

Feminist research with sex trafficking survivors and 'the ethics of care'

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This research examines the post-trafficking trajectories of Romanian women through the collection of qualitative data

Introduction and Aims

Main gaps on post-trafficking trajectories literature:

- lack of knowledge on post-trafficking trajectories of Romanian women;
- women's accounts of agency, strength and resilience as opposed to narratives of vulnerability and victimisation.

The research aims to contribute to evidence-based knowledge in relation to **preventive and disruptive approaches to sex trafficking** in the context of **the UK and Romania** and migratory relationship between the two.

Methods

Primary data collection method: online semi-structured in-depth interviews (due to COVID-19 limitations). **Secondary data**: document analysis of police records in Lancashire and NGO reports focused on Romanian cases of sex trafficking.

Data collection took place over a period of one and a half years with the support of 18 organizations in Romania & 19 organizations in the UK.

Participants & Sample

- **5 Survivors** of Sex Trafficking exploited in the UK (all over 18 years old, Romanian and female); 4 returned to RO; 1 in the UK.
- **24 Practitioners** (e.g., first responders; support workers) 12 in Romania; 12 in the UK.
- **14 Key Informants** (e.g., police forces; policy makers; anti-trafficking activists) 7 in Romania; 7 in the UK.

Sex Trafficking Survivors

Vulnerabilities and Needs

Exploitation and Trauma

Mental health and Recovery

Trust and Connection

Strengths and Resilience

Feminist research and 'the ethics of care'

- 1 **Inclusion** and **Representation** by enabling decision making and supporting survivor voice inclusion.
- 2 **Women's experiences** in their context by allowing nuances to surface.
- 3 **Participation** and **Empowerment** looking beyond vulnerability.
- 4 **Gender** and **Oppression** in the context of sex trafficking, gender inequality and exploitation of women.
- 5 **Care for self** and **Others** through respect, honesty, compassion.
- 6 **Positionality, Reflexivity** and **Researchers' experience**; insider and outsider roles and responsibilities.

Dilemmas, Challenges and Opportunities

- Gatekeepers and recruitment
- 'To include' or 'Not to include'
- Dealing with online interviewing
- Distressed participants and harm
- Reciprocity and sharing with survivors
- Supporting survivors and 'the ethics of care' from a distance; after care.
- Impact on survivor participants – reflections, realisation and possibility to support other women.
- Impact on researcher – 'unfinished business', continue contact with gatekeepers and ensuring accurate representation.

Reflecting on ethics in practice

- **Participation**: Survivor voice is relatively missing in practice and policymaking. Survivor inclusion allowed a first level of participation with positive impact on their experience; allowing the expression of agency while creating spaces for sharing.
- **Care**: Focus on recognise the therapeutical and healing potential of sharing ones' story if handled with care and attention (Pascual-Leone, 2017).

