

Chapter 12

Empowering Community Actors: Training Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Drivers as Allies in Combating Organized Crime

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the integral role of taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (PHV) services in combating organized crime, with a specific focus on child sexual exploitation as highlighted by cases like Operation Stovewood. The research scrutinizes the socio-economic impacts of organized crime on individuals and communities, emphasizing the need for a collaborative approach to address these issues. It particularly examines the involvement of the taxi and PHV industry in these crimes and advocates for effective public-private collaboration in tackling organized crime.

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Empowering Community Actors

Organized crime, including activities like human trafficking and extortion, undermines societal stability, fostering violence and eroding public trust in institutions. The chapter presents a disturbing dimension of this crime: the exploitation of certain taxi/PHV drivers in child sexual exploitation scandals, as seen in investigations across cities like Rotherham. This revelation has led to a critical inquiry into taxi and PHV licensing, aiming to address regulatory gaps and ensure the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals.

The research adopts a comprehensive methodology, analyzing Operation Stovewood as a case study and reviewing academic and government reports on the effectiveness of policies and legal frameworks governing taxi and PHV licensing. It also explores the ethical and legal responsibilities of regulating taxi and PHV services, balancing safety measures with privacy rights.

Key to this discourse is the necessity of public-private collaboration in combating organized crime. The strategic positioning of taxi and PHV drivers as local surveillance agents offers a unique opportunity in this fight. The chapter proposes comprehensive training, legal structures, and ethical guidelines to empower drivers in this role, supplemented by technological advancements like CCTV in taxis and PHVs.

INTRODUCTION

Following a series of alarming revelations of large-scale child sexual exploitation rings in Northern England, a spotlight has been cast on the role of taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (PHV) services in such crimes, prompting a critical inquiry by the Task and Finish Group into taxi and PHV licensing. This research delves into the socio-economic impacts of organized crime on individuals and communities, underscoring the imperative for a collaborative approach to combat these deep-rooted issues. It particularly scrutinizes the involvement of the taxi and PHV trade in these crimes, reflecting on the broader need for effective public-private collaboration in tackling organized crime (Task and Finish Group on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing, 2018).

Organized crime, which encompasses illicit activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and extortion, poses a severe threat to societal stability. It expands deep into the fabric of communities, fostering violence and corruption, thereby undermining public trust in institutions and impeding economic development. The direct impact of these criminal enterprises is evident in the heightened violence and insecurity experienced by individuals, while the indirect effects manifest in the erosion of institutional credibility and economic harm.

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