

**Gender violence and trafficking:
a one-sided and gendered conception of the victims?**

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Human trafficking is defined as an organised criminal activity, in which human beings are treated as possessions to be controlled and exploited. The exploitation consists in a number of violations of core human rights by drastically limiting the victims' personal freedom, violating their dignity and forcing them into prostitution or involuntary labour. The Norwegian penal law protects *anyone* from trafficking. According to the wording of the Criminal Code, the punishable act consists in coercing a *person* ("en person") by means of violence, threats, abuse of a vulnerable situation or improper behaviour, to prostitution, work, or services, among other. Although the law itself does not take a stand as to the victim's gender, it appears as though the public opinion, academia, judges, the office of the public prosecutor and even the conference organiser have a one-sided and gendered perception of the victims of trafficking. They all assume that girls and women are the victims of such crimes. This paper, which goes beyond legal doctrine to include field research conducted in Norway, will challenge this common opinion. Undoubtedly, women and girls are more prone to crimes of trafficking and, as such, represent the majority of the victims. Yet, gender stereotypes ought to be set aside by expanding the construction of equality to include all victims of trafficking, also men and boys. While the law's wording does not distinguish between the victims' gender, in its application it makes such one-sided distinction. In addition to semi-structured interviews, this paper will critically examine domestic jurisprudence and legal scholarship. It aims to discuss if and how the protection against trafficking should be adapted to changing social, legal, political landscapes to go beyond a binary conception of the victim's gender.

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