

Drug Trafficking in the Ferizaj region of Kosovo in the period 2018-2022

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to understand and analyze the phenomenon of drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region in the period 2018-2022. Through data collection and analysis, the research aims to gain detailed knowledge about the characteristics of drug trafficking in the region, including the types of drugs used, drug transportation routes, and actors involved in this activity. In addition, the aim of the research is to identify the social and economic factors that contribute to the spread of drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region. By analyzing these factors, the study aims to identify and analyze the ways in which social and economic conditions have created a favorable environment for the growth of drug trafficking in the region. Through achieving these objectives, the research aims to increase knowledge and awareness about the problem of drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region and contribute to improving policies and practices in the field of combating this illegal activity.

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Introduction

The study of drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region presents an important and complex challenge for authorities, non-governmental organizations and civil society. Drug trafficking is a devastating phenomenon that affects not only individuals and families, but also communities and society. This study aims to present an in-depth analysis of drug trafficking in Ferizaj, exploring the causes and factors that favor it, its impact on society, as well as efforts and initiatives to combat this disturbing phenomenon (Maloku & Maloku, 2024). To achieve this goal, the study will include a historical analysis of drug trafficking in the region, focusing on previous events and trends of this phenomenon. It will also examine the definition of drug trafficking, focusing on the meaning and relevance of this term in the context of Ferizaj. Factors to be examined include socioeconomic aspects, the influence of geographical location and trafficking routes, and the role of organized crime and trafficking networks in the spread of this phenomenon. Corruption and its impact on drug trafficking will also be in the spotlight (Dine, 2014).

In addition to analyzing the causes, the study will seek to assess the impact of drug trafficking on society. The social and economic consequences of this phenomenon will be examined, as well as the challenges in terms of public health and safety. Specialized analyses will be built to understand the impact on youth and communities. To meet the set goals, the study will analyze and evaluate the efforts and initiatives that have been undertaken to combat drug trafficking in Ferizaj. The response of the government and law enforcement agencies, international cooperation and assistance, and the role of non-governmental organizations will be in focus (Mehmat & Alban, 2009).

The study will also include the analysis of specific cases of drug trafficking in Ferizaj, focusing on investigations and their results. In order to prevent and control drug trafficking, strategies for combating this phenomenon will be analyzed, as well as the role of community-based programs and raising public awareness. The conclusion will provide a comprehensive overview of the study results and examine the future perspective on the fight against drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region. Current challenges will be addressed, and potential solutions will be proposed to address this important problem effectively. Overall, the topic of drug trafficking is of great importance for understanding, combating and preventing harmful criminal activity that affects the security, well-being and development of societies. Research in this area contributes to the creation of a strong knowledge base and helps in taking effective measures to combat and prevent drug trafficking.

Methodology

The methodology used for research on drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region in the period 2018-2022 is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Statistical and analytical methods are used to analyze official data, police reports, institutional documents and other available sources are analyzed to extract information on drug trafficking.

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Results and Discussion

Ferizaj is a region in southeastern Kosovo, which is a large part of the Ferizaj Municipality. The region is in the Sharr Valley, an area that has an important historical and cultural meaning for the people of Kosovo. Ferizaj is one of the largest and most developed cities in Kosovo, and the capital of the district of the same name. Drug trafficking in Ferizaj is a sensitive and worrying problem that affects the stability and security of the region. Ferizaj, as a developed city with a strategic geographical position, can be a desired destination for drug traffickers due to the frequent transport routes that pass through this area (Karović et al., 2020).

Some elements of drug trafficking in Ferizaj include:

- **Road Use:** Ferizaj is located in an important road location, with good connections to other cities in Kosovo and the region. This makes it an easy route to transport and traffic drugs from one country to another.
- **Importance of the Border:** Ferizaj is close to the border with North Macedonia and Albania, countries known for drug transit. This makes the region of interest to drug traffickers to exploit the borders to move drugs to other countries.
- **Presence of Black Markets:** Ferizaj, as a large city with a developed market, has a demand for drugs. The presence of a black market for drugs can concentrate the activity of traffickers in the region.
- **Socioeconomic Factors:** Certain socioeconomic factors, such as unemployment and poverty, can make individuals more prone to engaging in drug trafficking as a way to gain financial gain.
- **Conflict Crisis:** Escalating conflict crises in the past have created a favorable environment for drug traffickers to operate, taking advantage of unstable and turbulent situations to operate under the radar of authorities.

Drug trafficking is a criminal and illegal activity that involves the production, transportation, distribution, or trade of illicit substances, such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and other dangerous drugs. This criminal activity occurs at the international, regional, and local levels and has serious consequences for society and public safety (Maloku, 2024).

The study of drug trafficking is of great importance due to its wide-ranging impact on society and public safety. (Goldstein, 1984, 499-500). To address the challenges of drug trafficking in Ferizaj, the joint commitment of local authorities, police, civil society organizations, and the community is needed. Effective cooperation and coordination between these actors will help address this complex challenge and build a safer and more sustainable region for all residents.

Socioeconomic factors play a key role in drug trafficking in a region (Jasarevic & Maloku). These factors are closely linked to the social and economic conditions of a society and affect the distribution, demand, and supply of drugs. In the context of drug trafficking in the Ferizaj/Uroševac region or in any other region, some of the socioeconomic factors that may have an impact are:

Poverty and unemployment: High levels of poverty and a lack of job opportunities may encourage individuals to use and engage in trafficking to gain financial gain.

Lack of education and training opportunities: These factors may make the youth of the region less likely to find work and more likely to engage in drug trafficking.

Unequal distribution of wealth: In cases where wealth is concentrated in a few individuals or groups, this situation may support the pursuit of illegal means to achieve financial gain.

Lack of social services and healthcare: If there is insufficient access to social services and healthcare, this can create a poor environment for dealing with various problems, including drug use.

Spread of drug-related diseases: If we have a large spread of drug-related diseases, this can increase the demand and use of drugs in the region.

Duration of conflicts and wars: Conflicts and wars in a region can affect drug trafficking by creating an unstable environment for security and the rule of law.

Spread of pandemics (in recent times): The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the socio-economic aspects of societies and has affected all levels of society.

Drug trafficking has many important public health and safety issues. These issues affect the health of individuals and the pursuit of law, and require the focus of health and public safety authorities. The public health and safety issues related to drug trafficking are complex and often require the involvement of many sectors and organizations to address their challenges. A joint and holistic focus by public health and safety authorities, as well as international cooperation, is essential to address these issues (Goldstein, 1984).

The increase in drug trafficking is affecting crime levels in Ferizaj. This crime includes a variety of illegal acts, including robbery, theft, and violence. Ferizaj needs resources and services for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts. This includes specialized centers and support for users in the recovery process. It is important to establish preventive measures in Ferizaj to reduce the risks of drug use. Public awareness and education about the risks of drug trafficking are also needed. These issues are essential for Ferizaj and are examined in the context of public health and safety (Tobin, 2023).

To combat the negative effects of drug trafficking in Ferizaj, it is important to take preventive measures, provide support to victims and affected families, and conduct investigations to apprehend and stop drug traffickers. The cooperation of the community, local authorities and various organizations is key to addressing

this serious problem (Jasarevic, 2021). Prevention is also essential. The government should take preventive measures through school programs, youth centers and other activities to help young people resist drug use.

The response of the government and law enforcement agencies requires continuous commitment and effective coordination in the fight against drug trafficking. It is a complex challenge that requires deep cooperation between different sectors and organizations at the local and international levels to achieve success in preventing and combating this phenomenon. (AMCDDA and Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Report - Kosovo 2020)

International cooperation and assistance are essential in the fight against drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region and wider Kosovo. Drug trafficking is an international problem, and confronting it requires the joint commitment of various countries and organizations. The prevention and control of drug trafficking are key elements in the fight against this harmful phenomenon. These include measures designed to prevent the distribution, production, and use of narcotics, as well as to monitor and curb this illegal activity.¹

Drug trafficking crimes cause numerous and varied consequences. The consequences caused by these criminal crimes, in general, can be of a health, social and variable nature (drugs and the commission of criminal crimes), etc. In Kosovo, in recent years, drug users have increased massively, especially among the young population. This is proven by the number of over 30,000 drug users currently considered to exist in Kosovo and the fact of the annual increase in the number of drug users visiting and receiving treatment in psychiatric clinics in Kosovo. Thus, while in 2018 there were 771 visits to these clinics and 190 drug users were hospitalized, in 2019 there were 822 visits and 214 drug users were hospitalized (AMCDDA and Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Report - Kosovo 2020).

The consequences caused by these criminal crimes of drug trafficking, although numerous, are primarily health-related (morbidity and mortality of narcotics). Therefore, the use of narcotics without medical reasons and without the recommendation of a specialist doctor leads to the gradual destruction of physical and mental health until the person's death (Merja, 2014). As a result, five categories of diseases related to the use of illegal drugs are distinguished: overdose; other injuries; non-communicable diseases; mental health disorders; and infectious diseases (Todhri, 2015).

Overdoses (drug intoxication) account for the main weight in the mortality of narcotics users. It has been scientifically established that narcotics users experience an increased risk of death (Darke, et al 2007). It is estimated that 35% to 50% of drug injectors have experienced at least one incomplete overdose in their lifetime (Karin and Carl, 2003).

Narcotics impair cognitive abilities, vision, psychomotor control, reaction time, etc. These impairments have an impact on the commission of several different criminal offenses, especially in public traffic (Erin & Shane, 2004). A meta-analysis of cannabis use shows that the percentage of non-fatal injuries in drivers who tested positive for cannabis varies from 5% to 16.9%. Attempting or committing suicide is another type of consequence that can be associated with the use of illicit drugs (Goldstein, 1984).

Adverse health consequences associated with non-communicable diseases vary depending on the type of drug used and its route of administration (Sandro & David, 2002). For example, chronic use of cocaine and amphetamines can lead to fatal cardiovascular consequences, while cannabis can affect lung dysfunction, and physical pain is common in drug users (Wayne & Rosalie, 2003).

National and international diagnostic systems define drug addiction as a mental disorder. Therefore, the drug addiction syndrome is recorded as part of mental health problems. A recent study concluded that 36.4% of cocaine users had signs of psychiatric disorders, personality disorders and depression (Wayne & Rosalie, 2003). In practice, drug users are often also found as perpetrators of theft, robbery, threats, bodily harm and even murder, including their relatives who refuse to give money to buy drugs. In addition to health consequences, drug trafficking crimes also cause social consequences. These consequences can have personal, family and social consequences. The personal effects are numerous and varied. They appear through the isolation of the perpetrators of these criminal crimes from the family and social environment, the manifestation of family problems such as divorce (Anchalee, 1993), obstacles related to education, work, etc. The family consequences are related to the denial of the family by the environment where the perpetrator comes from, the degradation and destruction of the family's perspective.

Meanwhile, the social consequences stem from the fact that the high presence of these criminal crimes is an obstacle to domestic and international potential investments, to global integration processes, etc., because this organized criminal activity is damaging the country's image. The social consequences also occur to the detriment of the state budget. This is mainly related to the need to increase prison capacity, but also to the costs associated with the detention or serving the sentence of the perpetrators of these criminal crimes (Eric & Jurg, 2004).

Meanwhile, the behavioral consequences are those that appear in the increase in the number of drug addicts and in the commission of various criminal crimes. The growth trends that are manifesting in drug trafficking crimes in Kosovo, as emphasized above, have also influenced the increase in the number of drug addicts. This is a major concern since these are people who belong to the younger generations, where the

¹ (AMCDDA and Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Report - Kosovo 2020)

possibility of influencing drug use in other young people, due to the society they create in schools and neighborhoods, is more obvious. Of course, one of the greatest consequences of drug trafficking crimes lies in the relatively high level of their presence in society (Kakarriqi et al., 2012) and the interaction they have with the emergence of many other types of criminal crimes. This is because the perpetrators of these criminal crimes, in most cases, are also perpetrators of crimes of trafficking in women, trafficking in goods, and kidnappings and ordered murders (Finestone, 1957). In fact, when it comes to drug addictions, in practice, we also meet their perpetrators as perpetrators of thefts, robberies, threats, bodily harm and even murders, even of their relatives who refuse to give money to buy drugs.

The volume, dynamics and territorial extent of a certain type of crime represent an indicator through which it is intended to present the level and development of criminal behaviors observed in certain years and areas of the country or even beyond.

The treatment of the volume of drug trafficking crimes aims to present the level of their presence in the country. Of course, the real appearance of this type of criminal crime in society, as well as in other types of crime, is a complex, challenging and insoluble problem. This is because the exact volume of crime that occurs in society, despite formal evidence, which is almost impossible to know because it is never fully documented, is not known at all due to the various circumstances that are present in society (Halili, 2008).

Given the fact that these circumstances are also present in drug trafficking crimes, then the statistical data regarding their volume should be viewed in these terms with all the reservations that are usually present in research of this type. The number of people accused of committing drug trafficking crimes in the period 2018-2022 is 3785, (State Prosecutor's Work Reports for the years 2018-2022), while the number of persons convicted in connection with these criminal crimes during the period 2018-2022 is 2890 persons convicted. (Statistical reports (periodic and annual) of the Kosovo Judicial Council).

According to these data, during the period 2018-2022 in Kosovo, 3785 people were charged with the criminal offense of drug trafficking, of whom 2890 were convicted. This number of convicted people is 895 less than the number of persons charged with the commission of these criminal offenses, especially with the level of their presence based on the perception of public opinion that exists in Kosovo. The causes of this situation should probably be sought in inefficient and qualitative management regarding the process of confirming these criminal offenses, but without excluding other factors. Of course, the presence of the phenomenon of corruption (Riinvest Institute, 2013), as well as political interference in the country's judicial system, which are mainly reflected in cases involving political figures in this criminal business, either directly or indirectly (Riinvest Institute, 2013).

The cause of this situation should be sought in the increase in the level of drug users and distributors of doses that can be called relatively small narcotic substances, but without excluding the influence of other factors (advanced control of nightclubs by the police, notifications from responsible schools, pharmacies, citizens, etc.).

Criminal offenses of drug trafficking during the 2018-2022 period have marked their presence throughout the territory of Kosovo. Of course, the level of their presence in different municipalities is higher, while in others it is lower. What was the territorial extent of these criminal offenses in the territory of the basic courts of Kosovo for the period of the research is best shown by the data that will be reflected in the following table.

Crime in general, and therefore the specifics of its types, cannot be explained in all their complexity without studying and analyzing some basic personal and social characteristics of these behaviors, because crime as a general phenomenon manifests itself through the commission of specific criminal offenses. Given this fact, in the following treatment, the age, gender, educational level and social affiliation of the perpetrators of drug trafficking crimes will be briefly discussed. To address these characteristics, I have used the data of the studied judgments which during the period 2018-2022 were pronounced by the Basic Court of Ferizaj against the perpetrators of these criminal offenses. From these judgments studied it results in that age is an important characteristic of the criminal phenomenon that has a special importance in explaining criminal behavior (Halili, 2008). Age is considered one of the most important factors that influence criminal tendencies. Numerous statistical data from judicial practices, as well as data from criminal research, show that the perpetrators belong to people of different ages. This fact is present for all criminal offenses, including criminal offenses of drug trafficking. The results of the study of the perpetrators of these criminal offenses show that they are mainly adults.

According to research data, drug trafficking crimes were mostly committed by people aged 28-38, in 64 cases, followed by people aged 18-28 in 38 cases, people aged 38-48 in 37 cases, and people aged 48-58 in 12 cases. The lowest participation in the research period was by people aged 17-18 with 7 cases. The total number of convicted persons in the research period was 158.

These data show that the perpetrators of these crimes are mainly young people. The commission of the largest number of criminal offenses of drug trafficking by persons of the above-mentioned ages is explained by the fact that persons of these ages dominate the population of Kosovo and that they constitute the most active categories of the population, unable to secure a job and lacking prospects, therefore in various cases they seek a solution through the commission of illegal actions, including dealing with drug trafficking. Also, gender, like age, represents an important characteristic of the criminal phenomenon that has a certain

importance in explaining criminal behavior. There is a general impression that criminality is a typical phenomenon of the male gender (Halili, 2008, p. 130). Numerous research conducted on various forms of crimes in many countries of the world confirm this fact (Barbarete, 2004, pp. 33 – 34). This tendency is also observed in the commission of criminal offenses of drug trafficking. The studied judgments confirm that the perpetrators of these criminal offenses are mainly men. The following table reflects the gender of the perpetrators who have been convicted by the basic courts of Ferizaj for committing the criminal offense of drug trafficking.

According to research data, men are the ones who dominate in committing the criminal offense of drug trafficking. As it turns out, the number of convicted male persons is 151, while the number of convicted female persons is 7. Such a high participation of men in committing the criminal offense of drug trafficking should be sought in the more favorable treatment they enjoy in Kosovar society, "the fact that men are traditionally more active and dominant in society, which brings a much greater risk of their involvement in crimes, etc. (Elezi & Hysi, 2006, 174).

Consequently, the much lower level of involvement of women in committing criminal offenses of drug trafficking is related to the "high level of social control of women in society, their different treatment in Kosovar society, the structure of the female biopsy, as more difficult to adapt to difficulties, etc.

Numerous criminological research consider education as an important factor in preventing crime. This fact is also proven by the results of this paper. What is the degree of participation of persons convicted in committing criminal offenses of drug trafficking in a total of 158 studied perpetrators, based on their educational level, is best demonstrated by the data that will be reflected in the table below.

According to the data, the largest number of people convicted for committing criminal offenses of drug trafficking are people who have completed secondary education. Among the perpetrators studied, 76 people participated, followed by perpetrators who have only completed primary school with 54 people and followed by perpetrators without completing primary education with 28 people.

Numerous data from judicial practices and research from criminalistic studies show that the largest number of perpetrators of criminal offenses of narcotics trafficking comes from unemployed people and those who have a difficult financial situation. This fact is also confirmed by the results of this work. According to research data from 158 perpetrators studied, 132 of them were unemployed. The conviction of such a high number of criminal offenses of narcotics trafficking by unemployed people and with difficult social conditions is explained by the difficulties that these people have in ensuring the existence of those dictated by the difficult economic situation in which the country is located and the lack of prospects of people regarding their employment (Mustafa, Zogaj, 2009, p. 14), but without excluding the influence of other factors. Based on these facts, it can be concluded that with the increase in the level of employment and well-being of citizens, it will be possible to reduce the number of cases of committing these criminal offenses.

Conclusion

The research on drug trafficking in the Ferizaj region in the period 2018-2022 aimed to understand and analyze the phenomenon of drug trafficking in this area. In Kosovo, during the period 2018-2022, drug trafficking crimes have involved a relatively high level of criminal activity. It is underlined that it is worrying that a significant number of drug-related crimes continue to be undetected and uninvestigated by law enforcement authorities. Kosovo is a country of origin, transit and destination of narcotics. This is due to various factors, including the increase in the cultivation of some types of drugs in Kosovo, the geographical position of the country as an important transit route for trafficking. The perpetrators of drug trafficking crimes during the investigation period were mainly composed of persons aged 18 to 48, with males dominating much more, those with completed secondary education and those with poor social status. The reasons for this situation are different, but they are related to their concentration and activity in society and the social challenges that Kosovo faces.

Criminal policies for perpetrators of drug trafficking crimes have been considered lenient. During the investigation period, the courts considered a significant number of prison sentences compared to other alternative sentences. Most often, prison sentences are short, with an average of 1 year and 5 months, compared to the more severe sentences provided for by law for these crimes. Thus, it is important to review criminal policy if the aim is to reduce the incidence of these criminal crimes in the future.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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