

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON AND MEDIA EVENT: CONTEXTUALIZATION AND SPEECH

Ludmila RUSNAC<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, State University of Moldova, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova  
Corresponding author: Ludmila Rusnac; e-mail: rusnac.contacte@gmail.com

### Abstract

By publicizing cases of human trafficking, media outlets carry out several essential functions: informing the public about the existence, specifics and forms of this phenomenon, raising the population's awareness about the victims of human trafficking, as well as the social prevention function. The phenomenon of human trafficking is publicized sporadically on informational platforms, predominantly via news. Most of the materials published during the monitoring period are based on press releases disseminated by various state bodies regarding convictions related to human trafficking. In terms of contextualization of media discourse, it should be mentioned that online platforms treat the human trafficking phenomenon along the following dimensions: prevention of the phenomenon, presentation of the trafficking scenario and outcome of trafficking cases. At the level of the discourse, we have identified the following peculiarities: informative and inciting headlines, at times ironic attitude towards the victims of sex trafficking, unconcealed accounts of victims, and presentation by sensationalizing.

**Keywords:** *human traffic, media, social.*

Human trafficking has become an extremely significant phenomenon in recent decades as it involves destructive implication in various spheres of human existence, ending up being projected as a global problem. Although the roots of this calamity can even be found in the historical period of mankind development, the proportion it reached at the beginning of the millennium, present in concepts such as "freedom" and "fundamental rights", is amazing. It is possible to configure such a situation because human trafficking, the worst way in which one can violate human rights, sees an unprecedented expansion in the European space, and Republic of Moldova does not represent an exception. Unfortunately, related to the socio-economic dimension, the country meets all the necessary requirements in order to develop the present phenomenon. The results of the economic and

social research from the last decade related to the vector which identifies the populations' living standard certifies the fact that Republic of Moldova holds one of the last positions in the classification, not only among former Soviet Union states, but also worldwide. The dynamic of labour force, as well as the flexible character of the human trafficking phenomenon favours the exposure of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova to the risk of being trafficked for sexual, labour or begging purposes.

In 2017 a report belonging to the US State Department it is specified that the republic of Moldova represents a source country of men, women and children trafficking. The victims from Moldova are exposed to sexual and labour force trafficking in Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and other country from Europe, Middle East, Africa and Eastern Asia. Women and children are exposed to sexual trafficking in Moldova in brothels, saunas or massage salons. Children sexual tourism from the EU, Turkey, Australia, Israel, Thailand and USA also includes the children from Republic of Moldova when it comes to commercial sexual exploitation (CIURCĂ, 2018).

According to the statistics presented by the National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, during 2017, most of the citizens of Republic of Moldova were trafficked in the Russian Federation (92 people), within the country (25 people), in Italy (15 citizens), in Cyprus and Turkey (11 people) and a lower number of people were trafficked in the Czech Republic, Germany and Greece. On the whole, in 2017, 201 adult victims and 48 underage victims were identified. Among them 98 (49%) were women, 103 (51%) men, 31 (65%) girls and

17 (35%) boys and some of them received help from the Centre for Assistance and Protection from Chisinau, as following: 68 adult victims and 22 underage victims (ANTITRAFIC.MD, 2018).

According to the statistics presented by the La Strada international Centre, the first position is occupied by labour exploitation, sexual exploitation is on the second place and begging exploitation is on the third place. At the same time, citizens are exposed to exploitation both inside and outside their countries (SPUTNIK, 2018). According to article 2 Law 241 on the prevention and combating of human being trafficking, issued on 20.10.2015, the term "human being trafficking" refers to "recruiting, transporting, transfer and sheltering people by using force or any other means of constraint, through kidnapping, deception, power abuse or vulnerability situation or by giving or receiving money or other benefits of any kind in order to obtain a person's consent who holds control over another person, with the purpose of exploiting it" (LEX.JUSTICE, 2005). Exploitation refers to using a person for the purpose of prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, labour or forced services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, bondage or the extraction of organs.

Therefore, this criminal phenomenon presents three key elements:

- Recruiting, transport, transfer and the sheltering of people;
- Threatening using force or different means of constraint which do not involve violence, such as fraud or deception
- Exploitation, especially for forced labour in constructions, agriculture and the household sector, but also for begging, prostitution and various forms of sexual exploitation.

It is worth noticing the fact that the notion of children trafficking is separately regulated, being stipulated in art. 206 of the Criminal Code. According to this code, it is recognized as a children trafficking offence "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, sheltering or receiving some money or benefits in order to obtain the consent of a person who holds control on a child, with a sexually exploitation purpose, either commercial or non-commercial, in prostitution or pornographic industry, exploitation through

labour or forced services, exploitation in slavery or in similar conditions, including illegal adoptions, the use in armed conflicts or criminal activities, removal of organs or tissues for transplantation or abandonment abroad (LEX.JUSTICE, 2009)".

In recent years, according to the data offered by the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for Republic of Moldova, the human being trafficking phenomenon generally decreased when it comes to grown-ups, but it remained unchanged when it comes to the children sector (LA STRADA, 2017).

By promoting these situations related to the trafficking of human beings, media organizations fulfil some essential function: of informing the public about the existence, specificity and the manifestation forms of this phenomenon, to sensitize the population about the victims of the trafficking as well as the function of social prevention since informed people are protected people.

The present study aims to examine the way in which news portals in Republic of Moldova approach subjects related to the trafficking of human beings. With this purpose, we identified with the purpose of being investigated the online platforms with the highest number of log ins: diez.md, sputnik.md, protv.md, jurnal.md and news.yam.md. The analysed period was the following: November 11, 2018 – March 11, 2019.

A first conclusion of the results of the initiated scientific approach is that the human being trafficking phenomenon is rarely promoted on information portals, especially by means of news. Most materials published within the monitoring period are based on press releases issued by different state structures regarding convictions for illegal offences of human trafficking. There are rare cases in which journalists and editors make efforts in order to complete this information and to place it within a general context. Therefore, the monitored phenomenon is mainly presented as "newsflash". These events are not presented again later on, in order to reflect the evolution of investigations. The materials which followed some subjects presented before were in minority. The voices of the victims, aggressors or attorneys of the two parties lack almost completely from the

press materials. At the same time, there are almost no press articles which present the causes and the consequences of human trafficking. This is due both to the speed with which information flows in the online environment and to the short lifespan of the texts. In online journalism, the accent is mainly set on informing the public about *what happened* and *how it happened* and less on offering answers to the question *why it happened*.

At the same time, most materials related to these subjects do not respect the compulsoriness principle of the two sources, especially when it comes to press releases taken from different state structures – the General Prosecutor’s Office, The Frontier Guard Office, The Ministry of Internal Affairs, etc.

It is necessary to highlight the fact that, in general, press institutions do not reveal the identity of the people who were trafficked.

A particularity of the journalistic approach related to the promotion of the phenomenon refers to the fact that materials are not accompanied by pictures or there are some symbol pictures taken from the Internet, a fact which explains, but does not justify, the lack of the legend.

On the media speech contextualization vector, is has to be mentioned the fact that online platforms approach the human being trafficking phenomenon on the following dimensions:

#### **To prevent the phenomenon.**

Here we include news about information activities developed by institutions and organizations and other subjects on the topic (reportages, meetings, press campaigns, workshops, flash mobs, etc). Also, we include here materials which present the legality of the activity of the job placement agencies abroad, as well as materials which present the dangers of illegal migration

#### **Presentation of the trafficking scenario.**

Here we include news about the arrest of alleged traffickers, materials which explain the methods used by the traffickers, the schemes of the trafficking, as well as the techniques of approaching the victims. Here are a few examples: “Each member of the family had a well-determined role: the mother, aged 44, was the lead of the organization and managed the money

obtained following the criminal activities, the daughter, aged 26, and the son, aged 20, recruited and transported the victims to Turkey” (JC.MD, n.d.). Or: “In order to be sure that the victims will not run and announce the authorities, the suspects used to lock the victims in rented apartments and made them use “salt-like” drugs. These drugs made the victims not feel the need to sleep for a number of days in a row so that they could serve a larger number of customers”.

#### **Closing-up the cases.**

This dimension refers to trial sessions, situations in which the traffickers were convicted, materials which present the rehabilitation of the victims as well as their reintegration in the society. It is worth mentioning that there are very few such materials. Even if in Republic of Moldova there are seven centres which offer assistance and protection for human trafficking victims or potential victims which deal with the victims’ psychological, physical and social rehabilitation, journalists do not seem interested in promoting this aspect of the phenomenon.

At the discourse level, the text construction techniques are chosen according to the form of the journalistic material but online portals mostly publish news. Following the analysis of the phenomenon’s projection within the verbal communication sphere, we have identified the following particularities:

#### **Informative and exciting titles.**

They have the purpose of making the discourse touching. In this context, it is necessary to specify the fact that journalists become more and more responsible and do not so clearly opt for presenting sensational details in headlines when it comes to the human trafficking phenomenon. Therefore, the titles of the materials present the essential information for the event, the linguistic spectre is of course one specific to the field and the syntagma “human being trafficking” is to be found in most titles. Here are some examples: “Here is how a flight attendant managed to save a young girl victim of human being trafficking”, placed on diez.md (DIEZ, 2017), “Arrested for human trafficking”, placed on hotnews.md (POLITIA. MD, 2018), “A group specialized in human being trafficking destroyed in Chisinau”, placed on



news.yam.md, "A man from the capital, arrested for human trafficking. What he did to a 19-year-old girl", published on news.yam.md, "A number of girls, some of them underaged, locked up in apartments in Chisinau and forced to do drugs and to practice prostitution", placed on jurnal.md (JURNAL.MD, 2018), "A woman from the Republic of Moldova known for human trafficking was extradited from Greece", etc.

### **A confusion between the concepts of "prostitute" and "victim of sexual trafficking."**

Here, we refer to the misperception of the concept of victim of sexual trafficking and, many of the materials are accompanied by nude pictures taken from the internet and which do not include any legend. At a perceptual level, two different concepts overlap: prostitution and victim of sexual trafficking. We offer an example: "The case was revealed some short time ago by the city police. They followed the scene for a couple of days and then they acted. Following some perquisitions in a man's car, the policemen found some binoculars, a phone with electroshock, a gun imitation and 230 Euro which had just been taken from his prostitute wife. In the home of the man the policemen found 5 grams of hashish" (SPUTNIK, 2018). Under this aspect we mention that the victims of human trafficking are enslaved people. Being threatened with death, physically and psychologically tortured they are forced to offer sexual services. These women are brutalized and held in precarious conditions. Prostitutes are not slaves, they do not have masters and no one take away their money.

### **The victim's testimonies.**

Undoubtedly the best articles are those that speak about real people, their life stories and about the experiences they have gone through. The use of such materials manages to sensitize the public and people have the possibility of finding out directly from the source about the origin and functionality of the phenomenon, this way implying an enormous perceptive impact.

### **Presentation from the perspective of the sensational.**

It is worth mentioning the tragic of the subjects and the humanization techniques used by

journalists in presenting the stories ensure a constant interest on behalf of the readers. People mainly develop a predilection for unusual details and stories which arouse and amplify emotions, which are memorable and easy to retell. We offer the following example: "A woman from the Republic of Moldova, established in Italy, was forced to become a prostitute by her husband. Each night, the woman was taken by her husband to a gas station from Agrate Brianza, a city in the north of Italy, and forced to prostitute. Her husband, a 57-year-old Italian citizen, followed his wife with the help of some binoculars. Immediately after the "service" was over, the man went and collected the money" (SPUTNIK, 2018). At the same time, we delimit the importance of the expressive function of language which here consists in amplifying expressivity, in order to trigger emotivity. Therefore, with the purpose of amplifying the drama of the events, words such as "bloody business", "bloody money", "criminal Moldova", "flourishing business", "specialized in human commerce" or "criminal business" are often used.

The results following the end of the investigations on the way of reflecting the human trafficking phenomenon in the online environment allowed us to issue the following conclusions:

- The approach to the phenomenon is mainly done through news;
- Most human trafficking situation become well-known to the public due to press releases, criminal synthesis of the Internal Affairs Ministry, General Prosecutor's Office and Frontier Guard Office;
- The materials written by journalists from the beginning to the end are present in a very low number (interviews with victims, decision factors, news and reportages from events, for example from press campaigns launching conferences, flash-mobs, meetings);
- In promoting the case, journalists base themselves mainly on the official source in order to present the trafficking, but there are cases in which no concrete source is being presented;
- Most materials that present human trafficking situations are accompanied by symbol photographs taken from the Internet, which present nudes, images with handcuffs,

- handcuffed people or people behind bars, these pictures are not accompanied by legends;
- Most materials solve human trafficking situations with a sexual purpose, a lower number approach subjects such as: forced labour in constructions, agriculture or household sector, human trafficking with the purpose of begging, children trafficking and organ trafficking;
  - The predilection is to present sensational details and therefore the procedures and presentation techniques of the imagistic and verbal discourses are borrowed from the oral and literary-artistic spectrum.

### References

---

- ANTITRAFIC.MD (2018) *National Report on the Implementation of the Policy for Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2017* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://antitrafic.gov.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=30&id=1110&t=/Raport/Nationale/Raport-national-de-realizare-a-politicii-de-prevenire-si-combatere-a-traficului-de-fiinte-umane-pentru-anul-2017> [13 November 2018].
- CIURCĂ, A. (2018) *It was convicted of trafficking for forced labor purposes. Report: Moldova is a source country for trafficking in men, women and children* [in Romanian]. Available from: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-sociale/a-fost-condamnat-pentru-trafic-de-persoane-in-scopul-exploatarii-prin-munca-fortata-raport-moldova-este-o-tara-sursa-pentru-traficul-de-barbati-femei-si-copiii> [14 January 2019].
- DIEZ (2017) *How a stewardess managed to save a young victim of trafficking in human beings* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://diez.md/2017/02/10/cum-reusit-o-stewardesa-sa-salveze-o-tanara-victima-traficului-de-persoane/> [10 February 2019].
- JC.MD (n.d.) *Mom, daughter and son, detained for human trafficking* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://www.jc.md/audio-mama-fiica-si-fiul-retinuti-pentru-trafic-de-persoane/> [11 November 2018];
- JURNAL.MD (2018) *Several girls, including minors, locked in apartments in Chisinau and forcibly drugged and prostituted* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://www.jurnal.md/ro/tag/trafic%20de%20persoane> [27 December 2017].
- LA STRADA (2017) *Traffickers use the method "Loverboy" to recruit Moldovan women into prostitution* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://lastrada.md/rom/articole/traficantii-de-persoane-folosesc-metoda-loverboy-pentru-a-racola-moldovence-in-pro-123> [12 February 2019].
- LEX.JUSTICE (2005) *Law no. 241/20.10.2005 on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://lex.justice.md/md/313051/> [12 December 2018].
- LEX.JUSTICE (2009) *Code no. 985/18.04.2002, THE PENAL CODE of the Republic of Moldova* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://lex.justice.md/md/331268/> [20 November 2018].
- POLITIA.MD (2018) *Retained for human trafficking* [in Romanian]. Available from: <http://hotnews.md/articles/view.hot?id=53846> [13 February 2019].
- SPUTNIK (2018) *Moldovan, forced to prostitute even after her husband after the wedding* [in Romanian]. Available from: <https://ro.sputnik.md/moldova/20180203/17082303/moldoveanca-prostitutie-sot-nunta.html> [13 February 2019].
- SPUTNIK (2018) *Shocking details: how much are Moldovans on the black market?* [in Russian]. Available from: <https://ru.sputnik.md/society/20181019/22599142/shokskolko-stoyat-na-chernom-rynke-grazhdane-moldova.html> [19 December 2018].