Drug Trafficking and Violence Against Women

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I would like to thank you for reading my paper it is still going through major changes as I try and shift from a literature review to a project where I can recollect interviews in the future and hopefully expand the project to use as a thesis. I have also removed several case studies to try and shorten this paper. I left the conclusion in the paper in case anyone wanted a summary, but it will clearly need more interviews and case studies to test my model and hypothesis.

**Section I**

**Model and Research Question**

This project's practical relevance for a broad audience is based on better understanding the effects of a connection between transnational drug trafficking, Mexican culture, impunity, human trafficking and violence against women. My research question addresses a relationship between transnational drug trafficking and violence against women caused by human trafficking in Mexico. There is extensive research focusing on cross-border drug trafficking and violence, but little is focused on how transnational drug trafficking diversifies its business and how this affects women. I hypothesize that transnational drug trafficking is positively related to higher levels of violence against women in the form of forced disappearances and sexual exploitation especially targeting adolescent women in Mexico. I suggest that the drug war becomes an antecedent condition that has increased competition among drug traffickers that induced them to diversify their business into human trafficking. I argue that the Mexican cultural background and the environment of impunity are both condition variables that have facilitated the diversification of drug traffickers into human trafficking. Finally I suggest that the increase involvement of drug traffickers in the human trafficking business has resulted in an increase of violence against women including the increased number of disappearances of young women in Mexico in the last decade.

Model 1[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Variables and Definitions**

Disappearances: girls and women who as of January 2018 are not located ("Desapariciones en México, por año, mes y día en que ocurrieron los hechos," 2017). This definition is given by the “Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas” and utilized by REDIM. This delineation is broad as it also encompasses girls and adolescents who were not forcefully taken. Due to the lack of reliable statistics and data on forced disappearances, it is necessary to use this broad definition to encompass the severity of the problem and try to uncover some of the main reasons for this upward trend in disappearances.

The antecedent condition is the drug war. Melissa Wright defines it as an event in 2006 were the newly elected president Felipe Calderon declared war against the drug cartels and within a year had deployed thousands of troops to several cities in Mexico (Wright, 2011, p. 722).

The independent variable is transnational drug trafficking. The United Nations Office of Crime and Drugs defines transnational drug trafficking as a "global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws" (Crime). I choose this definition, as it demonstrates the international communities legal understanding of drug trafficking.

The condition variable is impunity: Juan Antonio Le Clercq and Gerardo Sánchez Lara created a global impunity index. They assert, “Impunity should be measured following two grand criteria. First, the functionality of the security, justice and human rights systems and second the structural capacity that each country has in its institutional designs” (Le Clercq & Sánchez Lara, 2015, p. 5). They define impunity as a “multi-dimensional phenomenon that goes beyond the analysis of punishable crimes… impunity has three dimensions: security, justice and human rights” (2015). I choose this definition of impunity due to its multi-dimensional nature which provides a framework to understand how impunity has created an environment in which human trafficking has become a viable way to diversify business for drug traffickers.

The other condition variable is Mexican culture in regards to its attitudes regarding women. A single definition is hard to establish, but the chapter on culture expands on several themes and attitudes that form Mexican culture regarding women.

The intervening variable is the diversification of drug traffickers business into human trafficking caused by the drug war. Human trafficking under the protocols of the Palermo convention is defined as a "process in which illegal and coercive means are used both in the smuggling of the victims and subjugating to an unfree or abusive status in the destination” (Vayrynen, 2003, p. 5). This definition has an international legal basis which helps distinguish it from other forms of human smuggling. The drug war is understood as the strategy undertaken by the Mexican government on December of 2006, using security forces to fight organized crime (REDIM, 2018a).

The dependent variable is Violence against women: The 20th of December 1993 the General Assembly of the UN stated that:

“Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following: Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs”(United & Department of Public, 1993).

I picked this definition as it encompasses a broad range of categories for violence that women suffer around the world. It also includes the trafficking of women as an act of violence against women, which is what this paper will focus on. It further allows for a division between domestic abuse and violence perpetrated by family members, violence perpetrated by individuals who are not related to the victim and violence against women perpetrated or condoned by the State. This rendition allows us to understand the different actors involved in human trafficking that interact within Lori Heise’s ecological approach to violence against women.

**Introduction**

My aim is to find out if transnational drug trafficking in Mexico is related to violence against women, specifically focusing on an increased participation into the human trafficking business. In order to understand the increase of violence against women in Mexico in the past decade it is important to understand some cultural factors that impact gender relations as well as the on going drug war. These cultural factors help us appreciate the levels of gender inequality in Mexico, the levels of impunity related to violence against women as well as the materialization and commodification of women’s bodies. Cultural factors also help unravel the difficulties involved in the prosecution of human trafficking and the pressures endured by the victims when deciding to denounce their exploiters. The drug war in the other hand has forced transnational drug traffickers to diversify their business in order to thrive under the increased pressure from other cartels as well as the government’s security forces. These drug trafficking groups have diversified into human trafficking and sexual exploitation of minors who are more sought after and are more lucrative in the illegal market (Casillas R, 2013, p. 98). This study seeks to untangle these complex relationships and afford a better understanding of the links between drug trafficking, Mexican culture, impunity, human trafficking and violence against women. It is crucial to investigate these relationships as they uncover a growing problem of disappearances of minors (especially girls) and other forms of violence against women that is perpetuated at all levels of society. It also shows how Mexican culture has helped create an environment that fomented impunity of violence against women setting up the right conditions for human trafficking to become a profitable and low risk venture. Finally it is important to study these relationships as they uncovers how the drug war increased pressure against drug traffickers from the state’s armed forces and from other drug traffickers that led them to diversify into the business of human trafficking. By understanding how all of these different factors interact together it is possible to gain a new perspective and understanding of the growing problem of human trafficking in Mexico.

**Map**

The paper is split into three major sections; the first section includes the model for the research project as well as the methodology and theory. The second section focuses on the antecedent condition and its effects on the independent variable as well as the conditional variables of impunity and culture. The last section focuses on how the intervening variable of drug traffickers diversifying into human trafficking happened and its effects on the dependent variable, which is violence against women. This paper first reviews the literature on violence against women caused by drug traffickers in Mexico. Then it focuses on a brief explanation of the case selection followed by the methodology used for this research as well as its justification. The next section centers on the theories on violence against women that will help facilitate the understanding of how human trafficking merges with other forms of violence against women and also perpetuates it. The proceeding section will establish the background of the situation in Mexico exposing the high levels of impunity in regards to human trafficking that has been responsible for fostering an environment ripe for human trafficking to grow. It will also reveal the growing problem of human trafficking in Mexico and how it targets in its majority young girls (under the age of 18). This section discusses Mexican culture and how cultural factors help us understand the levels of gender inequality in Mexico, the levels of impunity related to violence against women, as well as the materialization and commodification of women’s bodies. Prevalent cultural factors also help unravel the difficulties involved in the prosecution of human trafficking and the pressures faced by the victims once they decide to denounce their exploiters. The next segment analyses the link between transnational drug traffickers and their diversification into the business of human trafficking. It also includes case studies of victims that enable to establish the mechanisms through which human traffickers abduct their victims. It supports the link between drug traffickers and human trafficking, and it will serve to expose the interaction of other forms of violence against women and human trafficking as well as the use of force to exercise control over these women. Finally in the conclusion I present some policy recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.

**Literature Review**

The literature on trans-national drug trafficking and violence against women only focuses on some types of violence against women, but never includes an analysis on the diversification of the drug business into human trafficking. Louise Shelley explains how “despite the many points of intersection, the diverse relationship between human trafficking and drugs have rarely been discussed in the literature” (Shelley, 2012, pp. 241-242). She further explains that "there is a tendency to examine these forms of illicit trade separately or to group them with other types of transnational crime (Shelley, 2012, pp. 241-242). Sophia Koutsoyannis mentions how drug gangs have posed an increased threat to women through rape, robbery, and femicide (Koutsoyannis, 2011, pp. 2-3). She details the complicity of the government, but she never links it to an increase in human trafficking (Koutsoyannis, 2011, p. 4). Heather Agnew presents the case between a rise in transnational drug trafficking in Mexico in the 1990’s due to the balloon effect of drug enforcement operations in Colombia during the 1990’s and the increase in femicide in Ciudad Juarez (Agnew, 2015, p. 430). Although she mentions the role of the state's militarization of these areas resulting in an escalation of violence against women she does not elucidate why the rate of femicide has remained relatively stable in the last decade in contrast to the outburst of disappearances of young women in Mexico (Agnew, 2015, p. 441). Jonathan Ávila reports on a Unit in Jalisco in charge of helping women affected by domestic violence. The unit detected that in 8 out of 10 couples reporting domestic violence a partner had been linked to transnational drug trafficking groups (Ávila, 2017). It is essential to recognize how drug trafficking affects very different categories of violence against women and how these exert influence over each other to understand the severity of this problem. Furthermore, it uncovers the intricate ties between the drug trafficking business and the human trafficking business in Mexico. It also exposes the high levels of impunity and indifference by the government that has allowed human trafficking to boom in Mexico.

Jonathan Ávila reported that the attorney’s office for Mexico does not register or identify the possible links between drug cartels and violence against women (Ávila, 2017). Through a careful research of case studies, it is apparent that the disappearance of women and other forms of violence against women in Mexico as well as increased activity of human trafficking as a result of the cartels is understudied. Nina Lakhani reported for the Guardian the case of 50 women who disappeared in Veracruz in the span of three nights (Lakhani, 2016). She was able to uncover links between some of the women that disappeared and events related to their work as escorts where cartel members of the Zetas and government officials attended (Lakhani, 2016). The lack of news coverage about this event is noteworthy as it replicates the government’s active disregard to a link between transnational drug cartels and violence against women.

The annual report for human trafficking presented by the state department details that more than half of the victims of human trafficking in the world were women and girls (Casillas R, 2013, p. 14). A 43% of the victims of human trafficking worldwide were forced into sexual slavery out of which 98% were women ( 2013). The United Nations and the secretary of governance in Mexico informed that 70,000 children were victims of human trafficking in Mexico, which makes it the worst situation in all of Latin America (2013).

The Registro Nacional de Personas Extraviadas o Desparecidas (RNPED) that is in charge of the registry of missing or disappeared people in Mexico registers that there have been 37,435 disappearances since 2007 (REDIM, 2018a). Globally Mexico is the second country with most disappearances in the world only behind Syria that registered 5,174 disappearances in 2016 base on figures presented by the Syrian Network for Human Rights ("México, el país "en paz" con más desaparecidos," 2018). Mexico in contrast registered 4,152 disappearances in 2017 making it the country at peace with most disappearances in the world (2018). This shows an increasingly alarming trend, but it also shows how disappearances is one of the major forms of violence experienced in Mexico. Out of those 37,435 disappearances only 9,522 where identified as being women (REDIM, 2018a). This means that 82.2% of victims of disappearances have been male, but if one looks at the disappearances of minors women surprisingly account for 59% of disappearances (REDIM, 2018a).

It is necessary for people to understand the mechanisms behind these events and note the increase in recent years of disappearances of young women to set new policy goals and tackle this problem. Hazel Zamora Mendieta reported that the disappearance of adolescent women grew 974 percent in four years as published by REDIM (Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México) (Mendieta, 2017). Nina Lakhani says that 1,238 women and girls disappeared in 2011 and 2012 and out of all those cases 53 percent were minors (less than 17 years old) (Lakhani, 2015). The director of REDIM Juan Martin Perez Garcia states that his organization went from receiving 57 registered cases of disappearances in Mexico in 2010 to 612 by 2016 (Mendieta, 2017). Juan Martin reveals that 7 out of 10 adolescents that disappeared were women and that girls between the ages of 15-17 were the primary victims of human trafficking (Mendieta, 2017).

Table 1

Disappearances of minors by year as provided by REDIM and taken from the government’s Registro Nacional de Personas Extraviadas o Desparecidas (RNPED) (REDIM, 2018a)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Male | Female | Total |
| 2001 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 2002 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2003 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2004 | NA | NA | NA |
| 2005 | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| 2006 | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| 2007 | 46 | 41 | 87 |
| 2008 | 49 | 44 | 93 |
| 2009 | 95 | 122 | 217 |
| 2010 | 176 | 102 | 278 |
| 2011 | 220 | 278 | 498 |
| 2012 | 208 | 198 | 406 |
| 2013 | 278 | 322 | 600 |
| 2014 | 302 | 382 | 684 |
| 2015 | 291 | 426 | 717 |
| 2016 | 398 | 721 | 1119 |
| 2017 | 519 | 893 | 1412 |

REDIM demonstrates that disappearances of minors and specifically of girls have incremented substantially since December of 2006 which was the moment in which the government announced the deployment of security forces in order to directly combat organized crime (REDIM, 2018a). Comparatively in Argentina (which is not engaged in a drug war and has about a third of the population of Mexico) registered in 2017, 103 disappearances of minors of which only 33 were girls (Salinas, 2017).

Lori Heise’s theoretical framework helps uncover how drug trafficking (a specific form of violence against women) is perpetuated by different actors and propagates violence against women for future generations. It also explains how several types of violence against women from different levels of society merge with human trafficking. Most importantly this problem is not unique to Mexico; there has been an increase of trans-national drug trafficking activity in all of Central America that is also increasing violence against women in this region. I hope that this research will serve as a future basis for policymakers to tackle human trafficking and give a voice to the countless victims of these atrocities.

**Case Study Selection**

I choose to study Mexico due to the unexplained increase in disappearances of young women in the last decade. I also selected Mexico due to the rise of human trafficking over the previous decade as well as the increase of child sexual slavery. I choose to limit this study to Mexico and not include Central America for two main reasons. The first is the lack of reliable data on disappearances of minors in Central America and the second is that many of the Central American victims of human trafficking are captured within Mexico as they try to migrate North. Finally Mexico experienced a drug war in 2006 launched by the Mexican government that provides us with a catalyst to understand how competition is tied to drug traffickers diversifying into other illicit activity.

**Method**

I will use case studies to detail the relationship between transnational drug trafficking and the rise of violence against women in Mexico due to the diversification of drug traffickers into the human trafficking business. I believe this methodology to be the most appropriate to answer the question at hand due to two main reasons. The first points to the problematic nature of gathering information on violence against women and more specifically the disappearance of young women in Mexico. An example of this is the fact that there are no precise figures on how many women and girls are being stolen and trafficked in Mexico. Jennifer Clement attests to this fact and explains how few trust the police forces, as they are often involved with cartels that are responsible for these disappearances (Yodanis, 2004, p. 659).

Arturo Ángel exposes several issues based on the statistics in Mexico relating to disappearances of individuals. Eleven of the states in Mexico don't keep track or any form of quantification on the number of people who disappear in their state (Angel, 2017). What is most troubling about this fact is that according to the INEGI statistics many of these states, such as Baja California and Tamaulipas, are among the regions with most disappearances ("Mujeres extraviadas o desaparecidas del fuero común," 2018). Ángel notes that even if the states do keep track of the disappearances, their collection methods are unprofessional and are not to be trusted (Angel, 2017). Jennifer Clement explains that there are no precise figures of how many women are stolen or trafficked in Mexico as few people trust the security forces in Mexico (Clement, 2014). Many people believe that security forces in Mexico are often involved in local mafias, so many cases of disappearances do not get reported (Clement, 2014).

Ángel also identifies ten different official and non-official counts of disappearances but argues that none of these are set up to help identify patterns of this crime (Angel, 2017). An example of this is the “Registro Nacional de personas extraviadas o desparecidas”, which states that 20,000 people can be classified as disappeared, but makes no distinction between voluntary and forced disappearances (2017). The Attorney General produces another database for the republic that notes that 2,198 disappearances occurred between January of 2014 and October and 2016 but provide no methodology to explain how they obtained their results (2017).

Prosecutor Juana Camila Bautista is in charge of fighting human trafficking in Mexico City and expounds why human trafficking is also a sophisticated crime that makes tracking it with statistics complicated (Salazar, 2013). She says, "Human trafficking is a complex crime because the victims many times don't identify as such. They are subservient and don't want to denounce the human traffickers due to threats against them, their families or children"(Salazar, 2013). Nina Lakhani describes how statistics for disappearances are highly under-reported in official data (Lakhani, 2016). She mentions how the government registers 164 women as disappeared in Veracruz since 2007 yet a local monitoring group has documented over 500 cases in the past three years alone of disappearances of women and girls (Lakhani, 2016). The complications with the statistics and data on disappearances make a quantitative approach to understanding causation and the mechanisms behind it problematic. One must also recognize the cultural factors that make the denouncing of human trafficking and sexual exploitation complex as is detailed under the cultural background section. REDIM provided a package of information that includes their statistics and the document presented to the Interamerican Human Rights Commission in 2016. These statistics are shown in table one and two and are taken from RNPED (Registro Nacional de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas). The data is collected by people’s formal reports to the public ministry who are responsible for the investigation of missing people (RNPED). Abductions are not included in these reports as they are treated differently by the Judicial branch (RNPED). The official INEGI statistics and those supplied by REDIM suffice to establish a growing pattern of disappearances of young women in Mexico, but to unravel why this is happening the use of case studies as well as expert opinions is crucial.

The other reason why case studies are necessary is clear by the complex relationships between drug trafficking, human trafficking and violence against women. The case studies help reflect the theoretical work of Heise, which gives insight into the complex mechanics behind violence against women. The case studies in question are from interviews conducted with victims of violence by journalists and interviews with leaders of NGO's, politicians and experts with first-hand experience dealing with cases of violence against women. These interviews provide an invaluable context to elucidate why drug trafficking has diversified into human trafficking, which is a possible explanation for the upsurge of violence against women and the disappearances of young women in the last decade. The use of case studies, statistics and experts’ opinions help trace the relationship between Mexican culture, the war on drugs and violence against women.

**Theory**

Lori Heise criticizes explanations of violence against women that are focused on a single factor (Heise, 1998, p. 262). The importance of this theory on violence against women is that it provides a general framework to understand the specific mechanisms behind violence against women caused by human trafficking. She discloses how theorists have focused on singular explanations for violence against women such as a man beating a woman due to their psychopathology or poor impulse control (1998). Or else, how such violence is a result of “gender-power inequalities and the historical construction of the patriarchal family” (1998). She believes these single-factor theories, such as the feminist emphasis on male domination and the subordination of women do not explain why only some men commit acts of violence against women (1998). She reasons that all men are subjected to cultural messages that promote male superiority and the right to control female behavior (1998). So if a single factor such as male dominance and gender hierarchy explained violence against women, she would expect all men to commit violence against women (1998).

Heise, in contrast, presents an ecological approach to violence against women that “conceptualizes violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational and sociocultural factors” (Heise, 1998, pp. 262-263). She utilizes Belsky’s framework that consists of four levels of causality to understand violence against women and shows that these four levels can be interpreted as four concentric circles (Heise, 1998, p. 264).

She details these circles as follows: “The innermost circle represents the personal history factors that each individual brings to his or her behavior and relationships”(Heise, 1998, p. 264).[[2]](#footnote-2) Each one of these circles has specific predictive factors for violence that emerge from previous literature on violence against women. Some of the predictive factors for the innermost circle are "witnessing domestic violence as a child and experiencing physical or sexual abuse as a child" (Heise, 1998, p. 267). 94 percent of empirical studies reviewed established a “significant relationship for men between witnessing violence against their mother and later abusing a partner themselves” (Heise, 1998, p. 267). Heise notes, however, that this type of exposure to family violence is not a necessary prerequisite for abuse against women (Heise, 1998, p. 267). Heise examines Dutton’s hypothesis that abusive homes teach violence, but also lead to “psychological disturbances that, in combination with other micro level, exo level, and macro level influences, can lead to violence and aggression in later life" (Heise, 1998, p. 268).

The next circle corresponds to the microsystems that “represent the immediate context in which abuse takes place frequently in the family and other intimate or acquaintance relationships” (Heise, 1998, p. 264). A variety of factors exist that are related to the risk of violence against women spanning from sexual coercion to physical abuse of adult women (1998). The most critical factor for these types of violence is understood to be the structure of the traditional family (1998). Heise details Levinson's cross-cultural study that found that one of the strongest predictors of societies with high levels of violence against women were those where the man had sole authority in the family over economic and decision-making issues (1998). There is also evidence that points to the fact that men who were raised in patriarchal families are more likely to conduct violence against women than men raised in more egalitarian homes (1998). Heise describes how societies in which men control the wealth have higher frequencies of wife beatings (1998).

The third level is the exosystem that “encompasses the institutions and social structures, both formal and informal that embed the microsystem”(Heise, 1998, p. 264) This level includes places like the work environment or the neighborhood. This level includes several factors such as men with sexually aggressive peers that use violence against women as a way to gain status among their peers. The last level is the macro system that “represents the general views and attitudes that permeate the culture at large” (Heise, 1998, p. 264). This level includes factors such as the socialization of the hyper-masculine or men's sense of ownership over women. This theoretical framework blends perfectly with the research question as it allows for a multifaceted explanation of violence against women. Most importantly it shows how different forms of violence against women perpetuate future violence against women, which can be applied to the cases of human trafficking and furthermore suggest a culture of violence.

Carrie Yodanis supports Heise's theorization of violence against women and details how male-dominated arenas spanning from the family to social institutions perpetuate policies and practices that reproduce and legitimate male domination (Yodanis, 2004, p. 657). She continues to explain how men’s power over women expands and becomes normalized over time and spreads to society in general (2004). Once masculine power is established violence becomes a useful tool to subordinate women and maintain male power and control (2004). Yodanis notes how men can then use fear to control women's behavior (2004). The author warns how in a male-dominated setting, rape serves the purpose of devaluating women and reinforcing their subordinate position (2004).

Yodanis provides a theoretical framework to understand the connection between male domination in different areas, how they expand and become normalized and the use of violence and fear to maintain power and control. This theoretical understanding engages directly with the use of violence against women perpetuated at different levels of society that is valuable to cognize the rise of human trafficking in Mexico as well as the negligible response by the government. This is the case since the objectification of women makes it easier to view them as objects of profit and exchange.

**Section II**

**The drug war and impunity**

Since the mid 90's impunity has developed in Mexico through the increased corruption of police and government officials (2015). This impunity means that the probability of someone facing justice for crimes related to drug trafficking spanning from kidnapping to murder remains very low (2015). As Agnew explains "violence, corruption, and impunity work concurrently as territorial practices that reveal the relationships and interactions between trafficking organizations and their locations" (Agnew, 2015, p. 438).

Koutsoyannis spells out how Mexican authorities and security forces consistently failed to conduct proper criminal investigations for violence against women and have continuously corrupted or destroyed forensic evidence (Koutsoyannis, 2011, p. 2). She also accuses the government of trying to downplay the crisis and in many cases are responsible for protecting the perpetrators of said crimes (2011).

Nina Lakhani describes how women have been tortured, trafficked and targeted with almost total impunity in Mexico (Lakhani, 2016). Rupert Knox who works as the lead investigator in Mexico for Amnesty International up until 2015 reported,

“In this climate of corruption and impunity where security policies are determined by links between criminal networks, party politics and business interests opportunities for targeting women and girls are closely connected with the knowledge that no one will do anything serious to protect them” (Lakhani, 2016).

Koutsoyannis comments how the current environment of impunity operates in Mexico. “The killers are rarely convicted because narco gangs have established a parallel power in Mexico. Employees of security structures are continually replaced due to the murder of and threats against officials” (Koutsoyannis, 2011, p. 3). She explains how in 2010 alone 12 majors were assassinated and how drug gangs systematically intimidate judges to rule in their favor (2011). Police forces and prison security guards are often put in a position of accepting a bribe or being killed by the drug cartels a specific example of this is how a prison deputy in Durango was found decapitated on May 11 of 2011 (2011).

Le Clercq and Lara say that the problem of impunity in Mexico is both functional and structural (Le Clercq & Sánchez Lara, 2015, p. 8). They place Mexico as one of the countries with the worst impunity levels in the world within their index (2015). In 2017 the authors ranked Mexico in a 4th place among the countries with most impunity (Juan Antonio Le Clercq, 2018, p. 7). They make known that one of the most significant issues in Mexico is the fact that they have four times fewer judges and magistrates than average compared to the rest of the world (2018). They also found that non-reported crimes in Mexico rose from 92.5 percent in 2015 to 97.7 percent in 2018 (2018).

Martin Perez, an expert in human trafficking, links these problems of impunity with human trafficking by observing how it is very difficult to prevent or tackle the problem of disappearances (Mendieta, 2017). He describes a systematic inefficiency that prevents actions to try and address the issue of disappearances and that among the states in Mexico with most disappearances there is also the least amber alerts transmitted as a result of these crimes (2017). He also exposes that SIPINNA (Sistema Nacional de Protección Integral de niñas, niños y adolecentes) a system in charge of the protection of minors in Mexico is not able to function appropriately (2017). SIPINNA is unable to work correctly because it has not received help from other governmental entities as the Mexican government has been "intentionally hiding these disappearances to avoid taking responsibility" (2017).

Ignacio de los Reyes reports how in 2010 there was no single uniform law against human trafficking in Mexico which hindered chasing these criminals in an efficient manner (Reyes, 2010). He notes how the lack of a uniform law against human trafficking increased impunity and made it incredibly difficult to prosecute (2010). He provides a specific example of this impunity by examining how the “Fiscalia Especial para los delitos de violencia contra las mujeres y trata de personas” (the special prosecutor for crimes of violence against women and human trafficking) was only able to bring 7 out of 166 investigations into a judicial process (2010). What is most worrying is that this special prosecutor group only has 5 agents from the public ministry that are in charge of processing all of the cases in the country (2010).

Victoria Rietig provides a short description of anti-human trafficking laws in Mexico. She details how the Mexican Congress passed the first national law on human trafficking in 2007 which was followed by all Mexican states reforming their state's penal codes to include penalties for human trafficking (Rietig, 2012, p. 21). In 2012 Felipe Calderon’s government passed a new law that would “simplify the legal maze for more than thirty different penal codes” (Rietig, 2012, p. 21). Although the new law was considered a step forward in the right direction many civil organizations criticized it for lacking the precise language and being too complicated to be applied consistently by the authorities (2012).

Rosi Orozco, a congresswoman in Mexico explains how “if narcotics traffickers are caught, they go to high-security prisons, but with the trafficking of women, they have found absolute impunity” (O’Connor, 2011). Rietig believes that the bigger problem Mexico has to confront in regards to human trafficking is "widespread impunity: corruption, powerful cartels, and scarce funding that allow human trafficking to flourish in Mexico, while human rights workers face threats and violence" (Rietig, 2012, p. 21). Impunity does not cause human trafficking, but it propitiates an environment in which it can flourish and it can facilitate the decision of drug traffickers to diversify into this business.

Koutsoyannis provides support to the theoretical framework presented by Yodanis. She concludes that the continuous use of violence against women combined with the environment of impunity perpetuated by the state deny women their human rights and also normalizes gender violence (Koutsoyannis, 2011, p. 5). This normalization of gender violence and an environment of impunity have created the opportunity for drug traffickers to diversify their business into human trafficking. The widespread lack of protection from violence affecting women reinforces the idea of women as disposable and subordinate (2011)

**Culture**

The Mexican cultural background also plays an important role in understanding how violence against women is normalized. The cultural factors help us realize the levels of gender inequality in Mexico, the levels of impunity related to violence against women as well as the materialization and commodification of women’s bodies. The cultural factors also help unravel the difficulties involved in the prosecution of human trafficking and the pressures faced by the victims when deciding whether to denounce their exploiters. Heise describes how the “macro system refers to the broad set of cultural values and beliefs that permeate and inform the other three layers of the social ecology” (Heise, 1998, p. 277). She explains that the “macro system factor that promotes violence against women is a cultural definition of manhood that is linked to dominance, toughness or male honor” (Heise, 1998, p. 277).

Machismo is a concept that informs male behavior in much of Latin America and is particularly tied with male sexual culture ("Machismo Sexual Identity "). In sexual terms machismo establishes male sexuality as defined by an uncontrollable sexual appetite and condones the male as having the right to satisfy these urges in whatever way they may choose ("Machismo Sexual Identity "). Furthermore, machismo defines woman sexuality as an object that males control and women are expected to only have one sexual partner and no other, either before or outside of marriage ("Machismo Sexual Identity "). Using Heise’s theory in regards to machismo it is easy to understand how machismo is a macro system factor that promotes violence against women, as well as a culture of violence. Heise notes how Mosher and Tomkins understand how “the socialization of the hyper masculine man results in an overvaluing of a definition of masculinity as being tough, unfeeling and violent” (Heise, 1998, p. 278). Heise concludes by detailing how there is a direct link between “violence against women and men’s sense of ownership or entitlement over women” (Heise, 1998, p. 280).

María Eugenia Parra and Joel Heredia explain the importance of comprehending the social context and culture of a place to understand violence against women.

“Violence against women is founded upon the inequality among sexes and how feminine and masculine models are constructed. It is not the isolated actions of an individual, but the collectivity that supports and legitimizes certain types of violence. This violence is founded in the patriarchal pacts that males establish as a collectivity and that adjust to cultural contexts. This is why any violence against women must be analyzed in the social context in which it is produced” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 341).

Ivonne Szasz’ investigation studies the relationship between Mexican culture, the ordering of gender in Mexican society, the meaning of sexuality and human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Mexico through the use of several surveys (Casillas R, 2013, p. 41). She examines how there are several unequal norms regarding sexuality in Mexico where the male body is given exclusivity over sexual desire and sexual activity while women are seen as sexually passive ( 2013). She acknowledges that Mexican women have experienced several positive changes including an increased participation in schooling and the labor force ( 2013). Szasz notes, however, that the traditional meaning of “proper” feminine behavior has still persisted in Mexican society (2013).

Szasz explains how rural areas in Mexico have norms based on community while urban areas in Mexico foment the idea of the male as the provider and women as being constrained to domestic work (Casillas R, 2013, pp. 43-44). The author conceives heterosexual sexuality in Mexico as “built by social hierarchies and relations of power, in particular for gender” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 44). She regards Mexican sexuality as inhabiting a power structure that is formed by relations of “domination, inequality, discrimination and violence” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 44). She describes how the ideas that regulate Mexican sexuality have evolved from solely religious to a more scientific understanding alongside political discourses that coexist among concepts of traditional morality (2013). The norms regulating sexual activity reflect an inequality regarding autonomy and the possibility of choice between men and women (2013).

An example of this inequality is that there remains a much higher proportion of adolescent women who are sexually active that are married and have children before they are twenty years old (Casillas R, 2013, p. 49). In 1998 a national survey showed that 13 percent of single women under twenty years of age engaged in sexual activity and half of them had children versus 46 percent of single men that reported engaging in sexual activity and only one percent had children (2013). These statistics reflect the differences of choice regarding sexual activity between men and women. The norm that women are only allowed to have sexual activity inside of marriage or for the purpose of procreation severely hinders the choices women have in regards to sexual activity. Szasz research exposes that although rich women are allowed to engage in separate sexual relations from marriage the same cannot be said for women living in poverty (2013).

Szasz explains how the lack of alternatives regarding having a sexual life without long term consequences (such as marriage or procreating) for young women specially from poor backgrounds increases their vulnerability in regards to human trafficking and sexual exploitation (Casillas R, 2013, p. 63). In essence this lack of choice facilitates the human traffickers to lure young girls and become more liable to fall in love with them, then to marry and have children with them. Once married and with children the human traffickers pressure and blackmail these young girls into being sexually exploited.

Based on quantitative data Szasz asserts that in Mexico there is a coexistence between very conservative norms regarding marriage, parenting and scientific ideals of individuality of women that is spread through media and schools (Casillas R, 2013, p. 72). This leads to the continuance of sexual norms where men confirm their virility by placing themselves as sexual subjects and reinforcing the idea that women are present to fulfill their sexual desires and needs ( 2013). Even in urban areas where most women understand the autonomy over their body there is never a separation from the expectations and social values implemented by traditional Catholicism (2013).

Mexican culture reinterprets the ideals of individualism and liberty of choice for women (Casillas R, 2013, p. 73). It reinterprets them through “indigenous notions of the body and the person as an integral part of the social group and nature and from Hispanic traditions regarding solidarity and the unity of the communal group and the family” (Casillas R, 2013, pp. 73-74). These reinterpretations form a hybrid understanding of the individual that values belonging to a group and holds the communal and family status as important while also respecting individualism (2013).

Szasz focuses on how women’s choice of sexual activity is seen as transgressing gender norms and triggers social mechanisms of punishment (Casillas R, 2013, p. 74). Women who transgress these norms are faced with stigmatization, discrimination and violence (2013). Mexican women have not been able to gain auto determination in regards to sexual desire and pleasure (2013) women who transgress the idea of sex restricted to marriage and procreation are labeled as promiscuous and untrustworthy (2013). Women who transgress these norms are more vulnerable which creates a double victimization when it comes to women who are sexually exploited by human traffickers. Not only is the human trafficker exploiting them, but also by the nature of their sexual exploitation they are also socially punished.

Another problem young women face in Mexico is that by a cultural norm few women leave their parental home without a male partner as being alone is seen as a situation of “social illegitimacy” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 79). This places pressure on young women to find a man, which in many cases is taken advantage by human traffickers who present themselves as a loving partner who will protect them. This concept goes in hand with the cultural perception that men who provide economically must protect and exercise their authority over women under their command (2013).

Many of the victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation are minors. The author narrates how there is an increase in the sexual market for minors and explains how these minors are valued higher than adult women (2013). Szasz examines how in the construction of masculinity an “important role is formed around the sexual attraction to youth” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 100). The author notes how in rural areas in Mexico it is considered that a woman is most attractive at the age of 15 (2013). This culture creates the perfect environment for sexual tourism of minors in Mexico and human trafficking of minors (2013).

Table 2:

Disappearances of women in Mexico by age up to January 2018 (REDIM, 2018b)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Age | Number of disappearances | Percentage in respect to the total age |
| 0 | 32 | .4% |
| 1 | 64 | .8% |
| 2 | 60 | .7% |
| 3 | 62 | .7% |
| 4 | 62 | .7% |
| 5 | 58 | .7% |
| 6 | 40 | .5% |
| 7 | 42 | .5% |
| 8 | 51 | .6% |
| 9 | 41 | .5% |
| 10 | 44 | .5% |
| 11 | 77 | .9% |
| 12 | 116 | 1.4% |
| 13 | 323 | 3.9% |
| 14 | 530 | 6.4% |
| 15 | 747 | 9% |
| 16 | 758 | 9.2% |
| 17 | 566 | 6.8% |
| 18 | 316 | 3.8% |

The table demonstrates that the highest percentage of disappearances of women disproportionately targets girls that are around the ages of 15-16. As Mendieta explains girls between the ages of 15-17 are the primary victims of human trafficking (Mendieta, 2017). This suggests that Szasz analysis of culture and sexual attraction to youth as well as how it foments an environment for human trafficking of minors that may be linked to these figures.

The authors describe why many victims of human trafficking do not denounce their exploiters. They detail how these victims are afraid that they will be rejected by their families and society and are ashamed that their condition has forced them to transgress social norms such as keeping their virginity until getting married (Casillas R, 2013, p. 140). The authors conclude that as long as“ human trafficking is not publicly denounced there is the danger that it becomes socially legitimized” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 148).

Oscar Montiel Torres focuses on the “sociocultural processes that have modified the pattern of women-object into woman-merchandise” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 331). Montiel explains that many victims of human trafficking who are sexually exploited do not denounce their exploiters as they use sweet words, offer protection and paternal love as a major source of emotional support (2013). He notes that many of the recruiters and sexual exploiters in rural areas are from a Nahuatl background and use their culture and traditions to benefit the sexual exploitation of their victims (2013). He provides a specific example of how tradition and culture are strategies employed to recruit women as is the case with ‘el robo de la novia’ (The stealing of the bride) (2013). Men in these rural communities see women as sexual property that they can posses or exchange (2013). Montiel exposes how “it is through the control of the feminine body by the community that ethnic groups create cohesion among each other” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 350).

Montiel details how the “stealing of the bride consolidates the domination over women who are conceptualized as objects of exchange either as brides or as sexual merchandise” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 383). When the woman is stolen the human trafficker in this case will have sex with her to symbolize that the woman is now his property (2013). The man then visits the parents of the girl to ask for forgiveness and the man formalizes the relation by taking the girl to his house (2013). The woman becomes an “object of exchange either through marriage or as merchandise to be prostituted” (Casillas R, 2013, p. 384).

I will use the term ‘commodification’ defined as “the conversion of use-values into exchange-values and heralds a change in production relations” (Marshall, 1998). It is the process whereby “goods and services which were formerly used for subsistence purposes are bought and sold in the market” (Marshall, 1998). The objectification of the woman’s body is comodified and thus the community absorbs her objectification. She is no longer the object of one man, the process of objectification gets reproduced through the trafficking market every time she is sold and the process becomes engrained on a large scale. The human trafficker and sexual exploiter uses cultural elements to keep the girl submitted who by being sexually possessed becomes the male’s property and is afraid of being returned and seen as a failure by her community (2013).

REDIM provides a specific example of this hindrance towards public policies that target inequalities among men and women. They note how the government has not implemented alerts for gender violence against women (AVGM) in diverse entities and have chosen to politicize the matter ignoring the urgency of women seeking security ("REDIM señala que el 2017 fue un año de silencios, vacíos y retrocesos en los derechos de la infancia en México," 2018). REDIM argues that this reflects the institutionalization of machismo violence that guarantees impunity and in turn increments violence against women such as in the case of their forced disappearances (2018). This section has identified several ways in which Mexican culture in relation to women has facilitated drug trafficker’s diversification into human trafficking. Both Mexican culture and impunity work together to foment an environment where human trafficking can be very lucrative, low risk and is even normalized in several cases.

**Section III**

**Drug Traffickers, Human Trafficking and Violence Against Women**

Ana Davila examines how,

“The increasing participation of drug cartels in human trafficking has been made possible not only by their capabilities and resources, but by the widespread lack of law enforcement, the prevailing corruption, and the absence of adequate mechanisms to prevent and address human trafficking in Mexico” (Davila, 2015).

Ignacio de los Reyes interviewed Mario Luis Fuentes who is the general director for the CEIDAS (The center for studies and investigation of development and social assistance). Fuentes traces how drug trafficking became pursued at a higher rate and transnational drug traffickers became more involved with human trafficking and were not as targeted by security forces (Reyes, 2010). He also states that there is a direct link between an increase in kidnappings of migrants and higher rates of human trafficking in Mexico (2010). Fuentes recounts how many people in the country believe that drug trafficking and human trafficking are not related in Mexico, but he asserts that the evidence demonstrates otherwise (2010).

Nuria Torres details three main ways in which organized crime disappears girls (Torres, 2015). The first strategy is known as “el levantón”, which refers to the stalking of usually a young victim for days, learning their routine and finally abducting them ( (2015). The abduction is made possible by an organized crime group of men that control a particular area or several neighborhoods where they can search for targets (2015).

Another strategy is through fake advertisements or posting of jobs by which they lure their victims into meetings where they are abducted (Torres, 2015). A case study of the use of this mechanism is that of Rosa María who retells the story of how her daughter went missing (2015). She explains how her daughter came back one day and told her she had found an advertisement looking for a woman that could take care of seniors (2015). They agreed upon a meeting, and she accompanied her daughter, but nobody showed up (2015). The recruiters came up with an excuse and rescheduled the meeting, but this time Rosa María had some errands to run, so she was not able to accompany her daughter and she was taken (2015). This case study is a clear example of the second form exposed above, as a strategy of organized crime to abduct their victims.

The third central mechanism is referred to as that of “the padrote”, where men devote themselves to making minors fall in love with them to take them away from their families (Torres, 2015). The National Commission of Human rights in Mexico likewise identifies these three central mechanisms and also includes that of family members selling their children to human trafficking (United Nations Office on & Crime, 2013, pp. 62-65). Subsequently moving them to another state where they force them to work as sexual slaves and in many cases get the woman pregnant to take the child away and use it as an instrument for blackmail (2015).

An example of these last two intimidator mechanisms is that of Alejandra who was only ten years old when her aunts involved in drug dealing sold her into sexual slavery (Torres, 2015). While her aunts sold her, another family member abused her and forced her to give birth, so she decided to run away and disappear at the age of twelve (2015). When Alejandra ran away, she fell in love with a man who turned out to be what is referred to as a “padrote’ who took her to Michoacán and got her pregnant (2015). He took away the child to blackmail her, and when she tried to escape with her child, he found her and threatened to kill the child (2015). This man and his family forced her into sexual slavery for 18 years (2015).

Heise's framework provides a new way to understand this case study. From the perspective of Heise’s innermost circle there is an increased chance of perpetuation of violence against women. Her child was witness to the abuse her mother, a behavior which although not sufficient to predict violence in the future it does increase the possibilities. Concerning the microsystem, it shows how in this instance the padrote adopts a dominant role in the family, which is also a predictor for the perpetuation of violence against women at a societal level. From the macro perspective, we can observe this sense of ownership over a young woman, prevalent not only from the padrote’s demands but also from her own family. This case study is also relevant to Yodanis theoretical work as we can detect the padrote’s use of intimidation and violence to maintain control over Alejandra. This case study is also essential as it shows how drug traffickers can also target their family members for human trafficking. This speaks to Heise’s exosystem, as there is a strong perpetuation of male dominance and woman subordination from both within her family and outside of it. Many of the case studies that are presented fall under one or a few of these mechanisms as is seen with this last case study. It is necessary to use Heise’s and Yodanis frameworks to uncover how human trafficking (that is a form of violence against women) perpetuates further violence against women and how it also interacts with different kinds of violence against women at different levels of society.

Alberto Nájar reports that several NGO’s warned that drug trafficking has increased violence against women (Nájar, 2011). Teresa Ulloa is the director of the regional coalition against women trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean, and she explains that many women are abducted by drug trafficking groups to turn them into sexual slaves (2011). She notes how "there are places where girls will not attend middle school under fear of being taken by traffickers who wait to pick the beautiful girls and kidnap them” (2011).

A specific example of how drug cartel members abduct young women is detailed by Jennifer Clement who recounts how when armed drug cartel members arrive in Mexico's remote villages, mothers hide their daughters, so they are not stolen by the drug cartels to be trafficked for sex (Clement, 2014). Lupita was in a small community near Dos Boras outside the port of Veracruz when men with machine guns stole an 11-year-old girl called Ruth (2014). Lupita and others in the community heard that this was happening in other villages nearby and that the men worked for the drug cartels, taking girls to be trafficked for sex (2014). The problem became so persistent that the villagers dug holes in the ground so they could hide the girls from the village if they heard the Narcos were coming (2014). Clement narrates how some mothers in these remote villages told their daughters not to dress up, use makeup or perfume and some try and make them unattractive by dressing them and cutting their hair to look like boys (2014). This case study is helpful as it exposes the main mechanism of the “levantón” but also reveals how there are different drug cartels involved in human trafficking and the disappearance of young girls. The appropriation of these young girls is another way in which these men establish a structure of social domination. This structure is a useful example of how men’s power over women expands and becomes normalized over time.

Grillo narrates an account taken by a former deputy of a woman who was originally from El Salvador and described how the Zetas kidnaped her in Mexico (Grillo, 2013). They repeatedly assaulted her and then forced her to cook and clean clothes and weapons for them (2013). Grillo also describes a mother who located her daughter’s body in Oaxaca after a long two-year search for her (2013). She discovered that she had been held by a gang of Zetas who repeatedly abused her before murdering her (2013). These two case studies provide chilling evidence of the link between young girls who disappear and drug cartels. It also shows how the drug traffickers also use human trafficking to obtain personal sex slaves or use them themselves for forced labor. Since women are not acknowledged as subjects, violence against them is a way to deny their existence as subjects. As Yodanis would explain, it devalues women and reinforces their subordinate position.

Nuria Torres provides information from a report elaborated by the National Commission of Human Rights and CEIDAS stating that woman trafficking has become the second most lucrative illegal business in Mexico only behind drugs (Torres, 2015). The authors of the report are extremely concerned that both drug traffickers and security forces see human trafficking as an optimal way to diversify their revenue (2015). Juan Carlos Salazar reveals how Mexico turned into one of the worst countries in the world for human trafficking (Salazar, 2013). The “Fundación de Asistencia Social Humanitaria” (The Foundation for Social Humanitarian Assistance) regards Mexico as the second worst country in the world for human trafficking (2013). Teresa Ulloa reveals that her organization calculates that in 2012 “the Mexican drug cartels made 10,000 million dollars from the slavery and sexual exploitation of women and girls” (2013).

The National Commission for Human Rights in Mexico states that conservative estimates range between 16,000-20,000 minors becoming sexual slaves in Mexico (United Nations Office on & Crime, 2013, p. 17). Some studies believe the range is closer to 70,000 a total estimate of victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation ranging between 50,000 and 500,000 (2013). The commission believes that some factors that influenced the growing phenomenon of human trafficking are globalization, impunity, and corruption (2013). The commission notes how the study analyzed human trafficking in the tourist sector revealing how there is a high level of sexual exploitation of minors from human trafficking in the main tourist attractions in Mexico (2013). The commission also notes the problems of impunity in the creation of black figures in Mexico where 92 percent of crimes were not reported in 2011 and 2012 (2013). The US State Department calculates that 99.6 percent of human trafficking cases are not reported worldwide (2013).

Vayrynen explains that many human trafficking networks around the world work with criminal syndicates such as drug traffickers due to the resources and networks controlled by organized crime (Vayrynen, 2003, p. 7). Once established these criminal networks become essential in the recruitment process for human trafficking as local contacts help find either personally or through social media new victims (2003). What is most important is the access these people have to local communities and their willingness to provide victims for traffickers which keep the business thriving (2003).

Shelley explains in what way the relationship between the drug trade and human trafficking is complicated and requires a more profound understanding than the simple overlap of routes to understand this relationship (Shelley, 2012, p. 241). Shelley claims that drug trafficking is not just related to sex trafficking, but is also associated with other forms of trafficking such as for labor and begging (2012). She also remarks that drugs can also be used in the recruitment of victims or to maintain the victims in a state of exploitation (2012).

Shelley recounts how drug trade used to be so profitable before that many drug trafficking organizations restricted their activities to that of the drug trade (Shelley, 2012, p. 242). However as the drug market has become more saturated and many more criminal organizations have entered the drug trade business they had to diversify into other illicit activities such as human trafficking (2012). This change in character of the drug market was especially exacerbated once the Mexican government announced their war against drugs in 2006. Due to human trafficking’s high demand for individuals in different countries, it has become a "logical area for the diversification of drug trafficking organizations" (Shelley, 2012, p. 242). Shelley notes that it is drug traffickers who have entered the human trafficking business and not the other way around (2012). She believes there are several reasons why drug traffickers have made this transition (2012). She writes, “The entry costs of entering into human trafficking are low. One business can be hidden within the other. Lastly the risks of involvement… are less because few countries in the world have prioritized the prosecution of human trafficking or the confiscation of assets” (Shelley, 2012, p. 242).

Drug trafficking operations in Mexico have significant financial resources as a result of years of operations (Shelley, 2012, p. 242). These operations require transportation, communication and safe houses which makes it a business they can quickly enter since they already have all of this infrastructure from their drug business.(2012). She reports that diversification into human trafficking is logical as it is profitable and there is a low risk of being caught (2012). Shelley writes, "the penalties are less, and there is little risk of losing one's profits. Moreover, drugs and women can be moved along the same routes and sometimes simultaneously providing an economy of scale" (Shelley, 2012, p. 242). There is also the benefit that human traffickers can exploit the victims repeatedly (2012).

An example of how victims are repeatedly exploited is provided by a UN report that narrates how when she was three years old, her dad sold her to a woman (United Nations Office on & Crime, 2013, p. 61). When she turned 8, the woman returned her to her father, as she could no longer take care of the child (2013). Her father would beat up both her and her mother, and he decided to sell her once again (2013). He sold her for 20,000 pesos to a man who would rape her and would force her to work as a dancer at a bar he owned (2013). She escaped since the man was also a drug trafficker and she was afraid of him, but her father sold her again (2013). This case study once again exposes different forms of male ownership over the victim, violence to maintain control as well as the interaction of human trafficking with other types of violence against women. As women loose their subject identity they become commodities passing from one male abuser to the next. It is not only the human trafficker that can sell her over and over as a commodity, but also different men. This case study also relates to Heise’s microsystem as we can corroborate how the domination that the father inflicted within the structure of this family enabled violence and the sense of ownership over the women in his family.

San Juana Martinez quotes Teresa Ulloa who narrated that transnational drug traffickers had “diversified their activities into abductions, extortion, money laundering, contraband and human trafficking” (Martínez, 2009). Arthur Brice reported that Samuel Logan who is the founding director of an online information network, focused on Latin America, calculating conservatively that human trafficking is a 15-20 billion dollar business in Mexico (Brice, 2010). The center for strategic and international studies (a bipartisan, non-profit policy institute based in Washington) noted in a report that as drug traffickers have begun diversifying their activities human trafficking has taken an increasingly important role for these organizations (2010). The report also indicated that some cartels like the Zetas have come to rely on human trafficking as one of their primary revenue streams (2010).

Ioan Grillo explores to what extent the fight against human trafficking has become increasingly more difficult as a result of the mounting involvement of drug cartels in the business (Grillo, 2013). O’Connor quotes a United States official in Mexico that comments how drug cartels are “starting to change their business model and reaching out into things like sex trafficking” (O’Connor, 2011). The United States official explains that “they realize it is a lucrative way to generate revenue, and it is low-risk” (2011). O'Connor describes how the Zetas ran their prostitution ventures and how a Zeta leader was accused of "buying Central American teens from an immigrant smuggler and forcing them into prostitution in Reynosa bars and hotels" (2011). O'Connor records how federal police conducted a raid in bars and hotels in Ciudad Juarez recovering a missing 15-year-old girl as well as four other minors who were used for sexual exploitation (2011). Jaime Montejo is a spokesman for “Brigada Callejera”, a sex-worker support group in Mexico City. His position is that, "As the drug war becomes more intense, the networks that traffic women make their pacts with cartels" he asserts that "those that don't can’t survive" (2013).

Grillo explores how drug traffickers like the Zetas are “involved in human trafficking along many links on the chain. Cartels control most of Mexico’s smuggling networks through which victims are moved, while they also take money from pimps and brothels operating in their territories” (Grillo, 2013). The author examined several prosecution documents revealing several cases in which drug cartel members confessed to either killing pimps who crossed them or burning down establishments that refused to pay their quota (2013). After marines arrested one of the Zetas’ leaders, Ángel Treviño Morales, the prosecution declared their intention to level charges of human trafficking against him (2013). According to Teresa Ulloa, “the cartels know that drugs can only be sold once, but women can be sold again and again and again” (2013). After working with hundreds of sex trafficking victims in Mexico Ulloa concludes that drug trafficking organized crime is involved in 70 percent of these cases (2013).

**Conclusion**

There is not enough data to reach exact conclusions, but the evidence presented suggests that there is a positive relationship between violence against women and drug trafficking. Mexican culture helps us understand the levels of gender inequality in Mexico; the ranks of impunity related to violence against women as well as the materialization and commodification of women’s bodies. Cultural factors also help unravel the difficulties involved in the prosecution of human trafficking and the intimidation faced by the victims when deciding whether to denounce their exploiters. The high levels of impunity allow for an environment where human trafficking flourishes with low risks for the perpetrators. This creates a lucrative opportunity for organized crime.

The levels of impunity in Mexico perpetuated by a machismo culture in particular manifested by violence against women seems to create an environment that makes human trafficking attractive to pursue. The low rates of prosecution for this crime, the Mexican cultural background as well as the lack of essential resources to combat this problem provides a contextual frame where human traffickers can exploit victims with little fear of being caught. Machismo provides the cultural context to consolidate the commodification and objectification of women. Machismo culture also increases the vulnerability of women in Mexico and helps legitimates inequality and violence against women. These factors in combination with the coercion faced by drug traffickers caused by the war on drugs led to the natural diversification of drug traffickers into human trafficking.

The war on drugs has induced drug traffickers to diversify into human trafficking and sexual exploitation, which has disproportionately affected female minors. The coercion faced by drug traffickers from security forces and other cartels cause this diversification. The diversification into human trafficking is a natural choice due to the impunity, which provides low risks for organized crime while at the same time providing lucrative rewards. The infrastructure of the drug cartels also benefit from this transition and they eventually concentrate on the trafficking of young girls, which is currently in increasing demand for sexual exploitation markets. The disproportionate increase in disappearances of young women in Mexico especially around the ages of 15-16 (the prime targets of human traffickers) coincides with the beginning of the war on drugs and is likely related to drug traffickers’ entry into the human trafficking business. The increase in human trafficking that especially targets female minors has produced and perpetuated violence against women at different levels of society. This violence spans from physical abuse such as rape or forced disappearances to psychological abuse based on threats and emotional blackmail, and the destruction of women as subjects. By focusing on women in Mexico and the violence they experience we are able to find a series of factors that work in conjunction to perpetuate and normalize violence against women in Mexico.

The research presents evidence showing how transnational drug traffickers expanded into the business of human trafficking. Case studies of victims help establish the mechanisms through which human traffickers obtain their victims. The case studies help strengthen the link between drug traffickers and human trafficking and serve to expose the interaction of other forms of violence against women and human trafficking. Uncovering the interaction among different forms of violence against woman in human trafficking shows how these concepts of domination over women expand through different sectors of society. Finally the case studies provided expose the use of threats to control minors and women and how it reinforces a culture of violence encouraging an environment of male domination and the subjugation and commodification of women. These trends suggest that Mexico’s rankings in terms of disappearances, human trafficking and violence against women will only continue to deteriorate if not addressed by the government.

Going beyond this research it is important to note the different ways in which drug trafficking affects people. Most of the discussion regarding drug trafficking and violence limits itself to murder rates. The problem is that such a limited understanding of drug trafficking and its relationship with violence, especially in regards to violence against women, ignores the many ways in which drug traffickers are responsible for increasing violence against women. It is also crucial to understand the way in which organized crime is able to adapt and enter other illicit businesses and the effect of this on diverse populations. Adaptations and diversification by organized crime as a result of the drug war in Mexico also bring new concerns that need to be addressed by proponents of the drug war strategy. Many of the victims of human trafficking in Mexico are immigrants. The fact that immigrants are being systematically targeted by organized crime in Mexico needs to be further researched in order to fully comprehend the vulnerabilities faced by immigrants in Mexico. Mexico is not the only country affected by transnational drug trafficking and its ties to human trafficking and further research needs to be done to understand the effects of these in places like Central America and Colombia.

There are several policy implications that arise from this research. First of all there is a need for better statistics regarding disappearances and human trafficking around the world. Statistics based only on police reports severely underreport these types of crimes. It is important to establish a clear methodology for the recollection of this data that includes specific definitions and allows for replicability. It is crucial to gather reports of these crimes with the help of both governments and NGO’s in order to help diminish some of the under reporting caused by mistrust of the government or security forces. More attention needs to be placed on these issues as well as on violence against women and how it is perpetuated at all levels of society. A program should be established to help inform sex workers of their rights in Mexico and an anonymous phone line should be set up to report abuses.

The problem of impunity continues to haunt Mexico and exacerbate violence experienced as a result of organized crime. Mexico needs to reform their judicial system in order to address impunity. More magistrates are required in order to fill the void of judges in Mexico. Training needs to be implemented to help establish uniform protocols when dealing with victims of human trafficking or disappearances. Arturo Daen also presents some concerning problems that need to be addressed regarding the system for locating missing people in Mexico. Daen explains that only seven states in Mexico have formed a local commission to help with the search for the disappeared in Mexico (Daen, 2018). Daen also exposes that there is not enough funding for this commission and it is requires the help and availability of other institutions such as the federal police to borrow vehicles to search for the disappeared in Mexico (Daen, 2018). There is also a lack of personnel as the commission went from four members when it started to 20 as of October 2018 that are in charge of finding over 37,000 people (Daen, 2018). This newly formed commission for investigating the disappearances of Mexicans needs to be implemented in all the states of Mexico and requires the necessary funds, personnel and technology to be able to independently tackle their work load.

It is also important for amber alert systems to be implemented uniformly across all of Mexico and to go around schools and community centers to inform minors and adults of the tactics and deceits used by human traffickers to obtain their victims. The government and security forces must recognize the link between drug traffickers and human traffickers. They must also seek to increase punishments for human traffickers as well as invest more time and attention to the persecution and prosecution of human trafficking, sexual exploitation as well as that of forced disappearances to increase the costs for people involved in these businesses. It is crucial to recognize that violence against women is endemic and that one form of violence against women generally propagates other forms of violence against women across society. Recognition of the ways in which violence against women is fomented and promulgated across society is helpful to help try and change the norms and cultural perceptions that continue to enable a rise in violence against women. This paper focused mainly in the ways in which the diversification of transnational drug traffickers into human trafficking increased certain types of violence against women across Mexican society. There are many forms of violence against women that are perpetuated by drug traffickers that were beyond the scope of this research project. I encourage others to do complementary research on the effects of drug trafficking towards forced migration, feminicide and more generally in the destruction of families across Mexico that continue to be the victims of the violence perpetuated by the drug war.

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1. All of these acronyms and definitions for the model are taken from Stephen Van Evera’s guide to methods for students of political science.

   AC is Antecedent Condition “a phenomenon whose presence activates or magnifies the action of a causal law or hypothesis”

   IV is Independent Variable “a variable framing the causal phenomenon of a causal theory or hypothesis”

   DV is a Dependent Variable “A variable framing the caused phenomenon of a causal theory or hypothesis”

   IntV is an Intervening Variable “ A variable framing intervening phenomenon included in a causal theory’s explanation”

   CV is a Condition Variable “ A variable framing an antecedent condition. The values of condition variables govern the size of the impact that IV’s or IntV’s have on DV’s and other IntV’s” (Van Evera, 2015, pp. 9-11) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This paragraph references Heise’s article spanning from pages 264-280. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)