

To Report or Not to Report - A Qualitative Study of UK Victim Protection Policy and Incentives for Victims to Report

'Human trafficking' and 'modern slavery' are terms associated with the movement and exploitation of people and have been linked to international organised crime groups, smaller less structured criminal networks and opportunistic gangs (Burke, 2018). Amidst the vast number of statistical representations and academic research that presents an emotive and shocking image of this crime, it is important to understand why victims repeatedly avoid acknowledging their victimhood. Therefore, based upon qualitative data gathered from a group of highly experienced participants, this dissertation aimed to critically examine why victims of human trafficking are disincentivised from acknowledging victimhood by focusing on the factors which drive non-reporting whilst considering how current legislation and welfare provisions shape victim decisions.

This study discovered that victims do not report their exploitation due to several complex factors including the fear of deportation, criminalisation and reprisals as well as poor victim knowledge of support services and human rights. What is particularly shocking is that all of these factors could be eradicated or at least reduced with improved government policies and increased funding which would facilitate victim rehabilitation and reintegration. Otherwise, the implications of not addressing human trafficking as a global and national crime phenomenon will continue to mean impoverished migrants from poor 'source' nations will continue to be exploited because of their desire for a better life and their 'need' to survive (Johnstone, 2017).

Unacceptable cultural norms help to drive poverty, inequality and discrimination on a global scale and can be used to hide, justify or support human trafficking (Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2019). With this in mind, this study hoped to encourage further interest on the collateral damage of human trafficking to inspire further research to explore how victims of this extreme crime can be supported to achieve that 'better life'.

During the compilation of this dissertation, there were many interesting aspects due to the diverse and complex nature of this crime. It would have been easy to dilute the content by incorporating data beyond the project question because every piece of information felt relevant and important. However, in an attempt to provide rich and deep data, after many rejections and much searching, this project benefitted from a particularly high standard of participants who added validity and first-hand experience to each theme discussed. Their contributions made this research a real joy to complete particularly in regard to the many anecdotal comments that interspersed each interview, highlighting the very personal and caring approach each individual offered.