

CHILD TRAFFICKING IN MEDIA REPORTING IN SERBIA *

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Abstract. *This paper explores the correlation between child trafficking and the media discourse on child trafficking. Child trafficking is one of the most widespread forms of organized crime where potential victims are children as a particularly vulnerable category of persons. Media are communication and information tools which play an important role in reporting about different events and phenomena and creating an image about them among the general public. The author of this paper analyzes 100 media reports published in the most widely read printed and electronic media in the Republic of Serbia in order to respond to several questions: a) whether the media in Serbia responsibly and ethically report on this important issue; b) whether they use their power and influence to exert an impact on the suppression, prevention, and raising awareness among the general public; and c) whether they are actively employed as a tool in the fight against child trafficking. The analysis includes quantitative and qualitative analysis of media texts, classified according to media genres, quantitative analysis based on the reported topics and reasons for reporting, and the countries which the media reports refer to, as well as a comparative quantitative analysis of media reports based on official statistical data about the methods of child exploitation, victims' gender, and internal and foreign child trafficking.*

Key words: *organized crime, human trafficking, child trafficking, exploitation, media, media reporting.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

THE CONCEPT OF TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN

As a form of child abuse, the term “trafficking” implies situations of taking control over a child for exploitation purposes by a person who is not a parent or legal guardian, in pursuit of obtaining material resources or satisfying other needs and interests at the expense of the

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needs, interests and personality of the child. Various forms of exploitation, abuse, neglect and endangerment of children's well-being partially overlap with the field of child trafficking. Trafficking includes situations in which a child is separated from his/her immediate environment by various means or circumstances, most often for labor exploitation, disposal of the child as property, abuse of power or a state of vulnerability with or without the use of means of control and coercion (Žegarac, Baucal, Gvozden, 2005:16).

Pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)², a child is any person under the age of 18 (Article 1 CRC);³ thus, any such person may be a victim of human (child) trafficking. After the adoption of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its Protocols (2000)⁴, UN General Assembly supplemented the UNTOC by adopting the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol)⁵, which offers the most comprehensive definition of trafficking in persons.⁶ According to this Protocol, a child is any person under the age of 18 (Article 3 d), and "trafficking in persons" entails recruiting, transporting, transferring, hiding or receiving a child for exploitation, even if it does not include any of the forms of exploitation outlined in the definition of human trafficking in Article 3 a) of the Protocol.⁷

2. MEDIA AND MEDIA "FRAMING" OF CHILD TRAFFICKING

The media represent a set of instruments that act as intermediaries in communication and information exchange. In Serbian law, the concept of media was defined as "a means of public information that transmits editorially shaped information, ideas and opinions and other content intended for public distribution and an unspecified number of users in words, images, or sound" (Article 29 § 1 of the Public Information and Media Act; hereinafter: PIM Act).⁸ It refers to daily and periodical newspapers, news agencies, radio and television programs and electronic editions of those media, and independent electronic editions (internet pages or internet portals) registered in the Media Registry (Article 29 § 2 PIM Act).

² The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 44/25 on 20 November 1989; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

³ The Act on Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Official Gazette of the SFRY - International Treaties*, no. 15/90, and the *Official Gazette of the SFRY - International Agreements*, no. 4/96 and 2/97.

⁴ The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols were adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 55/25 on 15 Nov. 2000; <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html> In the SFRY, they were recognized by the Act on Ratification of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Additional Protocols, *Official Gazette of the SFRY - International Treaties*, no. 6/2001.

⁵ The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women or Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Palermo, 12-15. December 2000.

⁶ While criticizing the existing definitions, some authors dealing with human trafficking do not provide a comprehensive definition. They believe that the deficiency of the existing definitions lies precisely in the possibility of ambiguous interpretation of the term "exploitation", and they emphasize the connection with prostitution and ask what makes a position vulnerable (Brunovski, *et al*, 2008: 59).

⁷ Article 3 a) states that "trafficking in persons" (human beings) means recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring and receiving persons, through the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or one's vulnerable position, or giving or receiving money or benefits to obtain the consent of a person who has control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of other persons or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or service, slavery or a relationship similar to slavery, servitude or organ removal (Article 3a) of the Protocol).

⁸ Public Information and Media Act (hereinafter: PIM Act), *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 83/2014, 58/2015 and 12/2016 - authentic interpretation.

The presentation of some social phenomenon to the general public is done by "cognitive framing", which represents cognitive structures used for interpreting how a person perceives his/her environment and the phenomena that occur in it; thus, "frames" are an instrument which allows us to give meaning to different facts. In the media context, "framing" refers to: a) how politicians and decision-makers in the country communicate their decisions to attract media attention; b) how journalists create messages based on organizational guidelines and professional values, and c) how the audience (general public) interprets, questions and thinks about those media messages (Sanford, Martínez, Weitzer, 2016, in: Đukić, 2021:46-47). When it comes to victims of human trafficking, media frames created the concept of the *ideal victim* (Austin, Farrell, O'Brien, 2016), as an individual or a category of individuals who, when threatened, quickly acquire a full and legitimate victim status (Christie, 1986); this group includes individuals who are perceived as vulnerable, helpless, innocent and deserving sympathy, and thus attract greater media attention, generate collective sadness and can influence changes in social and criminal practice (Greer, 2017, in: Đukić, 2021: 48-49).

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF ANALYSIS OF MEDIA REPORTING ON CHILD TRAFFICKING

The analysis of media reporting is a useful tool for all experts dealing with various social phenomena. This kind of analysis provides a "sketch" of the observed phenomenon, on the basis of which it is possible to understand the importance that society attaches to that topic and how a certain topic is presented to the public. On the other hand, such analysis may be a good starting point for cooperation between the media and organizations dealing with a specific problem. Due to the complexity of the phenomenon of child trafficking, the presentation in the media is diverse and there is a great possibility of a diverse approach in the analysis of these contents.

This paper will present a quantitative and qualitative analysis of media reports (published in the most widely read printed and electronic media in the Republic of Serbia)⁹ according to media genres, a quantitative analysis according to the reported topics and the reasons for reporting, and a comparative quantitative analysis of media reports, with reference to official statistical data on the following parameters: the method of exploitation, the victims' gender, and internal and foreign trafficking (the Center for Protection of Human Trafficking Victims)¹⁰

3.1. Analysis of media reporting on child trafficking according to the media genre

Although some local authors (Tomić, 2012)¹¹ make a distinction between certain genres, classifying media texts into informative (factographic) texts, interpretive texts, and analytical (research) texts, a generally accepted typology still does not exist (Mršević, 2019:63). Yet, this classification may be applied in the analysis of media reporting on child trafficking.

⁹ Gemius Audience (2023). Country: Serbia, Overview (website for traffic tacking system), available at <https://rating.gemius.com/rs/overview> (accessed on 28.2.2023)

¹⁰ Center for the Protection of Human Trafficking Victims (2024). Statistički podaci (Statistical Reports, 2014-2024); available at <https://centarzztlj.rs/statisticki-podaci/>

¹¹ For more on this issue, see: Tomić B. (2012.) Uvod u medije (Introduction to Media), Čigoja, Beograd.

Interpretive texts are most common when reporting on child trafficking. They are usually written after the perpetrators are located and arrested, which sometimes occurs after several decades, especially when it comes to cases of trafficking newborns for adoption. What characterizes all interpretive texts is the use of colloquial vocabulary and sensationalist headlines to attract the general public attention as much as possible (e.g. "mother from hell", "face of evil", "horrific crime", "shocking confession", "bizarre", "horror", "scandal", "choose the child", "baby farms", etc.). It is particularly devastating that child trafficking is often described as an event rather than a crime, with a focus on sensationalist content (information related to the perpetrators' arrests) rather than preventive or educational information. The focus is on a "good story" and a sensation that will be talked about, and not on raising awareness about the real scale of this global problem, possible solutions, prevention and legal action. It is also worth noting that experts' comments on child trafficking, which have a great importance and potential in the media space, are rarely or almost never included in this type of journalistic texts. Information about where child trafficking victims can seek help, as the most important information and a condition *sine qua non* in the fight against child trafficking, can hardly be found in this type of texts.

Short *informative texts* are increasingly common in both printed and electronic media. These texts usually comprise sensationalist headlines and a very short description of the event, possibly including a brief statement of one of the actors as the focal point in the text. This type of texts are most often present when the domestic media reports on child trafficking that takes place abroad, most likely because in such cases there is a lack of relevant information; thus, reporters try to cover the scarce information with sensational headlines and subtitles to attract the readers' attention and create a sensation from a short story. The information provided in such texts is without additional data, either about child trafficking or the participants involved. Yet, the preventive role of such texts is significant because they provide a short and clear message to the public that the police have quickly and effectively arrested the perpetrators or that the competent public prosecutor's offices prosecute such crimes by initiating criminal proceedings.

Analytical (research) texts are characterized above all by expertise, correctness and ethical presentation of the global problem of child trafficking. In terms of content, such texts are aimed at raising awareness about the issue, educating the general public (like a lesson on child trafficking), warning about the prevalence of this phenomenon, and providing a true picture about the serious problem in society. These reports are not characterized by media shortcomings such as sensationalism, superficiality, misunderstanding of the phenomenon of child trafficking, violation of the presumption of innocence, implicit or explicit disclosure of the victim's identity, and violation of journalistic ethics, which is often the case with interpretive and informative texts. The good intentions of editors and journalists are combined with the engagement of expert, competent and professionally respected interlocutors, the use of research data and verified sources, all of which contribute to a higher quality of these texts and encourage critical thinking, socially responsible conduct, further education and preventive action. As a rule, such texts are always signed; editors' encourage visible authorship because they are convinced of the quality and importance of such texts (Mršević, 2019:75).

The differences between informative and interpretive texts (on the one hand) and analytical texts (on the other hand) will be best illustrated in the following subheadings, which include examples of these types of texts. In the research sample of 100 analyzed media texts about child trafficking published in Serbian printed and electronic media in the

last decade, only 25 texts are analytical texts, while the remaining 75 texts are informative and interpretive texts (Chart 1).

3.1.1. A representative example of interpretive media texts

The text titled *“They wanted to adopt a boy from an orphanage in Ukraine, now they are at the center of an investigation into child trafficking: The couple's hell* (Telegraf, 2022)¹² is a story about a married couple from the USA who wanted to adopt a child from a Ukrainian orphanage. The story reflects a “race” to be the first to report on “breaking and sensational news” from the war zone. The sensational impression is reinforced by the word “hell” in the title; in addition to the story about the married couple, the text also refers to the impact of war on inter-country adoptions, and the potential danger of increased exploitation and trafficking of children. From the legal perspective, the positive aspects of this text are the indication that war may be a factor that can contribute to the increase of this form of crime, particularly considering the fact that Ukraine is not a signatory to the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in the field of International Adoption (1993),¹³ and the legal consequences that may arise thereof. Images of children hiding in the basements and children with cardboard guns add a touch of sensation to this text. Yet, neither this text nor any subsequent texts offered the epilogue of this story, nor did they report on the investigation that was launched in this case.

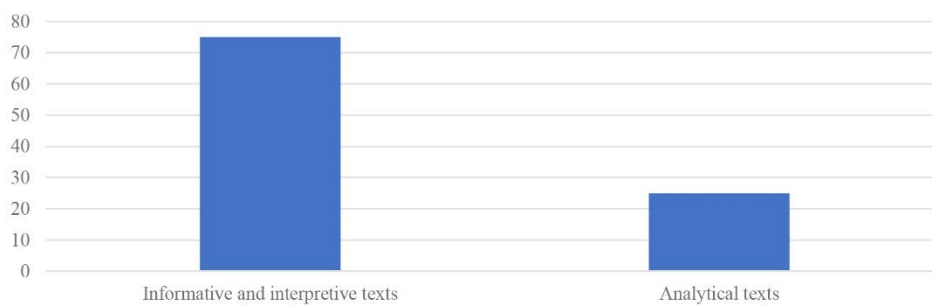


Chart 1. Informative and Interpretive texts, and Analytical texts
Source: Prepared by author (based on research results)

3.1.2. A representative example of informative media texts

The text titled *“MONSTEROUS ATTEMPT TO TRAFFICK CHILDREN! Approached a mother in a store and asked her to sell a baby* (video) (Alo, 2022)¹⁴ is a story about a dramatic event in a supermarket and attempted child trafficking in the US state of Texas. The dramatic headline written in capital letters, including the word “monstrous” and an

¹² Telegraf (2022). Hteli da usvoje dečaka iz sirotišta u Ukrajini, sad su u centru istrage o trgovini decom: Pakao bračnog para, Telegraf (daily newspaper), 26.4.2022; available at <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/svet/3489570-pokusali-da-usvoje-decaka-iz-sirotis-u-ukrajini-sad-su-u-centru-istrage-o-trgovini-decom-pakao-married-couple>

¹³ Act on Ratification of the Convention on Child Protection and Cooperation in the Field of International Adoption, *Official Gazette of the RS - International Treaties*, No. 12 of October 31, 2013.

¹⁴ Alo (2022). MONSTRUOZAN POKUŠAJ TRGOVINE DECOM! Prišla majci u prodavnici i tražila da joj proda bebu (VIDEO), 29.1.2022: <https://www.alo.rs/svet/planeta/591837/monstruozno-trgovina-bebama-otmica-hapsenje/vest>

indication about a video recording of the event, was followed by a brief note about haggling and price gouging after the mother refused to sell her child. Then, the journalist describes that a woman (aged 49) approached a young mother in the supermarket, offered her \$250,000 for her son and, when the mother refused, "raised" the price to \$500,000 explaining that she liked the boy's blond hair and blue eyes. In this text, the identity of the suspected offender is completely revealed, by stating her full name and surname, which constitutes a violation of the presumption of innocence. The dramatic impression is reinforced by the short statements of the mother about the events in the supermarket and the short statement of the policewoman about the incident during the suspect's arrest. The text reports that the woman was charged with attempted child trafficking, and predicts that she could be sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment.

3.1.3. A representative example of analytical media reports

The text titled "*There are laws but they are not observed*" (Vreme, 2021)¹⁵, including a clear designation of the author's name and surname, begins with statistical data on victims of human trafficking, a warning that more than half of the victims are children, and that more than 85% of cases involve sexual exploitation. The interlocutors and expert consultants in this text are representatives of the two civil sector organizations¹⁶ which jointly provide assistance to victims of human trafficking in Serbia. The author refers to legal provisions to explain the difference between the criminal offence of human trafficking for sexual exploitation (sex trafficking of mainly women and girls) and the offence of soliciting and facilitating prostitution which is envisaged as a misdemeanour.¹⁷ The interlocutors also point to the need to recognize victims of human trafficking as a special user group for supported housing. The author uses subtitles to emphasize specific issues. Thus, the part subtitled "Cybertrafficking" points to the increasingly common form of human trafficking, facilitated by the influx of new technologies and social networks and accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This issue is further illustrated by the results of a survey (conducted by the NGOs "Atina") which indicate that a third of human trafficking victims are children who experience threats, sexual abuse, recruitment or actual exploitation in the digital space. The interlocutors also point to the need for prevention, especially when it comes to children who are most exposed to threats in the digital world, and the need for more intensive work with schools, the training of teachers and all employees to recognize the risks of soliciting and facilitating prostitution. In the part subtitled "Child marriage and trafficking in girls", the author provides definitions of child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage, and clarifies the specifics by referring to the Serbian Family Act.¹⁸ The qualities of this text are indisputable: in addition to the absence of sensationalism, the analytical text based on serious research includes comments by experts, normative support, critical views, the applicable law to address the problem, recommendations for prevention and possible solutions.

¹⁵ Vreme (2021). *Zakoni postoje, ali se ne poštuju* (Trgovina ljudima- Devojčice i žene), 8. decembar 2021, Zora Drčelić, available at <https://www.vreme.com/vreme/zakoni-postoje-ali-se-ne-postuju/>

¹⁶ the NGO "ASTRA"- Action against human trafficking , and the NGO "ATINA" - Citizens' association for combating against human trafficking and all forms of violence against women.

¹⁷ Article 16 of the Public Order and Peace Act, *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 6/2016 and 24/2018.

¹⁸ Article 23 § 2 of the Family Act, *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 18/2005, 72/2011 - other law and 6/2015.

3.2. Analysis of media reporting on child trafficking according to reported cases and topics

When observing the reasons for publication of media texts, two groups of texts can be differentiated: 1) texts reporting on child trafficking as a specific event, regardless of whether it refers to a discovered child trafficking case, the traffickers' arrest, the initiated judicial proceeding or activities undertaken by domestic or international organizations aimed at resolving this global social problem; and 2) texts reporting on child trafficking as a phenomenon, which explain the concept, legal forms, aspects, participants and their roles in child trafficking, forms of prevention, etc. (Chart 2). The second group consists exclusively of analytical media texts, while the first group includes both interpretive and informative as well as analytical media texts.

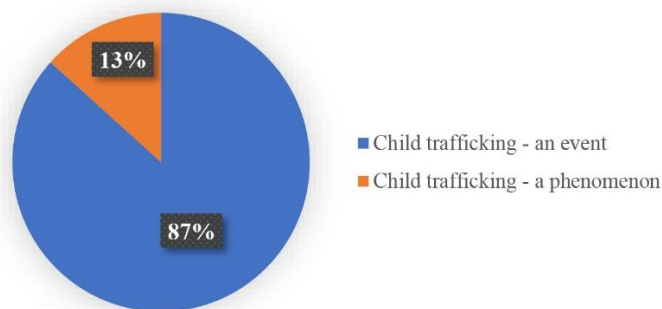


Chart 2 Reporting on child trafficking as an event and as a phenomenon

Source: Prepared by author (based on research results)

Looking at the data presented in Chart 2, it may be concluded that the media coverage in Serbia is dominated by texts reporting on child trafficking as an event. Little is written about the problem itself (13%), while the general public attention is largely focused on specific events and personalities (87%). Such data show that the average reader can rarely find information about what child trafficking is, how to recognize it, how to protect their loved ones from this problem, which institutions, people and organizations deal with this problem and provide assistance, and how an individual can contribute to combating this problem. Apart from the fact that reporting on child trafficking as a phenomenon is a real rarity, it may be concluded that writing about this problem, which is current at all times, is approached only when the event actually occurs.

3.3. Analysis of media reporting according to countries covered by media reports

Looking at the country-specific reports on child trafficking in the indicated period (Chart 3), it may be concluded that the largest number of reports refer to the Republic of Serbia (37%), followed by reports on countries from the region (22%) (Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Romania...), while reports related to America are in the third place (12%). In total, more than half of the media reports refer to another country (63%), which creates a prejudice among the general public that the child trafficking victims are mostly foreigners and that child trafficking does not happen "here and now, but somewhere far away, to some other people we do not know". As a matter of fact, in the

largest number of cases, it does happen Serbian citizens, "right now and here" , while the number of foreign citizens identified as victims in Serbia does not exceed 5% of the total number of identified persons (NGO Atina, n.d).¹⁹

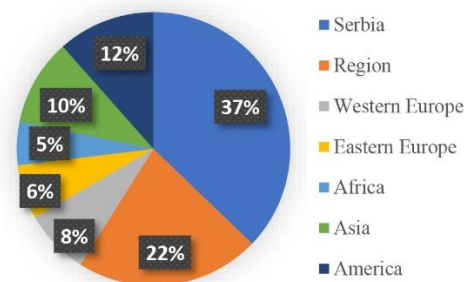


Chart 3 Child trafficking and countries covered by media reports

Source: Prepared by author (based on research results)

The US State Department Report on Trafficking in Persons (2022)²⁰ points out that Serbia has regressed and that the Serbian authorities have not shown stronger efforts in the fight against human trafficking when compared to the previous report, particularly taking into account the difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic; thus, Serbia remained in tier 2 (in the subcategory designated "Watch list")²¹, which entails the need to monitor the situation. Considering such a situation in Serbia, as well as the fact that 37% of media reports on human trafficking refer to Serbia while more than a half refer to some other country (63%), it may be concluded that the focus of media reporting on child trafficking in Serbia is shifting to the bad situation in other countries in order to "justify or cover up and ignore" the bad situation regarding child trafficking in Serbia. It is certainly not a good trend because the general public should be aware of the real situation in Serbia and familiar with the problems because raising awareness can lead to suppression, prevention and potential solutions of this global problem.

3.4. Reporting on child trafficking according to the method of child exploitation

In Serbia, the official statistical data on the form of child trafficking according to the method of exploitation (Chart 4)²² show that the largest number of children are sexually exploited (43%); multiple exploitation (which most frequently includes sexual exploitation

¹⁹ NGO Atina (n.d) Deset predrasuda o trgovini ljudima, (Ten prejudices about human trafficking), Udruženje građana za borbu protiv trgovine ljudima; <http://www.atina.org.rs/sr/deset-predrasuda-o-trgovini-ljudima>

²⁰ The US State Department's report on human trafficking is one of the most comprehensive sources of information on the fight against human trafficking carried out by governments worldwide; the first document was published in 2001. *See:* US Department of State (2022). Trafficking In Persons Report June 2022; available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221020-2022-TIP-Report.pdf>

²¹ Countries are ranked into three categories: first, second and third tier, while the second tier has a subcategory (*Watch list*) which entails additional monitoring a country's situation in the fight against human trafficking.

²² The forms of trafficking in children are: child trafficking for sexual exploitation, trafficking for child pornography and pedophilia, trafficking for the exploitation of child labor, trafficking for begging, child trafficking for criminal activities, trafficking in unborn or newly born children for adoption, child trafficking for marriage, child trafficking for participation in armed conflicts, and child trafficking for the sale of body organs.

and some other form of exploitation) is in the second place (18%), while child trafficking for forced marriage is in the third place (14%).

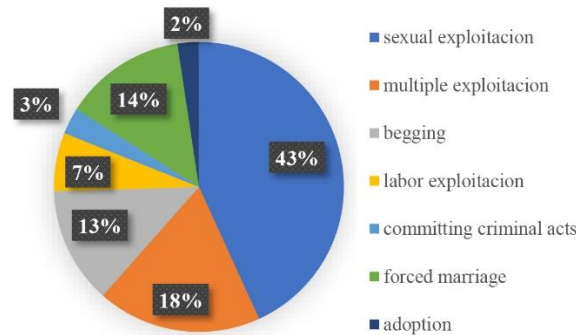


Chart 4 Statistical data on forms of child exploitation during child trafficking

Source: Prepared by author (based on statistical data obtained from the CPHTV website).

On the other hand, the analysis of the observed research sample of media reports on child trafficking in Serbia shows that the largest number of reports refer to the child trafficking for illegal adoption (35%), followed by sexual exploitation (34%) in the second place, and trafficking for forced marriage (10%) in the third place.

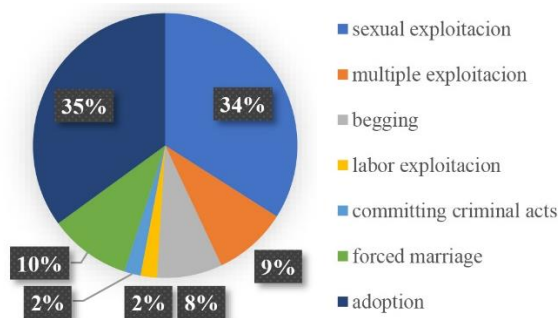


Chart 5 Research data on media reporting on forms of child exploitation during child trafficking

Source: Prepared by author (based on research results)

By comparing Chart 4 and Chart 5, it may be concluded that the media pay most attention to child trafficking for adoption, probably due to the popularity of such stories which often feature very sensational headlines, even though the official statistical data on the number of identified cases is significantly lower than in some other forms of child trafficking. The dark figure of this form of child exploitation is quite high and the media should raise awareness about this form of trafficking; thus, a more extensive media coverage of this issue may have a positive effect. On the other hand, if we observe the media reports on illegal adoption, it may be concluded that the largest number of reports were not written in view of combating, suppressing or preventing this form of child trafficking but for the purpose of “selling” the newspaper or increasing media circulation.

When comparing these two charts, we may observe that child labor exploitation (2%) and multiple exploitation (9%) are unfairly neglected in media reporting. Therefore, it can be concluded that media selectively report on child trafficking, by choosing those forms of child trafficking that will be popular among readers and become a sensation; on the other hand, they do not provide more detailed (analytical) information on the real situation in terms of certain forms of child trafficking, while some forms are grossly ignored.

3.5. Media reports on internal child trafficking and child trafficking abroad

Chart 6 shows statistical data on internal child trafficking²³ and child trafficking abroad.²⁴ and it can be concluded that internal child trafficking is to the greatest extent represented (83%), while foreign trafficking is represented to a significantly lesser extent (only 17%).

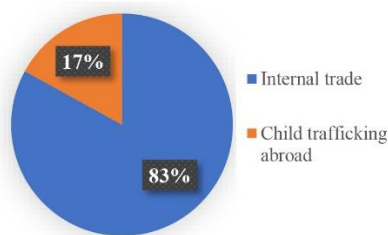


Chart 6 Statistical data on internal child trafficking and child trafficking abroad

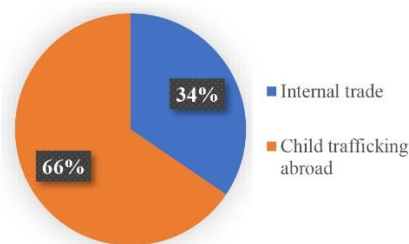


Chart 7 Research data on media reporting on internal child trafficking and child trafficking abroad

Source: Prepared by author (based on statistical data from the CPHTV website and research results).

Chart 7 presents research data on the representation of media reports on internal child trafficking and international child trafficking. The research results show a different trend than the one observed in the statistical data. Namely, child trafficking in foreign countries was covered in 66% of researched media reports, while internal child trafficking was covered in 34% of reports. It certainly does not correspond to the real picture of this phenomenon. When it comes to this parameter of the observed phenomenon, the question arises as to why the official statistical data and the research data on media reporting are inversely proportionate. A possible reply is that adding a foreign element to media reporting generates a greater sensation and interest of the general public. This trend of media coverage is certainly not positive because it misleads the general public, reinforces the misconception that child exploitation rarely happens, and conceals this dark figure of child trafficking in Serbia. Such a trend of media coverage reduces the attention of the general public in terms of recognizing different forms of child exploitation and child trafficking in their environment. Ultimately, it negatively affects the media potential to encourage individuals to recognize such occurrences and report them, and thus contribute to the combating, preventing, reducing and suppressing this global problem.

²³ Internal child trafficking entails situations when domestic citizens are exploited in Serbia.

²⁴ Child trafficking abroad entails cases where domestic citizens are recruited in Serbia but exploited abroad.

3.6. Media reporting on trafficking according to gender: trafficking in girls and in boys

Chart 8 shows data on the gender of identified victims in the observed period. The statistical data show that girls were victims in the largest number of cases (83%), boys were victims in 15% of cases, while only 2% of cases referred to infant trafficking for adoption.

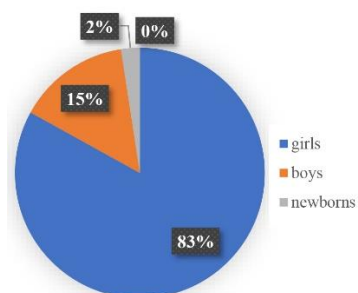


Chart 8 Statistical data on the gender of the identified victim

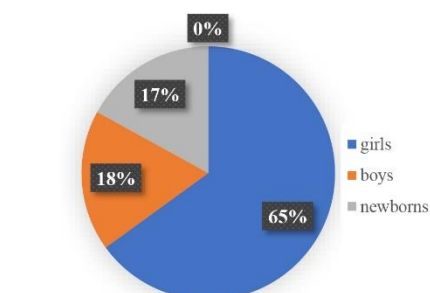


Chart 9 Research data on media coverage by gender of the victim

Source: Prepared by author (based on statistical data from the CPHTV website and research results).

Chart 9 shows research data on media coverage according to the victim's gender. The obtained data are somewhat different. The research data on media reports are consistent with the official statistical data when it comes to boys as identified victims (18%), while a small deviation is noticeable when it comes to girls as identified victims (65%) and a large deviation when it comes to baby victims (17%). This large discrepancy may imply several things. First, such texts attract more attention of the general public and, thus, they are disproportionately represented in the number of identified cases. Second, if the facts from the published media reports are true, there is a huge dark figure when it comes to the child trafficking (in newborns) for adoption. Finally, it is a consequence of the imbalance between statistics and data from media reports.

4. CONCLUSION

Child trafficking is a global problem that may occur in any country. In the 21st century, the media are increasingly strengthening and spreading their influence in "framing" the contemporary discourse by reporting on important issues and problems to the general public. However, their enormous influence also implies a great responsibility. In the Republic of Serbia, the main feature of media reporting on child trafficking is the lack of sufficient professional reporting. A successful model for obtaining a correct and professional text on child trafficking would be an interview with experts in this field. The choice of relevant interlocutors is a prerequisite for a high-quality, responsible and ethical media reporting. The abundance of such high-quality informative and educational media reports will increasingly contribute to shaping demanding readers who are less likely to opt for tabloids and sensationalist versions of events.

On the basis of comparative analysis of the official statistical data on child trafficking in the observed period and the research sample of media reports in the same period, it may

be concluded that the media do not convey a realistic picture about this phenomenon to the general public. Thus, they create numerous prejudices and misconceptions, which are harmful for public awareness. Considering that media frequently report on cases of child trafficking in foreign countries, they create one of the basic misconceptions that the child trafficking victims are not Serbian citizens. They also create a wrong picture about the most common forms of child trafficking because they choose to report on more "attractive" and sensationalist cases; thus, there is a common bias that sexual exploitation is the only or the most common form of child trafficking, while child labor exploitation is either neglected or unduly presented. Apart from these characteristics, there is a visible and widely present trend of reporting on child trafficking as an event, only after it occurs, while reporting on child trafficking as a phenomenon is neglected. Thus, the media fail to use their power and influence in view of preventing, reducing, suppressing and combating different forms of child trafficking.

The fight against child trafficking will be effective only if the general public understands this phenomenon properly. If this phenomenon is not understood and treated in the right way, our ability to react to crime decreases, particularly when it is conditioned by misconceptions and prejudices. Therefore, the media need to report responsibly on this topic and help individuals better understand and recognize this problem. Instead of creating myths and misconceptions through superficial reports and sensationalism, the media have to encourage the general public to become part of the fight against child trafficking. If the media take responsibility and use their communication power and impact for the purposes of ethical and responsible media reporting on child trafficking, the media may be a strong instrument in the fight against this global problem which would urge the society as a whole to join the fight.

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TRGOVINA DECOM U MEDIJSKOM IZVEŠTAVANJU U SRBIJI

Ovaj rad se bavi korelacijom između trgovine decom i medijskog diskursa o trgovini decom. Trgovina decom je jedan od najrasprostranjenijih oblika organizovanog kriminaliteta, gde se u ulozi potencijalne žrtve nalaze deca kao kvalifikovano osetljiva kategorija lica. Mediji su instrument komunikacije ali i izveštavanja i stvaranja slike o pojavama i fenomenima kod široke javnosti. Autorka rada analizira 100 medijskih izveštaja objavljenih u najčitanijim pisanim i elektronskim medijima u Republici Srbiji, radi davanja odgovora na pitanja da li mediji u Srbiji odgovorno i etički izveštavaju o jednom vrlo važnom pitanju, kao i da li svoju moć i uticaj koriste na način da utiču na suzbijanje, prevenciju, podizanje svesti kod široke javnosti, odnosno da li su aktivno oruđe u borbi protiv trgovine decom. Analiza obuhvata kvantitativnu i kvalitativnu analizu medijskih tekstova prema medijskim žanrovima, kvantitativnu analizu prema povodima i temama o kojima se izveštava, zemljama na koje se medijski izveštaji odnose i komparativnu kvantitativnu analizu medijskih izveštaja sa zvaničnim statističkim podacima o načinu eksploatacije, internoj i trgovini u inostranstvu i polu žrtve.

Ključne reči: *organizovani kriminalitet, trgovina ljudima, trgovina decom, eksploatacija, mediji, medijsko izveštavanje.*