiting women and girls, he only trafficked women and girls internationally and locally for extra money.

Cyril was in his mid-forties and worked as “a pimp” who also occasionally trafficked women for the sex industry. Cyril made it clear to us that he only trafficked women; and that he drew the line at trafficking underage girls. During the time of the interview, Cyril proclaimed that he had worked as a pimp for “over ten years,” trafficking women during that time. Perhaps because of his lengthy experience as a pimp, Cyril also had early experience working as a recruiter of women for the international sex industry. Similar to Ahmet and Dmitri, Cyril also had experience trafficking women internationally and lo-

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11. It was never discovered whom Ahmet was doing the transportation for. He would receive a call and either accepts the “job” or not. This decision was based on current work schedule and how much money the “job” would pay. If accepted, he would then make another call to a random phone number and talk to who Ahmet called, “the middle man” — again, unknown to him. This “middle man” would give specific directions for pick-up and he would transport a woman (sometimes several) by dropping her/them off to another local agent.



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cally. He was a British citizen, born and raised in London, whose family was originally from Turkey.

### Analysis and Findings

Research on trafficked women and girls<sup>12</sup> has been discussed as a phenomenon that encapsulates coercion, deception, severe and persistent abuse, as well as heightened sexualized violence. The data has been analyzed and arranged according to five re-occurring themes: 1) Clients who feed the demand; 2) Characteristics of a “good prostitute;” 3) Comparing women, specifically, who are “forced” versus “ones that choose;” 4) Understanding the exploitation of trafficked women and girls and; 5) Violence against trafficked women and girls.

These themes were chosen based upon a careful review of transcripts that were coded under an open coding scheme grounded in the conversations had with all participants. Then, similar to a grounded theory approach (Cobin and Strauss, 1990, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), both researchers engaged in comparing and contrasting the data in order to analyze further. Therefore, analysis of interview data was ongoing where examples of data collected was compared and contrasted (within/between each transcript/participant) and then further compared and contrasted to research on human trafficking and sex trafficking at the time (please see Troshynski and Blank, 2008). Original codes derived from interviews with human traffickers are included herein. Data excerpts presented within this chapter are reproduced exactly as spoken by respondents.

Based on this collaborative comparative and iterative process, what will be documented is evidence to suggest that hegemonic patriarchal social and cultural attitudes rooted in the local context contribute to violence against trafficked women and girls and help maintain the international sex industry.

### *Perspectives of Clients and Prostituted Women and Girls: A Double Standard?*

First, it is important to understand the context of the international sex industry to which the participants navigate. Human traffickers’ perceptions of clien-

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12. Throughout this chapter, “women and girls” are used together to denote the reality that the vast majority of sex trafficking victims are women older than age 18 and girls younger than age 17. It should be noted that, for all participants, they regularly discussed the differences between “women” and “girls” based on the legality of the age of consent in the United Kingdom, which was 14 at the time (2003) and is now aged 16.

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tele—men who seek out and solicit sex—suggest that these activities are part of a range of gendered relationships that both govern and constitute the sex industry as patriarchal and exploitive. Findings portray three very similar dialogues with few discrepancies. Participants talk about how soliciting sex is a form of addiction; an act considered unhealthy and wrong but done anyway. Slight divergences in opinions varied due to one of our participants working mainly as a pimp.

When asked to discuss his perceptions of the clients associated with the sex industry, Ahmet started the conversation by stating, “I don’t think that any woman should be a prostitute,” and that he had never been to a “prostitute” before because, “I can wank myself better ... [and] having a wank is safer that way.” When asked what he meant, he responded,

I agree that men go to prostitutes, but I don’t agree that they should.  
At the end of the day, if the women want to do it, it is better than having the fucking guy go out and rape someone.

Here, a justification for why men become clients in the sex industry is proposed as something not necessarily good but needed to curb potential violent acts. Ahmet continued to discuss his thoughts on the addictive association between men and sex, “Men go out and feel like they have to do it [have sex] and then afterwards they feel like assholes.” He offered an example:

It’s like drinking, you know it’s bad for you, but you do it anyway.  
You keep on drinking and in the morning you have a hangover and you feel like shit. It’s the same thing with going to prostitutes.

This clarification suggests that, regardless of if they know it is “wrong,” men solicit sex because it is readily available and desired. For this trafficker, women and girls are paid to perform sexual services. In his opinion, paid services are better than the vice: A man that desires sexual satisfaction, receives none, and then violates someone.

After discussing his background as a bouncer at a cabaret who occasionally trafficked women and girls, Dmitri voiced similar assumptions about men’s addictions to sex: “The men need prostitutes. I don’t know. They have developed severe addictions to prostitutes.” When asked to explain why he thought clients are addicted, he continued, “Prostitutes are dirty for the simple fact that so many men use them as just sexual satisfaction. The men need prostitutes. [But] I would never marry one.” Curious, about the comment of marriage, we asked him to explain this statement further,

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I've seen so many prostitutes. We used to work with 30 and 20 of them would work every night. Most of them used to have boyfriends, husbands with children [pause], so for me it was dirty, and I couldn't imagine being married to them. I'm a little old fashioned.

Again, like Ahmet, Dmitri conferred his opinions on men who solicit women and girls for sex. For these two traffickers, an apparent contradiction is articulated: Men “need” sex, they are “addicted” to sex, yet a double standard is demonstrated by these participants calling the solicited women and girls (and not the men/clients) “dirty” and never to be married.

Alternatively, in talking about clients, Cyril revealed different opinions. Working primarily as a pimp, he said, “Prostitutes aren't dirty. They always go and have checkups. They take care of themselves. Everyone is clean except the drug users.” When Cyril was asked to talk about clients and whether or not he has repeat clients, he substituted a different viewpoint. “Depends. It's not a fast, quick thing. Prostitution can be quick or it can be a weekend thing like with an escort service.” Without being prompted, Cyril quickly ended with this statement: “All prostitutes can be respected. Depends on their personal character. At the end of the day, you should respect them. They have guts; they make money.”

### *Characteristics of a “Good Prostitute”*

Just as Cyril mentioned that respecting the women and girls was dependent on “personal character,” other conversations revealed similar opinions based on characteristics associated with who traffickers believe are “good” and “bad” women and girls to traffic.

When asked what they look for in women and girls to traffic, Ahmet immediately noted age as being one of the most important characteristics. He explained, “It can start from age fourteen to fifteen regardless of the laws. Depends on how developed the women are. Being realistic, around the age of fifteen.” When asked what age was too old, Ahmet said, “Women should stop prostituting in the forty-one to fifty age bracket.” During our interview with Dmitri, he informed us that girls younger than the ideal age of fifteen are also in high demand. He explained, “Girls under age ten can start. But I don't necessarily agree with it.”

When Dmitri was asked whether or not there is a cut off age, he said, “No age is old enough to stop prostituting. So, no.” When talking with Cyril, he told us that women “should be around nineteen to twenty-one” and that “women should quit when they are around sixty.” Even though nineteen is three years older than the age of consent in London, this participant informed us that

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most clients request a woman “between the 19 to 21 year bracket.” Overall, there are noted discrepancies: Ahmet and Dmitri both suggested that girls age fourteen to fifteen and younger are in high demand yet Cyril said older was better.

When asked to describe if there are any other characteristics that are important to consider while trafficking, Ahmet quickly responded with a list of physical features: “They must be tall, good looking, nice boobs, and young. As young as possible.” Alternatively, Dmitri and Cyril discussed personal traits and attitudes. Dmitri suggested that they should be, “Professional, discrete, pretty,” while Cyril mentioned that they should always be, “Respectful and able to make money.” Both participants were asked to provide a follow-up example. Cyril noted, “Something exotic, something different, younger women will do,” while Dmitri said that, for him, “It’s always about the money. It’s about what makes the money.” When asked to help explain, “What makes the money,” Dmitri replied, “Pretty. Pretty will do.”

After discussing desirable characteristics, participants were then asked to talk about some “bad” qualities as well. Ahmet explained, “These women, they get sold like a bunch of sacks of potatoes, but if she is ugly she won’t do or she would be really cheap.” He clarified, “A good looking prostitute could get up to 6 or 700 [British] pounds a night.” This statement confirmed the reality that physical attractiveness equates to a higher purchasing price and a monetarily rewarding job for the trafficker.

In talking about “bad” qualities associated with trafficked women and girls, Cyril quickly responded, “There are none.” When asked the same question, Dmitri also shook his head in a negative and stated, “None that I can think of.” Upon further questioning, Dmitri thought of some bad qualities: “Not reliable; Piece of shit.” Cyril maintained his stance and insisted, “No. None that I can think of.” He continued, “Like I said, being a human, you respect them. They have guts, and they make money.” He explained that there is “also a demand for underage girls, boys . . .” he laughed quietly and looked at us and noted, “It doesn’t mean that it is always girls.”

Here again we find dissimilar opinions. All participants agreed that “good” qualities were associated with characteristics in high demand. Therefore, younger, pretty girls, “regardless of local laws,” were sought after even though Cyril believed they should be older. Throughout interviews with Cyril, he never confirmed whether or not the women “working” for him were underage. However, his quotes highlight other empirical evidence suggesting that many young girls *and* boys are actually in high-demand.

Interestingly enough, when asked about positive and negative descriptors of women and girls trafficked, Ahmet discussed physical features only while Dmitri

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and Cyril talked about personal character traits. For Cyril (the pimp) and Dmitri (the cabaret bouncer), they both had an easier time discussing desirable personalities associated with what they deemed to be “good” and “in demand.” On the contrary, Ahmet was quick to only point out physical features and monetary values associated with such “good” and “bad” appearances. For the full-time trafficker (Ahmet), women and girls are merely good or bad looking bodies, priced accordingly.

### *Comparing Women Who Are “Forced” to “Ones That Choose”*

Participants categorized perceptions about trafficked women and girls into different types based on personal experiences with: 1) “local prostitutes”—described as local British women and girls who “choose” to work as prostitutes; and 2) “foreign women/girls”—described as women and girls trafficked from another location and “forced” to work in the sex industry. During each interview, participants were asked to talk more about experiences with these two groupings. Ahmet explained,

The ones that are forced into it, I have respect for because of their situation. The ones that choose, I don’t think they should get any respect whatsoever. I see them dying in the streets and I wouldn’t help them out.

Ahmet continued, “Prostitutes I wouldn’t think would be professionals just because they are fucking a lot of men. They have their ways to make men cum quicker and get rid of them, but I don’t have any respect for them.” After this comment, we asked him to talk more about respect and what he thought about women and girls in the sex industry. He said, “Respect? Yes and no. Like I said, the ones that are forced into it, I have respect for. The ones that choose, I don’t think that they should get any respect.”

To supplement, we asked Ahmet to explain why he thought these women and girls “choose” to be a prostitute. He then said, “Because of drugs or [because they are] too lazy to work.” Making yet another comparison, Ahmet said that foreign women and girls, “... don’t know they are getting into it, [they] have no choice whatsoever, [and they] have kids to support.” He resumed,

Foreign women need the money to live. Their government don’t pay them enough and they don’t support them and there is no international law protecting them from doing something they really don’t know about. If they go to the coppers [the police], they are as well as dead.

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Ahmet's thoughts on the perceived differences between local and foreign women and girls in the sex industry are akin to broader stereotypes associated with women and girls who supposedly "choose" to enter prostitution compared to those that are "forced" into the sex industry.

For this participant, trafficked women and girls are unaware of what will happen to them when they arrive at the final destination. He continued to explain that once a trafficker picks them up and delivers them to their first destination, their chances for escaping and finding help are also greatly diminished. Based on our conversations with Ahmet, it was clear that he found it easier to respect those women and girls trafficked from foreign countries—those "foreign prostitutes"—an interesting finding when we consider that he is directly involved with the trafficking of these foreign women and girls. For this trafficker, even though he is involved with the trafficking of foreign women and girls, his verbal respect is freely acknowledged *only* for those women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation and not for those localized women and girls that—as this trafficker suggests—"chooses" to work for the sex industry.

Dmitri and Cyril did not necessarily share the same opinions. When asked to talk about his experience with women and girls he trafficked, Dmitri said, "I respect them. Not all of them. Depends on their personal character." Cyril's response was, "At the end of the day, they are all human, aren't they? It's a job at the end of the day. Some prostitutes are educated people." Once more, Cyril always made a point to let us know that he "respected" the women who "worked" for him. When asked if there was a difference between "local" women and girls and others trafficked in from "foreign" countries, he continued the conversation yet failed to give us a direct answer. Instead he said, "Yes. Yes. I talk, I like to be friends. You have to be able to talk to the people who are working for you."

Here, multiple categories are in play with one another: Not only are characteristics associated with attractiveness ranked in order based on demand but so too are trafficker's notions of who should be respected. Crude stereotypes serve in prioritizing "good" women and girls and also reflect socially constructed hierarchies of acceptability. Therefore, comparing women and girls who are "forced" to "ones that choose" to work in the sex industry, seems to be intimately linked with citizenship, ethnicity, and race.

### *Understanding the Exploitation of Trafficked Women And Girls*

Throughout each interview, it became apparent that the exploitation of trafficked "foreign" women and girls is an important element of the international sex industry. We become interested in whether or not human traffickers un-

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derstand the experiences of women and girls they traffic. We were curious why they continued to traffic “foreign” women and girls. Conversations resulted in a range of justifications associated with meeting the local demand. Requesting a specific “type” of female body was intimately attached to a demand for “something different” and something “exotic.” These requests were best met by supplying the local sex industry with what these traffickers referred to as “foreign women/girls.”

At the time of these interviews, every participant articulated an increased demand for “foreign women/girls” or “foreign prostitutes” as Cyril called them. In discussing requests for foreign women and girls, Ahmet said, “The demand is quite big. A lot of businessmen are around and they pay. Desperate, old men, ugly men use them a lot, and their wives are in a different country.” However, Ahmet also noted, “American businessmen are the most consistent clients.” When asked to explain how large the assumed demand (for foreign women/girls) is, Ahmet told us that the average client is,

White, Black, anyone. We even had a Priest come in and ask for a Russian girl. A lot of military guys come in. The American soldiers ask for foreign women. They like Chinese, specifically. They ask for the Asians, but the biggest demand is the Chinese. I’ve heard friends say police officers, but I’ve never seen it.

As this quote demonstrates, there is a range of clients from all different backgrounds requesting “foreign women/girls.” Even though Ahmet said that he had not personally seen police officers as clients, he did say that, “Police do drugs and use whore houses as well. I have a friend. He’s a copper and he sniffs a lot of Charlie [cocaine] and he tells me this.” Cyril also mentioned a similar array of clientele: “Yeah, you get regulars. They offer good services. Judges, lawyers, police, guys off the street, the young guy who wants to break his virginity, any walk of life really. Married men mostly.” Disconcerting enough, when all of the participants separately discussed their clientele, they all mentioned local law enforcement officials, “White, American, businessmen,” and a continuous demand for “foreign” or “different” women and girls.

Both Ahmet and Cyril explained that, “All types of men go to prostitutes,” but they all want, “something different.” When asked to specify what “something different” meant, Ahmet clarified, “Eastern European or Asian women because they are exotic.” Dmitri also acknowledged that, “Men who use prostitutes ask for something different than themselves.” When asked to specify what “something different” meant, Dmitri indicated, “Men look for something exotic, something different. Younger women will do, too.”

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Ahmet re-articulated what he personally observed as a trend in demanding “foreign women/girls,”

A lot of people like to shag foreign girls because they do a bit more. They are more into it. Men want something different. It’s like eating the same food every day. You want something different.

When asked to talk specifically about the demand for foreign versus local women and girls, similar to our conversations with Ahmet, Cyril used a comparable food analogy. He laughed, looked at us, and asked, “Can you imagine just having bacon for the rest of your life? Some want to try a kebab.”

Ahmet also provided accompanying information about increased demand and observed monetary changes when he said, “Look. Three years ago [the year 2000], the price for a good-looking Russian girl was about 1500 [British] pounds plus the couple grand getting her over here [to London].” To further explain the demand side of this example, Ahmet proceeded, “Now [the year 2003], it cost around 4,000 British Pounds to buy a good-looking Russian girl.” After this statement, he quickly added, “and prostitutes make about a thousand *dollars* a month” (emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Ahmet explained, “Foreign girls can’t go to the police because they’ll get deported back. They need the money more. The pimps tell them to satisfy the customer because they want them coming back.” He alleged,

This technique works very well because when you buy a foreign [woman/girl] you know her family, where she comes from. You can force ‘em. They don’t know any better about the world. They grow up beaten and bossed around. They don’t know any better. Pimps can’t stress the English girls a lot. They have more chances of getting nicked [arrested].

This detailed conversation alludes to the idea that “foreign women/girls” experience multiple layers of disadvantage and abuse yet they are also highly desired and constantly in demand.

From the perspective of the client, foreign women and girls fulfill a desire to experience “something different.” For human traffickers, women and girls who are trafficked from other countries are not only easier to control, but they fulfill a growing demand for “something different,” “something exotic.” For Cyril,

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13. During this portion of the interview, we quickly noticed this monetary difference between pounds and dollars. When asked why the United States’ Dollar was used as an example, Ahmet said, “The girls can use the dollars. The pounds can’t really be used.”



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the pimp, not only do these trafficked women and girls make a larger profit but, because they cannot speak the local language and are afraid of deportation or harm done to their family, the risk of being caught is greatly minimized.

Even though participants acknowledge “respect” for “foreign women/girls,” they admit they make the most money from trafficking these women and girls. A supply and demand connection is articulated; the demand includes a young (the younger the better) female body that is different (not White) and/or considered “exotic” (preferably “Asian”), submissive (not a local; unable to speak English) but still sexually advantageous (able to “satisfy” customers making sure that they “come back” again). Foreign women and girls who are trafficked have the greatest demand, are the easiest to control, are the least likely to escape, and are the most profitable. Therefore, for these participants, making money trumps any feelings of proclaimed respect.

### *Violence Against Trafficked Women and Girls*

Participants explained the difference between “local” and “foreign” women and girls in the sex industry as primarily being about choice (i.e. “local prostitutes choose to do this work”) or force (i.e. “foreign women and girls have no choice”). All agreed that a demand for foreign women and girls was the key reason why sex trafficking continued. Here, participants supply the local demand with foreign women and girls they “respected” yet trafficked anyways knowing they would be “forced” to work in the sex industry. Not only do these interviews help articulate contradictions and justifications for trafficking women and girls, but they also give insights into their perceptions on violence used while trafficking.

When asked to talk about whether or not he witnessed any violence while trafficking, Ahmet shook his head “Yes,” and said, “I think it is the control bit. The pimps don’t have it easy and take it out on the women. People involved with that thing have a violent past and get upset and take it out on the women because they are there.” He continued, “The pimps set the money and the traffickers get paid from the pimps. They [the pimps] are violent to show control.” Ahmet explained further,

You have to be violent to be a pimp. There have been times when the girl likes the client and they run off. The pimp won’t let that happen. They go out and look for them and if they find them, they would kill them both. They put a lot of money and time into finding them. The thing is they don’t want her to run away and tell the police. For example, this guy in a city in Russia takes the girls from the city and sells them for money. Then if the girls run, it gets back to the girls’ families and

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they go back and threaten to kill their family. The girls do anything the pimps ask.

He continued,

The only thing that stopped me from being a pimp was because I can't hit women, I just can't. Back then I would of [become a pimp] if I didn't have to hit the women. They [the pimps] knew me and wouldn't hit the women around me. I didn't allow that, I wouldn't have it.

Ahmet believed that trafficked women and girls become victims of violence because of their circumstances being trafficked, because of their families, and simply "because they are there." In this industry, violence is justified due to the pimps having a "violent past" and trying to control a range of actors (local women/girls, foreign women/girls, and traffickers bringing in women/girls). Even though he too, "had a violent past," Ahmet described violence as just another part of the environment.

Ahmet believed that there was never a reason to be physically aggressive; yet, he also mentioned that he would employ verbal threats to women and girls he trafficked. In comparing himself and his actions to typical acts of "violent pimps," Ahmet further justifies his role as a human trafficker:

I once had to use a gun. I had two kilos of coke in the back of the car and was worried about that. The cops pulled us over and she [the trafficked woman] started crying. So I had to put a gun to her head and tell her that I'd kill her if she didn't shut up.

This trafficker's position as a human trafficker *and* a trafficker of drugs and guns greatly helps explain the gross violence experienced by trafficked women and girls.

When asked if he ever witnessed any violence, Dmitri, also nodded his head, "Yes," and said, "Violence is the only thing that works." When asked to clarify whether or not he would ever be violent, he slowly answered, "I don't know. I suppose." When asked why he thought violence occurred, he suggested,

Because of the attitude that men have about the women. She sells love for money and the men think they can do whatever with her. It's all about the money. Very experienced pimps have told me that violence is the only thing that works. It's about the money.

Cyril, on the other hand, avoided any questions having to do with violence. He expressed an alternative viewpoint and mentioned, "Women who were pimps

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can be violent at times. They just do it. It's their job. They are a pimp and it's their job." Right after making this comment, he was also quick to say that he was never violent to those women who "worked" for him but that he knew "many who were."

Human traffickers understand violence against trafficked women and girls as actions intimately associated with their precarious status as "foreign"—not citizens to the country they are trafficked to. For example, when Ahmet discussed his experience with the young Russian he trafficked, he knew that she was coming from an extremely impoverished region with limited economic resources. He also knew that she was oblivious to any social support services or legal protections afforded to her. He also assumed that she did not know the English language.

In sum, these participants understand violence as occurring on several different levels: First, in order to successfully complete their trip, traffickers employ threats of violence (and engage in physical violence). Secondly, and primarily due to the status of these trafficked women and girls as being "foreign" and in high demand, pimps regularly use violence as a means of power and control. And lastly, perhaps because of the stereotypical gendered norms associated with the sex industry, violence—either carried out by the clients or by the pimps—is just part of "what you pay for." It happens to women and girls "because they are there."

## Discussion

To begin the discussion, we would like to note that the contradictions between participants of this study was, and continues to be, perplexing. Granted, this was an exploratory study where we were able to interview a handful of individuals who trafficked and worked in the local sex industry or were still trafficking at the time of the study. If we were able to meet with and interview more human traffickers, including other actors working in and/or associated with the local sex industry, perhaps we would see some of this variance develop into more thematic findings. Either way, what we learn from these conversations is that human trafficking and sex trafficking is a complex, clandestine phenomenon with a range of actors subsuming various roles with an array of intentions and an assortment justifications.

Overall, we surmise that these variances are most likely due to the unique backgrounds of each participant, their primary role within the industry, how long they have worked in the industry, and their unique justifications for trafficking. For example, in comparing local and "foreign" women, Ahmet expressed more empathy for those women who were trafficked in to a foreign country. This could be because of his own background fleeing his home coun-

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try and his precarious citizenship status at the time of the interview. Similarly, these participants had varied opinions regarding age of consent, age of entering, ageing out, etc. This variance, again, could be because of the possibly conflicting norms within their own country of origin (Ahmet and Dmitri, who were not citizens) compared to the norms within London at the time (Cyril, who was a citizen) (please see Blank, 2012 and 2013).

As we heard the varied opinions of the traffickers, it still remained clear that violence and abuse was “part of the business” and happened to women and girls “because they were there.” While we believe it is possible the participants may have curbed what they shared with two female researchers, the message was clear that violence and abuse were routinely used to feed the demand.

Specifically, human traffickers’ perceptions of sex and violence suggest that there are multiple layers of abuse occurring. Violence against trafficked women and girls is understood as a range of actions taking place at various points in time. First, violence occurs via the *supply* side where “exotic” and “different” women and girls are unremittingly requested. Regardless of their primary role within the international sex industry, recruiters, traffickers, middle men and pimps all work to supply “foreign” women and girls requested by clients. In order to meet this *demand*, “foreign” women and girls are purposely sought after for their “exotic” feminine bodies. They are then trafficked to locations characterized with patriarchal values that condone violent behavior through justification and normalization of violence.

Within this local context there are also several violent double standards occurring. First, *clients’ actions* are not only considered normal but are justified as well. Additionally, these clients are said to pay for sex because they are “addicted” or “severely addicted” and desire “something different.” Equated to binge drinking, clients’ actions are considered impulsive where “you know it’s bad for you but you do it anyway.” Secondly, *pimps’ actions* are also justified because they “have it bad,” or “come from a violent past.” On the other hand, girls and women’s actions are viewed as “dirty” and “lazy,” where “selling sex for money” has violent consequences. For these participants, justifications are pathologies based on gendered norms.

Meanwhile, traffickers’ actions are self-proclaimed as “just a job” that is akin to a taxi service where it is all about “making money.” Traffickers pick and choose the job based on profit compared to risk allowing them to further justify their actions as not being “as bad as . . .” those committed by clients and pimps. Furthermore, traffickers interviewed compound any differences between—what they call “local” and “foreign” prostituted women and girls. Even if they “felt bad for” or “had more respect for” those “foreign” women and girls

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they trafficked, the fact remains that *all* of these women and girls end up in the same sexualized and highly violent arena.

Within this context, misogynistic attitudes, coupled with gender discrimination, cultural and ethnic stereotypes, and blatant racism mix together in a hodge-podge sex industry promoted as either “entertainment” or “tourism” for wealthy “White, male customers,” who are predominately “rich Americans.” Male dominance is continuously (re)produced and (re)enforced through the use of sex and violence. Indeed, the patriarchal world system is thriving on and sustains the international trafficking of women and girls for the global sex industry where an anthology of complex power relations, ideologies, and significant global forces contribute to the phenomenon; all of which consecutively produce women and girls as nothing more than a sexual object.

## Conclusion

To conclude, even though the study of human trafficking is still considered a growing field of academic inquiry, there is much more work to be done. What has transpired here highlights the great importance of qualitative research rooted in the local context. Findings from interviews with human traffickers support previous research that discusses the targeting of women and girls from areas where there is a lack of access to education and equitable employment opportunities. Additionally, this research further promotes the salient reality that discrimination, racism, and sexism are underlying issues at the heart of human trafficking. Indeed, patterns of global inequality, access, and sexism are intimately associated with the trafficking of women and girls from “source” countries to “destination” countries, and this pattern helps bolster an environment where traffickers are able to coerce and abuse those trafficked. Furthermore, these patterns of global gendered violence are also acted out at the local level and to those local women and girls who are also caught up in the sex trafficking “business.”

Therefore, this chapter contributes to broader violence against women and girls research that exemplifies long-held social and cultural traditions associated with male perceptions of sex and dominance. Future studies must focus on racism, gendered stereotypes, and classist attitudes regarding what the hegemonic norm (here, White men) considers “exotic” including the assumptions associated with “local” and “foreign” women and girls who are sexually exploited.

Based on these findings and conclusive remarks, we believe that a holistic and comprehensive strategy is needed: one that is both preventative and reac-

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tive. This policy should be a long-term, forward thinking commitment that pays close attention to the nexus of supply (i.e. factors associated with where the girls and women are before they are trafficked), demand (i.e. factors associated with where the girls and women are trafficked to), and law (successes and shortcomings at the local, national, and international level).

For example, in thinking about supply—efforts to end sex trafficking, specifically, must include an all-inclusive plan to eliminate gender discrimination at the local, state, national, and global level. Gender inequality encourages sexism, and sexism promotes violence. Then, as highlighted by our participants' candid remarks, there is a demand that fuels the trafficking of girls and women for sex. Therefore, a campaign to increase the public's understanding of the complex realities of sex trafficking is also needed. This should also include a conversation about masculinity (at the local level) and perceptions of sex and abuse. Furthermore, very specific efforts to curb the demand for commercial sex and sex tourism are necessary. Additionally, laws that fail to encourage gender equality via access to education, health care, and employment opportunities, contribute to the problem. Furthermore, laws that fail to protect women and girls from violence (i.e. inadequate and/or complicit law enforcement, lack of penalties) further render them susceptible.

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