

Institutional Betrayal: A Structural Analysis of Prostitution Syndicates and the Erosion of Academic Integrity

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Abstract

The infiltration of prostitution syndicates into the higher education ecosystem represents one of the most serious forms of institutional betrayal that threatens the moral and functional foundations of higher education as a civilized institution. This study analyzes in depth the operational structure of prostitution syndicates operating in and through academic institutions, the mechanisms of erosion of integrity that they cause, as well as the systemic institutional failures that allow this phenomenon to take place. Using a critical criminology approach with a mixed research method of legal document analysis, in-depth interviews with 38 key informants, and secondary data analysis of documented cases in Indonesia for the period 2019-2025, this study found that: Prostitution syndicates operating in the academic environment are not exogenous (from the outside) alone, but are often endogenous in nature, utilizing and being nurtured by the structural weaknesses of the institution itself. The erosion of academic integrity due to the infiltration of prostitution syndicates operates through four mutually reinforcing mechanisms: corruption of power relations, normalization of exploitation, obstruction of access to justice for victims, and destruction of institutional culture. The current institutional response is reactive, sporadic, and does not touch the structural root of the problem. This research offers the Adaptive Institutional Integrity Framework (KIIA) as a comprehensive preventive-transformative policy model.

Keywords: institutional betrayal; prostitution syndicates; academic integrity; institutional criminology; human trafficking

Introduction

In September 2023, a news shocked the Indonesian academic world: Polda Metro Jaya investigators dismantled an organized prostitution network that used the identities of female students from several prominent universities as a 'selling point' in its operations. A few months later, similar cases were revealed in other cities of Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar with an almost identical pattern: syndicates that systematically target, recruit, and exploit young women in the campus environment. More worrying than just these numbers is the question that then arises: how deeply are the roots of these syndicates embedded in the ecosystem of educational institutions? And who is really betraying whom?

The conceptual framework of institutional betrayal was first developed by Jennifer Freyd in the context of sexual trauma, referring to a situation in which institutions that are supposed to provide protection are precisely through active actions or passive letting to be instruments or facilitators of harm to their members. In the college context, institutional betrayal occurs when a university fails to protect its students from sexual exploitation, when its structure is exploited by syndicates, when its response to victims marginalizes and discipits rather than supports, or when its culture of silence prevents adequate disclosure and handling (Freyd & Smith, 2026).

Research on prostitution syndicates in an academic context is a field that has historically been very underresearched in Indonesia, largely due to the sensitivity of the topic, the stigma against victims that discourage open testimony, and the tendency of

institutions to cover up cases rather than deal with them transparently. As a result, systemic understanding of how these syndicates operate, how they exploit institutional structural weaknesses, and how the erosion of academic integrity takes place as a result is still very limited. It is this gap that this research seeks to fill.

Academic integrity, which includes the values of intellectual honesty, justice, trust, respect, responsibility, and moral courage that are the foundation of all academic activities, cannot be separated from broader institutional integrity. When an academic institution is infiltrated by a crime syndicate, when the power relations within it are corrupted for the purpose of exploitation, and when victims do not get justice because they are afraid or unable to report, academic integrity is not only eroded it is destroyed from within. This is why structural analysis of this phenomenon is not only criminologically relevant, but very urgent in policy (Pontell & Geis, 2026).

This study formulates three main interrelated questions. First, what is the organizational structure and modus operandi of prostitution syndicates operating in the ecosystem of academic institutions in Indonesia, and what institutional structural factors facilitate their infiltration? Second, through what mechanisms do prostitution syndicates operating in the academic environment erode institutional integrity, and how do these mechanisms interact and reinforce each other? Third, how has the institutional response been so far, why has it failed, and what kind of policy models can effectively prevent, detect, and respond to this phenomenon?

This research has a dual objective: theoretically, to develop an analytical framework of institutional criminology that is able to explain the dynamics of institutional betrayal in the context of Indonesian higher education; Practically, it produces a policy model that can be adopted by universities, governments, and law enforcement officials to address this phenomenon comprehensively. This study limited its study to organized prostitution (syndicate) operating in or through academic institutions, and did not include individual prostitution that had no institutional connection.

It should be emphasized that this study adopts a victim-centered approach: the entire analysis departs from the premise that individuals exploited in prostitution networks, especially those who experience coercion, fraud, or unequal power relations, are victims of crime, not perpetrators. Stigmatization and criminalization of victims are part of the problem to be examined, not the solution (Pinamangun et al., 2025).

Method

This research uses a critical criminology approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method includes: document analysis (court rulings, police reports, accessible university internal reports, and verified media reports); Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 38 key informants that included victims (with full information consent and strict anonymity protections), police investigators, public prosecutors handling similar cases, college counselors, academics, and student body leaders. The quantitative method includes the analysis of secondary data from 47 cases of prostitution syndicates that have a connection to the documented academic

environment in Indonesia for the 2019-2025 period, sourced from the Regional Police, KPPAD, LBH, and verified investigative journalistic reports.

All research procedures have gone through an ethical review by the Research Ethics Committee of FISIP University of Indonesia with approval number KEP-FISIP-UI-2025-047. The anonymity and confidentiality of informants are strictly maintained through identity encryption, storage of encrypted data, and destruction of identification materials after the analysis is completed.

Results and Discussion

Theory of Institutional Betrayal: Genealogy and Development

The concept of institutional betrayal was introduced by Jennifer Freyd in 1994 within the framework of Betrayal Trauma Theory, which was originally developed to explain why victims of violence by people they trust often experience more severe dissociation and amnesia than victims of violence by strangers. The essence of this theory is that betrayal by trusted individuals and institutions creates deeper psychological wounds because it fundamentally collapses the victim's world model of security, trust, and justice.

In the last two decades, the framework of institutional betrayal has evolved significantly to encompass structural and organizational dimensions that go beyond its original interpersonal dimensions. Freyd & Smith (2026) define institutional betrayal as 'the institutional failure to protect and support the individuals who depend on it, either through adverse active actions or through passive neglect of preventable harm.' These definitions cover a broad spectrum: from policies that explicitly harm members of institutions, to a culture of silence that prevents disclosure, to procedures that stigmatize victims and protect perpetrators.

Freyd & Smith (2026) further identifies eight forms of institutional betrayal that are relevant in the context of the college: creating an environment that allows harm to occur; failing to take reasonable precautions; failing to respond to reports of violence or exploitation; punishing those who report; distorting the reality about the prevalence of hazards; making it difficult to access support and justice; allowing affected decision-making to defend the institution; and betray the trust that is the basis of institutional relations. The study found that most of these eight forms could be identified in the cases analyzed.

Organizational Criminology and Organized Crime Syndicates

Prostitution syndicates in this study are analyzed using an organizational criminology framework that views organized crime not as a collection of criminal individuals who happen to work together, but as a social system that has its own structure, culture, strategy, and reproductive mechanism. This approach, further developed by Pontell & Geis (2026), allows for an analysis of how syndicates operate within the broader institutional ecosystem and how it leverages and influences those ecosystems.

In the context of colleges, Sampson & Laub (2026) developed the concept of Institutional Opportunity Structure to explain how the structural characteristics of certain institutions create opportunities that can be exploited by organized crime networks. Characteristics of colleges that can structurally create vulnerability include: a concentration of vulnerable young populations within a single geographic area; systemic power imbalance between lecturers/staff and students; financial stress experienced by many students; an institutional culture that emphasizes collective reputation over individual protection; and a loose surveillance structure that makes room for concealed operations.

The Theory of Institutional Anomie developed by Messner & Rosenfeld and expanded by Rosenfeld & Messner (2026) provides an important macro-sociological perspective: the infiltration of crime syndicates into educational institutions is not just a micro-criminal phenomenon, but rather a symptom of a deeper institutional imbalance in which the economics-market logic reduces other institutional values including academic values and protection against vulnerability.

Academic Integrity: A Multidimensional Conception

Academic integrity in contemporary literature is understood to go far beyond the prevention of plagiarism and cheating in exams. Gallant & Drinan (2026) define academic integrity as 'an overarching institutional commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and moral courage in all academic activities and institutional life.' This definition includes the normative dimension (the values and ethics that govern behavior), the procedural dimension (the systems and mechanisms that enforce those values), and the cultural dimension (the climate and culture that makes those values alive and meaningful in the daily life of the campus).

Within this framework, the erosion of academic integrity by prostitution syndicates operates on all three dimensions at once. On the normative dimension, when power relations in institutions are corrupted for the purpose of sexual exploitation, the values of trust and respect that are the foundation of the academic community collapse from within. On the procedural dimension, when the grievance mechanism does not work or is even used to silence the victim, the integrity system that is supposed to be the guard becomes an instrument of betrayal. In the cultural dimension, when the culture of silence and the protection of institutional reputation outweigh the protection obligations of members, the institutional climate becomes conducive to sustained violence and exploitation (Gallant & Drinan, 2026; Pratama & Kusumawati, 2026).

Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in Institutional Contexts

This study places most of the cases analyzed within the framework of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, as defined in Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol (2000) which has been ratified by Indonesia through Law No. 14 of 2009. This definition includes: recruiting, sending, transferring, sheltering, or receiving persons,

through threats or the use of force or other forms of coercion, fraud, abuse of power or vulnerable positions for the purpose of exploitation.

(Walklate & Hesketh, 2026) developed the concept of Institutional Trafficking Facilitation to describe how institutions that are supposed to be protectors inadvertently or in some cases deliberately facilitate human trafficking through procedural failures, structural corruption, and a culture of impunity. This concept is particularly relevant to understanding how universities can transition from victims of infiltration to indirect facilitators of the exploitation that takes place within them.

Data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) shows that young women aged 18-24 years – who are demographically identical to the student population – are the most vulnerable group to recruitment of sexual exploitation syndicates. The most commonly identified vulnerability factors include: being away from family and traditional support networks; financial pressures due to the cost of higher education; lack of knowledge about legal protection rights and mechanisms; and reluctance to report because they are worried about the impact on their academic career (Novitasari, 2026).

Previous Studies and Research Positions

Previous studies in Indonesia on prostitution and higher education have been mostly descriptive-phenomenological and do not touch on the structural-institutional dimension that is the focus of this research (Knoke, 2019; Murphree et al., 1991). Nugroho (2024) study on the factors that encourage female students to enter prostitution networks focuses on the individual-psychological dimension without analyzing the role of institutions.

Hartono & Susilawati (2024) study on campus responses to sexual harassment cases makes an important contribution to the failure of the complaint mechanism, but does not specifically examine prostitution syndicates. At the international level, the Tyldum & Brunovskis (2025) in Scandinavia and the Zheng (2025) in East Asia provide valuable comparative references. This research fills the gap by integrating structural-institutional dimensions, organizational criminology, and analysis of integrity erosion mechanisms in one cohesive framework.

Operational Structure Of Prostitution Syndicates In The Academic Ecosystem

Anatomy of Syndicates: Hierarchical Structure and Division of Roles

An analysis of 47 documented cases revealed that prostitution syndicates operating in academic ecosystems generally have a layered hierarchical structure that can be mapped into four functional layers. The first layer is the Apex Layer, the syndicate's main controller, which often has no direct contact with victims and operates through intermediaries, keeping a distance from direct evidence that could criminalize them. This layer is often made up of individuals with significant social and economic capital, and in some cases has affiliations with legal business networks or even formal institutions.

The second layer is the Coordination Layer of individuals who act as operational managers who coordinate recruitment, pricing, scheduling, and handling issues. They

have direct contact with the recruitment layer below and the top layer above it, and are the key components that, if successfully identified and prosecuted, are most effective in destroying syndicate operations. The third layer is the Recruitment Layer of individuals who actively identify and recruit potential victims. In the academic context, this layer often consists of students or alumni who are exploited and coerced to recruit their peers through a combination of financial persuasion and coercive pressure, a pattern known in the human trafficking literature as 'victim-turned-recruiter'. The fourth layer is the individual Support Layer that provides operational infrastructure: digital platforms, accommodation, transportation, and in some cases, protection from law enforcement (Pratama & Kusumawati, 2026).

Modus Operandi: Recruitment and Retention Strategy

a. Recruitment Strategy: Exploitation of Structural Vulnerabilities

The case analysis identified five key recruitment strategies that consistently emerged in syndicates operating in academic settings. The first strategy is Loverboy/Lovergirl Recruitment building a fake romantic relationship with the target recruiter before gradually directing him or her into a prostitution network. This strategy specifically exploits freshmen who have recently been separated from family support networks and who are vulnerable to affective manipulation. The second strategy is Financial Entrapment offering 'loans' or 'investments' on non-transparent terms to students who are experiencing financial stress, which are then converted into 'debts' that must be repaid through 'services'. This strategy operates on the structural vulnerabilities created by the high cost of education and the inadequate financial support system for students (Novitasari, 2026).

The third strategy is Glamour Recruitment recruitment through the lure of a luxurious lifestyle, digital content model, or a career in the entertainment industry, which often targets students who have high-status aspirations but face financial limitations. The fourth strategy is Peer Network Recruitment leveraging a network of friends and campus communities to spread recruitment organically, where victims who are already trapped are encouraged or forced to recruit their own friends. The fifth strategy is Digital Platform Recruitment the use of social media, dating apps, and other digital platforms to reach recruitment targets massively and anonymously, with content designed to appear normal and not suspicious.

b. Retention Mechanism: Invisible Entanglements

After recruitment, the syndicate used a number of retention mechanisms to prevent victims from escaping. The mechanisms most often found in the data include: debt bondage (debt bondage that continues to grow so that victims feel they will never be able to repay it); document control (in some cases, the victim's identity or academic documents are mastered); threat and coercion (threats to the victim's own life, family, or academic reputation); shame management (exploitation of shame and stigma to prevent reporting);

and psychological dependency (emotional manipulation that creates the victim's psychological dependence on the perpetrator).

Particularly prominent in the academic context is academic leverage the threat to reveal the victim's involvement to the campus or family as a way to prevent reporting or escape. It is a retention mechanism that uniquely utilizes the characteristics of academic institutions where academic status and reputation are of great value as a control tool. Ironically, these mechanisms are effective precisely because victims know or expect that their institutions will not protect them if such involvement is exposed an anticipation of institutional betrayal that, in many cases, has proven to be accurate (Freyd & Smith, 2026).

c. Internal Actors: When Betrayal Comes from Within

One of the most significant and most alarming findings of the study was the identification of internal institutional actors who to varying degrees of involvement facilitated or even organized the operations of syndicates. Data analysis showed that in 23 out of 47 cases (48.9%), there was at least one internal institutional actor involved or had knowledge of syndicate operations. These actors can be categorized into three types.

The first type is Active Actors individuals who are directly involved in syndicate operations, either as coordinators, recruiters, or facility providers. In the data studied, this type includes administrative staff who misuse access to student data for syndicate recruitment, campus security officers who provide access and protection for campus operations, and in one very serious case, a lecturer who uses academic power relations to recruit and control victims.

The second type is Passive-Facilitative Actors individuals who have knowledge of syndicate operations but choose not to report or prevent them, either out of fear, because of receiving indirect benefits, or because of normalization that prevents them from identifying what they witness as crime. The third type is Reactive-Protective Actors individuals who know about a particular case but, instead of protecting the victim, choose to protect the institution's reputation through non-transparent internal settlements, which ultimately protect the perpetrator and leave the victim without justice (Pontell & Geis, 2026; Pratama & Kusumawati, 2026)

d. Institutional Structural Factors Facilitating Infiltration

The identification of internal actors leads to a deeper question: why can this infiltration occur and persist? The structural analysis identified eight institutional factors that consistently emerged as conditions that facilitate infiltration. First, the absence of a safe and reliable reporting mechanism: most of the affected colleges do not have an effective anonymous complaint mechanism, or have mechanisms that are perceived often accurately as unsafe and unreliable by potential whistleblowers. Second, uncontrolled power relations inequality: a very steep structure of academic hierarchies creates conditions where subordinates (students, junior staff) do not have a safe channel to report abuse by superiors.

Third, the financial pressure of students that is not structurally addressed: the high cost of higher education and the inadequate mechanisms of scholarships, social assistance, and campus work create financial vulnerabilities that are systematically exploited by syndicates. Fourth, a reputational culture that prioritizes the image of the institution over the protection of the individual: a tradition of campus 'whitewashing' management that resolves sensitive cases internally and is not transparent, which effectively gives impunity to the perpetrator and sends a signal that the institution will not be an ally of the victim. Fifth, weak personnel verification and supervision systems: lack of strict procedures in staff recruitment and supervision, especially for positions that have access to student data or the campus environment during off-peak hours.

Sixth, the absence of comprehensive education on gender-based violence and sexual exploitation: students who do not have an adequate understanding of syndicate recruitment modes, their legal rights, and available protection mechanisms are much easier targets for syndicates. Seventh, the gap between formal policy and informal practice: many universities have a fairly good formal policy on student protection, but these policies are not lived up to in the culture and day-to-day practices of the institution. Eighth, fragmentation of the institutional response: the absence of an integrated unit or mechanism clearly responsible for handling cases of sexual exploitation, resulting in reported cases falling between fragmented authority gaps and no one taking full responsibility (Gallant & Drinan, 2026).

Mechanisms Of Academic Integrity Erosion: Multidimensional Analysis

a. The First Mechanism: Corruption of Academic Power Relations

Power relations are a fundamental element in the academic ecosystem: the relationship between lecturers and students, between supervisors and guidance, between leaders and staff, between seniority and juniority. These relationships are inherently asymmetrical, and these asymmetries are inherently unproblematic because they are based on differences in knowledge and legitimate experience. What makes it problematic is when this asymmetry of power is exploited for purposes contrary to the academic mission including, in the most extreme cases, to recruit or control victims of sexual exploitation.

This study identifies three operational ways of corruption in academic power relations. First, predatory supervisory relations the abuse of supervisory relationships (theses, theses, dissertations, research) by academic actors to create dependencies that pave the way for exploitation. Victims in this pattern often don't realize that they are being manipulated because their interaction patterns appear similar to normal mentoring relationships. Second, grade and opportunity leverage the use of academic grades, recommendations, or career opportunities as transactional instruments in contexts that contain an exploitative dimension. Third, institutional access exploitation misuse of access to facilities, information, or institutional networks for the benefit of syndicate operations (Pratama & Kusumawati, 2026).

This corruption of power relations erodes academic integrity at a very basic level because it undermines the trust that is a requirement for all academic activities. When students cannot trust their supervisors, when they have to calculate the sexual risks in every academic interaction, when the relationship of trust that is supposed to facilitate intellectual growth becomes an instrument of exploitation the entire academic project loses its.

b. Second Mechanism: Normalization of Exploitation through Institutional Culture

Normalization of exploitation refers to the process by which patterns of behavior that objectively constitute exploitation or violence become accepted as 'normal', 'commonplace', or even 'inevitable' in the culture of an institution. This normalization process does not happen overnight it is an accumulation of small decisions that each seem harmless: the choice not to take issue with sexist comments from senior lecturers, the decision to resolve abuse cases 'familiially' rather than through formal channels, a narrative that places the victim as the 'inviting' party.

In the context of prostitution syndicates, normalization operates through several mutually reinforcing mechanisms. First, trivialization the treatment of sexual exploitation as a 'personal problem' or 'lifestyle choice' rather than an institutional matter, effectively removing the dimensions of organized crime and coercion from the institutional narrative. Second, victim blaming the placing of responsibility for exploitation on the victim through narratives of 'choice', 'lifestyle', or 'problematic behaviour', which systematically distract from the power and coercion structures that allow exploitation to take place. Third, institutional amnesia the institutional tendency not to document, study, and communicate previous cases internally, so that recurring patterns are not identified and not addressed systemically (Walklate & Hesketh, 2026).

Normalization erodes academic integrity in a very dangerous way because it is cumulative and invisible. There is no single event that can be designated as a 'moment of normalization' this process takes place in thousands of everyday interactions, policy decisions, and institutional narratives that gradually build and consolidate a culture tolerant of exploitation. When normalization has lasted for a long time, it becomes part of the 'habitual way of working' of institutions' that is very difficult to change without deliberate and significant structural intervention.

c. Third Mechanism: Obstruction of Access to Justice for Victims

One of the most obvious and damaging manifestations of institutional betrayal is the bottlenecks that victims face when they try to access justice both internal justice (through institutional grievance mechanisms) and external justice (through law enforcement officials). The study identified that of the victims interviewed who had tried to report their cases, 67.4% experienced at least one form of obstruction that prevented or stopped the justice process.

The forms of blockage identified span a spectrum from administrative to coercive in nature. On the administrative end: an unclear, unannounced, or highly bureaucratic complaint procedure; the absence of specially trained personnel to handle reports of sexual exploitation; lack of a convincing guarantee of confidentiality for the whistleblower. At the coercive end: active pressure on the part of the institution not to proceed with the report; threats to the complainant's academic status; and in some of the most extreme cases, the involvement of institutional personnel in leaking the identity of the whistleblower to the syndicate.

Obstructions of access to justice erode academic integrity in two ways. Directly, it allows the perpetrator to continue operating within the institution because there are no effective consequences for their actions. Indirectly, it sends a very strong message to the entire academic community that institutions cannot be trusted as protectors which fundamentally undermines the relationship of trust that is a prerequisite for a healthy and productive academic life (Novitasari, 2026).

d. Fourth Mechanism: Destruction of Institutional Culture

The most long-term and most difficult mechanism of erosion of integrity is the destruction of institutional culture the gradual erosion of the shared values, norms, and beliefs that are the foundation of the academic community. This destruction takes place on three different levels.

On a relational level, when cases of prostitution syndicates come to light within an institution, it creates a wave of distrust that extends beyond the specific case: students begin to question the motives behind all interactions with academic staff, professors with integrity become vigilant and withdraw from previously productive informal interactions, and healthy academic collaboration is hampered by the atmosphere of suspicion that surrounds it. At the normative level, exposure to unaddressed exploitation expressly communicates the implicit norm that institution-declared ethical standards are not actually applied which undermines commitment to other academic integrity standards. At the cultural level, the accumulation of cases that are not resolved with justice builds an institutional narrative that gradually shifts the identity of the academic community: from a community committed to the values of honesty and mutual protection, to a community that is busy maintaining its image while allowing violence to flourish beneath the surface (Gallant & Drinan, 2026).

Critical Analysis Of Institutional Responses: Why There Is Not Enough

a. Mapping of Existing Institutional Responses

An analysis of institutional responses from 47 cases studied identified four dominant response patterns currently applied by universities when dealing with prostitution syndicate cases. First, Response by Omission the institution does not take any formal action, either because it is not aware of the occurrence of the case, because it chooses not to know about it (willful ignorance), or because it considers the problem to be outside the jurisdiction of the institution. This pattern was found in 34.0% of cases.

Second, Unilateral Termination Response institutions respond by expelling the students involved (both the perpetrator and the victim) or firing the staff involved, without due process, without victim recovery handling, and without structural repairs. This pattern, which effectively punishes victims and perpetrators uniformly, was found in 27.7% of cases. Third, Reputational Mediation Response institutions seek to resolve cases internally and not transparently, with the primary goal of protecting the institution's reputation rather than providing justice to victims. This pattern is found in 25.5% of cases. Fourth, Collaborative Law Enforcement Response institutions actively cooperate with law enforcement officials, support victims, and conduct internal evaluations and improvements. This most constructive pattern was found in only 12.8% of cases.

Table 1. Typology and Comparative Analysis of Institutional Response Patterns to Prostitution Syndicate Cases

Dimensions	Neglect	Unilateral Termination	Reputational Mediation	Collaborative
Case Frequency	34,0%	27,7%	25,5%	12,8%
Main Orientation	None	Institutional protection	Reputation of the institution	Victim justice
Victim Protection	None	Minimal/negative	Minimal	Active
Criminalization of Perpetrators	None	Administrative only	Internal only	Formal criminal
Structural Repair	None	None	None	Some of them exist
Deterrence Effect	None	Low	Low	Medium-High
Public Trust	Destructive	Destructive	Destructive	Build

Source: Data Processed

Failure Diagnosis: Three Layers of Structural Problems

From the analysis of existing response patterns, this study diagnoses three layers of structural problems that explain why the institutional response that exists in general is inadequate. The first layer is a problem of capacity: most colleges lack the technical capacity, human resources, and information systems necessary to effectively detect, investigate, and respond to prostitution syndicate cases. This weak capacity isn't just a budget issue it also reflects a lack of serious institutional priorities for student protection from sexual exploitation.

The second layer is the problem of institutional incentives: the current accountability system does not provide adequate incentives for institutions to respond to these cases in a transparent and constructive manner. In contrast, existing systems often provide the opposite incentive: institutions that uncover and deal with cases openly face

significant short-term reputational risks, while institutions that cover up cases often avoid consequences. Without a fundamental shift in this incentive system through stricter accreditation, regulation, and public oversight mechanisms the institutional response will not change significantly (Freyd & Smith, 2026).

The third layer is a paradigm problem: most existing responses operate in a paradigm centered on institutional risk management, rather than on fulfilling protection and justice obligations. In this paradigm, victims of sexual exploitation are implicitly treated as a source of reputational risk to be managed, rather than as members of the community in need of protection and support. A paradigmatic shift from risk management to duty of care is a prerequisite for a real and sustainable transformation of institutional responses.

Comparative Studies: Best Practices from Three Countries

Table 2. Best Practices of Institutional Responses to Prostitution and Sexual Exploitation Syndicates: A Comparative Perspective

Aspects	Australia	English	Sweden
Policy Basis	National Action Plan to End Violence against Women	Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) & Duty of Care	Action Plan against Human Trafficking in Academia
Complaint Mechanism	Independent Sexual Assault Reporting Unit	Anonymous Digital Reporting Platform	Academic Special Ombudsman
Whistleblower Protection	Legal whistleblower + academic protection	Academic Privilege for Reporters	Full anonymity + legal aid
Victim Recovery	Trauma-informed support + academic accommodation	Specialist Officer + exam postponement	Comprehensive + specialized psychologist
Institutional Accountability	Annual national audit + data publication	OfS monitoring + deregistration threat	Independent inspection + data transparency
Police Involvement	Mandatory for syndicate cases	Mandatory for cases of violence	Compulsory + special units on campus

Source: Data Processed

Adaptive Institutional Integrity Framework (KIia): Preventive-Transformative Policy Model

a. KIIA Driver Principles

The Adaptive Institutional Integrity Framework (KIIA) proposed by this study is built on five guiding principles that collectively define different paradigms of existing

responses. The first principle is Victim-Centrality: all policies and procedures in the KIIA are designed with the interests, safety, and recovery of victims at the top of their game not the institution's reputational interests or administrative efficiency. The second principle is Structural Accountability: KIIA recognizes that victim protection failures are not just individual failures, but systemic failures and therefore require a structural-systemic response, not just a case-by-case response.

The third principle is Adaptive Learning: KIIA is designed to learn and evolve continuously from experience, data, and feedback a principle that is deliberately in contrast to the institutional tendency to maintain the status quo and avoid critical self-evaluation. The fourth principle is Collaborative Architecture: KIIA recognizes that no academic institution can tackle the phenomenon of prostitution syndicates alone it requires structured collaboration with law enforcement officials, women's protection institutions, health systems, and the broader community. The fifth principle is Transformative Prevention: KIIA not only aims to deal with cases that have already occurred, but also to transform the structural conditions that allow syndicates to operate by fundamentally and sustainably changing the structure of institutional incentives, institutional culture, and protection capacity (Freyd & Smith, 2026; Pratama & Kusumawati, 2026).

b. KIIA's Four Operational Pillars

1) First Pillar: Evidence-Based Detection and Prevention Systems

The first pillar of KIIA is the development of an Evidence-Based Detection and Prevention System (SDPBB) which includes three main components. The first component is the Early Warning System (EWS) a monitoring system that uses validated indicators to detect patterns that indicate syndicate operations in a campus environment. Indicators identified in this study include: patterns of sudden academic leave requests by certain students; a pattern of absences that correlate with certain days; student reports of peer pressure to engage in certain activities; and student financial transaction patterns that are inconsistent with known economic profiles.

The second component is the Mandatory Institutional Self-Assessment (MISA) an obligation for each university to conduct a systematic and standardized self-assessment every two years on their structural vulnerability to syndicate infiltration, the results of which are transparently reported to the Ministry of Education and Culture and made public. MISA uses an assessment protocol developed jointly between academics, law enforcement officials, and women's protection agencies. The third component is Comprehensive Prevention Education a mandatory curriculum on personal safety, legal rights, syndicate recruitment modes, and reporting mechanisms provided to all new students, with periodic updates as the syndicate's modus operandi develops (Gallant & Drinan, 2026).

2) Second Pillar: An Independent and Reliable Complaint Mechanism

The second pillar is a comprehensive reform of the grievance mechanism that results in a system that is completely independent of the institutional line of command and that can be trusted by victims. KIIA proposes the establishment of an Independent Student Protection Unit (UPMI) a body that is structurally separate from the rectorate and dean, has leadership that is elected through a transparent process involving student and community representation, and is protected by regulation from the intervention of institutional leaders.

UPMI has four key authorities: to receive and process reports from students confidentially; conduct an independent investigation into incoming reports; recommend action to institutional leaders with an override mechanism if the recommendations are not acted upon; and proactively coordinate with law enforcement officials in cases that indicate organized crime. UPMI is also responsible for publishing aggregated (anonymous) data on reports received and acted upon each semester a transparency mechanism that creates public accountability without compromising the confidentiality of individual cases.

3) *Third Pillar: A Holistic Victim Support and Recovery System*

The third pillar is the construction of support and recovery systems that recognize the complexity of trauma experienced by victims of sexual exploitation and that provide a comprehensive, non-stigmatized, and sustainable response. The system includes five integrated services: psychological support by counselors specially trained in the trauma of sexual exploitation; legal assistance that ensures victims understand their rights and the legal options available; flexible academic accommodation (extension of exam time, delay in payment, academic leave without consequence) that allows the victim to continue his education; emergency financial support that ensures economic crises do not become a factor that encourages victims to remain in exploitative networks; and social reintegration that helps victims rebuild social support networks within the academic community (Novitasari, 2026; Zimmermann & Gould, 2026).

4) *Fourth Pillar: Cultural Reform and Institutional Accountability*

The fourth pillar is the most transformative: institutional culture reform and the development of sustainable institutional accountability mechanisms. Cultural reform includes: leadership development programs that integrate a commitment to student protection as a key performance component for all academic leaders; a peer accountability system among academic staff that creates social norms that are intolerant of the abuse of power relations; and a reward mechanism for individuals who report non-compliance or support victims, which creates a positive incentive for institutional moral courage.

Institutional accountability is realized through three instruments. First, the Institutional Integrity Index a composite index that measures the quality of the student protection system at each university based on standardized indicators, which are published nationally annually and which are integrated into accreditation assessments.

Second, mandatory disclosure for universities to proactively disclose the number of sexual exploitation cases reported and handled each year. Third, consequential accountability a mechanism by which proven colleges systematically fail to protect their students face real regulatory consequences, including a decline in accreditation status or restrictions on new admissions (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2026; Sampson & Laub, 2026).

Required Legal Framework

The optimal implementation of KIIA requires strengthening the legal framework in three dimensions. At the legislative level, an amendment to Law No. 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education is needed to explicitly regulate the obligations of universities in protecting students from sexual exploitation and organized crime, including the obligation to report to law enforcement officials in cases that indicate human trafficking. At the government regulatory level, regulations are needed that regulate the minimum standards of student protection mechanisms that must be possessed by each university, including standards on the independence and capacity of UPMI. At the regulatory level of the Ministry of Education and Culture, a Permendikbud is needed that integrates the Institutional Integrity Index into national accreditation instruments.

Theoretical Implications: Institutional Betrayal as an Analytical Category

This research contributes to the development of the concept of institutional betrayal as an analytical category in criminology. In contrast to its use in clinical psychology which tends to focus on individual impact, this study suggests that institutional betrayal can and should be analyzed at the structural-organizational level: as a systemic pattern that reflects institutional architectural choices, rather than simply an accumulation of individual failures.

Within this framework, universities that experience prostitution syndicate infiltration are not only victims of outside crimes they are also indirect facilitators of those crimes through structural weaknesses that are chosen or left behind. This perspective does not aim to shift responsibility from the perpetrators of crimes to the institution, but to identify more accurately where legal and policy interventions are most necessary and most effective. Syndicates can be arrested and convicted but if the institutional structural weaknesses that allow them to operate are not addressed, new syndicates will take their place (Camargo & Souza, 2026; Hirt & Bolino, 2026).

Ethical Dimension: Moral Responsibility of Academic Institutions

From an institutional ethics perspective, this study argues that universities have a special moral obligation that goes beyond mere legal obligations to protect their students from exploitation. This obligation stems from a fundamental relationship of trust between the institution and its members: when a student enrolls in a college, he or she is not only purchasing educational services he or she is also entering a community that implicitly promises to create a safe, supportive, and exploit-free environment for his or her intellectual and personal development (Aziz & Soetjipto, 2026).

Failure to fulfill this moral obligation even when there is no obvious violation of the law constitutes a betrayal of such an implicit contract. This argument has important policy implications: the standards applied to universities in terms of student protection should not be limited to minimum legal compliance, but rather should reflect ethical standards that are consistent with the mission of the civilization they carry. A university that turns a blind eye to syndicate operations on its campus is not only legally failing it is betraying the entire reason for its existence (Gallant & Drinan, 2026; Palm-Rønning & Skjeie, 2026).

Implications for National Victim Protection Policies

The findings of this study have significant implications for national policies on the protection of victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Current policies codified in Law No. 21 of 2007 on the Eradication of Trafficking in Persons and its implementing regulations tend to focus on criminalizing perpetrators and are inadequate in regulating institutional responsibilities that allow or fail to prevent trafficking in persons. The addition of a dimension of institutional responsibility to this legal framework which can be done through amendments or through government regulations will significantly expand the scope of victim protection policies (Barak, 2026).

More specifically, the study recommends that the Task Force on the Prevention and Handling of Trafficking in Persons under the coordination of the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture explicitly include the dimension of higher education in its mandate including by requiring representation from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Association of Universities, and student representation in the composition of its task force, as well as by developing specific protocols for handling cases human trafficking related to academic ecosystems (Novitasari, 2026; Roth & Chen, 2026)

Research Limitations and Advanced Research Agenda

This research has several limitations that need to be openly acknowledged (Burgess-Proctor & Pattavina, 2026). First, the available empirical data reflect significant underreporting documented cases are very likely only a small fraction of the actual cases, given the stigma and reporting barriers identified. Findings on prevalence and structural patterns should be read with these limitations in mind. Second, access to informants from institutional leaders is severely limited because no one is willing to provide statements that can openly confirm institutional failures limitations that are themselves data on the culture of institutional silence being studied.

The prioritized follow-up research agenda includes: KIIA implementation trial research in several universities that are willing as early adopters; longitudinal studies on the impact of KIIA-based preventive interventions on case prevalence; research on the role of digital platforms in syndicate recruitment has not been sufficiently studied; and a study of the perspectives and experiences of academic staff in dealing with situations of institutional betrayal a group that in this study could only be reached in a limited way.

Conclusion

This research has answered all three research questions formulated. Regarding the first question, this study reveals that prostitution syndicates operating in the academic ecosystem have a four-layer hierarchical structure with a modus operandi that is highly adaptive to institutional characteristics. Most significantly, syndicate infiltration is facilitated by eight identifiable institutional structural weaknesses from the absence of effective grievance mechanisms to a reputational culture that prioritizes image over member protection. In nearly half of the cases studied, there were internal institutional actors involved or with knowledge of syndicate operations a very serious indicator of institutional betrayal. Regarding the second question, this study identifies four mutually reinforcing mechanisms of academic integrity: corruption of academic power relations, normalization of exploitation through institutional culture, obstruction of access to justice for victims (with 67.4% of victims who tried to report experiencing at least one form of obstruction), and cumulative and long-term destruction of institutional culture. These four mechanisms operate synergistically and create a negative spiral that further consolidates conditions conducive to sustainable exploitation. To the third question, the study diagnosed that existing institutional responses dominated by patterns of laissez-faire, unilateral termination, and reputational mediation failed due to three layers of structural problems: inadequate capacity, flawed incentive systems, and a paradigm centered on risk management instead of protection obligations. The proposed Adaptive Institutional Integrity Framework (KIIA) responds to these three layers of issues through four complementary pillars: Evidence-Based Detection and Prevention Systems, Independent and Trusted Complaint Mechanisms, Holistic Victim Support and Recovery Systems, and Cultural Reform and Institutional Accountability.

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