The USSR's Role in Imbalanced Sex Ratios at Birth and Human Trafficking in the South Caucasus

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Introduction
The optimal sex ratio at birth (SRB) for humans is 105-107 boys born for every 100 girls (Hesketh & Xing, 2006, p. 2). Since 1990, the population of the South Caucasus has exhibited abnormally high SRB, with rates reaching as high as 120 boys per 100 girls (Abrahamyan et al., 2012, p. 4). In the same period of time, human trafficking in the South Caucasus has also increased, particularly in the capitals and major cities of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (Shahinian, 2008, p. 2). While the two phenomena have been compared and researched together in other regions of Asia, there is a lack of research on the relationship between imbalanced SRBs and human trafficking in the South Caucasus.

Cultural Consequences
When the USSR entered the Southern Caucasus, the government began to enforce Soviet cultural ideals onto traditional families (Ishkanian, p. 5). Because this ideal was imposed from without, women in the culture began to define their identities in contrast to the Soviets, reinforcing traditionalism in their lives (Tohidi, 1996, p. 7). However, when the Soviets left, a cultural vacuum was created. In this void, women continued to subject themselves to strict private lives, maintaining higher moral standards than men (Tohidi, p. 7). In fact, the most traditional families place a greater value on men, and 43.8% of families prefer male children as opposed to the 7.6% who prefer female children (Duthe et al., 2012, p. 10; Abrahamyan et al., p. 41). This, coupled with the abortion culture, has encouraged and extended the practice of gendercide in the region. Likewise, this inequality and undervaluation of women creates an environment ripe for human trafficking.

Conclusion
While there is not enough evidence to conclude that gendercide is a causing factor behind human trafficking, the situation in the South Caucasus does reveal the two phenomena to be correlated due to their similar causes. In the South Caucasus, both events are accelerated and partially caused by the economic and cultural effects of the collapse and withdrawal of the Soviet Union. This connection has implications for the way in which the governments of the South Caucasus address the problems of gendercide and human trafficking. Instead of treating the two as separate issues, politicians, law enforcement, and activists in the region must treat the disease instead of the symptoms, addressing the economic and cultural problems left behind by the Soviet Union.

Works Cited