

Committee: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (GA3)

Topic: Combating human organ trafficking in Northern Africa

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Topic Introduction

The issue of human organ trafficking is one of utmost importance and concern in North African countries including Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Sudan. It is a process of coercing and exploiting individuals to have their organs removed and traded illicitly. This issue has many cultural and social concerns and various moral dilemmas in relation to the donor's consent and the conditions the procedures are done in. Exploitation, human rights violations and the grave medical risks of these procedures are important humanitarian aspects of the issue. Trafficked organs are often transplanted under suboptimal and unsanitary conditions in the absence of authorized medical staff and necessary medical resources leading to poor patient outcomes. The dangers of organ trafficking are severe and can lead to both physical and psychological complications. Human organ trafficking entertains many human rights violations as vulnerable victims are taken advantage of in these communities. This issue is one that is hard to tackle as it is also hard to detect. Organ trafficking is done in many ways and victims often do not identify themselves out of fear of the traffickers themselves and the power that they hold as they are a threat to people in these vulnerable communities and their families. This issue is constantly growing in importance and so does the threat it imposes on people in various communities and on cultural values in North African communities. Therefore it must be addressed promptly and effectively.

Definition of key concepts

Organ trafficking

Removing and selling/transplanting organs illegally. ¹

¹ International, Paula Cornell | Writer & Brand Journalist at Love Justice. "What Is Organ Trafficking?" *Www.lovejustice.ngo*, 9 Mar. 2023,

www.lovejustice.ngo/blog/what-is-organ-trafficking.



Transplant Tourism

Patients traveling across the borders to be transplanted elsewhere.²

Red Market

The global market for illegal trade of human body parts.³

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

A disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a traumatic, scary, or dangerous event.⁴

Background Information

Human organ traffickers operate using various networks, fraudulent documents, initiating transplant tourism to operate across countries and train victims to lie to authorities to steer away from suspicion. Traffickers begin by recruiting donors online or in person, they are often uneducated and told lies by traffickers that kidneys grow back, that they have three kidneys, or that they will be given medical care after the surgery. They are promised anywhere from \$500 to \$10,000 but may never be paid at all. These donors agree to the procedure under false interpretation and afterwards do not receive medical care or the compensation they were promised. The organs are then harvested for transplantation and sold on the red market.

Causes

Economic factors

Economic instability is common among North African countries and also one of the main precursors of organ trafficking as people in poor conditions are looking for a quick way to make money This means turning to any means necessary to achieve this. Donating their organs can seem like a very attractive option as these people are often unaware of the health risks and choose to trust the

² Broumand, B., and R. F. Saidi. "New Definition of Transplant Tourism." *International Journal of Organ Transplantation Medicine*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2017, pp. 49–51, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5347406/#B4.

³ Meringer, Michelle. "The Red Market: International Organ Trade." *The Observer*, Oct. 2017, theobserver-giaa.org/the-red-market-international-organ-trade.

⁴ National Institute of Mental Health. "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." *National Institute of Mental Health*, 2023, www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd.



traffickers and what they are being promised without realizing the lies they are being told. This can make the vulnerable people living in poor conditions a target for organ traffickers as they are the most likely to agree to this procedure as they are desperate for this quick source of income.

Cultural pressure

In many cultures, societal pressure can be immense and family duty is of paramount importance especially for male figures in the family. Individuals often feel obligated to provide for their families by any means necessary ignoring the dangers so by selling their organs they are fulfilling their 'duty' and protecting their families through financial support. Furthermore, many cultures in North Africa do not support traditional organ donation as it can be seen as a violation of the body's wholeness and interfere with preserving the body for the afterlife. This can lead people to turn to illegal means to achieve organs for transplantation as they do not want their communities to know they went against these beliefs and practices, it would cause social and cultural ties between individuals to weaken.

Inadequate organ donation system

North African countries face major setbacks in organ transplantation as there is a significant lack in organ donation systems and facilities. This is due to the fact that many people in these countries are unaware of the importance of organ donation. Misinformation and cultural conceptions about the process can deter individuals from registering as donors. The legal and regulatory frameworks governing organ donation are underdeveloped; this leads to facilities not being correctly equipped to support organ donation and transplantation. The speed of organ donation processes decreases causing mortality rates in these countries to increase and leading to the demand for organs for transplantation to be much larger. This has led to people turning to illicit methods of transplantation as they are desperate.

Social instability

Corruption and other social and political instabilities have led to the growth of organ trafficking. Government officials and officers are often bribed to ignore these illicit procedures. This leads to weak law enforcement and therefore an environment where these illicit procedures can thrive. Displacement and migration among these countries is very common and migrants are of the most vulnerable groups to organ trafficking due to precarious living conditions, lack of legal protection and desperation. Social instability in these countries has also affected education and awareness about



the issue. A large gap of knowledge on human organ trafficking creates a large problem as the public isn't aware and doesn't know how to deal with and avoid traffickers. This leads to the issue being even harder to tackle as not many people recognize the threat in the first place.

Consequences

Health and wellbeing

Human Organ trafficking has been reported to cause adverse health complications to both the donors and the receivers of the organs. Inadequate post operative care can lead to pain, discomfort, asthenia and various infections. As well as this a lack of documentation and testing can lead to poor donor matching causing patients to have more medical issues in the future. Human organ trafficking can also lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression.

Human rights violations

Victims in vulnerable economic, social and medical positions are easily taken advantage of by traffickers and are controlled through use of force, kidnapping, fraud and the abuse of power or weakness; this is an important humanitarian aspect of organ trafficking, thus falling under the mandate of the committee. This shows how basic human rights and respect as both organs and donors are treated as commodities by traffickers.

Strain on healthcare system

Organ trafficking often requires the participation of unethical medical practitioners who perform illegal surgeries. This deeply compromises the standard of the medical profession and can cause public trust in healthcare providers and institutions to be severely damaged. Medical professionals may face ethical dilemmas when they become aware of or are indirectly involved in organ trafficking activities. This can compromise their professional integrity and the integrity of other medical professionals that are not involved as their inventions are questioned.

Case Studies

Egypt

Organ trafficking in Egypt is a serious and multifaceted issue that affects the country's healthcare system, economy, and social fabric. Egypt is considered one of the major hubs for organ trafficking In July 2018, a statement from the Egyptian Health Ministry announced that 37 out of 41 people



including doctors, nurses and middlemen had been found guilty by an Egyptian court on charges related to illicit trading in human organs.⁵

Morocco

Cross-border organ trafficking is a significant issue in Morocco, affecting individuals, healthcare systems, and societies at large. These consequences span across health, legal, economic, and socio-cultural domains. The nature of organ trafficking and cross-border operations make it challenging for law enforcement to track and prosecute offenders. Moroccan traffickers dominate human organ trafficking in North Africa through its main route, the Strait of Gibraltar, and possess centers on the Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian borders.

Major countries/ organizations and alliances

European Union (EU)

The EU combats organ trafficking through council frameworks such as the EU directive 2011/36/EU⁶ on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims covers organ trafficking in depth as well as the EU Directive 2010/53/EU⁷ on standards of quality and safety of human organs intended for transplantation. It was stressed upon in multiple EU conferences and various frameworks showing the EU's support in preventing and combating human organ trafficking in North Africa as well as financial support to strengthen the legal and institutional capacities of North African countries to deal with organ trafficking.

United States of America (USA)

The USA is involved in global anti-trafficking efforts through legislation, funding as well as the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report evaluates countries' efforts to combat human

⁵ Columb, Seán. "Organ Trafficking in Egypt: "They Locked Me in and Took My Kidney."" *The Guardian*, 9 Feb. 2019, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/feb/09/trafficking-people-smugglers-organs-egypt-mediterranean-refugees-migrants.

⁶ "EUR-Lex - 32011L0036 - EN - EUR-Lex." *Europa.eu*, 2011, eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011L0036.

⁷ *Directive 2010/45/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on Standards of Quality and Safety of Human Organs Intended for Transplantation*. 7 July 2010, data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2010/53/oj/eng. Accessed 3 Aug. 2024.



trafficking, including organ trafficking. As well as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) that addresses human organ trafficking specifically. The US offers training programs for law enforcement and medical professionals in North Africa to detect and combat organ trafficking. Their Capacity-building initiatives help improve local responses and enforcement of anti-trafficking laws.

United Kingdom (UK)

The UK has played a significant role in combating organ trafficking in North Africa through legislative support, funding, training and intelligence sharing. For example, the UK has stringent laws against human trafficking, including organ trafficking, under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. As well as this the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), funds programs aimed at addressing the root causes of organ trafficking. UK support has helped North African countries improve their legal frameworks and new and strengthened laws have made it more challenging for traffickers to operate.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Project ENACT

Funded by the EU and enforced by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), project ENACT (2017-2025) has been making ongoing efforts through conferences and financial aid to assist police in Africa to adopt proactive strategies to combat organized crime threats including human organ trafficking, facilitate information exchange and enhance their investigative skills. This is done through criminal analysis and capacity building training and providing equipment, analytical software, access to INTERPOL databases and regular mentoring. This project offers significant benefits in terms of legislative improvements, capacity building, and regional cooperation. However there are also challenges such as resource limitations, coordination issues, and cultural barriers.

Palermo Protocol

The Palermo Protocol, formally known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, was adopted by the United Nations in 2000 as part of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). It addresses organ trafficking, and outlines comprehensive measures for prevention, protection of victims, and prosecution of traffickers. It has



initiated many successes and has provided a common framework for defining and addressing trafficking, which has been adopted by many countries in their national legislation and many countries have amended their laws to align with the Protocol's provisions, enhancing their legal frameworks to combat trafficking more effectively. Advancements have been made by the protocol in the global fight against organized crime, providing a comprehensive framework for international cooperation and legal standardization. While there are challenges in implementation and enforcement.

Possible solutions

Border security

Border surveillance can play a crucial role in combating organ trafficking by helping to detect potential trafficking operations and prevent the illegal transport of organs and trafficking victims across national and international borders. Detection and Interception is a big aspect of this solution. The use of advanced technologies such as biometrics, x-ray scanners, thermal imaging and CCTV cameras can help detect suspicious shipments. Utilizing data analytics and pattern recognition software can help identify unusual travel patterns or shipping routes As well as this coordinated efforts between border control, customs, and police can enhance the detection as data can be shared with law enforcement agencies to assist in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers. To ensure success border officials must be trained to recognize fraudulent medical documents or suspicious travel itineraries. Finally collaboration between countries and the integration of advanced technologies are essential to overcome the challenges and ensure that border surveillance contributes to the overall goal of eradicating organ trafficking.

Socio-cultural interventions

North African countries can create an environment that discourages organ trafficking and promotes ethical, legal, and culturally respectful practices in organ donation and transplantation. This can be done by developing and enforcing strict ethical guidelines for healthcare professionals involved in organ transplantation. Addressing the vulnerabilities that lead individuals to consider selling organs is crucial. Economic empowerment within these communities can be achieved through vocational



training, microfinance programs, and employment opportunities. Providing social safety nets and support for vulnerable populations can also help reduce susceptibility to exploitation by traffickers. Finally, utilizing respected cultural figures to endorse anti-trafficking messages. This endorsement can lend credibility and resonate with the local population, encouraging community members to reject organ trafficking practices.

Strengthening international collaborations

Organ trafficking often transcends national borders and involves multiple countries in the trafficking chain. Strong International collaboration can enhance their efforts to combat this crime through shared resources, information, and strategies. This involves fostering cooperation between countries, international organizations, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to share resources, expertise, and strategies. Agreements provide a framework for international cooperation and set legal standards for combating trafficking. This can be done through developing regional agreements within Africa and with neighboring regions to enhance cross-border cooperation in law enforcement, information sharing, and victim protection. Regional bodies like the African Union (AU) can play a significant role in coordinating these efforts. To try to prevent the issue collaborative research projects can be launched that involve researchers from multiple countries to study the patterns, causes, and effects of organ trafficking. It is crucial for countries' harmonization of national laws with international legal frameworks to ensure consistency in the prosecution of organ trafficking crimes. This can help close legal loopholes that traffickers exploit.

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