

Dark Side of a Global Community: Girl Trafficking in the Southeast of Mexico

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ABSTRACT: *Each day, hundreds of girls and women become victims of girl trafficking. International organized crime groups recruit them in forms of sexual exploitation. The trafficking process begins with the demand for girls to be used in prostitution. Sex trafficking has become a significant problem in global communities like Tabasco, a state in the southeast of Mexico. The state of Tabasco is a source, destination and transit place for girl trafficking as commercial sexual exploitation. In this place, there is trafficking within the state and a large number trafficked come from a region known as the Northern Triangle. The method performed to approach these qualitative investigation entailed classical approaches involving newspaper sources, as well as direct, and Geographic analysis. Findings show that girl trafficking has been intensified in the poorest municipalities of Tabasco. It was also realized that girl trafficking as sexual exploitation is practiced within the Southeast of Mexico. Tabasco is exposed as a recruitment site for traffickers. Proactive and police measures are necessary for containing the phenomenon.*

Keywords: *Child girl trafficking, girl commercial sexual exploitation, global community, human rights, poverty.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The state of Tabasco, located in the Southeast of Mexico, bordered by the Gulf of Mexico to the North, by the state of Campeche to the East, by Guatemala to the Southeast, by the states of Chiapas to the South and Veracruz to the West. Its capital city is Villahermosa. Tabasco has seventeen municipalities: Balancán, Cárdenas, Centla, Centro (Villahermosa), Comalcalco, Cunduacán, Emiliano Zapata, Huimanguillo, Jalapa, Jalpa de Méndez, Jonuta, Macuspana, Nacajuca, Paraíso, Tacotalpa, Teapa and Tenosique.

The state of Tabasco is a source, destination and transit place for girl trafficking as commercial sexual exploitation. There is trafficking within the state and a large number of girls are being trafficked from the region known as the Northern Triangle. Young girls are being trafficked to states in the USA and Canadian Provinces.

Every day, hundreds of girls throughout the Mexican Republic are victims of sex trafficking. Some of them remain in the national territory and are sexually exploited by criminal groups, while others are transferred to other countries to suffer violations of their human rights and exercise child prostitution. The state of Tabasco has been indicated by Morales (2011) and the CNDH (2014) as a place of recruitment for trafficking girl victims, by UNODC (2014) as a place of transfer and by IOM (2015) as a place of transit.

The Southern border of Mexico has a length of 1 149 kilometers and covers the states of Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco and Chiapas. These states have been identified as being part of the routes used by organized crime groups that operates trafficking networks. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2014) has noted that a great mass of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation -in particular the Central American North Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) - mainly occur in the border strip (Chiapas, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo and Tabasco) and from there it moves to other sex markets of the country to the American market.

The use of children of Central American origin (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) are being involved in activities related to agricultural work, domestic service, street vending and even begging on the streets -simulating physical disabilities to stimulate donations- has become a standard practice in many parts of Southeastern Mexico. The conditions of social and economic exclusion as well as the problems related to family violence and the abuses suffered by children, have been the main causes leading to expulsion of children from their homeland -increasing conditions of vulnerability. This has led to loss of social consciousness, minimizing the rights of children and adults in conditions of marginality; socially justifying the abuses they suffer in exchange for shelter and food. Many people are deceived and agree to travel and work in Mexico under abusive conditions that are violating their rights. However, in some occasions, these conditions are considered to be much better than what the victims experienced in their home country (United Nations Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders, 2011). The economic and social situation of the countries involved in migration processes, show scenarios that help understand and analyze migratory flows.

Compared to the United States, which is among the top five countries with the highest human development index (HDI) worldwide (0.914), the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America, made up of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, have an index of 0.662, 0.628 and 0.617 respectively. This data contributes to the different scenarios of poverty, inequality, and violence in the region, which influence those who decide to emigrate and seek better living conditions, mainly in the United States but in some cases also in Mexico (Emif Sur, 2014).

Trafficking victims in the southeast of Mexico

The National Institute of Migration (INM) reported that from January 2014 to February 2015 the entities where the highest number of detentions for abuses against migrants have been achieved are: Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila.

The main crimes are: kidnapping, homicide, rape, falsification of documents, extortion, drug trafficking and human trafficking. It is established that not only migrants' routes were perpetuated but also in commercial establishments such as bars, canteens, nightclubs, hotels and restaurants, where people from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala were recruited for the purpose of sexual and labor exploitation. Child Protection Officers or Repatriation Officers and the National Institute of Migration detained more than 430,000 migrants which 23,000 of them were children and adolescents (Noticieros Televisa, 2015).

The International Bureau of Migration (2015) recognizes that there are three corridors, Tapachula, Tenosique and Chetumal, used by Central American and Mexican traffickers, to move trafficked victims to cities such as Tijuana, Monterrey and Tampico to be sexually exploited and to continue towards the United States.

Five routes used by traffickers have been identified:

Route 1: El Ceibo, Javier Rojo Gómez, Gregorio Méndez in Emiliano Zapata, Tabasco; Chacamax Station, Palenque and Salto de Agua in Chiapas; Municipalities of Tacotalpa, Teapa and Chontalpa Station in Huimanguillo in Tabasco, to Coatzacoalcos in Veracruz.

Route 2: Raudales de Malpaso in Chiapas; Estación Chontalpa and Francisco Rueda in Huimanguillo in Tabasco, to Las Choapas in Veracruz.

Route 3: Villa Quetzalcoatl in Balacán, Tabasco; Candelaria, San Jorge, Sabancuy and Ciudad del Carmen in Campeche; Frontera, Paraíso and Cuauhtemoczin of Cardenas in Tabasco, towards Agua Dulce and Coatzacoalcos in Veracruz.

Route 4: Meritorious of the Americas, Champa, Palenque and Playa de Catazajá, Big Bajadas in Chiapas; Bonanza 1st and 2nd Sections, Ramón Grande, Monte Grande, Jose Colomo, Pemex city in Macuspana, Aquiles Serdán in Jalapa, Villahermosa and Cárdenas in Tabasco, to Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz.

Route 5: Villa Quetzalcoatl in Balacán, Tabasco; Palizada in Campeche; Jonuta, Monte Grande, José Colomo, Pemex city in Macuspana; Aquiles Serdán (Exit El Portón) in Jalapa; Villahermosa and Cárdenas in Tabasco, towards Coatzacoalcos in Veracruz (CNDH, 2013).

Political context, social interactions and power relations at regional and binational levels build the risks faced by migrants at the border crossing. States, criminal organizations, transporters and “coyotes” are involved in this construction. (Paris Pombo, 2013).

The 2015 report by the United States on human trafficking, indicated that Mexico does not meet the minimum standards. To eliminate this problem, some officials charge bribery and sexual services to those who prostitute themselves, extort undocumented immigrants, and falsify the roles of victims. Officials threaten to prosecute people if they do not report traffickers, accept bribes, facilitate the transboundary movement of victims, operate or frequent brothels -where victims are exploited-, and fail to respond to traffic offenses, including those committed at commercial sex sites (Guzman, 2015).

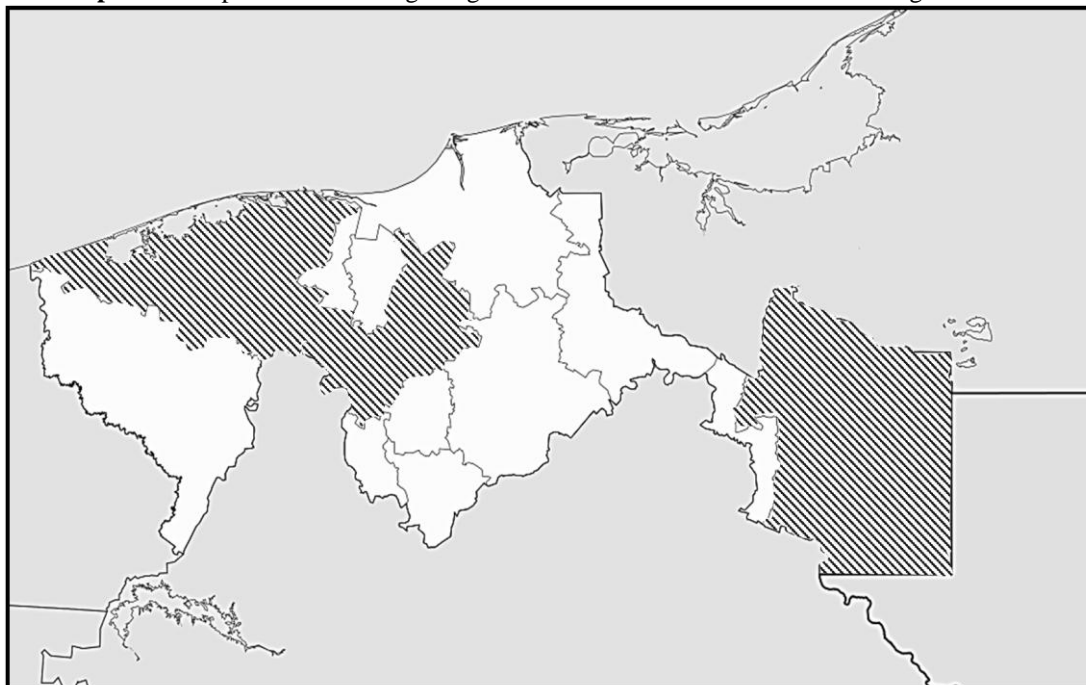
In the various routes and times that migrants follow crossing Mexico, there are possible events that endanger their physical and mental integrity. Extortion by gangs or authorities, robbery or assault are the main risks (36.5%). The second most frequent risk is the lack of food or water (11.5%) and falling off the train (9.8%) (Emif Sur, 2014).

Human trafficking in Mexico has changed its face, it is crueler. Civil society organizations ensure that the victims of trafficking have numerically grown in the country and every day younger women are caught. This is due to drug trafficking cartels having diversified their "sources of income" through exploitation of humans. Adult women and girls, from six years of age, are abducted or hooked up to be sold repeatedly until they cease to be a business for their captors. If they resist or betray their exploiter, they are killed (Alcántara, 2013).

Tabasco and Chiapas have been identified as places of recruitment, and studies conducted by Morales (2011) indicate that most trafficking victims come from the South of the country: 41.1% from Puebla, 17.6% from Tlaxcala, 14.7% from the State of Mexico, 11.7% from Veracruz, 5.8% from Guerrero and the rest from Oaxaca, Jalisco and Tabasco

The hemerographic analysis carried out from 2013-2015 depicts the municipalities of Tabasco where raids have been carried out by different institutions -including municipal and judicial police- to rescue girls and women victims of trafficking. These municipalities are: Cárdenas, Comalcalco, Cunduacán, Centro, Balancán and Tenosique (See Map 1).

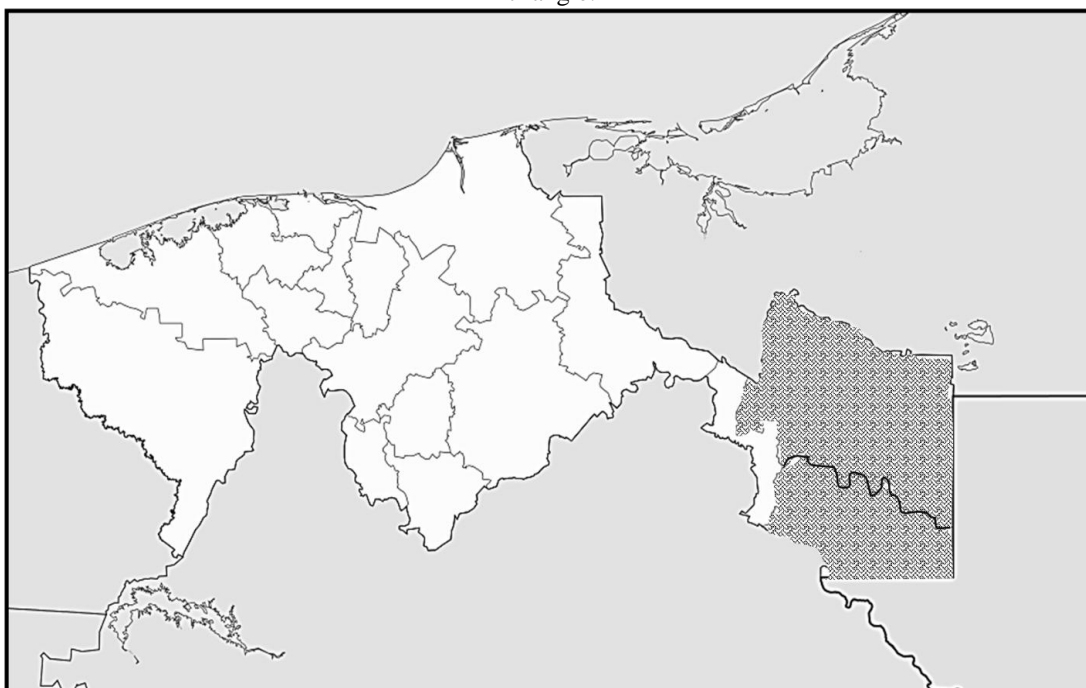
Map 1. Municipalities where migrant girls and women have been rescued during 2013-2015



Source: Own elaboration.

According to the migration office, the North Triangle traffickers' route has been denoted in two municipalities in the state of Tabasco as the main girls and women trafficking route. See Map 2.

Map 2. Municipalities of the state of Tabasco detected as a migrant traffickers route of the Northern traffickers triangle.



Source: Own elaboration with data of the Integral Office of the Migrations (2015).

Organized crime groups profit from sex trafficking and force Mexicans and foreigners to participate in illicit activities, including working as hired killers and vigilantes; in the production, transportation and sale of drugs. Related corruption, especially among local police, judicial and immigration officials, is a significant concern.

70,000 children are affected by sexual exploitation; mainly in vulnerable states such as Oaxaca, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Guerrero, Veracruz, Chiapas, Tabasco and Quintana Roo (AFP, 2015). In the past 2-years in the municipalities of Cárdenas, Comalcalco and Paraíso, the recorded cases of lenocinio are quantified already as more than 300, since there has been notifications in the social networks of girls and boys who are raised and drugged to be transferred to cities (Tijuana, Monterrey and Tampico), where they are sexually exploited (Vinagre, 2015).

IOM statistics identify 35 points in 16 states of the country as the main destinations for the exploitation of foreigners for sex tourism; Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Tapachula being at the top of the list. There are also important cases in Cancun, Villahermosa, DF, Jalapa, Veracruz and Playa del Carmen (Hernández, 2014), that can be claimed/counted.

Sexual tourism in the southeast of Mexico

The promotion of sex trade in tourism is a new form of commercial sexual exploitation that has developed from the technological advances in communications; especially with the development of the Internet. It is not difficult to find pages where region of countries are promoted as havens for sex tourism; where children and adolescents can be found available, without consequences to the exploiters. This has created the need to contemplate the criminalization of this type of behavior. From this perspective, the criminal type of sex trade in tourism should include conducts such as promoting commercial sexual exploitation within and outside the country by different means, including the creation of websites containing information on minors for these purposes (ILO, 2009).

Sex tourism has networks which offer services for tourist guides, prostitutes, unofficial house visits, brothels, massage houses with service of foreign sex tourists as well as local clients. Many people are attracted to entering this environment to obtain money from activities that do not require a special ability: the working tool is the own human body. When it comes to children or adolescents, those who are not prostitutes are exposed to other crime and exploitation.

The money involved in the transaction depends on the age, virginity (past use) and beauty of young women. The human being is turned into merchandise and the laws of supply and demand work just as well as any other product, good or service on the market. The state facilitates the service and facilities to promote such criminal activity by granting permits and accepting money or some other form of payment to look the other way of this problem. Consumers of other countries are attracted by the consumption of sex to the supply of underage girls, on internet sites which include plane, hotel and sexual services packages.

The tactics they use to keep girls as sex slaves are similar to those used by the aggressor in a situation of violence: isolation of women, minimization of abuse, denial of violence, male power exercise, threats, intimidation, abuse Emotional, physical and sexual. The common goal is the maintenance as power control over women either out of love or money (IPEC, 2009)

Hence an economically failed state before the desperate struggle for employment and a livelihood are some of the reasons why Tabasqueñas families subject their daughters to sell their body in global and / or national markets. We are seeing how the pimping character of patriarchy reifies the bodies of women as one of the axes of domination. The incorporation of patriarchy, in the discussion of the phenomenon of trafficking in girls for commercial exploitation, is the basis for all oppressions; from the hierarchical position of the male at home to the naturalization of symbolic, daily and religious violence.

The Attorney General for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons of the State of Tabasco, said that Tabasco ranks fifth in the country in the crime of trafficking white slavery (Hernández Ramírez, 2015). Figures from the Superior Court of Justice (TSJ) also revealed from 2010 to 2014, only three individuals have been sentenced for this crime in Tabasco (Robles García, 2015). In the last four years, the State Commission on Human Rights (ECHR) has dealt with 18 petitions related to trafficking in humans. Likewise, a recommendation to the Jalpa de Méndez City Council derived from the sexual exploitation that agents of the Municipal Police carried out with a group of women (Olán, 2015).

As noted above, Tabasco is a place of origin, transit, destination and return of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It is also the meeting point of internal migratory flows. The common thought is that only adults disappear, but we tend to forget that children and adolescents disappear too. It is in this last group where the figures are worrying. In recent years the disappearance of underage women has increased up to 200% (Martínez, 2016). According to The Network for the Rights of Children in Mexico, about one hundred children of Tabasco origin have been reported missing during the period from 2007 to 2014. The majority of them are

female -71 cases and 29 cases in which the victims are male. They were between 0 and 17 years old (Esquivel, 2016).

It should be noted that in the specific case of Tabasco, from 2007 to 2012, only one to three cases of disappearances of children were recorded, at most per year. However in recent years the increase has been excessive, registering 35 in 2013 and 56 in 2014 (Esquivel, 2016). In the absence of support, care and search networks, the risk situation of adolescent females in this area of disappearance is exacerbated.

The Observatory against human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation considers it fundamental that the authorities work together to eradicate this scourge and that cases of disappearance whose lines of investigation are directed towards a possible link with trafficking are investigated from different angles in order to contribute to the effective location of women and children. In this instance, it should be noted that the missing people generally belong to vulnerable populations (Centro de Estudios Sociales y Culturales Antonio de Montesinos, 2014).

Until this date, there is no database of victims of trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation in the state of Tabasco. Therefore, there is an urgent need to carry out research that will allow a deeper understanding of the relationship between the disappearance of women and trafficking with Sexual exploitation, since both phenomena represent serious violations of human rights of women and adolescents females and undermine security.

It is estimated that as many as 46 percent of trafficking victims are minors, a sector in which the risk of committing suicide doubles (Méndoza, 2015).

As a highly complex offense, officials responsible for investigating, prosecuting and punishing require specialized training to identify victims and to integrate records and sentences. This implies an institutional learning process that requires time and budget to consolidate. Another obstacle, is the low rate in denunciations hindering the prosecution of the crime of trafficking. There has also been a case for a complaint, but prosecutors or judges have reclassified the offense because they consider it not to be a case of human trafficking rather one of pimping or corruption of minors of age. An interesting fact that points out the ENVIPE (2015) is that 96% of the crimes committed in Tabasco were not denounced, nor did they initiate preliminary investigations during 2014.

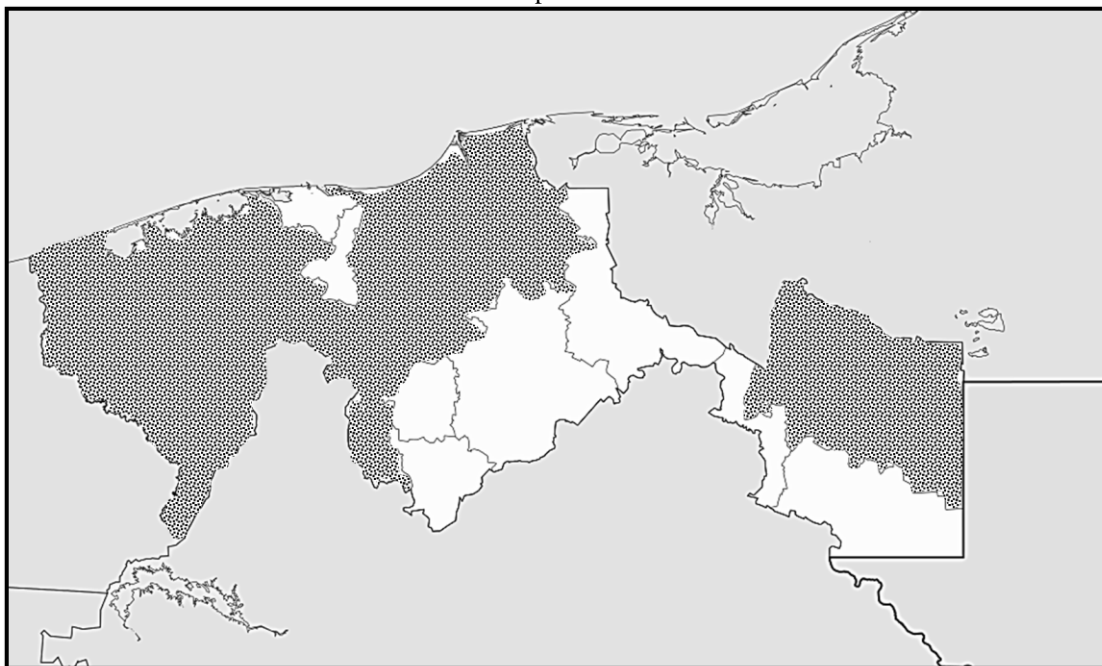
In the state of Tabasco from 2009-2011, there were only two consignments with detention for human trafficking according to the FEVIMTRA-PGR (2012). According to FEVIMTRA (2013), there have been 20 arrests related to human trafficking in Tabasco, and one conviction. Eleven adolescent female Tabasqueñas have been rescued from 2010-2013 by the federation and 10 by the state. The obstacles faced by the 32 states for reporting, preliminary inquiries and consigning the crime of human trafficking have to do with: complexity and subjective elements in the definition of crime, lack of experience of a complex crime, difficulty in integrating the body of crime, absence of comprehensive reforms in the states and the criminal type of human trafficking overlapping the criminal type of other crimes. The lack of homologation of the concept of human trafficking, the lack of homologation of the criminal type in the states and the lack of denunciation of civil society due to the idea of helplessness on the part of the authorities, creates a state of confusion. The existence of "paradises" where some activities that should be considered as trafficking are not typified, the lack of knowledge and sensitivity about this criminal phenomenon by the operators of the norm, the lack of denunciation of civil society due to the idea of neglect by the authorities, corruption and negligence, limited human and budgetary resources, especially in municipalities far from urban areas (UNODC MEXICO, 2014).

Girl trafficking for sexual exploitation in the State of Tabasco

The Commercial Sexual exploitation of Children and Adolescents (CSEC) is a visible problem in our streets, communities, cities, and countries, but it is covered with a cloak of invisibility that leaves those who manage to see it perplexed. (ECPAT International, 2014).

Based on the results of monitoring journalism 2013-2015, it found that the municipalities of provenance of the girls who are victims of trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation are: Balancán, Cárdenas, Centla, Center, Centro, Comalcalco, Cunduacán, Huimanguillo, Nacajuca and Teapa (map 3). The sites have been bars, dating houses and SPAs with sex service authorization.

Map 3. Origin of girl victims of trafficking for purposes of commercial exploitation in other states of the republic.



Source: Own elaboration

The girls who were victims of trafficking of Tabasco origin who have been rescued in black money were found in the states of Puebla, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Estado de México, Distrito Federal, Acapulco, Quintana Roo and Monterrey.

A case of girl trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, presented in Tabasco in April 2014, alleged that traffickers were public officials of the municipality of Balancán.

Following a complaint from the mother of one of the affected minors, the officials of City Hall A, alias "El Tico" - DIF employee, assigned to the cleaning area and head of the gang- as well as Dr. L -63 Years old, coordinator of Municipal Regulations-, were dedicated to the sale of 13-year-old girls, who were recruited to sell them to other public officials in the administrative, health and educational sectors. The Attorney General of Tabasco initiated the preliminary investigation 190/2014, in addition to detaining an employee of the System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIF) of the Municipality of Balancán, who served as "head of the criminal group" (Excelsior, 2014).

Other places where trafficking is reported for the purpose of sexual exploitation, are in tourist places such as inns and hotels. The Deputy High Impact Office of the State Attorney General's Office (FGE) has been held on August 8, 2015, a search of a 'Posada' in the center of the city, where 11 women were rescued, including 5 minors (Tabasco Hoy, 2015).

During a search carried out in the state capital by the State Judicial Police on August 24, 2015, minors between 15 and 17 years of age were rescued from commercial sexual exploitation in a fun bar center (Torres, 2015). Commercial sexual exploitation is constructed in a context of relations of subordination and domination between generations, where the most powerful people - generally men - take advantage of their position to satisfy their desires and needs, violating the physical, psychological and moral integrity of girls and boys (IPEC, 2009).

The Office of the Attorney General of Justice arrested two people for pederasty crimes and human trafficking, in the domicile of one of the detainees. When one of the traffickers, B, was arrested, he mentioned that he was accompanied by a 15-year-old minor, and stated that the minor was his partner from a year ago, as well as he had contacted teenagers to "sell" them to older people for a year and a half. In her statement to the Public Prosecutor's Office, the minor said that she had left her house because her father abused and mistreated her. Likewise, the teenager said she met at least three other minors, to whom her partner was a prostitute, just like her (General Prosecutor's Office, 2015).

The expert in the human trafficking project, Gender and Migrant Childhood Unit of the International Organization for Migration in Mexico (IOM), Eva Reyes Ibanez, said that 80 percent of trafficking victims are women and female adolescents. She pointed out that Mexico occupies the second place at the international level

in this phenomenon; 50 percent of the cases occur in the family, -it is the relatives or close relatives who "hook" the victims (Domínguez, 2013).

In the last four years, the State Commission on Human Rights (ECHR) has dealt with 18 petitions related to human trafficking. Just like the recommendation to the City of Jalpa de Méndez derived from the sexual exploitation that agents of the Municipal Police carried out with a group of women.

According to the preliminary investigation number AV-JM-II-180/2011, which began in the second investigative agency of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the young women, F and K, were filed as women sold to the highest bidder, by first being convinced to get drunk and then abused. The young women said that on a Saturday they went to look for the policemen with names E and F, to get them drunk and then put them on the tables, where beers are sold under threat. F and K mentioned that the person who contacted them was the sister of one of the detainees who owned the domicile, where they were locked up and under threat (La Policiaca, 2011).

Despite the arrests, the figures of the High Court of Justice (TSJ) revealed that from 2010 to 2014 only three individuals have been sentenced for the crime of trafficking in Tabasco. Eradicating women and children trafficking for sexual exploitation is a global problem. Due to the violation of the person's human rights, it is necessary to admit that in local environments the training of public servants is needed, just as the person's responsibility for the delivery of justice in the area. Many women and girls from the state of Tabasco are bought, sold, given away, abducted, rented, lent, raped, tortured and murdered. Based on the "machista" code, women are valued as objects and not as persons, and even those who participate in criminal organizations reproduce the patterns of scorn and misogyny (Cacho, 2015).

II. CONCLUSIONS

It is essential to recognize that in the state of Tabasco there are risk factors that could lead to potential victims of trafficking, since there are municipalities that are in poverty and extreme poverty. There are high levels of educational backwardness, which implies a lack of opportunities in employment of girls and women. Prostitution is promoted from the basis of the family, in the poorest communities which are proximity to the Northern golden triangle. Women and girls are victims to the exploitation sexual trafficking due to the lack sex education in families and schools.

Education based on human rights is required to reduce and solve the problem. It is time to train police officers, public ministries, and judges so they can understand international treaties and improve their performance, based on protocols of action for the management of female adolescents in situations of sexual exploitation and victims of trafficking.

Understanding the scope of the Convention on the Rights of the Child-as well as its sources of law-and creating prohibitive policies for those who go to brothels and consume, are other priorities.

Focusing on the effects of victims, to the extent that there is a denouncement could lead to possible follow ups to the groups that are illicitly enriched in this market.

Creating shelters in the state and in municipalities for female adolescents and women with psychological attention are needed in order to integrate them to society.

Child sex tourism is a cruel reality and measures should be taken to train hotel staff in relation to the protocols on sexual exploitation of children. If the employee of a hotel is not aware of the permanent damage that can be made to a child or adolescent, the employee will look the other way and ignore the importance of the client taking a minor to a room.

Finally, it is very important that state schools provide courses on the prevention of children and adolescents being trafficked, taking into account cyberbullying and the ways traffickers capture victims using social media.

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