



Universiteit Utrecht

Sex Workers Warriors Against Sex Trafficking

Exploring the agency of sex workers in the combat on sex trafficking

By

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Abstract

Since the start of the twenty-first century the need to combat human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, or sex trafficking, has been the focus of non-governmental organisations and governments, in which sex trafficking has been identified as a global growing problem, pressed mainly by governments and feminists.

There is the need to understand the issue of sex trafficking in order to prosecute those involved in trafficking activities and provide support to those who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Therefore this research seeks to comprehend and address how sex workers, when perceived and recognised as agents who are able to choose and act in pro of their own benefit, can be important allies in the fight against sex trafficking. Through the standpoint of sex workers' rights activists - who have a vast experience with empowering sex workers - this research will bring new perspectives on the issue of sex trafficking and how those who are directly involved with the sex industry can contribute to combating this issue. Those agents are the sex workers.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Human trafficking is one of the most debated issues nowadays and is at the core of many non-governmental organisations and governments' agenda. In the twenty-first century, human trafficking was identified by the United Nations as a transnational crime and addressed together with terrorism and drug trafficking by political leaders; trafficking in persons was also classified as one of the three evils that haunt the globe (Kempadoo 7).

The human trafficking debate has always been focused on sexual exploitation (Ditmore in: Kempadoo 108) and in 2000 the term “sex trafficking” was established through the US Trafficking in Persons Act¹. Since its appearance, the term sex trafficking has become the main focus of human trafficking debates, in which the exploitation of especially migrant women in the sex industry becomes the main target of anti-trafficking campaigns (Kempadoo xiv).

This research will address the issue of sex trafficking and bring the understanding of how sex workers can be important allies in the fight against it. This knowledge will be produced through interviews performed with sex workers' rights activists who work with sex workers groups which advocate for the human rights and empowerment of other sex workers.

Embedded in the principle of agency, which will be further addressed in chapter 4, this research aims to present how sex workers who are empowered² and perceived as agents can be key players in the combat against sex trafficking.

Considering the agency of sex workers to effectively fight sex trafficking is important because sex workers have a better understanding of how the sex industry works and consequently have more access to networks or people who can help them identify and report cases of sex trafficking. Furthermore, sex workers who investigate against sex trafficking are better accepted by the sex workers community, which facilitates access to sex workers who have been trafficked, however, who fear reprisals from authorities due to the stigmatization of sex work as a profession.

This introduction shall also explain why I decided to work on this subject of study for my thesis.

¹ US Trafficking in Persons Act refers to *The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000*. Source available at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61124.htm>.

² Through educational programs such as: paralegal training to learn about human rights, and programs to build self-esteem, such as self defense and through artistic performances. For more examples, see the Empower Foundation website <http://www.empowerfoundation.org>.

This research has been largely supported and inspired by the project Red Umbrella Fund,³ where I did my master's program internship for thirteen weeks.

The Red Umbrella Fund was created in April 2012 and was born from the collaboration between donors and sex workers' rights activists. The project strengthens sex workers' rights movements and funds sex worker-led organisations. The Red Umbrella Fund recognises the self-determination of sex workers; that means, it opposes criminalization and recognises sex work as work. Furthermore, the Red Umbrella Fund does not adopt rescuing strategies, as it believes that rescuing sex workers perpetuates stigmas and denies sex workers' agency. The grants provided to sex workers groups by this project give them the opportunity to work within their communities advocating for the right to practice their profession without stigmas and violence.

Many sex workers groups which are funded by the Red Umbrella invest in advocacy for changes in laws to protect the human rights of sex workers; literacy and paralegal courses to teach sex workers about human rights and self-defense, as well as capacity building courses such as business administration and health and safety (van der Linde).

In this project, I mainly researched about sex workers groups' activities which are funded by the Red Umbrella. The research involved understanding how sex workers fight for their right to work and how they use the fund to advocate for the right to practice their profession. I also maintained communication with the grantee groups in order to understand their difficulties and main needs; worked on surveys to sex workers groups in order to understand how the fund could be improved and to learn about their main difficulties. Furthermore, I developed research on international discussions about sex workers rights and anti-trafficking campaigns, and how they might affect sex workers' rights.

Working for the Red Umbrella Fund has inspired me to write about sex workers and their agency, especially when sex trafficking is at stake, because there I had the opportunity to learn about the ways in which sex workers contribute to fighting sex trafficking, through, for example, courses and educational programs which teach sex workers how to avoid and identify cases of exploitation. Witnessing all the activities developed by the sex workers and learning how active they can be against sex trafficking, I became inspired to further address the agency that sex workers have in combating sex trafficking. Furthermore, after working on a project that recognises sex workers as agents rather than victims, made me rethink about my old personal

³ For more information see <http://www.mamacash.org/page.php?id=3013>.

concepts regarding sex workers' agency. I tended to believe that sex work could only be consented once one did not have other choices; however after talking to some sex workers I learned that many of them, regardless their social background, have freely chosen to do sex work, and in many cases the financial aspect was not the only factor which influenced the decision of some sex workers. Other factors such as: working-hours flexibility; feeling powerful for earning money through sexuality or simply enjoying to sell sex, were some of the reasons which influenced some sex workers to practice this profession.

While this thesis has been inspired and supported by the Red Umbrella Fund, it can also be used as a contributor to the Red Umbrella Fund by bringing a better understanding to donors of the power that sex workers have to combat sex trafficking and how they can be involved in activities which seek to end exploitation in the sex industry. This awareness would bring more donors to fund sex workers organisations and contribute to the strengthening of sex workers movements, contributing therefore to a better life for sex workers, who want to have the right to self-determination and fight for the respect and recognition of their profession. To cite an example, Nadia van der Linde, the coordinator of the Red Umbrella Fund proposed me to create a blog site directed to Mama Cash's donors, where I can present my experience from the interviews with the sex workers activists and publish articles regarding sex workers' contributions to fighting sex trafficking and exploitation in the sex industry. The blog site is under discussion and in conversation with the Red Umbrella Fund and Mama Cash, we intend to present new ways in which sex trafficking can be combated with the help of sex workers who are empowered.

This research therefore can be used by sex workers' rights organisations or sex workers groups, which are also partners with the Red Umbrella Fund, to raise awareness of the power they have to contribute in the fight against sex trafficking.

1.1 Research Question and Aims

The topic of this thesis, as presented in the introduction, addresses the understanding of how sex workers can be important contributors to combating sex trafficking when the principle of agency plays a central role. The main research question of this research, which will explore the sex workers' relations with combating sex trafficking is:

How can sex workers contribute to combating sex trafficking?

Exploring the ways in which sex trafficking can be fought by sex workers aims to bring the understanding of sex workers' agency when combating sex trafficking is at stake. That means, this research question intends to investigate agency as a fundamental aspect in sex workers' contribution against sex trafficking.

The standpoint from the sex workers' rights activists interviewed will be the main contributor to this knowledge production.

In order to support the understanding of sex workers' contribution to combating sex trafficking, this research will also explore how sex trafficking is perceived by the interviewees by investigating the issues which are intrinsically connected to sex trafficking, such as: the scale, and vulnerabilities to sex trafficking. It is important to understand how sex trafficking is perceived by the sex workers activists in order to gain new insights on this issue and learn how sex workers respond to the problem accordingly. The scale and vulnerabilities to sex trafficking will be presented together with the analysis from the interviews, in chapter 5

The main research question of this thesis will develop associated sub-questions which will help answering the main question. These sub-questions will be addressed in chapter 2.

The sub-questions are:

What is sex trafficking?

What is the difference between sex trafficking and sex work?

In order to explore how sex workers can combat sex trafficking it is important to first understand what is sex trafficking and the differences between sex trafficking and sex work. Explaining these differences is fundamental because when both terms are addressed interchangeably sex workers are essentially perceived as victims with no agency, which is inaccurate as, sex work, differently from sex trafficking, is not associated with exploitation, but rather with choice and self-determination (Kapur in: Kempadoo 37). Therefore, when sex work is understood as different from sex trafficking, sex workers can participate in ending real cases of exploitation, named, sex trafficking.

1.2 Theory Framework

To answer the research question presented above, the theoretical framework of this thesis will be based on the concept of agency, more specifically, the agency of sex workers to combat sex trafficking. Agency here will be based on a postmodern feminist approach as it will document

sex workers' agency regardless of their gender/gender identity. Therefore a postmodern approach offers the analysis of agency which goes beyond those who bear a normative gender identity, it is therefore more inclusive than, for example, only documenting women sex workers' agency (Leavy in: Leavy and Hesse-Biber 101). This is important because there are not only women sex workers, but also men and transgender. Furthermore, a postmodern approach was chosen to address sex workers' agency because the interviewees work with men; women, and transgender sex workers, thus through their standpoint, the agency of all sex workers' gender/gender identity will be considered when exploring sex workers' fight on sex trafficking. Furthermore, a postmodern feminist approach will also contribute to the knowledge production which is not only based on the experiences of Western, white, middle-class women (Nicholson 5), as the examples of sex workers agents against sex trafficking come from different countries and therefore from varied ethnic backgrounds, as it will be presented in chapter 5.

Agency will be the frame of this study as being fundamental to documenting the practice of sex workers against sex trafficking because it brings them to an active position and challenges the essential idea that all sex workers are victims (Kempadoo xi). Unfortunately, sex workers are almost never included in the strategies for fighting sex trafficking, as they are perceived as innocent "preys" who are unable to make choices and contribute to the society (NSWP sex work 8). This study therefore intends to bring a new perspective to the concept of sex workers' agency in order to present how they can participate in the fight on sex trafficking and contribute to the society.

1.3 Methodology

The method used in this research to gain new perspectives on how sex trafficking can be combated by sex workers will be an explorative qualitative research. The data collection will be through semi-structured in-depth interviews with eleven open-ended questions which will explore the interviewees' perspectives on sex trafficking and how it can be combated by sex workers.

This research does not intend to prove a theory, but to understand the position of sex workers' activists in relation to sex trafficking and learn how sex workers can be allies in fighting it.

The in-depth interviews will be conducted with a small sample of five respondents. The respondents are all board members or founders of important sex workers' rights organisations

and have a vast experience with sex workers human rights, working directly with sex workers as individuals or groups. Therefore the sample chosen can provide valuable information on how sex workers can be great contributors against sex trafficking. The complete profile of the respondents and why they were chosen will be presented in chapter 3.

The current research will not enter the specificities of trafficking in minors, due to the fact that this subject would need a completely new research with a specific focus on it.

1.4 Limitations

This study intends to bring new knowledge on how sex trafficking can be combated, that means, by recognising sex workers' agency and adding sex workers as key players in the fights against sex trafficking. However, due to time limitation and lack of financial resources to extend this study into a more detailed project, there are some limitations in this study which involve a in-depth comparison between traditional rescues and rescues made by sex workers and the understanding of which of them can bring better results in terms of combating exploitation in the sex industry and helping victims of sex trafficking.

This study also suggests that a detailed research on numbers of migrant sex workers who have been trafficked or not be made; however considering carefully who in fact classifies as a victim of trafficking, as there has been a great conflation between sex workers who consciously decide to travel to sell sex and those who are indeed forced into sex work, as this study will address further in chapter 2.

This thesis serves as a suggestion for further investigation in the field of sex workers' rights and sex workers' agency, and how granting sex workers with agency and capacity building can help fighting sex trafficking in effective ways. Thought the understanding of how sex workers, who are agents, can contribute to combating sex trafficking, this research suggests the development of more study in this area in order to bring new ways of helping those who are subjected to exploitation, without offering any collateral damages to sex workers and to *real* victims of sex trafficking.

1.5 Overview

Chapter 1 introduces this research and presents in short sections the research question and aims; the theory framework used; the methodology adopted; the limitations, and the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 will present the definition of human trafficking; the definition of sex trafficking and how the notion of sex trafficking developed from the human trafficking debate. Subsequently some numbers on sex trafficking, followed by the critique of activists and academics from the field of sex workers' rights, will be presented. Lastly, this chapter will address the issues related to the conflation of sex trafficking with sex work and the differences between sex work and sex trafficking, followed by the definition of sex work.

Chapter 3 will present the methodology and approach to this research. The method adopted - which is semi-structured interviews - will be detailed, together with: the objective of this study; the sample chosen for the interviews; the approach used for the analysis of the interviews; the profile of the interviewees and my position as a feminist to this research.

Chapter 4 will address the theoretical framework of this research. Here the concept of agency under a postmodern approach will be presented under the individualist and collectivist models. The relevance of agency and its connection to sex workers' actions against sex trafficking will be linked, in chapter 5, to the knowledge produced from the interviews with the sex workers activists, who perceive sex workers as powerful citizens capable of impacting the society in positive ways.

Chapter 5 will bring the analysis of the interviews with the sex workers activists and present new perspectives on how sex trafficking can be fought by sex workers under the principle of agency. The conclusion will be presented in chapter 6, where it will be explained what has been learned from the interviews with the sex workers activists in relation to sex workers' agency against sex trafficking.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review on Human Trafficking, Sex Trafficking and Sex Work

Addressing the differences between sex trafficking and sex work

This chapter will first present how human trafficking has been defined and addressed by the 2003 UN Protocol, followed by the definition of sex trafficking and how the term sex trafficking developed from the intersections of human trafficking with sexual exploitation. Subsequently, the scale in which sex trafficking is addressed by international NGOs will be presented, together with the critique of activists and academics in the area of sex workers' rights. It is important to briefly present some of the main contestations regarding the degree in which sex trafficking is addressed in general because sex trafficking "is not a neutral terrain, unwritten and unblemished, upon which facts...can simply be attached (Doezema 5). Furthermore, before presenting how sex trafficking can be combated by sex workers, this research finds important to address the difficulties to accurately measure sex trafficking. This is important because it influences the decision-making process which target how sex trafficking can be better combated.

This chapter will also present the issues related to the conflation of sex trafficking with sex work; the differences between sex work and sex trafficking and the definition of sex work.

2.1 Defining human trafficking

In the twenty-first century, human trafficking was identified by the United Nations as a transnational crime and was tackled by political leaders together with terrorism and drug trafficking issues. Human Trafficking was also classified as one of the three evils that haunt the globe (Kempadoo 7). According to the 2012 UN Global Report on Trafficking in Persons: "human trafficking can be understood as a process by which people are recruited in their community and exploited by traffickers using deception and/or some form of coercion to lure and control them" (16).

Until the creation of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children [UN Protocol] in 2000 - which came into force in 2003 - there was no legal international description for trafficking; thus trafficking was used to designate various processes and outcomes without a proper definition (Sanghera in: Kempadoo 11). Currently, according to the 2003 UN Protocol, trafficking is defined as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (UNODC Human Trafficking)

It is important to mention that although there is now a clearer definition of trafficking and the 2003 UN Protocol designates trafficking as the abuse of persons for any kind of labor, in practice the human trafficking debate in most countries is primarily focused on sexual exploitation, named, sex trafficking (Davidson 11); which will be addressed further below.

2.2 Defining sex trafficking and its development from the human trafficking debate

This section will explain what sex trafficking means and how the term “sex trafficking” developed.

Different organisations and governments define sex trafficking in different ways (Grant 2). For example, according to The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000⁴, sex trafficking is defined as: “The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age” (US Dept. of Health).

Present concerns with trafficking (especially in women) for the purpose of sexual exploitation is based on a historical precedent in the campaigns against ‘white slavery’⁵ which happened in the end of the nineteenth century (Doezema 3-4). In the 1970s and 1980s the subject of trafficking in women and girls was reinstated by feminists who were concerned with the social impacts of the development of the South-east Asian region after the Vietnam War and the establishment of US

⁴ *The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000*. Source available at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61124.htm>.

⁵ ‘White Slavery’ refers to the supposed traffic in women and girls for sexual exploitation between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (Doezema 4)

military troops in South-east Asia (Kempadoo xi-xiii). The women's movement at this time was focused on ending violence against women and on campaigns to recognise marital rape as a crime; create laws to protect women from domestic violence, and bring reproductive rights (Shah). The sex industry was also at the core of the campaigns and, from a radical feminist perspective - particularly from the US women's movement - "sexual slavery" was claimed to be fundamental to the understanding of trafficking. In this feminist approach, the patriarchal institution of prostitution was classified as intrinsically violent for women and those women who took part in it were seen as deceived victims of male power (Shah). Embedded on the evils that sexual slavery represented, by 2000, the term "sexual slavery" was replaced by "sex trafficking" (Kempadoo xiii-xiv). The notion of sex trafficking was then established through the US Trafficking in Persons Act and nominated as a 'severe form of trafficking in persons' (Kempadoo xiv). As in Kempadoo's words: "since its appearance, the notion of sex trafficking has come to dominate this particular narrative on human trafficking, specifying the exploitation of (migrant) labor in the sex trade..." (xiv). Trafficking for sexual exploitation has therefore become the main agenda of anti-trafficking interventions (Sanghera in: Kempadoo 11) and it has been addressed by NGOs and governments in growing scales, as it will be presented below.

To illustrate some general figures on human trafficking focused on sexual exploitation, named, sex trafficking, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that 20.9 million people are victims of forced labour worldwide and that 4.5 million of all forced laborers are involved in forced sexual exploitation (ILO). The 2012 UN Global Report on Trafficking in Persons also shows that cases of sexual exploitation were detected in higher scales than forced labor in the Americas, Europe and Central Asia, and among all the detected cases worldwide, trafficking for sexual exploitation is more frequent than trafficking for forced labor (UNODC 11). The 2012 UN Global Report states: "trafficking for sexual exploitation accounts for 58 percent of all detected trafficking cases globally and trafficking for forced labour accounts for 36 percent" (7)⁶. Other statistics presented by important federal organs also depict sex trafficking in high scales. For example, the US State Department estimated in 2006 that 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked for forced sex worldwide and that 80 percent of trafficked persons are women and

⁶ The 2012 UN Global Report in Trafficking in Persons however recognises that the statistic which says that worldwide trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation is higher than for forced labor might be biased, as "European countries detect more victims than do any other region". Therefore, it is recognised that models of exploitation which are salient in Europe may be disproportionately represented in global numbers, and the global proportion of trafficking for forced labour in this report is possibly underestimated (11).

girls (Agustín 38). Furthermore, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) says that “Human sex trafficking is the most common form of modern-day slavery, in which millions of people, mostly females, are being enslaved and are identified as victims of sex trafficking” (Walker-Rodriguez and Hill)

These are only a few examples that can illustrate how sex trafficking has been brought to the public view. Although sex trafficking is often presented as a growing issue by NGOs and governments, many scholars and activists⁷ have refuted numbers on sex trafficking. One of the main reasons for such contestations is the fact that very often sex trafficking is equated with sex work – this issue will be addressed further below - that means, migrant sex workers who consciously and willingly cross borders to sell sex are essentially classified as victims of sex trafficking (Kempadoo xiv). To present an example, the 2013 article *Unpacking the Sex Trafficking Panic* published by the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists, explains that statistics presented on sex trafficking could be inflated by classifying persons who have chosen to do sex work as victims of trafficking. The same article also says that criminal justice statistics presented by the FBI might be biased, as it only counts sex workers who have come into contact with law enforcement (e.g. illegal migrants); therefore FBI’s statistics do not differentiate those who consent to do sex work from those who are forced to sell sex (Grant 4). As a result of the conflation between sex work and sex trafficking, the estimation on the number of sex trafficking is high (Kapur in: Kempadoo 30) and in many cases excessive sources (e.g.: mobilization of police force, money and time) are spent due to the believe that huge numbers of people have been trafficked and need rescue (Stone in: Wagenaar and Altink). To illustrate an operation that was prepared for targeting high numbers of cases of sex trafficking, is the creation of the Poppy Project in UK in 2000, which was based on the claim from the UK Home Office that every year between 140 and 1.400 women and girls were being trafficked for sexual exploitation in Britain. A special attention by the police was then directed to off-street sex work, where most of the trafficked women and girls were believed to be. However, in 2003, the London Metropolitan Police Clubs and Vice Unit and immigration service officers

⁷ See for example, Jyoti Sanghera in: Kempadoo, Kamala. *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*; Doezema, Jo. *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters. The Construction of Trafficking*, the NSWP publication paper *Sex work is not trafficking*, and the article published by the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists *Contemporary Sexuality. Unpacking the Sex Trafficking Panic*.

found 295 immigration offenders, of whom only 4 or 5 were identified as victim of trafficking (Davidson 5).

The information presented above is important because highlights the fact that sex trafficking is conflated with sex work. Therefore understanding that sex workers are not all victims of sex trafficking is important because it recognises sex workers' agency, thus, perceiving sex workers as agents is the most important aspect to understand how they can contribute to fighting sex trafficking. It is also worth to mention that the conflation with sex work is not the only problem which dissimulates accurate numbers on sex trafficking. There is also a lack of proper qualitative and quantitative research in this field of study (Kapur in: Kempadoo 29)⁸. As Sanghera explains, figures on the scale of sex trafficking are often drawn from small-scale surveys based on divergent methodologies or sources such as police records, local information or media reports, which cannot be statistically or empirically representative, as they are based on untested assumptions (in: Kempadoo 12)⁹.

Although reliable and accurate statistics in sex trafficking are still hard to find, the issue exists and needs to be combated. Sex trafficking is also acknowledged by sex workers and sex workers organisations as a problem which needs to be combated, especially by sex workers themselves, who are directly affected by exploitation in the sex industry.

This chapter will now present how the conflation between sex work and sex trafficking happens and the consequences of it to sex workers. Also the differences between sex work and sex trafficking will be presented, which will be useful to define sex work.

2.3 The conflation of sex trafficking and sex work and the definition of sex work

Understanding what sex trafficking means and its origins is important to avoid connotations with sex work, which is completely different from sex trafficking. This section will present the harms that conflating sex trafficking with sex work can cause, especially to sex workers; the difference between sex trafficking and sex work, and the definition of sex work.

Although sex workers' rights organisations, such as the NSWPP, have insistently presented the differences between sex trafficking and sex work, unfortunately the two terms have been

⁸ This information is also shared among activists and writers such as Marjan Wijers and Ratna Kapur, among others. Jo Doezema also presents a vast critique on numbers on sex trafficking in her book *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters. The Construction of Trafficking*.

⁹For example, the internal auditor of the US annual Trafficking in Persons Report pointed out that the data collection methods used by the report are highly 'questionable' and there is no accuracy due to 'methodological weaknesses, gaps in data, and numerical discrepancies' (qtd. in Kapur 29)

conflated in international agreements and by the media, and as in Ditmore's words, "the forerunner to the latest anti-trafficking legislation [which conflates sex trafficking with sex work] is the 1949 UN Convention on Suppression of All Forms of Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others which exclusively addressed prostitution" (in: Kempadoo 108).

The conflation between the two terms can be historically explained. For example, at the beginning of the twentieth century conventions established that the movement of women across borders to do sex work was equal to trafficking and exploitation, irrespective of consent (NSWP sex work 2). Furthermore, the 1949 UN Convention stated that its purpose was to present prostitution as a practice that is 'incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person' (qtd. in NSWP sex work 2); thus, such statement endorsed the interpretation of sex work as intrinsically connected to exploitation (NSWP sex work 3). Thirty years later, article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)¹⁰ reinforced the need to end exploitation of women by selling sex; however, it did not define exploitation, hence equating sex work with the notion of exploitation. Only two decades later, the definition of exploitation emerged through the 2003 UN Protocol (NSWP sex work 2).

Although the UN Protocol presents a clear distinction between trafficking and sex work, many countries want to ban sex work under the argument of combating trafficking, rather than addressing situations of forced labour in the sex industry (Wijers 4). In countries where sex work is illegal¹¹, implementing laws to prevent trafficking has been conflated with enforcing laws to ban sex work; furthermore the demand for sex work has been conflated with the increase of sex trafficking (NSWP sex work 2-3).

Conflating sex trafficking with sex work is dangerous and extremely harmful for sex workers; as it increases stigmas and violence towards sex workers (Wijers 3). For example, in Australia, immigration authorities and police who visit brothels to seek victims of trafficking often target sex workers by their racial appearance (e.g.: Asian appearance) and with the use of coercion and violence, officials arrest sex workers who have been legally and willingly doing sex work. Furthermore, globally, sex workers report arrests carried out in the name of anti-trafficking measurements (NSWP sex work 3-6). Besides, the agency of sex workers is completely denied

¹⁰ Complete overview on the convention available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

¹¹ For a full list of countries where sex work is considered illegal see the Criminalize Hate not HIV organisation 's website <http://www.hivandthelaw.com/countries-where-sex-work-prostitution-deemed-illegal>.

when they are essentially seen as victims of trafficking, as a result, sex workers are targeted and harassed in rescues and raids which are hostile and use violence to remove them from their workplace. In these operations their money and belongings are confiscated and sex workers are subjected to forced habilitation programs, which often use violence and coercion and undermine sex workers' ability to control their lives and make decisions (NSWP sex work 3).

It is important therefore to differentiate sex trafficking from sex work in order to protect the human rights and right to self-determination of sex workers, as not all victims of trafficking are sex workers, and not all migrant sex workers are victims of trafficking (Sanghera in: Kempadoo 11). For this reason the differences between sex trafficking and sex work will be presented below, followed by the definition of sex work.

Sex trafficking differs from sex work for being classified as forced labor, in which the victim is trafficked against her will and forced to perform sexual activities in exchange for money, with little or no own financial benefits of her own (Walker-Rodriguez and Hill).

Sex trafficking always involves a third party forcing someone into an exploitative situation. Sex work, on the contrary, is voluntary and consensual, "It involves the individual's decision to engage in sexual activity for money" (Mar 10). According to a study made by the African Centre for Migration and Society, a leading institution for research on human mobility at Witwatersrand University, sex work is defined as follows: "Sex work refers to the practice of engaging in sexual activities for reward. It involves the exchange of labour for an agreed upon amount of money, goods or services" (Richter and Monson). Sex work can also be defined as: "...adults who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally. A sex worker can be male, female, or transgender" (Open Society 1).

Moreover, according to the sex work discourse, which emerged in the 1970s in response to the attempt to deal more efficiently and effectively with the challenges facing sex workers, sex work is defined and acknowledged as "...not solely the result of economic or physical compulsion and coercion but also of choice...Sex work represents a rational choice and action" (Gall 4-5). The sex work discourse explains that many of the problems associated with sex work relate to stigmatization, criminalization and discrimination; stigmas increase the chances to conflate sex worker with sex trafficking, thus making impossible for sex workers to be recognised as agents who can participate in the society (Gall 5).

This is why understanding the differences between sex work and sex trafficking is extremely important to recognise the agency sex workers have and to understand how they can be important contributors to combating sex trafficking. When sex workers are perceived as conscious agents and not victims, they can be included in operations which target cases of sex trafficking. Therefore, sex workers can collaborate in the identification and reporting of cases of trafficking once they are free of stigmas which place them as inactive victims in the society.

The literature review presented on this chapter aimed to bring a general understanding regarding the definition of sex trafficking, how it originated, the scale in which sex trafficking is presented to the public – together with the main contestations on it – and the importance of differentiating sex trafficking from sex work, which is fundamental to recognise sex workers as agents rather than victims.

The following chapter will present the methodology and approach used in this research in order to produce the knowledge of how sex workers can contribute to fighting sex trafficking.

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Approach

3.1 Presenting the method adopted

As the goal of this research is to explore and understand the ways in which sex workers can contribute to combating sex trafficking, I will utilize an explorative¹² qualitative research method, using semi-structured in-depth interviews with sex workers' rights activists, consisting of eleven open-ended questions as the data collection method.

A literature review based on data from the United Nations (UN); World Health Organisation (WHO); International Labor Organisation (ILO), and other relevant material regarding the concept of sex trafficking and sex work, as well as numbers related to sex trafficking, were presented in chapter 2 in order to present a general understanding of the subjects which are part of this research, named sex trafficking and sex work. The focus of this research will be on the new insights which the sex workers' activists will bring during the interviews.

3.2 Objective of this Study - Why using a qualitative research method?

Using an explorative qualitative research is an ideal method to gain the understanding of the ways in which sex workers can contribute to fighting sex trafficking, and to achieve new insights on the issue of sex trafficking. As in every qualitative research, the main aim here is to develop the understanding of sex workers' agency in the fight against sex trafficking, rather than making generalizations; as such, the qualitative research will "look at a 'process' individuals attribute to their given situation" (Hesse-Biber in: Hesse-Biber and Leavy 119), that means, it will investigate the ways in which sex workers can give their contribution against sex trafficking, rather than presenting *how many* cases of sex trafficking sex workers have combated.

This qualitative research will use a small sample of five respondents and will also select a *purposive sample*. To explain *purposive sample* I quote Palys: "To say you will engage in purposive sampling signifies that you see sampling as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where and how to do your research" (1). There are many different approaches that can be applied to *purposive samples* (Palys 1) and for this research I will use a "criterion sampling" strategy, which involves "searching for cases or individuals who meet a certain criterion, e.g.: that they have a certain disease or have had a particular life experience" (Palys 2).

¹² "Exploratory research is conducted to provide a better understanding of a situation...to discover ideas and insights" (Monroe College 27-28)

The knowledge gained from the interviews with the sex workers' rights activists is embedded on a feminist standpoint epistemology, which will hear the voices of people who work for the empowerment of a socially oppressed group, named, the sex workers. As Harding explains in Hesse-Biber and Leavy, the standpoint of those who work with a specific group of people (in this case, the sex workers activists who work with sex workers groups or individuals) can generate more truthful and objective knowledge (70); therefore the experiences from the interviewees, will add an important knowledge regarding sex workers' agency against sex trafficking.

Below I will explain why this specific sample was selected for the interviews and how I had access to the interviewees, who are important contributors to the knowledge construction which this research needs to answer the research question: "how can sex workers contribute to combating sex trafficking?"

3.3 Data collection – The research sample

The five interviewees were selected due to their vast experience and history of activism as sex workers' rights advocates who have been supporting sex workers as individuals or groups for many years. The experiences of the interviewees vary from twelve to thirty years of involvement with sex workers' rights. Moreover, two respondents are former sex workers. The profile of the interviewees will be presented further below, in which their education and experience will be addressed.

The position the respondents hold, as either founders of their own organisations or board members of recognised sex workers' organisations was also a very important point to be considered when choosing them for this research because they are deeply involved with various individuals or groups of sex workers who fight for self-determination; respect, and for ending the exploitation of other sex workers; therefore, the interviewees can bring a valuable knowledge regarding the agency sex workers have to fight sex trafficking as well as how sex workers perceive and combat sex trafficking.

Another important feature regarding the sample selection is that the interviewees have experience with sex workers in different regions of the globe, and due to the fact that sex trafficking is perceived as a global issue (UNODC Global Report 12) it will be interesting to explore the activists' perspectives regarding sex trafficking and how it can be combated by sex workers.

It is also important to highlight that having access to experts in the field of sex workers' rights, makes this research exclusive and add extremely valuable knowledge to it. The access to these important people was facilitated by the project Red Umbrella Fund. I was introduced to all the interviewees through Nadia van der Linde, the coordinator of the Red Umbrella and had the opportunity to interview four of them face to face. The only exception was Dr. Jana Smarajit, who is based in India and was interviewed by telephone.

The interviewees Ruth Morgan Thomas and Chantawipa Apisuk are members of the International Steering Committee (ISC)¹³ and are both based outside the Netherlands; however, I had the opportunity to interview them face to face when they came for the annual meeting with the ISC members in May, which was organised by the Red Umbrella Fund.

Without the Red Umbrella Fund it would have been extremely difficult to establish contact with the sex workers' activists because, besides being extremely occupied by their work, sex work is a controversial subject and some activists fear media misinterpretation (often on purposive) of their speech, in which in many cases the information the sex workers activists provide are misinterpreted and used against them, as Ruth M. Thomas explained me.

3.4 Approach used in the analysis of the interviews

The analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the in-depth interviews, which include new perspectives on the issue of sex trafficking, and how it can be combated by sex workers, will be based on two approaches, first on a "generic approach to coding", which will be useful for the organisation and categorization of the data collected to later present the data from the interviews under thematic synthesis (Lichtman 258); which means that the knowledge gained from the interviews will be presented in a summarized form and divided by themes. The generic coding will enable me to analyse the important aspects of the interviews which connect to the subject of study of this thesis, named, sex trafficking and sex workers' agency to combat it. Therefore, the reduced amount of central and meaningful concepts presented under this approach will reveal the understanding of the topic of interest of this research (Lichtman 248).

The analysis of the data from the interviews will also use an "interpretative and descriptive approach" which "aims to understand and report the views...of those being studied" (Lewis and

¹³The International Steering Committee (ISC) is formed by members who are part of the governance and administration of the project Red Umbrella Fund, where I did my internship. The ISC members provide strategic policy and programmatic supervision for the Red Umbrella Fund (The Red Umbrella 5)

Ritchie 201). This analytical approach will be used for a detailed examination of the sex workers activists experience with empowering sex workers as individual and groups and bring the knowledge of how sex workers can combat sex trafficking, linking the theory of agency - addressed in chapter 4 – to the analysis of the interviews.

From all the five participants, four were interviewed in person and the interviews have been recorded for the purpose of facilitating the access to the content and therefore doing a proper data analysis and interpretation of each participant's answers. Due to the geographical distance, I interviewed Dr. Jana Smarajit, who is based in India, via Skype.

The questions addressed in interviews and which were used as my interview guide are available in the appendix of this thesis¹⁴.

3.5 The profile of the interviewees

The profile of the interviewees who contributed to this research will be presented below. I will first address their personal information, such as education and work experience, which will be followed by the main activities related to the organisation they run or work for.

I will start by presenting Ruth Morgan Thomas, who is from the United Kingdom and is currently based in Scotland. Thomas is the global coordinator of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) and co-chair of the UNAIDS Advisory Group on HIV and Sex Work on behalf of the NSWP. She has been involved in the sex workers' rights area for more than thirty year; eight years as a sex worker, two and a half years as an academic researcher at Edinburgh University - researching on HIV related risks in the sex industry - and around twenty years as a sex workers' rights advocate within a UK, European and global context (RH Reality Check).

The NSWP advocates for the voice of sex workers globally and connect regional networks which fight for the rights of female, male, and transgender sex workers. The NSPW promotes rights

¹⁴All the questions addressed in the interviewees were useful to gain new insights on the issue of sex trafficking and the understanding of sex workers' contribution against it; however, when I analysed the questions and answers regarding: the scale of migrant sex workers who might be trafficked, and whether decriminalization and legalization can be supportive to sex workers' human rights and to fight sex trafficking, I realised that these are complex subjects which involve researching numbers on migrant sex workers as well as the use of statistical procedures to test assumptions and comparison between groups to understand the impacts of decriminalization and legalization on sex workers (Creswell 129). Therefore, to address migration and laws (decriminalization and legalization), a new study, using quantitative research, would need to take place. Although the interviewees have a vast experience with migrant and non-migrant sex workers, and a very good understanding of the mechanisms of decriminalization and legalization, these are subjects which need specific focus and more accurate quantifications in order to be presented, that is why I decided not to focus on these subjects in the analysis of the interviews.

based health and social services, freedom from abuse and discrimination, and self-determination for sex workers (NSWP who we are).

The next interviewee is Chantawipa Apisuk, from Thailand. She is the founder and director of Empower Foundation, in Thailand.

Apisuk graduated in sociology in Bangkok and went to the United States to continue her studies and in 1984 she returned to Thailand, where she became involved with sex workers human rights. In 1985 Apisuk founded Empower Foundation. She currently runs the head office in Nonthaburi Province. Empower maintains centers in Patpong (Bangkok), Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Sai and Patong Beach, Phuket (Ashoka Innovators). Empower Foundation works mostly with women sex workers and provides educational programs to overcome illiteracy; legal trainings for sex workers' awareness of their human rights, and theatrical performances to build self-esteem. (Empower Foundation).

The next interviewee is Dr. Jana Smarajit. He is the chief advisor to Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), in India. Dr. Smarajit has an educational background in Public Health Sciences and in the early 1990s taught epidemiology at the Public Health Institute. During this period Dr. Smarajit engaged with the sex workers community in Kolkata, India, and became interested in understanding sex workers issues and rights. From this period on, Dr. Smarajit became a strong supporter of sex workers' rights and is currently the chief advisor to the DMSC; furthermore he is also the principal of Sonagachi Research and Training Institute (SRTI) in Kolkata, India.

The DMSC is a collectivization of 6,500 sex workers which functions as an exclusive forum of female, male and transgender sex workers in West Bengal, India. The DMSC represents 65,000 sex-workers (male, female and transgender) and challenges the socio-structural factors that perpetuate stigma and social exclusion of sex-workers. Since 1997, the organisation focuses on tackling underage girls and women trafficked into sex work. To combat sex trafficking, the DMSC adopted self-regulatory boards in the sex work sites. Self-regulatory boards are collaborative efforts formed by 60 percent of sex workers and 40 percent of local doctors; lawyers; councilors, and local opinion leaders. The DMSC serves as a double-check to prevent entry of minor girls and unwilling adult women into sex work; control exploitative practices; regulate the rules and practices of sex trade and institute social welfare measures for sex workers and their children (DMSC).

Now presenting the interviewees who are based in the Netherlands, I will start by Ilonka Stakelborough, director of Stichting-Geisha, in the Netherlands. Stakelborough worked as a sex worker for twenty five years and became involved with sex workers' rights in 2001. In 2012 she founded Stichting-Geisha, an organisation which helps sex workers in the areas of exploitation, coercion and violence. Stichting-Geisha works together with information provided by sex workers to identify cases of exploitation and is also actively working against sex trafficking with the support of sex workers. The organisation is currently advocating for a pension system for sex workers; legal support; negotiations with real state companies to provide rooms under fair prices, and coaching for straightening the self-determination of sex workers (Stichting-Geisha).

The last interviewee to be presented is Marie-Louise Janssen, also from the Netherlands. She is the Founder of Foundation Esperanza (Fundación Esperanza) and is currently a lecturer in the areas of gender and sexuality studies, migration and human trafficking and ethnographic research methods and techniques at the department of Cultural Anthropology of the University of Amsterdam. Janssen graduated in Cultural Anthropology in 1991. After her graduation she worked in Nicaragua as a coordinator of women projects. There, she became interested in male street sex workers and started working with them on health issues and empowerment activities. In 1993 she founded with her Colombian colleague Foundation Esperanza, a Colombian-Dutch NGO, in Colombia, dedicated to preventing and combating human trafficking in Latin American women. The NGO also works providing shelter and legal support to victims of human trafficking in the European sex industry (University of Amsterdam).

All the organisations and the experiences of the interviewees relate to empowering methods to sex workers rather than focusing on rescues measurements and victimization; these techniques therefore recognise sex workers as agents.

3.6 My position as a feminist to this research

The legal status of sex work is central to the subject of sex trafficking and is a highly debated issue between the feminists who declare to be abolitionists and the feminists who adopt a liberal approach to sex work. From the political perspectives of those who adopt an abolitionist approach, sex work is seen as a form of male violence against women and reduces women to the status of pure objects in the society. To these feminists, there is no distinction between forced or voluntary sex work (Anderson and Davidson 10). On the other hand, feminists who defend the rights and agency of sex workers reject the idea that selling sex is essentially degrading and

recognise that adults who made the personal choice to be sex workers should not be victimized or have their right to self-determination denied. Furthermore, these feminists challenge the abolitionists' view which conflates sex work with sex trafficking (Anderson).

As a feminist researcher who seeks to understand sex work and sex trafficking - preferably from the standpoint of those who are involved with sex workers' rights - I do believe that it is necessary to acknowledge the agency that every citizen has when a decision is made, and this agency should be respected and classify people as citizens rather than mute victims who have to be spoken by. It is interesting however to mention that my perception of sex workers' agency was completely different before I engaged in my internship at the Red Umbrella Fund and previous to my research for this thesis. Having an educational background in languages and education, which did not include gender and sexuality studies, plus, being raised in a Catholic family and in a country where sexuality is a taboo and sex work is considered as morally wrong and degrading, when I initiated my internship at the Red Umbrella Fund, I was very hesitant to write a thesis on sex workers' rights and agency. Influenced by my background, I found this subject very controversial and problematic. I was also hesitant because I found difficult to understand how sex workers could have any agency, as I tended to believe that sex work is a product of a patriarchal oppression. However, I decided to take the challenge and understand more about sex work and sex trafficking. Having researched immensely for the thesis and at my internship, I learned that sex work, as any other controversial subject, only appeared problematic to me due to my lack of understanding about it. I therefore learned that, specially subjects which are controversial, need to be understood primarily under the lens of those who are deeply involved with it, in this case, the sex workers or people who work very closely with them. I can now recognise sex work as a choice that is made by many persons who have agency and should be respected as citizens who are fully capable of making their own decisions; thus, sex work to me is not a problematic subject anymore, as I became more familiar with it.

I would like to point however that discussing whether sex work is degrading is not the focus of this research. Rather, this thesis intends to explore the agency sex workers have and how they can use their agency to contribute to combating sex trafficking. Furthermore, I do recognise that the concept of "choosing" to do sex work can be influenced by economical or other structural conditions; as in Agustín's words: "To grant agency to migrating individuals does not mean denying structural conditions...but it does consider their own perceptions and desires to be

crucial” (41). Therefore, I now understand that simply denying the capacity of sex workers to choose and their ability to understand the risks they bear is an essentialist approach that position sex workers as victims who should be saved and remain mute, which brings a “colonialist operation...of western feminism treatment of third-world women (Agustín 39). Therefore, recognising sex workers’ agency and perceiving them as brave individuals who take risks in order to achieve financial ascension helped me understand better how sex workers can be perceived as powerful citizens who also deserve to participate in the society and benefit other sex workers.

As it will be presented below in chapter 4, agency is an important mechanism to be considered when capacitating citizens to be socially active is at stake.

Chapter 4 – Theoretical Framework

Agency as the capacity to choose, act and influence social changes

This chapter is based on the concept of agency as the capacity to choose, act, and influence social changes (Davidow in: Gardiner 24), which relate to sex workers and their choice for their profession as well as their capacity to contribute to the fight on sex trafficking. Hence, agency here will be the main aspect of the analysis from the interviews with the sex workers activists to understand how sex workers can contribute to combating the exploitation of other sex workers.

4.1 A postmodern approach to the theory of agency

The theory of agency presented in this research has been inspired by a postmodern feminist approach. Postmodernism is important to the concept of agency because when exploring the capacity of sex workers to fight sex trafficking, not only women will be taken into account, but also men and transgender sex workers. Therefore, this research does not focus only on women's sex workers' agency as the interviewees work with sex workers from all gender and gender identities and who are active on the fight against sex trafficking. Therefore, agency here draws from a feminist postmodern approach which takes into account the diversity of sex workers' gender and gender identity¹⁵ and their agency (Flax in: Nicholson 45).

As Hekman notes: “An essentialist conception of identity, whether masculine or feminine, is always unitary and hierarchical... (in: Gardiner 201). As such, this research will benefit from a feminist postmodern approach which explores sex workers' agency transcending gender binaries of identity as knowledge production; as women, men and transgender sex workers are represented as social agents against sex trafficking.

Besides considering all sex workers' gender/gender identities as agents, the postmodern feminist approach connected to the theory of agency will also provide basis for avoiding the tendency to construct theory that is based on the experiences of Western, white, middle-class women (Fraser and Nicholson 5) because the examples of sex workers who fight against sex trafficking – which are provided by the interviewees - come from sex workers groups and individuals from places like India, Thailand, Cambodia, United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Therefore, sex workers

¹⁵The diversity of gender here refers to women and men sex workers, whereas gender identity refers to transgender people or those who perceive themselves as male, female or both or neither. For example, gender identity here refers to one's gender identification as the same or different than the sex assigned at birth (Gender spectrum).

who contribute to combating sex trafficking do not represent hegemonic ethnic groups, as they belong and act in different places of the globe.

Using a postmodern feminist approach to the concept of sex workers' agency will seek to address the "empowerment and emancipation for women and other marginalized groups" (Brooks and Hesse-Biber in: Leavy and Hesse-Biber 4) named, the sex workers. Through a postmodern feminist approach, the agency of sex workers, who are marginalized, will be recognised and show their importance for the society, as they can fight against sex trafficking.

4.2 "Why agency now?"

This question was posed by Ellen Messer Davidow (in: Gardiner 23) when she explains the impacts on the society caused by actions taken by conservative politic leaders in the United States. To exemplify the power that agency has to change or shape societies, Davidow mentions some measurements adopted by conservative politicians which 'seek to conserve traditional Western culture' (qtd. In: Davidow 24). Such actions, as Davidow explains, opposes to feminism; Marxism; deconstruction, and multiculturalism and prohibits financial aid targeted to ethnic minority students in higher education (in: Gardiner 23-24). Therefore, the politicians, who are recognised and perceived as agents, are the ones who shape the society by their actions. For example, when minority students are not funded anymore, it changes the structuring of higher education, its demographics, finances, pedagogy and intellectual products (Davidow in: Gardiner 25), that means, it influences power relations and redefines who will have access to, for example, decision-making jobs which affect our society, such as policy making.

The example of conservative politicians who decide how the society will function according to their interests, shows that as agents, individuals or groups of people can impact the society in profound ways. Therefore, the same way that conservative leaders exercise their agency to shape the society, agency, when granted to minority groups, can be a powerful tool to bring changes that benefit their own interests and eventually the whole society. As Davidow says: "agentic practices are at the heart of the profound changes now sweeping our society" (in: Gardiner 25), that means, agency is extremely important to be considered as a powerful instrument of change for feminists who seek to work for the benefit of those who are excluded. As in Davidow's words: "agency must be translated from an interesting academic problem to an urgent practical one..." (In: Gardiner 25).

As presented above, agency can be an effective and important way to impact societies; therefore empowering groups or individuals, who have been disfavored by decision making processes, as agents can transform them into active citizens who can contribute to solving social problems that affect society as a whole. Furthermore, it can contribute to ending the problem of social exclusion of certain groups, such as the sex workers.

In the case of sex workers – who are usually perceived as either victims of trafficking or morally corrupted (NSWP Sex work 8) - drawing from the concept of agency is important because it recognises their power to act against sex trafficking, which consequently bring positive changes in the society. This is why this research is embedded in the concept of agency to address how sex workers can act against sex trafficking.

4.3 Defining agency for this thesis

The concept of agency has been used by different disciplines, such as anthropology, gender studies, linguistic, among others (Ahearn 109), and may vary in different sociocultural contexts (Ahearn 113). Ahearn draws attention to the fact that the concept of agency can be approached in different ways by different scholars. To illustrate that, she quotes Pickering when he suggests that “within different cultures human beings and the material world might exhibit capacities for action quite different from those we customarily attribute to them” (qtd. in Ahearn 113). This shows that agency cannot be used as a fixed approach to all fields of study and even in the same study area.

Traditionally, agency is defined as the capacity to decide and act; furthermore agency is attached to an entity, such as an individual, or a collective or social structure (Davidow in: Gardiner 25).

As Davidow explains, when referring to individuals, agency is attached to a ‘self’ and is connected to a psychological state; it is therefore said to be the individual’s capacity for self-determination practiced through decision and action, whereas when attached to persons or groups, agency is conceived as an element of social being and is understood as the capacity to act on social influence and intervention. Davidow also notes that the making of the ‘self’ and ‘society’ are culturally variable, as anthropologists have noticed (in: Gardiner 25).

In feminist conceptualisations, agency may be complex and its concept can be varied (Lloyd, Few, and Allen 265). Ahearn for example draws attention to the fact that the concept of agency has being overemphasised on resistance, when, due to Ortner, “there is no such a thing as pure

resistance, motivations are always complex and contradictory” (qtd. in Ahearn 116). Ahearn also refers to McLeod’s nuanced definition of agency in feminist theory; in which women “always play an active part that goes beyond the dichotomy of victimisation/acceptance” (qtd in: Ahearn 116); therefore the complexity of agency, in which women [or oppressed groups] “accept, accommodate, ignore, resist or protest – sometimes all at the same time” (qtd in: Ahearn 116) should be at the core of its definition, especially in a feminist context (Ahearn 116).

Embedded in the idea of exploring the agency of sex workers when fighting sex trafficking, I draw on Ahearn’s definition of agency as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (112), which means that agency is mediated by a sociocultural environment; that is, an individual or group’s action do not take place without the influence of the environment; agency from this context does not take place in a void, but it is rather socially motivated, socially influenced, it is an agency which is shaped by historical and cultural trajectories (Lier in: Lantolf and Poehner 163). I will also draw from the definition of agency as the “capacity for self-determination”, which involves decision and action, where the individual decides for his actions and proceeds in pro of his own benefits (Davidow in Gardiner 25-26). Self-determination therefore is the individual’s own initiative and decision to engage in activities that concern his individual integrity (Cornell University). Lastly I will draw on the definition of agency as “the capacity for social influence and intervention”, which means that persons organise themselves, as groups, to act as elements of change in the society (Davidow in: Gardiner 25).

These three definitions of agency were chosen for fitting precisely in the work that sex workers do in the fight on sex trafficking. Furthermore, the definitions of agency presented above are connected to the two agency models which will be presented below and which serve as the foundation of this research when exploring the agency of sex workers in the fight against sex trafficking.

Before presenting the two models of agency as the groundwork for this study, at this point it is important to mention that agency which represents “choice” in this research recognises that the decision of a person to engage in sex work might involve outside factors, such as economic needs; however this study will focus on agency which relates to the individual’s choice as conscious decision, without coercion (Simmons in: Dank and Refinetti 127). While a further analysis on the system which might push men and women into the decision of selling sex as a better source of income is not the objective of this research, the focus here is on sex workers’

agency as synonym of conscious decision and action; which is connected to the individualist agency model – presented below - as well as the capacity to influence the society, which connects to the collectivist agency model, also presented below.

Therefore, the term agency here focuses on the capacity that sex workers have to self-determination and consciously choose for their jobs, and how they can also participate in the society contributing to social changes when they fight sex trafficking.

The definitions of agency presented above are embedded in the two models of agency, as presented by Davidow:

The first agency model is the “individualist model”. This model of agency involves the individual’s choice of acting with integrity and against moral conventions or advice at any cost. Furthermore, agency here has as its elements and main characteristics: volition, decision and action (Davidow in: Gardiner 26). This model also addresses agency as the capacity for self-determination, as presented above. Self-determination occurs in this model because agency is attached to a ‘self’ and conceived as an element of psychological being; it is then said to be an individual’s capacity for self-determination which is realised through decision and action (Davidow in Gardiner 25). Agents here choose a path of action, and choice ‘implies the realizability of more than one path’ (qtd. in Davidow 26). Agency in this model therefore, Davidow quotes Harré, ‘is exercised in a choice between branches...’ (qtd. in Davidow 26). This quote illustrates that choice implies the existence of more than one option for an individual to decide.

Another characteristic presented in the individualist model is that, as presented above, the individual acts based on his own choice and against moral rules; therefore bearing with the consequences from his choices. As a characteristic of this model, agency allows for unintended consequences (Davidow in: Gardiner 26).

The individualist model of agency illustrates very well that sex workers are agents and agency here “involves the individual’s decision to engage in sexual activity for money” (Mar 10).

The individualist agency model intersects with sex workers’ agency as a principle to fight sex trafficking. For example, sex workers who have the power of self-determination – which is the main element of the individualist agency model – are able to recognise their human rights and tend to advocate for better working conditions, hence avoiding and speaking up against exploitation to themselves and even to other sex workers (Thomas). The principle of making sex

workers recognise their power of self-determination also works with building up self-esteem; therefore equipped with notions of self-respect, the sex workers denounce cases of exploitation as they do not feel ashamed for their profession (Thomas).

The second agency model is the “collectivist model”. This model attaches the idea of agency to groups or collective forms of organisation or process (Davidow in: Gardiner 26). Here agency is addressed as the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn 112) and the capacity for social influence and intervention (Davidow in: Gardiner 26). The socio-mediated capacity to act is an aspect of this model of agency as groups who share the same values and believes, and are influenced by their socio-cultural environment, organise themselves and act in pro of changes that benefit those who are part of the same group; therefore these actions give rise to a series of social influences and intervention. The collectivist model is embedded in the principle of a group acting to change social structures, such as a hierarchical institution or ending the violence of the dominant social order (Davidow in: Gardiner 28).

To illustrate how a collectivist model of agency works it is worth to mention that this agency model was adopted by movements which worked on important social changes, such as the civil rights, New Left, and women’s liberation movements of the 1960’s. These movements also expanded the humanist-Marxist notion of working-class agency in history. The civil rights, New Left, and women’s liberation believed that they could act as agents of history by making changes acting through organisational forms and processes which already existed. For example, the New Left believed in the participation in organisational forms that were not hierarchical, but were community-based rather than bureaucratic. As a result, agency as the concept to make changes was conceived as “counterforming some structures to transform others” (Davidow in: Gardiner 28-29). These examples serve as a good illustration of the ways in which the collectivist model of agency can work in the society.

The collectivist agency model is also an important connection to sex workers’ agency in the fight on sex trafficking because as groups, sex workers can organise themselves to report cases of exploitation; furthermore, their actions are influenced and motivated by their socio-cultural environment, as they are sex workers who act to benefit other sex workers who are exploited.

The two models of agency, individualist and collectivist, presented above will therefore be the foundation to this research when approaching the sex workers’ contribution to the fight on sex trafficking.

Chapter 5 - Interviews Data Analysis

This chapter will present the analysis of the interviews with the five sex workers' rights activists. Before bringing the understanding of sex workers' contribution to combating sex trafficking, the perspectives of the respondents on sex trafficking and its inherent aspects, such as: whether sex trafficking is the main challenge sex workers face; vulnerability, and the scale of sex trafficking, will be presented.

The interview analysis will be divided in thematic sections. Furthermore, this chapter will connect the activities of sex workers in the fight on sex trafficking to the theory of agency presented in chapter 4.

5.1 Understanding sex trafficking under the sex workers activists' perspectives

Before understanding sex workers' agency and how they can contribute to fighting sex trafficking, it is important to explore sex trafficking and its inherent aspects under the experts' perspectives, this is relevant because the activists are deeply and directly involved with this issue and therefore can contribute to the understanding of how sex trafficking can be combated; who should be involved with it and what are the best ways to approach this issue. As Stakelborough said: "NGOs, policy makers and governments are talking about us [sex workers], they are implementing laws...So, let's talk *with* us". Therefore, understanding the most important aspects related to sex trafficking through the voices of those who are directly involved with sex workers' rights is fundamental as sex trafficking relates directly to sex workers; as such, their views on the issue cannot be ignored.

5.1.1 Addressing the scale of sex trafficking

I will start by analysing the scale of sex trafficking. Understanding the degree of sex trafficking by those who are involved with sex work, named, the sex workers activists, is important in order to explore how sex workers adopt the most adequate measurements to combat it.

When investigating what are the main issues sex workers face, most of the answers from the interviewees did not point to sex trafficking; rather, sex workers' main challenge is to face violence and discrimination from the police; legal authorities, and civilians. Due to stigmas and discrimination against their profession, sex workers do not have access to social justice and protection from the police when they suffer violence. As Apisuk said: "sex workers suffer from

discrimination and stigmatization all the time. Sex workers are seen as stupid, dirty, disease spreaders, victims of the society, or sometimes law breakers”. Therefore, sex trafficking was not mentioned by any of the respondents as being the main issue sex workers have to face. In fact, and based on the interviews, sex trafficking is often brought to the public view in much higher degrees than it really occurs. Interestingly, all the interviewees¹⁶ believed that sex trafficking happens and people are coerced into sex work; however, it does not happen within the scale that it is presented by the mainstream media. To illustrate that I quote Thomas: “The scale of sex trafficking is really hysterical in terms of public media, there are so many myths about it...We do not deny that victims exist. People who are deceived exist, but the media will cover these histories over and over again”. Thomas explained me that the media focuses on presenting sex trafficking in alarming degrees rather than as a erratic happening because, and in her words: “When the media does cover a positive history about sex work, they quite often get attacked for doing that, because they are accused of trying to glamorize sex work” (Thomas).

Thomas’ words represents the other four interviewees’ opinion. For example, Dr. Smarajit said: “there are a small number of sex workers who have been trafficked; only 4 or 5 percent of sex workers the DMSC encounters in the field have been trafficked”.

When exploring the degree of sex trafficking, I could realise from the interviews that one of the main reasons that causes sex trafficking to be addressed as growing issue is the conflation of sex work with sex trafficking. This problem was often addressed by the interviewees. To illustrate it I quote Dr. Smarajit: “There is a confusion of who have been really trafficked. There is a conflation with sex work and sex trafficking. The agency and decisions of people who decide to work in sex work are not respected due to this conflation”. Therefore, besides causing numbers in sex trafficking to be puzzled, conflating sex work with sex trafficking brings the sex industry to an image that perpetuates the exploitation of people, which is inaccurate, as Thomas explained. Thomas said:

Conflating sex work with trafficking increases the vulnerability of those who have chosen sex work as their occupation...Sex workers are seen as pursuing no agency. They are often seen as minors who do not know how to take care of themselves and who have to be rescued and spoken by all the time. This has lead

¹⁶ Except for Apisuk Chantawipa, who did not want to discuss sex trafficking at all, as she does not like the term and does not believe in the term “sex trafficking”.

to police intervention in which sex workers are taken and told to make candles and sewing, or doing any kind of income generating that a 'good woman' is supposed to do, rather than selling sexual services.

The issue of conflating sex trafficking with sex work seems to be one of the main challenges that sex workers face when I interviewed the sex workers' activists. Besides, the conflation seems to be the major reason for inflating numbers on sex trafficking and classifying it as an uncontrollable growing problem which needs massive interventions, especially by governmental authorities.

When exploring the scale of sex trafficking during the interviews, I could realise that if organisations and governments wish to target sex trafficking in more effective ways, they first need to understand the real proportions of this problem to then direct the right amount of sources and the right strategies to combat it. One of the most important ways to readdress sex trafficking is by first understanding the differences between those who choose to do sex work and those who are in fact trafficked and are being coerced. Besides, sex workers who have chosen to sell sex need to have their agency recognised. In this case, I shall connect the individualist agency model which involves the capacity to act and choose (Davidow in Gardiner 26). When having their agency recognised, sex workers could also become helpful sources to identify real cases of sex trafficking, as they have knowledge in the sex industry and are directly connected to networks.

Although conflating sex work with sex trafficking seems to be the main reason for increasing the number on sex trafficking statistics, from the interviews I also learned that another important aspect that mislead sex trafficking numbers is the fact that many laws and policies focus on transportation, or whether there is debt involved to classify a person as a victim of trafficking.

For example, as Thomas explained me: "In the UK we have a trafficking legislation which focuses primarily on transportation. That means, if you transport sex workers knowing they are sex workers, than you are a trafficker and they are victims of trafficking". Thomas also mentioned that when sex workers make a debt to migrate, they are automatically considered to be trafficked due to the fact that they have borrowed money from a mediator, therefore the decision to borrow money that the sex worker made in order to travel is not taken into account whatsoever. Stakelborough and the other interviewees also mentioned that there are problems to classify those who choose to sell sex from the real victims of sex trafficking due to confusing interpretations which are not based on factual truths. As Stakelborough said: "It is not so easy to

define sex trafficking, who is considered to be trafficked? There is the public opinion that every migrant sex worker is a victim and this is driving sex workers crazy”.

In the case presented above by Thomas, the principle of individualist agency is clearly denied due to the fact that sex workers are wrongly classified as victims because of laws which do not consider each case individually and do not look into important aspects, such as forced labor, coercion and exploitation during work. Sex workers therefore are all perceived as victims due to the fact that authorities base their judgment of who might be a victim on superfluous mechanisms (transportation and debt intake).

After exploring the scale of sex trafficking through the interviewees’ standpoint, I can conclude that sex trafficking has been addressed in uncritical ways and in higher degrees than reality might prove, mostly due to the denial of sex workers’ capacity to choose and act in pro of their own benefits. Furthermore, if authorities are really interested in solving the issue of sex trafficking, and as Thomas has pointed out, there need to be more focus on identifying cases of exploitation and coercion rather than classifying people as victims based on transportation or debt intake.

5.1.2 Addressing vulnerabilities to sex trafficking

When it comes to vulnerability to sex trafficking, women might represent a bigger number of people who have been trafficked in the sex industry due to the fact that there are more women than men and transgender sex workers in the sex industry; as Thomas said: “I do believe that there is the idea that women are more vulnerable to sex trafficking only because there are more women sex workers in general, so they represent a bigger number of cases of exploitation”.

However, the idea that women are more prone to sex trafficking due to the fact that they are more innocent and more vulnerable in general seems to be more mythological than factual. To illustrate that, I quote Dr. Smarajit: “I think it can happen more to women to be sexually exploited in other layers of social sphere, but *not* when we are talking about sex work. There are moral perceptions which make women sex workers appear more vulnerable in contrast to men, but in sex work, women are more powerful, they become economically empowered as they earn their own money”.

In fact, the idea that women are more vulnerable to sex trafficking because they are more innocent and naturally more vulnerable seems to be a myth which is used by mainstream media

to perpetuate the idea that women in sex work are all victims without any agency (Kempadoo ix). Cases of sex trafficking which involve women are used to emphasize their vulnerability, as if sex trafficking only happened to female sex workers. The mainstream media therefore ignores the fact that men and transgender sex workers are also subjected to exploitation when the focus is only on women who have been trafficked; as Janssen said: “Transgender sex workers are actually very vulnerable when it comes to sex trafficking because they suffer double stigma, for being sex workers and for being transgender”. Stakelborough also pointed out that: “transgender people tend to be more stigmatised and are subjected to violence and discrimination also from other sex workers, especially women, so they tend to be more vulnerable to exploitation.”

While investigating individual's vulnerability to sex trafficking, I concluded that stigmas and discrimination against sex work creates the myth that women are “naturally” more subjected to sex trafficking. This idea comes from the perception that sex work is essentially degrading and exploitative to all women (Kempadoo xiii). Furthermore there is the believe that almost all women are victims of trafficking as there are more women sex workers in the sex industry. This creates a big myth which denies the agency of women sex worker, as Apisuk said: “women sex workers are the head of their families; they provide better conditions to their family members and are agents with the power to self-determination. Sex workers need to be recognised as agents, their inclusion in the society as fully capable citizens should be considered”.

It is therefore necessary to be considered that when understanding vulnerabilities to sex trafficking is at stake; men and transgender people should also be taken into account rather than perpetuating the believe that only women sex workers might be trafficked for sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the perception that women are more prone to sex trafficking needs to be critically reviewed and better understood, as the conflation of sex work and sex trafficking persists greatly, as this research has showed. As such, many women sex workers are automatically seem as victims of trafficking, which creates inflated numbers on women sex workers who are victims of sex trafficking.

Having new perceptions on sex trafficking, that means, understanding that it might not happen in alarming scales and understanding that (especially women) sex workers are not essentially victims of trafficking brings new perspectives on how it can be combated, especially by sex workers, who can help identifying and reporting cases of sex trafficking due to their expertise in the sex industry. Furthermore, the understanding that sex trafficking is not happening in gigantic

proportions - which requires military especial operations-like - allows sex workers, especially as groups, and in combination with other agencies; authorities, and governments, to be involved in the process of combating sex trafficking. That means; it might not be necessary to always have the intervention of special mechanisms in order to combat sex trafficking when sex workers can intervene and give their contribution.

Therefore, these new perspectives on sex trafficking, based on the interviews, leads to a better understanding of how the problem can be combated and who should be involved in developing solutions for it.

5.2 Combating sex trafficking

“Nothing for us without us”

In this sub-chapter, based on the outcome of the interviews, I will analyse the main ways in which sex workers can contribute to fight sex trafficking and how their activities can connect to the two models of agency - individualist and collectivist – addressed in chapter 4.

5.2.1 Combating sex trafficking under sex workers’ individualist agency

When sex workers recognise the value they have as humans and are aware of their right to self-determination, they tend to feel stronger to speak up against exploitation and become more able to identify false promises of work which could bring them into exploitative situations. Being aware of their self-determination help sex workers avoid being entrapped into situations of sex trafficking. The acknowledgement of self-determination and capacity to act in pro of one’s own good is connected to the individualist agency model presented in chapter 4. For example, as Apisuk said: “Empower Foundation teaches sex workers to say ‘no’ when they want to say; to claim their rights. Through education and paralegal courses sex workers become aware of their human rights. We use a non-judgmental approach; we do not want to rescue sex workers, but to offer them a space in which they can learn how to work safely”. Apisuk passage is an example of training sex workers to be aware of their right to self-determination; with this, they are able to work without being coerced and exploited. Therefore, the individualist agency model is taught to sex workers in order to make them able to become agents of their own lives rather than making them believe that they need to be rescued, which would deny their agency completely.

The capacity to act based on the individualist agency model can be exemplified by what Apisuk said, in which acting means when sex workers say “no” to abusive situations. Furthermore, sex workers who have a sense of individual agency and self-esteem tend to choose safer working conditions, because they know they deserve to be respected as workers. Therefore, sex workers choose their profession and they also choose how to act in this occupation. This can be understood as the individualist model of agency, in which the sex workers choose a path (sex work) among other options, and act for their integrity, choosing the best ways to work safely (Davidow in: Gardiner 26). Thus, from the interviews I have learned that sex workers can be agents against sex trafficking by using their individualist agency model besides acting as groups - which will be addressed further below.

When equipped with information which make sex workers aware of their values and rights, they can become their own agents against sex trafficking. Sex workers organisations such as Empower Foundation, the NSWP, DMSC, Stichting Geisha, among others, provide courses to sex workers which work on their self-esteem and teach them how to avoid becoming victims of trafficking; that shows how important it is to recognise sex workers’ individual agency in order to prevent sex trafficking. As Stakelborough said: “Making sex workers aware of their capacities as agents and individuals is a first and the most important step to make them allies in the fight against sex trafficking”.

One good example of how the individualist agency of sex workers can be developed and its contribution to combating sex trafficking is the work that Empower Foundation does. The trainings offered by Empower Foundation, such as: literacy courses; cultural performances to build up self-esteem, and leadership teaching, are basic steps to make sex workers feel empowered and understand that they can decide for their profession, without being victimized, and also how to practice their profession. When sex workers learn that they have the capacity to develop different skills, they tend not to accept exploitative situations because their sense of self-esteem is greater, furthermore, having more information regarding their rights as humans, they also learn how to identify exploitative conditions and avoid them. As Apisuk said “Sex workers who are made agents as individuals will hardly be subjected to exploitation and abuses, as any other person who is empowered would”. Stichting-Geisha is also a good example of how developing the individualist agency model of sex workers can prevent cases of exploitation. Stakelborough said: “When sex workers are well informed about safety; know how to look for

help and learn how to react in case of abuses, they feel more confident to speak up against sex trafficking”.

Sex workers who are equipped with important information about their rights, have sense of self-esteem and feel confident to report cases of abuse will consequently prevent or fight sex trafficking; prevent by not engaging into dangerous situations and fighting by identifying and reporting other possible cases of exploitation.

Based on the examples above, the interviews with the sex workers activists has demonstrated that the fight on sex trafficking starts by empowering sex workers as individuals, by teaching them how to be agents of their own lives, as persons who have the right to choose to do sex work in safe ways; thus, acting in pro of their own well being, as it happens in the individualist agency model. Recognising sex workers as agents is a basic step to include them in the fight on sex trafficking because as soon as sex workers acknowledge the power and rights they have, they can actively contribute to preventing and identifying cases of sex trafficking, as it was presented above.

The examples brought in this section bring the understanding of how sex workers, who are equipped with the power of self-determination and the capacity to act, can contribute to fighting sex trafficking. Furthermore, the characteristics from the individualist agency model can be seen in the way that sex workers can act as individual agents, which translates in their capacity to determine what is the best path for them; as such, sex trafficking can be avoided and combated.

Although the individualist agency model is an important aspect to be considered when analysing how sex workers as individuals can contribute to combating sex trafficking, only by empowering sex workers individually is not enough to effectively work against sex trafficking. One interesting and important way is to combine agency which involves an individualist model and a collectivist model, which will be presented below.

5.2.2 Combating sex trafficking under sex workers’ collective agency

This analysis will present how sex workers can combat sex trafficking when they act as a group. This section therefore will connect some of the sex workers’ actions to the collectivist model of agency presented in chapter 4.

During my interviews with the sex workers activists, I learned about an important way in which sex workers can fight sex trafficking; that is, sex workers who act as groups, identifying and

reporting cases of trafficking and who also provide support to the sex workers who have been abused, without any “collateral damage”, as Dr. Smarajit mentioned.

The examples I will present below are embedded in the collectivist agency model - which uses the concept of agency as the “socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 112) and the “capacity for social influence and intervention” (Davidow in: Gardiner 26).

One important example of how sex workers who act as groups can contribute to the fight on sex trafficking is the work done by the NSWP, which is comprised of sex workers. The NSWP provides trainings for other sex workers-led organisations in which sex workers learn, among other things, about human rights; law and policy, and ethics. Equipped with all these information, sex workers can more easily identify and report cases of abuse against other sex workers and avoid exploitation against themselves, as Thomas explained me.

The empowering system adopted by the NSWP is interesting because it makes use of sex workers expertise (the sex workers from the NSWP) to teach and empower other sex workers in order to make them aware of their human rights and their capacity to act against exploitation. Based on the collectivist agency model, the sex workers from the NSWP organise themselves and follow a process (Davidow: in Gardiner 28), which means, providing information and training to other sex workers groups, who then become empowered and can avoid exploitation. Another characteristic from the collectivist agency in the work of the NSWP is their capacity to organise themselves in order to bring social influence and intervention, as the NSWP provides courses and material to other sex workers to prepare them to identify and denounce cases of exploitation. All these actions contribute to combating sex trafficking in which it uses the expertise of the NSWP sex workers, as a group, who teach and empower other sex workers and make them aware of ways to avoid and identify cases of sex trafficking. Furthermore, sex workers groups who train other sex workers can be an efficient way to create safe spaces, without stigmas and discrimination, where sex workers can learn how to practice their profession avoiding situations of exploitation, namely, sex trafficking.

Another important example which shows how sex workers can act as groups against sex trafficking is the case of sex-workers-led organisations in Cambodia, Macedonia and Bangkok, which provide paralegal support to sex workers who have been trafficked. As Thomas explained: “One of our sex workers-led organisation members set up a community legal service to provide sex workers with legal support in cases of sex trafficking. Sex workers are trained as paralegals

to give advice to other sex workers”. Interestingly here, sex workers who are paralegals help other sex workers who have been trafficked to act against abusive situations, and due to the sense of trust among sex workers, those who were trafficked feel safer to report abuses, as they know they will hardly be judged or victimized by the paralegal sex workers. As such, empowering sex workers as groups, in order to help other sex workers who have been trafficked, can be extremely helpful to those who have been subjected to exploitation and might be afraid or feel ashamed to report their situation to authorities, who do not always comprehend and support the human rights of sex workers, as their profession is highly stigmatised and not understood and respected by everyone (Smarajit).

In the example of the paralegal sex workers, the collectivist agency model is also a characteristic of their work. The paralegal sex workers are organised as groups which work with social influence and intervention (Davidow in: Gardiner 26) when they identify and prosecute cases of sex trafficking. The paralegal sex workers are also influenced by their socio-cultural reality (Ahearn 112), as they are sex workers themselves; therefore there is a mutual understanding among the paralegals and the sex workers who have been trafficked and need support, which decreases the risk of judgments and procedures which might not benefit those who need help, as for example, treating trafficked sex workers as either law breakers or victims who will never be able to integrate normally in the society again (NSWP sex work 5).

The example presented above is another case which shows that capacitating sex workers to fight in pro of sex workers who have been trafficked can be extremely beneficial, as it offers a fair approach to combating sex trafficking without over-victimizing and damaging the self-identity of trafficked sex workers.

Another important example of sex workers contribution to combating sex trafficking is the strategy adopted by the organisation DMSC. As Dr. Smarajit presented, the DMSC adopts a self-regulatory board strategy to address and combat sex trafficking and other injustices against sex workers. The self-regulatory board is a participatory model in which a sex worker collective (which includes female, male and transgender sex workers) are the major decision makers within the organisation . The members of the DMSC– who are sex workers – go to the field work of sex workers and make sure that there is nobody working under coercion or abuses by talking to the sex workers and building a relation of trust. The members of the DMSC maintain contact with the sex workers and make sure that in case of exploitation the sex workers feel free to report and

ask for help. The DMSC members also provide advice on how to deal with abuses and how to maintain safe practices. Dr. Smarajit explained that when cases of sex trafficking are detected, the members of the DMSC make sure to provide the abused sex workers with medical examinations, repatriation, rehabilitation and even psychological support. However, there is no use of coercion to make sex workers, who have been abused, leave the practice. The sex workers themselves decide whether they wish or not to continue working as sex workers, in safer situations, naturally. Due to Dr. Smarajit, the work by the sex workers groups from the DMSC have been successful in helping identifying and reporting cases of sex trafficking because the sex workers who have been exploited feel more comfortable to speak up with the DMSC members, as they know they can trust other sex workers. Therefore, sex workers who have been subjected to exploitation do not fear reprisals or stigmas when they contact the members of the DMSC, which results in a more trustworthy environment to help solving cases of sex trafficking.

When applying the theory of agency to the example of the work done by the DMSC, as in the case of the paralegal sex workers, it seems to be very effective to consider sex workers as agents who act as groups in order to combat cases of sex trafficking. The sex workers from the DMSC act in a collective way by going to the sites, approaching sex workers and identifying cases of sex trafficking, they also intervene when there are problems, providing the necessary support for the sex workers who need. These therefore, are relevant characteristics from the collectivist agency model which are important to be used to transform sex workers into agents in the fight on sex trafficking. Importantly, the way in which the DMSC works is also based on the principle which seeks to end the violence of a dominant social order (Davidow in: Gardiner 28), as the DMSC recognises that traditional raids and rescues are mostly violent and not helpful to sex workers who have been trafficked (Smarajit). The principle of ending the violence of raids and rescues is based on a collectivist agency model and it is very beneficial for trafficked sex workers who need support without being judged or forced to leave their place of work. Furthermore, the self-regulatory board of the DMSC also adopts the “participatory democracy” aspect from the collectivist agency, in which ordinary people – in this case the sex workers – share “the decision making that affect their lives” (Davidow in: Gardiner 28); that means, sex workers who are board members of the DMSC decide what are the best ways to combat sex trafficking based on their experience as sex workers and on their contact with other sex workers. Therefore, positioning sex workers as agents instead of victims, and recognising that they can be

trained and prepared to help other sex workers can be a very effective way to combat sex trafficking, as sex workers have a better understanding among each other and can offer solidarity to those who need support, however without criminalising or victimising trafficked sex workers. Empowering and involving sex workers as agents in the fight against sex trafficking, especially as groups, seems to be an important mechanism to be considered by sex workers organisations which focus on combating sex trafficking, as the examples presented here has showed.

For example, the organisation *Stiching-Geisha*, founded and directed by Ilonka Stakelborough, works on combating sex trafficking in the Netherlands and is now preparing a big campaign against sex trafficking which is based on the principle of using sex workers as groups as the main cooperators. For this campaign, Stakelborough explained me that: “sex workers will be trained and will help identify cases of exploitation, providing all the necessary support to sex workers who have been trafficked”.

Once more, in the example above, sex workers who are empowered, that means, receive training to detect and report cases of sex trafficking, are considered to be important allies to combat sex trafficking. Sex workers who become allies in programs and campaigns to fight sex trafficking are seen as agents instead of victims and can develop capacities that are usually denied to them, due to stigmas to their profession. Therefore, besides the effectiveness of detecting and accessing cases of sex trafficking - due to the fact that sex workers who need help have more trust on other sex workers - recognising the agency of sex workers as important allies in combating sex trafficking give them the chance to have self-determination and be more respected as sex workers, as they can participate in a important work for the whole society, which is: combating sex trafficking. Thus, considering sex workers’ agency in the fight against sex trafficking is beneficial for the sex workers who need help and for the sex workers who act as agents, who can finally show their value and power to influence in positive ways the society. Furthermore, ending exploitation is beneficial not only for sex workers, but for the whole society.

Throughout the analysis of data provided by the interviewees, this research has found the main ways in which sex workers can act against sex trafficking, and the principle of agency - as the capacity for self-determination and the capacity to act - was the main aspect to be considered within their actions.

Empowering sex workers to combat sex trafficking can be understood as individual agency, in which sex workers are provided with the right to self-determination and sufficient information to

avoid situations of exploitation, and as collective agency, in which groups of sex workers detect cases of sex trafficking and provide capacity building trainings to other sex workers to avoid abuses and exploitation in their profession.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The main goal of this research is to answer the question “how can sex workers contribute to combating sex trafficking”. Based on the principle of agency and based on the standpoint of experienced sex workers activists, this study has identified the different ways in which sex workers can be important allies in the fight against sex trafficking and the benefits they can bring.

This study has also found that the social phenomenon of sex trafficking is an issue that deserves a critical eye because it might be used by governments to support their own political agendas and prevent the entrance of migrant men and, especially women, in the name of “preventing people to become victims of trafficking” (Wijers 3). Furthermore sex trafficking is seen by many policy makers; international agencies; non-governmental organisations, and governments as a mere connection to sex work. As such, there is a big effort to end sex work under the justification that eradicating sex work would prevent and suppress cases of sex trafficking (Kapur in: Kempadoo 30). However, as Sanghera explains, trying to combat sex trafficking under the idea that sex work must be eradicated would be the same as trying to eradicate marriage as an institution and domestic work as a sector of employment in order to prevent trafficking for domestic work and forced marriage. Therefore, the abuses; the violation of human rights; coercion, and exploitation must be the targets of anti-sex trafficking campaigns and not the eradication of the sex industry (Sanghera in: Kempadoo 11). As this research has shown, it is also important to have new insights on the scale of sex trafficking in order to understand better how it can be combated and whether sex workers can really help in this battle.

In fact, as this research has showed, it is important to consider the contributions that sex workers can bring to help ending sex trafficking, rather than trying to end the profession and the entire sex sector. Thus, embedded on the principle of agency as the capacity to choose, act, and influence social changes (Davidow in: Gardiner 24), sex workers can become key-players in the fight on sex trafficking, as they are deeply involved with this issue. Furthermore sex trafficking affects sex workers directly more than anyone else. As such, it is important to consider that it is of the interest of sex workers to combat this issue. This research however does not propose that sex workers be entirely responsible for ending sex trafficking, rather, it suggests recognising the

agency of sex workers in order to contribute to the fight on sex trafficking, together with authorities, agencies and governments.

One of the most important aspects to be understood when addressing sex workers' agency against sex trafficking is the fact that, in order for sex workers to be perceived as agents, the conflation between sex work and sex trafficking has to come to an end, as due to such conflation, sex workers who have chosen their occupation have their agency denied, making it impossible for them to participate in an social inclusion and intervention to help other sex workers (NSWP Sex work 9). Furthermore, when all sex workers are perceived and treated as victims of trafficking, it makes it impossible for them to take part in the identification and reporting of cases of exploitation of other sex workers. Another problem related to the conflation is that, the time and money which sex workers have to spend defending their work and convincing authorities and non-governmental organisations that they are not victims of trafficking, could be used in programs to identify and eradicate real cases of sex trafficking.¹⁷

Therefore, it can be understood that the principle of recognising sex workers' agency is connected to every aspect which counts for the participation of sex workers in combating sex trafficking. Focusing on the recognition of sex workers' agency is a fundamental and basic step to make them important allies in the fight against sex trafficking, in which they can act as individuals or groups and participate in actions which seek to prevent, identify and report cases of sex trafficking.

Furthermore, this researched has presented that sex trafficking can be combated in effective ways through the expertise of those who are part of this field of work - that means, the sex workers – who understand deeply the dangers and benefits of sex work and can help identify and act against cases of sex trafficking without collateral damage¹⁸ to the sex workers who have been subjected to exploitation and coercion.

Sex workers who are empowered and equipped with information about safety; who have a strong sense of self-esteem and recognise their power to claim their rights as human beings and as professionals, have a huge capacity to contribute to the fight on sex trafficking, as cases of

¹⁷ The need to end the conflation between sex work and sex trafficking in order to provide sex workers with human rights and recognise their agency – which also enables them to become allies against sex trafficking - was emphasized by all the interviewees; furthermore, this information can be found at the paper written by the NSWP named *Sex work is not trafficking* at www.nswp.org.

¹⁸ For more information about collateral damage from anti-trafficking measurements on human rights around the world see: http://www.gaatw.org/Collateral%20Damage_Final/singlefile_CollateralDamagefinal.pdf.

exploitation occur mostly when sex workers are not aware of their rights and do not have safe places to report abuses. Moreover, when sex workers are not essentially perceived as victims, they can organise themselves and act as groups helping other sex workers. This is when the collective agency comes into the scene and explains how sex workers can contribute to combating sex trafficking. As Stakelborough told me:

[Sex workers] can detect cases of abuses and fight with us because they are also willing to do it and they are able to keep contact with other sex workers who are being abused...When the profession is free of stigma, sex workers can feel empowered to claim their rights and this is only good for them and for the society because they become less vulnerable to all forms of exploitation. Stigmatisation is ruining lives”

One of the most effective ways to combat sex trafficking, therefore, is through empowering sex workers as special agents to report cases of exploitation and offer necessary support to sex workers who need, as Dr. Smarajit explained.

What sex workers need is not special laws to restrict and strictly control their work and mobility (Thomas); what they need is to be empowered and respected in order to contribute to the society as any other citizen has the right to. Believing in the agency and capacity of sex workers can change the way sex trafficking can be combated.

Therefore, interviewing specialists in the field of sex workers’ rights, who have a vast experience with sex workers, has brought a fundamental understanding that sex workers can combat sex trafficking in many different ways; they can be key players in the fight on sex trafficking and should be empowered to act as individuals or groups in order to avoid, identify and report cases of exploitation against other sex workers.

As a continuation for this research I propose to investigate the effects of sex workers acting as agents against sex trafficking using quantitative research methods in order to evaluate the here drawn conclusion.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Questions addressed in the interviews with the sex workers activists

Appendix A – Questions addressed in the interviews with sex workers activists

Research question

How can sex workers contribute to combating sex trafficking?

Sub-questions

What is sex trafficking?

What is the difference between sex trafficking and sex work?

Topics followed by specific questions

Introduction

1. Can you tell me about yourself and how you got involved in sex workers' rights?
2. How long have you been involved with sex worker's rights?

Violation of sex workers' human rights

1. In your vision, what are the main violations of sex worker's human rights?
2. What are the main strategies used by the [org. name] to address and fight against these violations?

The issue of sex trafficking – Understanding more about sex trafficking

1. Do you think sex trafficking is a rapidly growing global issue?
2. Do you think that the majority of migrant sex workers have been trafficked? Does this result in different problems/vulnerabilities than with non-migrant sex workers?
3. Do you think that the intersections of gender and ethnicity play an important role regarding the vulnerability of persons who are trafficked for sexual exploitation?

Combating sex trafficking

1. Can you tell me what are the strategies used by [org. name] to combat sex trafficking?
2. What do you think would work best to combat sex trafficking?
3. Do you think that decriminalizing and legalization would in fact help sex workers?
4. In your opinion, would the decriminalization together with legalization have different impacts on different regions of the world? (e.g.: less beneficial for sex workers depending on their region)