



National Rapporteur on Trafficking in
Human Beings and Sexual Violence
against Children

Broad perspective on offending

*Backgrounds of domestic sex traffickers
Summary*

trafficking
in
human
beings

Summary

This summary is based on [two publications](#) of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children in 2024. The main publication: *Brede blik op daderschap; Achtergronden van daders van binnenlandse seksuele uitbuiting [Broad perspective on offending; Backgrounds of domestic sex traffickers]*. And the additional publication: *Daders van binnenlandse seksuele uitbuiting: licht verstandelijke beperking en slachtofferschap [Domestic sex traffickers: mild intellectual disability and victimhood]*. [The accompanying infographic](#) based on both publications, is available in English.

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Colophon

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Broad perspective on domestic sex traffickers: key findings

This research is the first to map out the offending trajectories of domestic sex traffickers, as well as their backgrounds and personal situations. It shows that domestic sex traffickers are not specialists, but generalists. The offence of human trafficking fits a broader criminal career. However, at least 18% does commit the serious offence of human trafficking more than once, which is about a quarter of those who reoffend after human trafficking with any crime.

Still, a typical domestic sex trafficker does not exist: there are four groups of offenders with different criminal careers. Many offenders come from a vulnerable background, such as an unstable family situation growing up, poor school performance and criminal individuals in their direct social environment. These are risk factors for committing offences. For offenders of domestic sex trafficking, these factors appear to be significantly more prevalent. Not only compared to non-offenders, but also when compared to general offenders.

This means that early intervention among youths with a high risk profile and maximum efforts to aid offenders results in opportunities to prevent (repeat) offences. And thus to prevent an estimated 700 to 1,000 victims of domestic sex trafficking in the Netherlands annually, of which a fifth to a third are minors.¹ The insights from this research form a rich source and offer valuable tools to achieve this.

Research background

A multitude of data from various sources² was collected on 630 domestic sex traffickers who were brought to trial in the Netherlands, and whose case was registered with the Public Prosecution Service in 2008-2017. In addition, this group of domestic sex traffickers was compared with two control groups matched on, among others, gender and age: a criminal control group of general offenders and a non-criminal control group of non-offenders. The results come from the doctoral research of Suzanne L. J. Kragten-Heerdink, senior researcher at the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children.

What is domestic sex trafficking?

Sexual exploitation occurs if a person (the victim) is coerced to perform sexual acts, which profits the person coercing the victim (the offender/human trafficker). In practice, this generally concerns financial gain. This coercing may be violent, for example through (threat of) violence, as well as manipulative, such as abusing a vulnerable position. (*Near-*)domestic sex trafficking concerns victims recruited in the same (or neighbouring)

¹ Van Dijk, J., Cruyff, M., & Van der Heijden, P. (2021). *Multiple Systems Estimation Slachtoffers Mensenhandel Nederland 2016–2019 [Multiple Systems Estimation Victims of Human Trafficking in the Netherlands 2016–2019]*. Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum (WODC).

² The national database that contains information on the prosecution of suspects by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service, a file analysis on the indictments and/or verdicts, data from the Dutch Offender Index, and non-public microdata from Statistics Netherlands.

country, as the one in which they are sexually exploited. In this report, this is the Netherlands (or neighbouring Belgium and Germany).

Domestic sex traffickers score higher on risk factors

There are so-called risk factors which, according to research, increase the likelihood of exhibiting criminal behaviour. These factors are more common among domestic sex traffickers, compared to general offenders, and even more so when compared to non-offenders. Domestic sex traffickers more often grow up in a family situation that could be experienced as complex or unstable, such as a single-parent family or a family that often changes in composition. They are also significantly lower educated. Only 30% has obtained a basic qualification in education at age 23, compared to 62% of the general offenders and 89% of the non-offenders. They are also more likely to have a mild intellectual disability and more likely to be victims of crime. In addition, they appear to deal with mental issues more often and they are more often (children of) migrants.

Furthermore, domestic sex traffickers more often have criminal parents, criminal (half-)siblings, and/or criminal (ex-)partners. This is the case for no less than 9 in 10 domestic sex traffickers (89%). Conversely, this only applies to 64% of the general offenders and to 24% of the non-offenders. Moreover, a significant share of both the criminal (half-)siblings and the criminal (ex-)partners also commit human trafficking (12%, respectively, 16%). This is striking, as this is never the case among the criminal (half-)siblings and criminal (ex-)partners of general offenders and non-offenders.

Domestic sex traffickers score lower on protective factors

Work, a partner and children can have a protective effect on committing offences, as shown by the literature. However, most of these protective factors have less effect on domestic sex traffickers. For example, entering into a partner relationship has a smaller protective effect on them than it has on general offenders. This is likely due to the fact that domestic sex traffickers more often have a relation with a criminal partner and that they change partners more often. Just like among the criminal control group, having biological children seems to have no protective effect. Having non-biological children who live at home even appears to be a risk factor and thus increases the odds of committing an offence. When domestic sex traffickers commit human trafficking for the first time, at least 31% have at least one biological child or a child who lives at home. Only less than a quarter have a job at the time they commit human trafficking (23%). However, when they have a job, this does have a protective effect similar to that on general offenders.

Domestic sex traffickers start criminal career as a minor, but generally commit human trafficking as an adult and not infrequently more than once

Domestic sex traffickers generally start their criminal career when they are still underaged (65%). When they first commit human trafficking, they are often adults (94%), although 52% is still under the age of 25 at that time. Similar to other offenders, domestic sex traffickers are usually generalists rather than specialists. They often

have a broad criminal career, consisting of many, and many different, offences. And yet at least 18% commits the offence of human trafficking more than once, which is about a quarter of those who reoffend after human trafficking with any crime. This is most likely an underestimate of the actual repeat human trafficking offences, as many offences remain unnoticed by the police and the criminal justice system. And also because it is not based on their registered criminal behaviour in their entire lives, but only until the reference date of 2 July 2021, at which time they had an average age of 37.6.

There is no typical domestic sex trafficker: four offending trajectories

Despite this general image, there is no typical domestic sex trafficker. The criminal careers of domestic sex traffickers can be categorised into four different offending trajectories: low-rate offenders, early-peak offenders, late-peak offenders, and high-rate-persistent offenders.

Low-rate offenders: start their criminal career relatively often through human trafficking

At 36%, low-rate offenders form the largest group of domestic sex traffickers. Yet, they deviate the most from the stereotypical image of the domestic sex trafficker. The group consists of a relatively high percentage of female offenders (24%) and they score (slightly) better on the risk and protective factors than the other three groups of domestic sex traffickers. For example, they are the least likely to have a criminal social environment (criminal parent, criminal (half-)sibling and/or criminal (ex-)partner), although that rate is still 81%. In addition, a large majority commits their first crime only after reaching adulthood (71%). At 30.4 years, they have the oldest age when first committing human trafficking. However, the most striking is their limited criminal career. On average, they only have 2.0 criminal cases registered against them before they engage in human trafficking. A relatively large share of the low-rate offenders even start their criminal career with human trafficking (29%).

Therefore, the National Rapporteur recommends obtaining more insight into these atypical low-rate offenders, as they engage in the serious offence of human trafficking seemingly without precedent (*recommendation 4*). More knowledge about the factors that drive them to this might result in valuable information on how to prevent it.

Early-peak offenders: substantial share commits human trafficking as a minor

Early-peak offenders represent 28% of the domestic sex traffickers. They start their criminal career when they are relatively young (on average: 15.1 years). With an average age of 22.2 years, they are the youngest human traffickers. This is the sole group of domestic sex traffickers of which a substantial share, namely 14%, commits human trafficking as a minor. As such, when they first commit human trafficking, they are relatively often still in school or studying (26%) and a relatively large share still lives at home (41%). No more than over a fifth of them has obtained a basic qualification in education at age 23. Only the high-rate-persistent offenders score lower on this factor. In addition, 11% is female and almost all of them have a person in their direct social environment who also commits offences (93%).

Late-peak offenders: start criminal career quietly

Late-peak offenders represent 21% of the domestic sex traffickers. On average, they start their criminal career at the age of 17.2. Their criminal behaviour escalates only at a later age. They first commit human trafficking when they are 28.0 years on average and have, at that time, an average of 9.4 criminal cases registered against them. Of these late-peak offenders, only 4% is female and almost all have a criminal social environment (94%). Most late-peak offenders receive welfare benefits or have no income (70%) when they first commit human trafficking.

High-rate-persistent offenders: offend the youngest and most often, and commit the most varied offences

The high-rate-persistent offenders form the smallest group of domestic sex traffickers, at 15%. With an average age of 14.4, they are the youngest at the time they commit their first offence. However, at 27.0, the age at which they first commit human trafficking is in line with the average. Before they first commit human trafficking, they have no less than 22.4 criminal cases registered against them. There are no females in this group. High-rate-persistent offenders also score the highest on risk factors. The family situation they grow up in is the most complex or unstable: 79% grow up in a single-parent family and 50% have stayed in an institution as a minor. Only 14% have obtained a basic qualification in education at age 23. Moreover, they all have a criminal social environment. 54% of them have a criminal parent, 85% have a criminal (half-)sibling and 68% have a criminal (ex-)partner.

Maximum effort required to aid domestic sex traffickers

The often young age of domestic sex traffickers, their high risk profile and their high recidivism show the need for a maximum effort in aiding these offenders. Therefore, the National Rapporteur emphasises the importance of focused intervention as early as possible. For example, through the use of prevention programmes and aid programmes aimed at youths with a high risk profile. This might in the first instance prevent that the interplay of risk factors leads to (extreme) offending behaviour, including (the escalation to) human trafficking. Previously, the National Rapporteur observed that only few convicted human traffickers are placed under supervision of the probation service. Therefore, the National Rapporteur recommends that a probation advice is requested and issued for all accused (domestic) sex traffickers (*recommendation 1*). The in-depth insights into the four groups of domestic sex traffickers with different offending trajectories is a rich supplementary source for this advice, especially when offenders do not cooperate in the probation service investigation.

The probation service could also use these insights for the interpretation of the results of the risk assessment (the professional evaluation of the probation worker) and in advising on and determining the interventions to be used. Therefore, the National Rapporteur recommends that the responsible government members enable the three probation organisations and the youth rehabilitation service to actively distribute and use the findings of this research within their own organisation (*recommendation 2*). This would allow them to offer domestic sex traffickers the best suited rehabilitation.

Need for specific interventions to prevent human trafficking recidivism

This research shows that almost all domestic sex traffickers have a person in their direct social environment who also commits criminal offences. Moreover, there are indications that sometimes domestic sex trafficking is committed within a criminal social context. This is implied by the high specific human trafficking recidivism of offenders (at least 18%) and the relatively high degree of involvement of their social environment ((half-)siblings and (ex-)partners) for specifically the offence of human trafficking. Therefore, the National Rapporteur recommends that the three probation organisations and the youth rehabilitation service are enabled to research or commission research into which existing or to be developed interventions are required to counter the specific human trafficking recidivism, taking into account the criminal social context in which it is committed (*recommendation 3*). These specific interventions could then be used for all domestic sex traffickers placed under their supervision. Monitoring could establish if the desired effect of these specific interventions are actually achieved.

The National Rapporteur investigates the nature and scope of human trafficking and sexual violence against children in the Netherlands, and the impact of policy measures on these issues.



About us

The institute of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children consists of the National Rapporteur and a team of enthusiastic employees with a multidisciplinary background. The National Rapporteur is independent, addresses her reports to the government, and is appointed by law for a four-year term. This term can be extended by four years. National Rapporteur Conny Rijken took office on 1 September 2022.