



Мемлекет және құқық теориясы. Конституциялық құқық /
Theory of State and Law. Constitutional Law / Теория государства и права.
Конституционное право

IRSTI 10.77.51

<https://doi.org/10.32523/2616-6844-2026-155-2-50-64>

Scientific article

Intersections between child trafficking and educational perspectives

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Abstract. Child trafficking remains one of the most serious violations of children's rights and a significant social problem worldwide. The issue of child trafficking can be considered in an interdisciplinary context, linking it with various scientific fields. In order to determine the part that educational initiatives play in preventing child trafficking, this article will look at the problem from the perspectives of law and education, particularly as it relates to higher education.

It is known that certain crimes, such as child trafficking, domestic violence, forced child labor, etc., are committed due to a lack of education. Therefore, it is important to link the work of law enforcement agencies, especially those dealing with child trafficking, with education to better understand how to improve the quality and effectiveness of efforts to combat this crime. This paper examines the relationship between child trafficking in the legal context and education, particularly higher education. The study aims to analyze the understanding of the problem of child trafficking among university students in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Almaty and Astana. The work's primary goal is to determine how well-informed students are about the causes, effects, and measures to combat child trafficking, as well as how they view the issue from the perspectives of social and legal responsibility.

Keywords: child trafficking, higher education, student awareness, child rights, legal literacy.

Introduction

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of studies devoted to human trafficking, especially child trafficking. Thus, the issue has aroused a lot of interest among foreign and Kazakhstani researchers. In this context, the investigation of child trafficking issues and laws related to this topic became particularly relevant. The issue of child trafficking has been

Received: 11.03.2026. Accepted: 15.06.2026. Available online: 30.06.2026

examined from various perspectives: some study the basic concepts, parameters, and causes of child trafficking; others examine prevention measures and solutions.

It is also important to note that there are various studies examining the issue of child trafficking in an interdisciplinary context, including legal, social, economic, psychological, and educational aspects [1], [2], [3], [4]. In this article, the problem of child trafficking will be considered in both legal and educational contexts.

The issue of child trafficking is widespread in countries such as Africa, Thailand, South Asia, etc. [5], [6], [7]. Therefore, effective preventive measures are required to reduce the risk of child trafficking. Table 2 summarizes the latest available international and national statistics, illustrating the continuing vulnerability of children to trafficking and exploitation. These data provide a broader understanding of the current scope of the problem and justify the need for strengthened preventive interventions through education and public policy.

Value	Indicator
Identified victims of human trafficking in the world (2022)	69 627 people
Proportion of children among identified victims (2022)	38%
The proportion of girls among all victims	22%
The proportion of boys among all victims	16%
An increase in the number of identified victims in the world compared to 2019.	+25%
Identified victims of human trafficking in Kazakhstan (2024)	247 people
Some of them are children (2024)	54 children (21,9%)
Identified victims in Kazakhstan as of May 1, 2025	58 people
Some of them are children (2025)	10 children (17,2%)

(Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024 https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf P. 41-42) [8]

Based on the data presented in Table 2, child trafficking remains a significant component of the global human trafficking problem. According to recent international statistics, children account for more than one-third of all identified trafficking victims worldwide, indicating their high vulnerability to various forms of exploitation. The increase in the number of detected victims compared to pre-pandemic levels suggests that trafficking networks continue to adapt to changing social and economic conditions.

The statistics from Kazakhstan demonstrate that child trafficking also remains a relevant issue at the national level (Retrieved from the internet portal of the Committee on Legal Statistics and special accounts of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CPSU RK) <https://qamqor.gov.kz/crimestat/statistics> [9]). In 2024, children constituted approximately one-fifth of all identified trafficking victims, confirming that minors remain a vulnerable group requiring special protection. Although the number of officially identified victims is lower than global figures, experts emphasize that trafficking crimes are often underreported, meaning that the actual scale of the problem may be considerably higher.

These findings support the argument that preventive measures should focus not only on law enforcement activities but also on addressing the social and educational factors that

increase children's vulnerability to trafficking. Educational institutions can play an important role in raising awareness, developing critical thinking skills, and informing young people about potential risks associated with exploitation and trafficking. Therefore, strengthening educational initiatives may contribute significantly to the prevention of child trafficking and the protection of children's rights.

According to Kazakhstani researchers, more attention should be paid by the government to solve issues such as violence against minors, child neglect, the increase in low-income families, and juvenile crime [10]. Considering that one of the main causes of child trafficking is poverty and social instability [11], solving this problem requires several changes in the education system and economic policy at the state level. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the problem of child trafficking and finding ways to prevent it is one of the important tasks of society, and solving such complex problems is possible only in a country with a conscious generation and educated citizens. *The goal of the study* is to investigate how child trafficking and the education sector intersect from a legal and educational standpoint, and to determine the elements that affect how educational establishments handle this problem. *To achieve the stated goal, the following objectives are set:*

- to examine the demographic characteristics of the participants to determine the relevance of the study to the issue of child trafficking;
- to assess the level of awareness and perception of participants regarding the problem of child trafficking, including key associations, ideas about risk factors and the most vulnerable age groups;
- to determine respondents' views on the effectiveness of existing measures to prevent child trafficking, as well as the effectiveness of legal and government mechanisms to combat this phenomenon;
- to identify participants' perceptions of the most effective approaches to supporting and reintegrating victims of child trafficking.

Existing research on the problem of child trafficking in Kazakhstan focuses primarily on the legal aspects, while the educational dimension, including the role of universities, is barely considered. This topic was investigated only from a legal perspective by several Kazakhstani authors [12], [3], [13]. However, there are no studies examining this topic in an interdisciplinary context. Therefore, this study will be the first study in Kazakhstan that examines the issue of child trafficking in connection with education, representing a unique interdisciplinary study at the intersection of human rights and higher education.

The legal framework for combating child trafficking in Kazakhstan has significantly evolved over the past decade. The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan guarantees the protection of human rights and freedoms, including the rights of children. More specifically, the Law “On the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Kazakhstan” establishes state guarantees for protecting children from exploitation, violence, and trafficking. In addition, the recently adopted Law “On Counteracting Human Trafficking” introduced a comprehensive mechanism for prevention, victim protection, interagency cooperation, and rehabilitation. Criminal liability for trafficking-related offences is regulated by several provisions of the Criminal Code of Kazakhstan, including Articles 128 and 135, which establish penalties for human trafficking and trafficking in minors. Furthermore, Kazakhstan has ratified major international legal instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Palermo Protocol, demonstrating its commitment to international standards in combating child trafficking.

According to the authors, the results of the study will be useful for human rights experts, policymakers against child trafficking, and universities.

Child Trafficking And Education

While the topic of child trafficking may seem far removed from education, there is a deep and multifaceted relationship between the two. Especially in the modern world, where good and high-quality education is the way to educate law-abiding citizens and create an economically developed country. The author argues that anti-trafficking training and education on the topic are very vital and needed [14]. The vast amount of information currently available must be taken into account in order to comprehend modern education on human trafficking. It's critical to consider the attitudes and ideas it promotes. This chapter is aimed at discussing the role of education in protecting children from trafficking. It describes how educational institutions can help raise students' awareness, prevent exploitation, and build their general understanding of risk factors for human trafficking.

According to researchers, in order to prevent human trafficking, it's vital to educate school students on this topic from a young age and incorporate it into the school curriculum. Scientists warn that not including this topic in school lessons could lead to children being unaware of the dangers and even becoming victims of human trafficking. Because of some political decisions and educational limitations, students can't receive important information about the topic. This situation makes them more vulnerable to various threats. In addition, they are unable to acquire the necessary knowledge in an educational institution, where they spend most of their time: six to eight hours a day [15].

To find out what students think about teaching such a significant social issue as human trafficking in schools, the authors conducted a study among 9–12th grade students in Florida. A total of 123 people participated in the survey: 9.8% preferred required online courses, 37.4% decided to incorporate the topic into already-existing courses, and 44.7% indicated a special preference for yearly presentations. According to the interview, the focus should be on an initiative that will enable the broad distribution of trustworthy information regarding human trafficking rather than educational techniques in and of themselves. Overall, Central Florida students have demonstrated that effective classroom discussions and the use of small incentives like visual posters, brochures, or informational materials can help increase awareness of human trafficking and its prevalence and risks [16].

The author from Nigeria touched on the issue of human trafficking and its connection to education. He looks at the reasons behind human trafficking and assesses how much each of the causes that have been identified contributes to the problem. According to the study's findings and analysis, the respondents (university students in Nigeria) defined the following causes of human trafficking: lack of employment, poverty, discrimination against women, inadequate curriculum planning, a lack of relevant textbooks on the issue of human trafficking, and a shortage of trained instructors to instruct on the subject [17: 496]. The researcher states that these elements are connected and reinforce each other. That's why it leads to the creation of an environment that contributes to the presence of this social problem. For instance, women's low level of education increases their vulnerability. This situation makes them an effortless target for recruiters. In addition, youth ignorance on the topic of human trafficking is growing due to the lack of systematic training in educational institutions. The author believes that a possible

solution could be the mandatory inclusion of human trafficking topics in school and university curricula, as well as the provision of relevant educational materials and qualified teachers. This will improve the overall level of legal literacy among youth. It will also build the younger generation's resilience to engage in illegal activities.

A Canadian medical student's awareness and attitudes toward human trafficking were studied. The study involved 262 student respondents. An analysis of the responses revealed that a significant portion of students lacked awareness of the problem of human trafficking: 48.5% admitted to a complete lack of knowledge on the topic, and 45.4% indicated only a superficial understanding. Significantly, the overwhelming majority of students (76.0%) expressed the opinion that human trafficking should be included in the medical school curriculum. They also believed that special attention should be paid to training future physicians in the skills of recognizing victims and assessing their healthcare needs [18].

As mentioned above, a large number of studies are being conducted abroad to examine child trafficking and education together and to demonstrate the connection between these two concepts [19]. However, the paucity of Kazakhstani research on this topic, in particular the complete absence of studies that combine child trafficking and education, highlights the theoretical and practical importance of this research.

Materials and methods

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine university students' awareness and perceptions of child trafficking and to assess the role of educational institutions in preventing this phenomenon.

The research was conducted among 304 students enrolled in higher educational institutions in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument consisted of two sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including gender, age, and educational level. The second section comprised seven questions designed to assess students' awareness of child trafficking, perceptions of its main risk factors, knowledge of preventive measures, understanding of legal protection mechanisms, and attitudes toward victim rehabilitation and reintegration.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the fields of law and education prior to data collection. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version of the survey instrument.

The collected data were processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to summarize participants' responses and identify prevailing trends and patterns related to child trafficking awareness and prevention.

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the sample was restricted to students from a single city, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider population of Kazakhstan. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced response bias. Future research should include participants from different regions of the country and employ mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and the role of educational institutions in combating child trafficking.

Findings and discussion

The gender distribution of the participants' demographic characteristics is presented in Table 2. It is seen that the majority of the participants (304) were female (61.8%, $f = 188$), while 38.2% ($f = 116$) were male.

Table 2. Distribution of participants by gender variable

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
Female	188	61.8
Male	116	38.2
Total number	304	100.0

Table 3 shows the distribution of participants by their age group. The vast majority of participants (84.9%, $f = 258$) were found to be between the ages of 18 and 20. The proportion of participants aged 24 and over is 3.0% ($f = 9$), making up the lowest group, whereas the proportion of participants aged 21–23 is 12.2% ($f = 37$).

Table 3. Distribution of participants by age variable

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
18-20 years old	258	84.9
21-23 years old	37	12.2
24 years old and over	9	3.0
Total number	304	100.0

When the participants' educational levels are examined (Table 4), it is shown that almost the entire sample (93.1%, $f = 283$) contains bachelor's degree, students. The number of students with a master's degree is 5.6% ($f = 17$), and those with a doctorate is 1.3% ($f = 4$).

Table 4. Distribution of participants by the educational level variable

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
Bachelor's degree	283	93.1
Master's degree	17	5.6
Doctorate (PhD)	4	1.3
Total number	304	100.0

Table 5 reflects the participants' views on whether they have sufficient knowledge about child trafficking. More than half of the participants (53.9%, $f = 164$) stated that they did not have sufficient knowledge on this topic. While the percentage of those who consider themselves sufficient is 24.7% ($f = 75$), the percentage of those who consider themselves partially sufficient is 21.4% ($f = 65$). This indicates that in order to increase students' knowledge of child

trafficking, educational institutions should improve their training initiatives and offer more thorough information on child trafficking. These initiatives could improve the overall efficacy of preventative measures and aid in the early detection of possible cases.

Table 5. Students' perceptions of their knowledge of child trafficking

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
No	164	53.9
Yes	75	24.7
Partially	65	21.4
Total number	304	100.0

When students were asked what came to mind first when they hear the word "child trafficking" (Table 6), the most frequent response was "Organ trafficking" (44.7%, f = 136). This was followed by "Forced labor" (28.0%, f = 85) and "Sexual abuse" (14.8%, f = 45). The least evocative concepts were "Begging" (f = 7, 2.3%) and "Slavery" (f = 1, 0.3%).

Table 6. Students' opinions on the distribution of the initial connotations of the concept of child trafficking

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
Organ trafficking	136	44.7
Forced labor	85	28.0
Sexual abuse	45	14.8
Other	30	9.9
Begging	7	2.3
Slavery	1	0.3
Total number	304	100.0

According to Table 7, more than half of the participants (53.3%, f = 162) believe that the age group most exposed to child trafficking is the 6-10 age group. The 11-15 age group comes second with 23.7% (f = 72), while the 16-18 age group (8.2%, f = 25) is perceived as the least at risk.

Table 7. Students' opinions on the perceptions regarding the age group most exposed to child trafficking

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
6-10 years old	162	53.3
11-15 years old	72	23.7
0-5 years old	45	14.8
16-18 years old	25	8.2
Total number	304	100.0

Opinions on the most effective method for preventing child trafficking are examined in Table 8. Nearly half of the respondents (48.7%, $f = 148$) indicated "Strengthening child protection services" as the most effective method. This was followed by "Toughening legal penalties" (33.6%) ($f = 102$). "Economic support programs" (7.9%) and "Informing parents" (9.9%) were seen as less effective methods.

Table 8. Students' opinions on the most effective methods of preventing child trafficking

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
Strengthening child protection services	148	48,7
Toughening legal penalties	102	33,6
Informing parents	30	9,9
Economic support programs	24	7,9
Total number	304	100,0

Table 9 presents students' opinions on the most effective ways to integrate children who have become victims of child trafficking into society. The survey results show that the majority of respondents believe offering psychological support is necessary for victims of child trafficking (72.4%, $f = 220$). The second-highest preference was for conducting educational and professional programs ($f = 46$, 15.1%), while parental reunification was the least preferred option by the students ($f = 14$, 4.6%).

Table 9. Students' opinions on the most effective way to integrate victims of child trafficking back into society

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
Offering psychological support	220	72,4
Conducting educational or vocational programs	46	15,1
Placement with a foster family	24	7,9
Parental reunification	14	4,6
Total number	304	100,0

Table 10 presents students' opinions on whether legal procedures carried out by the government regarding child trafficking are effective or not. The table shows that the differences between the responses "Not sure" and "No, they are not effective" are almost identical, with a difference of 0.7%. Most students responded that they are "Not sure" (43.1%, $f = 131$), followed by the response "No, they are not effective" (42.4%, $f = 129$). Thus, the results indicate a significant ambivalence or negative attitude toward legal processes carried out by the government

Table 10. Students' opinions on the effectiveness of legal procedures carried out by the government

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
Not sure	131	43,1

No, they are not effective	129	42,4
Yes, they are effective	44	14,5
Total number	304	100,0

According to Table 11, the majority of students noted that state policy to combat child trafficking is insufficient (54.3%, $f = 165$). Of those who consider this policy sometimes sufficient, 33.9% ($f = 103$), believe that government policy to struggle with child trafficking is effective. Therefore, it is important to note the importance of collaboration between law enforcement agencies, the Ministry of Higher Education, and universities. These two bodies should develop more effective and efficient measures to address the problem of human and child trafficking in our country.

Table 11. Students' opinions on the struggle policies offered by the government

Variable	Frequency (f)	%
No, insufficient	165	54,3
Sometimes sufficient	103	33,9
Yes, sufficient	36	11,8
Total number	304	100,0

Practical Recommendations

For Universities

- Introduce elective courses focusing on human trafficking, child protection, and victim support.
- Integrate child trafficking prevention topics into curricula of law, education, sociology, psychology, and social work programs.
- Organize annual awareness campaigns, workshops, and seminars aimed at increasing students' knowledge of trafficking risks and prevention strategies.

For Government Agencies

- Strengthen cooperation among universities, law enforcement agencies, and social service organizations in preventing child trafficking.
- Develop and implement national educational programs aimed at raising awareness and preventing trafficking among children and young people.
- Enhance public awareness initiatives through social media, digital platforms, and public information campaigns.

For Schools

- Incorporate child trafficking prevention topics into civic education, life skills, and social studies courses.
- Provide specialized training for teachers and school staff to recognize potential indicators of trafficking, exploitation, and child vulnerability.

For Researchers

- Conduct comparative studies across different regions of Kazakhstan to identify regional differences in awareness and risk factors.

- Examine the relationship between legal literacy and vulnerability to trafficking.
- Assess the effectiveness of educational interventions and prevention programs in reducing trafficking risks among children and youth.

Conclusion

This paper is dedicated to one of the unique topics which is concerning the investigation of child trafficking along with education. The article is considered one of the first in Kazakhstan to connect two distinct areas: law and education. The authors of the paper took a look at the topic of child trafficking from both legal and educational perspectives. Students from universities in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Almaty and Astana took part in the study (total number of students - 304). The questionnaire was aimed at obtaining data concerning their opinions and awareness on the topic of human trafficking, especially child trafficking. According to the data, most of the participants became female. Participants were mostly aged 18 to 20. Students who answered the questionnaire were mostly aged 18 or 20. Almost all had their bachelor's degrees. Thus, the opinions and awareness of this problem among students will help to reveal this topic and achieve the research goals.

According to the responses in the questionnaire, most of the participants (about 164 students) noted that they did not have sufficient knowledge about child trafficking. Only a few of them (for about 75 students) indicated that they had sufficient knowledge on the topic. Thus, the study results demonstrate a lack of knowledge among university students about the problem of child trafficking and its prevention. Therefore, these findings further support the need to incorporate a course, training, or specialized courses on child trafficking into curricula. This approach to education will help prevent child trafficking, as students will be aware and understand from an early age the human costs of this violation of the law.

According to the participants' responses to the question of what comes to their mind first when they hear the term "child trafficking," most students linked it to organ trafficking, followed by forced labor. Based on the participants' opinions, the age group most exposed to child trafficking became children aged 6 to 10. This indicates that there is a certain awareness of the danger, but this group may also include children and teenagers of different ages, as described in studies from India and the USA. Students' opinions on the variable "the most effective method of preventing child trafficking" was "strengthening child protection services". Stricter laws and penalties were next at 33.6 %. For getting victims back into society, psychological support and organizing education and vocational training programs came out the most. Then, students stated that education and job training programs are the best way to integrate child trafficking victims into society. Thus, pointing to the importance of education in solving this difficult issue.

In conclusion, it's important to note that, according to the results of the study, the objectives of the research were fully achieved. The survey results reveal significant differences in opinions and knowledge about child trafficking among students. Therefore, the results of this study highlight the need for universities and other educational institutions to implement courses to enhance student understanding and the prevention of child trafficking.

Furthermore, university students need to deepen their knowledge in various fields, such as sociology, education, and law. Therefore, the inclusion of an elective course on combating human/child trafficking in Kazakhstan's university curricula is vital. This approach will contribute to combating this social problem and preventing child trafficking-related crimes in our country.

Based on the findings, education should be recognized not only as a tool for awareness raising but also as a key preventive mechanism in combating child trafficking. Strengthening legal literacy, integrating anti-trafficking education into university curricula, and enhancing cooperation between educational institutions and government agencies may significantly contribute to reducing the risks of child exploitation and trafficking in Kazakhstan.

The contribution of the authors

All the authors, **A.T. Batyrbekova**, **A.SH. Mutalyapova**, and **L.V. Bertovskii**, contributed equally. Each author conducted significant research and demonstrated active participation, which played a vital role in the preparation of the article.

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Балалар саудасы мен білім беру перспективаларының өзара байланысы

Аңдатпа. Қоғамдағы маңызды мәселелердің бірі – балалар саудасы мәселесі. Бұл тақырып бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарында да, ғылыми ортада да зерттелуге лайық. Бала саудасы мәселесін әртүрлі ғылыми салалармен байланыстыра отырып, пәнаралық контексте қарастыруға болады. Бұл жұмыста балалар саудасы мәселесі құқық және білім беру контекстінде, яғни жоғары білім контекстінде қарастырылатын болады, бұл оның алдын алудағы білім беру бастамаларының рөлін анықтайды.

Кейбір қылмыстар білімнің жетіспеушілігінен жасалатыны белгілі, мысалы, бала саудасы, тұрмыстық құлдық, мәжбүрлі балалар еңбегі және т.б. Сондықтан құқық қорғау органдары, әсіресе балалар саудасы бөлімі мен білім беру саласы арасында осы қылмысқа қарсы күрестегі күш-жігердің сапасы мен тиімділігін қалай жақсартуға болатынын жақсы түсіну үшін қарым-қатынастың болуы маңызды. Бұл мақалада балалар саудасы мен білім берудің құқықтық контекстегі, әсіресе жоғары білім берудегі байланысы қарастырылады. Зерттеу Өскемен, Алматы, Астана қалаларындағы жоғары оқу орындарының студенттері арасындағы балалар саудасы мәселесін түсінуді талдауға бағытталған. Жұмыстың негізгі мақсаты – студенттердің балалар саудасына қарсы іс-қимылдың себептері, салдары мен алдын алу шаралары туралы хабардар болу деңгейін, сондай-ақ олардың бұл мәселені құқықтық және әлеуметтік жауапкершілік призмасы арқылы қабылдауын анықтау.

Түйін сөздер: балалар саудасы, жоғары білім, университет білім алушылары, білім алушылардың хабардарлығы, бала құқықтары, құқықтық сауаттылық.

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Взаимосвязь между торговлей детьми и образовательными перспективами

Аннотация. Одной из важнейших проблем в социуме является проблема торговли детьми. Эта тема заслуживает изучения как в СМИ, так и в научной среде. Вопрос торговли детьми можно рассматривать в междисциплинарном контексте, связывая его с различными научными направлениями. В данной статье проблема торговли детьми будет исследоваться в контексте права и образования, а именно в контексте высшего образования, что позволит выявить роль образовательных инициатив в её предотвращении.

Известно, что некоторые преступления, такие как торговля детьми, домашнее рабство, принудительный детский труд и т.д., совершаются в связи с отсутствием образования. Поэтому важно, чтобы была связь между работой правоохранительных органов (особенно отдела по борьбе с торговлей детьми) и системой образования. Это поможет лучше понять, как повысить качество и эффективность борьбы с этим преступлением. В данной работе рассматривается связь торговли детьми в правовом контексте с процессами ее освещения в сфере образования, в частности высшего. Исследование направлено на анализ понимания проблемы торговли детьми среди студентов университетов городов Усть-Каменогорска, Алматы и Астаны. Основной целью работы является выявление уровня осведомленности студентов о причинах, последствиях и мерах противодействия торговле детьми, а также восприятия ими данной проблемы через призму правовой и социальной ответственности.

Ключевые слова: торговля детьми, высшее образование, осведомленность учащихся, права ребенка, правовая грамотность.

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