Factors Affecting the Empowerment and Integration of Sex Trafficked Women in Denmark

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2019 Laurea

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Social Services
Bachelor's Thesis
May 2019

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Tanskaan Seksityöhön Ihmiskaupattujen Naisten Voimaantumiseen ja Integroitumiseen Vaikuttavat Tekijät

Tämä opinnäytetyö toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena, jonka tavoitteena oli selvittää tekijöitä, jotka vaikuttavat seksityöhön ihmiskaupattujen henkilöiden voimaantumis- ja integraatioprosesseja Tanskassa. Tutkielmaan haastateltiin kolmea naista, jotka ovat kaikki kotoisin Saharan etelänpuoleisesta Afrikasta. He eivät ole tehneet seksityötä vähintään vuoteen ja ovat nyt asettuneet Kööpenhaminaan asumaan. Haastatellut henkilöt ovat kaikki olleet tanskalaisen ruohonjuuritason organisaation HopeNow:n avustamia ja tulivat heidän kauttaan tunnistetuksi ihmiskaupan uhreiksi. HopeNow toimi tämän opinnäytetyön työelämäkumppanina, ja työn tavoitteena oli tulosten avulla kehittää organisaation toimintaa ihmiskaupan uhrien parissa. Tämä opinnäytetyö on kirjoitettu englanniksi, jotta työn tulosten hyödyntäminen on HopeNow:n toiminnassa mahdollista.

Opinnäytetyön viitekehys perustuu neljään tutkimuskysymykseen, joiden perusteella tutkielman teoreettista tietopohjaa ja menetelmällisiä ratkaisuja lähdettiin työstämään. Työn teoreettisena tietoperustana toimivat termit; seksikauppa, traumasta toipuminen, voimaantuminen ja integraatio. Opinnäytetyö toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena, eli laadullisena tutkimuksena, jonka aineistonkeruumenetelmänä toimivat yksilölliset teemahaastattelut. Työn keskeiset tulokset saavutettiin sisällönanalyysilla.

Tulosten mukaan voimaantumista edesauttavia tekijöitä ovat psykologinen ja fyysinen tuki, mahdollisuus luoda tulevaisuuden suunnitelmia, henkilökohtaiset selviytymismekanismit, vertaistuki ja vapauden tunne, kun taas voimaantumista hankaloittavia tekijöitä ovat trauma, sorto, luottamuksen puute ja paranoia, sekä leimautumisen pelko. Naisten integraatiota tukee yhteiskuntajärjestelmään integroituminen, perheen perustaminen ja paikat, joissa he kokevat kuuluvuuden tunnetta. Integraatioprosessia hankaloittaa psykologiset vaikeudet, henkilön oikeudellinen tilanne sekä se, että Tanska kokonaisuudessaan tuntuu liian hankalalta paikalta asettua asumaan.

Koko tutkielman toteutuksen aikana painotettiin huolellista eettistä pohdintaa, ja haastateltujen identiteetin suojelemisessa oltiin erityisen tarkkoja. Analyysin tuloksia voidaan pitää luotettavina, mutta on hyvin mahdollista, että aran tutkimusaiheen vuoksi todellisuudessa voimaantumiseen ja integraatioon vaikuttavia tekijöitä on vielä useampia, jotka eivät kaikki tulleet haastattelujen aikana esiin. Tuloksia ei voi käyttää pätevinä kaikkien samankaltaisessa asemassa olevien naisten tilanteessa, vaan enemmänkin suuntaa antavina esimerkkeinä seksikaupattujen naisten parissa tehtävässä työssä.

The purpose of this Bachelor's thesis was to conduct a qualitative study, examining the factors affecting the empowerment and integration processes of sex trafficked persons in Denmark. The three women interviewed for this thesis originally come from Sub-Saharan Africa and were previously sex trafficked to Copenhagen but have managed to get out of the exploitative situation and are now settling in Denmark. The women have been identified trafficked by HopeNow, a Danish grassroot nongovernmental organization. HopeNow also acts as the working life partner of this thesis, as the objective of the study was to further benefit and improve their work among sex trafficked persons. This thesis was written in English to make it possible for HopeNow to benefit from the key findings.

The framework of this thesis is based on four research questions, forming the basis on which the theoretical and methodological solutions were built. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the terms of sex trafficking, trauma recovery, empowerment and integration. This thesis was conducted as a qualitative research and the data collection was carried out with individual semi-structured interviews. The findings were obtained through qualitative content analysis.

According to the findings, factors supporting the empowerment are psychological and physical support, a possibility to plan the future, internal coping strategies, peer support and the feeling of freedom. Factors hindering the empowerment were found to be the trauma, oppression, mistrust and paranoia and fear of stigmatization. The integration of the women was supported by institutional integration, starting a family and finding environments where experiencing feeling of belonging. The integration process was hindered by the psychological issues, the persons' individual legal situations and finding Denmark too overwhelming to settle in.

Careful ethical reflection was emphasized throughout the research process and with the cautious protection of the participants' identities. The findings of the analysis can be considered reliable, even though it is likely, that there are more factors affecting the empowerment and the integration, which did not emerge during the interviews due to the vulnerability of the research topic. The findings cannot be considered applicable to all women in a similar situation, but more as guiding examples for professionals working with trafficked women.

Keywords: Sex Trafficking, Trauma Recovery, Empowerment, Integration

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1   Introduction

"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by improper means for an improper purpose including forced labor or sexual exploitation"

The definition above is how human trafficking is qualified by the United Nations (UN). Trafficking in persons is a worldwide phenomenon, annually affecting tens of millions of people often targeting the most vulnerable populations (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2019). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2017) in 2016 a total of 24.9 million people were globally trapped in forced labour, from which 4.8 million were in forced sexual exploitation. From the victims of commercial sex industry, 99% are estimated to be women and girls. This unacceptable violation of fundamental human rights is constantly combated with international conventions regarding the prevention and protection of trafficked persons and the prosecution of traffickers (Blair & Chalke 2011, 7).

The reason why women and girls are over-represented in these statistics can be explained with several economic, historical and social reasons. The inferior position of women in many cultures and societies around the world has caused the lack of education and high unemployment rate, which forces a high number of females dreaming of better lives abroad and therefore making them vulnerable for exploitation. The discrimination towards women makes it easy for human traffickers to act and intensify the situation where women are seen as merchandise. (Blair & Chalke 2011, 27 – 33). Luckily there are significant nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and governmental actors combating these situations of exploitation and abuse.

Specifically, the purpose of this thesis is to find factors supporting and hindering the empowerment and integration of women trafficked for sex work, who are no longer trapped in the industry and are now settling in Denmark. The theoretical key concepts of this thesis are sex trafficking, trauma recovery, empowerment and integration, forming the base on which the research is implemented on. The results of this thesis are acquired through a qualitative research, carried out using semi-structured interviewing method. The objective of this bachelor's thesis is to further benefit the services provided by the Danish NGO HopeNow, which is the working life partner of this research.

HopeNow is a local grassroot NGO combating human trafficking and promoting better rights for the persons affected by it. For HopeNow it is important to understand the already existing inner resources of the trafficked persons and to support the self-autonomy of them. (HopeNow, 2019.) Reaching the purpose of this thesis, will help to target HopeNow's resources in more effective ways and to prevent the harmful suppressive and disempowering actions of taking place. This is hoped to have a further restorative effect on the trafficked persons.

2   Background

As this research was done as a thesis for bachelor studies of social services, it was important to carry out the strong principles of ethics throughout the work. As a social worker it is important to avoid oppressive practice towards the clients in order to retain a healthy power relation and an empowering approach (Talentia 2017, 10). It is important to address the issues related to the clients keeping their perspectives in mind as the field of social services is fundamentally based on the respect of human dignity and rights. Strong ethical consideration was included in the whole research process. An important matter in this work was to refer to the participants in a non-victimizing way, therefore using the term "victim" is avoided in this thesis. For clarification, these persons are indeed seen as victims of criminal activities but referring to them as victims is not desirable.

An important objective of social work is to combat existing social problems in the society and hopefully bring relief to people influenced by them. A social problem can be defined as a *"condition or behavior that has negative consequences for large numbers of people and that is generally recognized as a condition or behavior that needs to be addressed" (*Aizon 2010). Sex trafficking clearly falls under this definition and as a social problem should be addressed on a multidisciplinary level. Different services provided for the identified sex trafficked persons, such as immigrational, counselling, housing or safe house services employ social workers and therefore it has a strong connection to the profession of social work.

The idea for the research topic came from a personal interest and experience on the field of human trafficking. Previous courses during the bachelor studies and an internship in Kenya, with persons trafficked for forced labour to middle east from the coastal region of Mombasa, played as a huge inspiration to conduct a research on a similar topic. The motivation to prevent human trafficking and to improve the situations of trafficked persons has personally had an important role during the second half of studies. During a student exchange semester in Denmark, a connection with HopeNow was established and the research idea was formed together, with a common interest to bring improvement for the trafficked women.

2.1   HopeNow

This thesis is done in co-operation with the Danish NGO HopeNow, which works primarily to empower trafficked people and to promote their human rights and protection. HopeNow is an independent organization having a focus on the outreach work, primarily to patrol an area where victims of trafficking are likely to be found. Afterwards the goal is to identify and build relationships with the trafficked persons. HopeNow (2019) indicates that their focus is in responding to the target group's needs and to the trends in national politics, using multiple methods to create trust and identify trafficked people. Important components in the outreach work are establishing continuity and building trust, in order to have a reliable reputation

among the trafficked persons, which then leads to a higher number of persons being referred to them, and to act as a bridge between them and the Danish authorities. HopeNow is committed to improve social work methods in consideration of the different ethnic origins of the target group. (HopeNow 2019)

In addition to the outreach work, HopeNow offers psychological and legal counselling, trauma therapy and refers trafficked persons to essential services, including physical and psychological care, protection and shelter. Some years HopeNow has managed to identify locally more trafficked persons than what the overall national statistics present. For example, between 2016 and 2018 HopeNow managed to identify 82 new trafficked victims, but only 29 of them agreed to be officially identified as trafficked, which still made one third of the nationally identified persons in that time. One reason for this disproportion is that majority of these undocumented trafficked persons refuse to seek for help from the governmental authorities, as it might not bring any improvement to their situation and the return to their country of origin is not in their interest. (HopeNow 2018). Also, the dependent relationship with their traffickers, along the lack of knowledge and linguistic barriers can prevent the persons from seeking for help (Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings 2015, 21). Unwillingness for an official identification brings challenges in the work when seeking to bring improvement in the trafficked persons lives.

2.2   Legal Framework in Denmark

As the traffickers often use physical violence, threatening and extortion to dominate and control the trafficked persons, it leaves the victim psychologically vulnerable and with severe trauma, even when they are no longer in the exploitive situation. The recovery process is complex and long, where various methods of support are often needed. When a victim of human trafficking is identified by the Danish officials, they are offered a voluntary prepared return to their country of origin, even though according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2008, 13) the assumption of the safe repatriation often results to a situation where the person suffers further harm or is easily trafficked again. (Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings 2015, 28). The voluntary return can be a good solution in a situation where the trafficked person *wants* to return and therefore is supported through the process with a thorough risk assessment and money to start a new life, minimizing the risk of re-trafficking.

After the official identification of a trafficked person, it's not uncommon that instead of accepting the voluntary repatriation, they apply for an asylum in order to stay in Denmark. However, according to the legislation, human trafficking is not seen as a valid reason to grant an asylum, due to the assumption of a possible safe return without the fear of persecution in their country of origin. This leads to a situation in which the trafficked person often must leave Denmark and accept the voluntary return. (Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human

Beings 2015, 28.) However, even in an assisted return, for many of the trafficked persons the danger is often substantive for various reasons and therefore the trafficked persons often prefer to disappear underground instead of accepting the return, which is also seen as action with a high risk. The persons who were interviewed for this thesis, are now settling in Denmark and have either been granted an asylum or a visa for other reasons than human trafficking or they are staying in Denmark undocumented.

The alignment on immigration policies of the current Danish government, is described restrictive with strict policies making even a family reunion and receiving an asylum hard to obtain (Jorgensen 2014, 4). As it is stated in the Danish Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (2015), most of the victims of trafficking are officially identified during police operations concerning prostitution, forced labor or forced crime. The risk of these operations is, that it might conclude to situations where the trafficked person is not able to prove the exploitation, and therefore might be punished for being an illegal or undocumented migrant, instead of receiving the appropriate support and services. (Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings 2015, 21).

3 Purpose and Objectives

The goal of this thesis was to conduct a qualitative research that corresponds to the purpose and objectives. The purpose was to research the different factors supporting and hindering the integration and empowerment of persons trafficked to Denmark for sex work, who are no longer in the exploitive situation and are now settling into the country. For a small NGO, HopeNow aims to target the existing funds as effectively as possible, in order to have a bigger impact on the current situation of trafficked persons. Therefore, the objective of this study was to further develop and improve the services provided by HopeNow, to answer more efficiently to the needs. Semi-structured interviewing of three former clients of HopeNow is used as the main method of data collection. This study is based on four research questions which were used to set the frame for the purpose and objectives;

1. What factors are supporting the empowerment of sex trafficked persons in Denmark?

2. What factors are hindering the empowerment of sex trafficked persons in Denmark?

3. What factors are supporting the process of sex trafficked persons integrating into the Danish society?

4. What factors are hindering the process of sex trafficked persons integrating into the Danish society?

Raising awareness is also considered as a long-term target of the thesis that will hopefully have an impact on the issue in a longer period of time. The number of human trafficking

related articles and news seems to be constantly increasing, one reason likely being the rising amount of identified trafficked persons. For example, during 2007 Denmark officially identified 17 trafficked victims and just 7 years later the amount had grown to 71 persons being identified (Figure 1). Even though these numbers are not expected to be entirely accurate since human trafficking is a hidden crime, the increase is still positive progress. It is important to raise awareness and to advocate for the trafficked persons to be able to prevent and combat the sex trafficking and to achieve better rights for the trafficked persons.

NUMBER OF VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN DENMARK

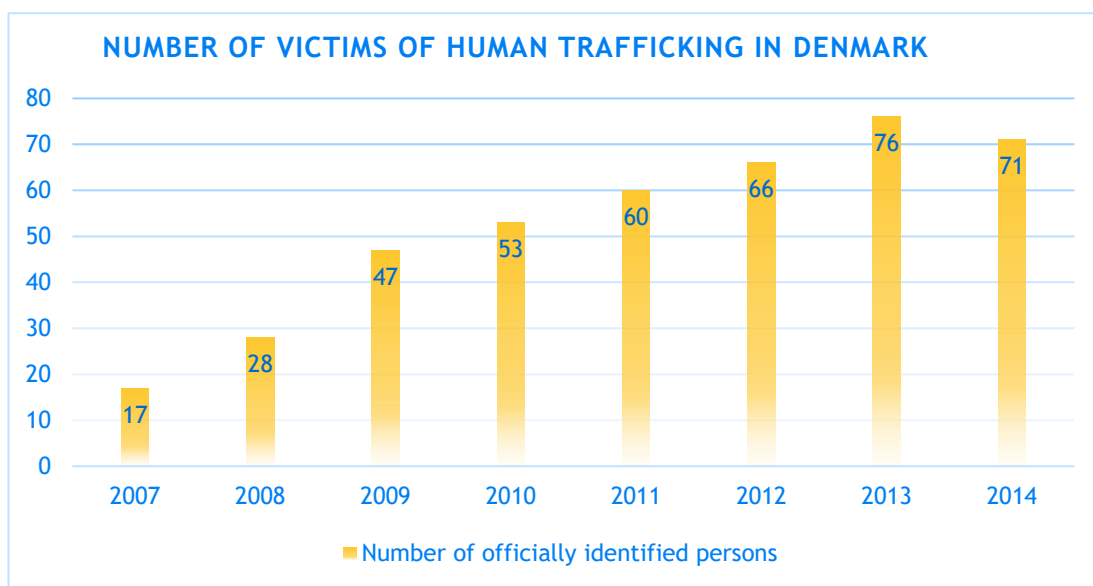| Year	Number of officially identified persons
2007	17
2008	28
2009	47
2010	53
2011	60
2012	66
2013	76
2014	71

■ Number of officially identified persons

Figure 1. The chart indicates the number of officially identified victims of human trafficking in Denmark between the years 2007 to 2014 (Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings 2015, 10).

4   Theoretical Framework & Key Concepts

In this chapter the key concepts of the thesis will be elaborated and described. The basics of human trafficking were shortly presented in the previous chapter, as well as the work of HopeNow and the approach of the Danish government towards the consequences of immigration and trafficking. At this point it is important to go more in depth and to explain the fundamental factors for better understanding of the research.

By clarifying how the concepts of sex trafficking and trauma are used in this thesis will help the reader to comprehend the focal approach to the topics. The terms of empowerment and integration are also explained, as they are used as the key concepts in the four research questions. These terms can be defined differently depending on the interdisciplinary context and approach, therefore the specific definitions used for this thesis are presented below.

4.1 Sex Trafficking

The commercial sex industry can be approached from different ideological point of views. Different national approaches and legislations influence the local prevalence and dynamics of the sex work and therefore the different stances affect the ways the matters are dealt. The two most common approaches are the opposing abolitionist and decriminalizing stances. Abolitionists consider all sex workers to be victims who should be helped out from prostitution, demanding for total disappearance of all kind of sex work, pornography and erotic massage. They consider prostitution as rape and claim it to always objectify the women. This stance can be seen as radical feminism. (Comte 2014, 2 – 4, 9 – 11)

The opposite stance is the decriminalizing approach, which usually campaigns for the improvement of the rights and working conditions of the sex workers. It concentrates on the negative impact of criminalization and stigmatization, which is created when sex work is seen as a crime. They believe that if sex workers were offered stronger legal rights and the work was regulated in similar ways as any other legit job, it would leave the workers less vulnerable. (Comte 2014, 2 – 4, 9 – 11)

The focus of this thesis is specifically in the issues related to trafficking among the sex industry. A good example of how the approach can affect the conditions of the sex workers is from Sweden, where prostitution is officially considered to be a patriarchal tool of male sexual violence against women and therefore buying sexual services is prohibited and the buyers are criminalized, whereas for protection of the women, selling sexual services is allowed. (Ekberg 2004, 1190, 1199.) Some studies have managed to gather evidence that these abolitionist policies have decreased the number of trafficked women in Sweden (Ekberg 2004, 1199). However, the risk is that for the men not getting caught and prosecuted, the prostitution is driven underground where the women face greater danger and are more vulnerable (Gould 2001, 445). Once again, this situation proves how hard it is to address the complexities of the commercial sex industry.

This research is conducted with the decriminalizing approach, as it promotes for better rights for the sex workers and has potential in decreasing sex trafficking through stronger regulations on the industry. As long as the demand for prostitution exists, there will be a market (Gould 2001, 443). Of course, it is essential to make a distinction between the forced and voluntary sex work to tackle the violations and issues occurring. That is why, instead of criminalization, legitimizing the sex trade and bringing equal rights to the workers can be seen as an effective way to tackle the sex trafficking of women and children.

4.1.1 Structure of Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is a form of human trafficking, with the purpose of exploiting the person for sexual services. Sex trafficking can happen within or across the borders, but unlike what the

wording indicates, trafficking is not about the actual movement but about slavery. The structure of sex trafficking consists of two components; the supplement side as slave trading and the demand where the slavery occurs (Figure 2). The usual steps to slavery are acquisition, movement and exploitation, as presented in the figure below. (Siddharth 2010, 31 – 32.) According to an ILO (2017, 40) report, up to 21 per cent of all the victims of forced sexual exploitation are children under 18 years. Even though it's a big part of the overall amount, the next chapters will focus on the issues of sex trafficking related to women as it is the primary group of study.
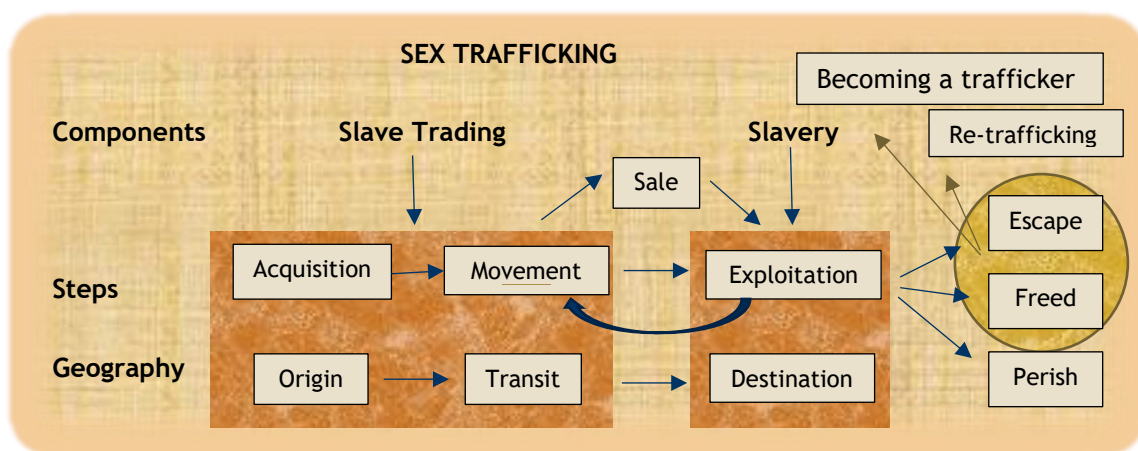

Figure 2. The structure of sex trafficking (Siddharth 2010, 32)

According to Siddharth (2019, 33) the acquisition for sex trafficking happens usually in one of five ways: deception, sale by family, abduction, lure or romance. Deception is usually based on a false offer of employment or marriage abroad and often targeting those in desperate situations. Bad economic status, lack of job opportunities, displacement or war make people vulnerable to accept the proposal of a false job offer abroad. Many of these people are in such desperate situations, that even being aware of the risks doesn't prevent them from accepting the offer, in the belief that they will be lucky enough not to get exploited. The same unfavorable living conditions can lead to families selling their child into sex slavery, rarely out of greed, but because of extreme poverty. (Siddharth 2010, 33 - 35.)

Abduction is a more uncommon way of acquisition as this way the woman is likely to attempt escaping any chance possible. Romance and promises of love are also used to recruit some unsuspecting women to the targeted destination only to find they've been deceived. (Siddharth 2010, 34 – 35.) Even though there are multiple ways of acquisition, movement and exploitation, only the practices with most relevance for the framework will be presented more thoroughly in this research.

4.1.2 Juju oath

In addition to the usual ways mentioned above, there are also various cultural patterns affecting the recruitment in different countries. A highly effective mean of acquisition in Nigeria, is to recruit women using a juju ritual, mainly in the state of Edo where numbers of trafficked women is very high. The ritual binds their spirits to a commitment to the trafficker to pay off the unreasonable debts of transport to the destination country. The juju ritual starts by collecting pubic hair, nails and menstrual blood from the woman. During the ritual the woman will give an oath to repay the debt, not to report to the police and never to discuss the events with anyone. If the oath is broken, it is believed that she and her loved ones will face great misfortune, diseases or even death. (Siddharth 2010, 34 - 35)

The juju rituals are demanded by the traffickers as the Nigerians are so deeply committed to them and an attempt to escape the exploitive situation is rare in the fear of the dangers of a betrayed juju oath (Siddharth 2010, 101 - 102). The effectiveness of this ritual might be hard for others to internalize, but in cultural encounters with trafficked Nigerian sex workers it is essential. The believe in the juju is so strong, that if a loved one gets sick or dies for a natural reason during the enslavement, it is usually believed to be caused by the juju. This topic is considered, as some of the participants for this thesis were expected to possibly originate from Nigeria, and if so, there is a high probability they have also made the juju oath.

To understand the entire dynamic complexities of the juju, would require deep investigation into the cultural matters. As using the juju is highly appealing to the traffickers, due to its effectiveness, in March 2018 there was an intervention from the Oba, the traditional ruler of the kingdom of Benin in the Edo state, who revoked the juju oaths and reversed them to curse the human traffickers instead. This intervention is hoped to empower the victims of trafficking to come forward to seek for help. When the Oba's Prime Minister was interviewed by the International Organization of Migration's (IOM), he said that, "Everything that considers itself juju (spiritually negative) is under the power of the Oba. It will not work if the Oba says it will not work. When it became a problem for everybody, the Oba decided to make it plain to everyone..." (International Organization of Migration 2018)

4.1.3 Dynamics of Sex Trafficking

The harsh reality is revealed at the latest when the women reach the destination, where the exploitation and slavery begin. The exact setting of the sex trafficking industry depends on the destination country and its legislation. Usual venues are brothels, clubs, massage saloons, hotels, apartments and streets (Siddharth 2010, 37 – 38). In Denmark many of the trafficked sex workers end up working in the streets, as selling and buying sex is legal, but pimping and making profit of someone else selling sexual services is forbidden, including running a brothel.

The strict law is made to protect the prostitutes but as such, the legislation leaves only very little possibilities for organized sex industry and therefore it leaves the sex workers in a vulnerable position. (The Criminal Code of Denmark §228)

Systematic rape, torture and even murders are constantly present in the worlds of sex trafficked persons. Death can occur either through sexually transmitted diseases, drugs or directly through homicides. The lives of these women rarely offer much hope; even in the occasion of an escape, there exists a major risk of getting re-trafficked. Taking the Danish system as an example: after an official identification and prepared repatriation back to their home countries, the women return into the same poor circumstances from where they were originally trafficked from, only now possibly with a severe trauma in addition. Poverty, lack of job and economic opportunities or risk of domestic violence leads to many women being recruited or deceived again. (Saldana 2010, 39 – 40)

The trafficker, also often called a 'madam', has multiple ways of having control over the trafficked persons. The Nigerian women are often easily controlled just with the threat of breaking the juju oath, but other possible ways can be physical or psychological abuse and torture, threatening, a false promise of freedom after paying the debt or raping in the case of a failed attempt to escape. A debt bondage is a common economic model to bind the trafficked person to the work and to bring profit to the trafficker. The 'debt' usually forms from the transportation costs, possible visas and other necessary documents and the current costs of upkeep and living. The transportation costs can be told to be anything up to tens of thousands of dollars, which can be almost impossible for the trafficked person to ever pay back. (Saldana 2010, 40, 206)

4.1.4 Indicators and Prevention

UNODC has created a list of indicators to help to identify a trafficked victim. This document can be relevant for anyone but has especially great importance for professionals dealing with migrants, such as social workers, doctors or immigration officers. The list of the indicators for human trafficking is long but includes for example the following points; *"Have tattoos or other marks indicating "ownership" by their exploiters"," Have very few items of clothing"* and *"Be unable to show an identity document"* (Human Trafficking Indicators 2019). Even if some of the indicators might be quite general, it is important that this knowledge is recognized interdisciplinary for better identification of the trafficked persons.

To effectively prevent and combat this dynamic and complex exploitation of sex trafficked women and children, comprehensive international conventions are needed. Sex trafficking is affecting millions of women all around the world, violating the fundamental human rights through exploitive and abusive situations. Sex trafficking is a trade of high profit and low risk for the perpetrators, as the risk of getting prosecuted is very low. A significant convention,

often referred to as the Palermo Protocol and officially called the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* was adopted by the United Nations in 2000 and by now it is ratified by 178 countries worldwide. The convention includes articles on prevention and combating human trafficking, protection of the victims and prosecution of the traffickers to help states create and implement anti-trafficking strategies. (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2000)

Strict anti-migration policies in the destination countries, such as in Denmark, make the immigrants dependent on intermediaries, which has now become a market strongly controlled by criminals. The vulnerable persons wanting to travel abroad for work, rely highly on the intermediaries, who traffic them across the boarders just to earn enormous amounts of money with the long-term forced sexual exploiting and abuse. Repressive policies towards prostitution and migration, which are sometimes disguised as anti-trafficking policies, can be seen to combat a wrong phenomenon and not addressing the issues they are designed for. (Baker, Dalla, DeFrain & Williamson 2011, 19 – 21). To prevent this severe exploitation, states should be dealing with the protection of human rights, instead of concentrating on criminalization and repression.

4.2   Trauma Recovery

In this thesis it is considered that the trauma of the trafficked persons might have a hampering effect on their empowerment and integration. All the events causing trauma cannot even be listed, as they depend strongly on the individual. Nevertheless, many experiences of sex trafficked persons such as a long-lasting deprivation of liberty, psychological and physical abuse, rapes and threatening, all fall in an official definition of factors causing trauma. A trauma is seen to be caused by a stressful occurrence and can be diagnosed for people who have, for example, experienced something that would be "obviously distressing to almost anyone" (Levine 1997, 44 - 48).

Indications of trauma can be different emotional or physical symptoms categorized in four core components: hyperarousal, constriction, dissociation and immobility. Experiencing all four components simultaneously over an extended period of time can usually be considered as a strong indication of an unresolved trauma. The symptoms can vary from diminished interest in life to panic attacks or from difficulties to sleep to problems with the immune system. In order to heal the symptoms, the trauma behind them must be treated in relevant ways, usually including psychological help. (Levine 1997, 132, 147 - 149)

Unfortunately, the trauma recovery of sex trafficked persons has not been researched much and almost no literature was found on specific cases. However, some researches focusing on the psychological consequences of sex work have made relevant findings on the traumatizing impact on the sex workers, even without them being previously trafficked. Baker, Dalla,

DeFrain & Williamson (2011, 22) state that the occurrence of the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among sex workers, is not culturally bounded and does affect sex workers prevalently in numerous countries, as already the work itself can be traumatizing. The emotional distress of a sex worker can be partly explained also by the cognitive and behavioral coping strategies, related to the stigma and the oppressive characteristics of sex work (Baker et al. 2011, 22). These results have relevance for this research, helping to understand the intersectional issues caused by both sex work and human trafficking.

Stigmatization has been researched to correlate with the mental health problems of the sex workers. The fear of being judged, and in some cases the fear of being reported to the authorities, prevents the sex workers from searching for help. The stigma must not be seen just as an individual psychological process, but also as a social phenomenon resulting from structural factors, such as a negative, criminalized or victimized perception of sex work. (Cunningham, Grenfell, Macioti, Platt & Sanders 2017, 2 - 4)

Even though the stigma affects all sex workers, it has been studied that workers with a documented migration status, better working conditions and stronger autonomy also have better mental health than other groups of sex workers. The women who had been exposed to trauma, forced into sex work because of social disadvantages, trafficked, exploited, stigmatized, having worse working conditions and a lower autonomy or lacking social support were more likely to develop mental health problems. (Cunningham et al. 2017, 2 - 4)

For this research the causes and symptoms of trauma were not addressed for neurological or psychological understanding, but to acknowledge as possibly having an effect in the research results. It is possible that the interviewed women have received some medical or psychological help to overcome their traumatic experiences. The ability to understand these traumatizing events during sex trafficking had importance when planning and holding the interviews. Luckily, the founder of HopeNow, Michelle Mildwater, is a qualified trauma therapist and was able to provide some essential empirical observations on the topic in prior to the interviews.

4.3   Empowerment

Empowerment is nowadays a widely used interdisciplinary term, having multiple interpretations depending on the context. The exact understanding of the term has blurred over time, as it is extensively used among social and political disciplines. It has been in common use ever since 1980s, when the social sector began using it as a word to define working methods leading to increased power of their clients (Carlberg 2006, 7). Before being able to conduct research on the factors affecting empowerment, it is relevant to assess and clarify the focal definition of the term used in this thesis and why the empowering methods are important when working with sex trafficked persons.

A comprehensive and well-known definition for empowerment was defined by Robert Adams (2008, 6) in 1996 as *"the capacity of individuals, groups or communities to take over the control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives"*. Empowerment can be defined as a tool used with marginalized and subordinate people or groups where the goal is to reduce alienation and feeling of powerlessness and to improve the skills of life management in all environments (Mäntysaari, Pohjola & Pösö 2017, 317). Empowerment is both a physical and psychological process happening on an individual level or among a community. In this thesis it was mostly observed as a method used with individuals.

For professionals of social services to be able to support the empowerment of a client, the practice needs to have an anti-oppressive approach, where the needs and wishes of the client are heard. In the center of this approach is the idea of allowing people to make their own choices and decisions (Carlberg 2006, 13). Even though empowerment is intrinsically a personal process, it does not mean that an outsider, in this case a professional, cannot play a conclusive part in supporting an individual taking steps towards the empowerment process. At the same time the professional needs to avoid creating a situation of dependency, where the roles of "a victim" and "a helper" strengthen and instead of empowerment, the reality becomes the opposite (Carlberg 2006, 15).

Like the previous example shows, it might sometime be hard to distinguish between empowering support and harmful dependency. That is why continuous interaction of critical reflection and empowering practice are in focus while proceeding towards the set goal. The empowerment can be seen as a process as well as a goal of the process. The goal is to achieve a situation, where the circumstances are better than the starting point. (Mäntysaari, Pohjola & Pösö 2017, 317 - 319)

When talking about empowering sex trafficked women, many aspects need to be taken into consideration. The severe trauma which evolved under a long-lasting exploitation, cultural differences and physical abuse, play a part in the healing process of these women. Empowerment should be an underlying motive that directs the development of the law enforcement for stronger protection of human rights and dignity of the trafficked persons. To contribute to this process, psychological support and counselling, where the trafficked persons can share their experiences with peers has been proven to help empowerment. (Jorge-Birol 2008, 166)

Being able to make own choices and decisions is considered an essential matter in the process of empowerment. It is important to ensure that the trafficked persons are provided with necessary help and support to recover from trauma in order to make well informed decisions. When working for the empowerment of the trafficked persons, an important goal is to help

them regain the autonomy and control of their own lives. One step towards stronger personal control and restoring dignity is to get rid of all the victimizing labels such as "an illegal immigrant", "a victim" or "a prostitute" and to be seen purely as human beings with equal rights. It will not only change the way their cases are handled, but also how the women perceive themselves. (Jorge-Birol 2008, 177)

4.4 Integration

In this thesis, integration is observed in the context of a migrant moving into a new country, in this case Denmark. Generally, integration is a long, multi-dimensional process, during which the migrant familiarizes with the new society. The primary dimensions consist of cultural, social and structural factors. It is normal that this dynamic process includes different economic and social changes varying with every individual. Depending on the personal motives of the migrant, it can take years to get to know and used to the new country, culture and norms. (Alitolppa-Niitamo, Fågel & Säävälä 2013, 64 – 67)

Integration can be approached from several different perspectives, so when can it be seen to be successful or finished? From the point of view of a migrant or a state the answers and requirements for a proper integration would probably be quite different. An integration process of a migrant requires commitment from both migrant and non-migrant members of a society. A goal of positive and peaceful interaction between both parts can be achieved by committing to respect and adapt to each other (Koser 2016, 22). It is important to make a distinction between the *process* of integration and the integration *policies*. As written, the process itself contains several dimensions. For institutional integration, the receiving society must increase the immigrant participation, but to integrate culturally the newcomer needs to adapt and identify with the dominant values of the society.

Cultural integration and skills of local language are seen as enabling factors when integrating to the new society, affecting positively into the feeling of belonging (Frideres & Biles 2012, 53). Several studies have shown how the quality and quantity of social relationships correlates positively with health (Pillemer, Glasgow, Moen & Wethington 2000, 19). The importance of social integration cannot be underestimated in the modern world, especially when individualism is constantly extending. There are many examples across Europe, where the lack of cultural or social integration has caused multiculturally concentrated parallel societies (Hill, Parallel Societies). Generally, these areas or urban neighborhoods are reported to have a higher unemployment rate and a lower educational achievements level (Bodemann & Yurdakul 2006, 136).

Alitolppa-Niitamo et al. (2013, 68) write about the difficulties and challenges of integrating into a new country as a refugee. Even though the journey, motivation to migrate and background, can be very different compared to someone with an experience of trafficking, there

are still a lot of elements in common. Before a refugee arrives to the destination country, the challenging journey might be full of traumatizing experiences. Violence in various forms, feeling of insecurity, which can continue even after arrival, torture or worry of wellbeing on personal level or for family. All these situations and experiences are familiar to many refugees as well as for sex trafficked persons and are likely to affect further integration into the new home country. Providing psychological support and medical services during the integration process is an important goal, as an untreated trauma can affect a whole family and even further generations (Alitolppa-Niitamo et al. 2013, 69).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has developed a tool to evaluate the progress of refugee integration in Europe. The four major areas this tool covers are legal, socio-economic, socio-cultural and general consideration of the reception conditions on integration. The area of legal integration covers the residency rights, protection, family unity and reunification. Depending on legislation, the rights for these might be different for refugees and sex trafficked asylum seekers but have an absolute importance for both groups. The socio-economic integration includes housing, employment, lifelong learning, health, public relief and social security, therefore many of the basic needs of any person are covered in this category. Socio-cultural integration contains the education, language learning, bridge building and fostering participation. (UNHCR 2013, 12.) All the areas and topics above are listed in the tool for a reason: they hold importance in the overall integration process of an immigrant, some with more value and some less, depending on the individual.

5   Research Methodology & Data Collection

The premise of this study was to generate relevant and reliable information about factors affecting the empowerment and integration of sex trafficked women in Denmark. The research was conducted in co-operation with HopeNow, and an objective of the study was to improve their work among trafficked people. This thesis was planned, implemented and analyzed during the early 2019 and finalized and presented the following May. The results were reached through semi-structured interviews, which were subsequently transcribed and analyzed.

Semi-structured interviewing was selected as the main research method to achieve the purpose and objectives of this thesis. The interviews were half structured to enable a natural environment for a flowing conversation, but also to gather the required information to conduct a valid research. The interviews were conducted individually because it would have been difficult to gather all the participants simultaneously to the same place. An individual face-to-face interview also allowed to observe the verbal and non-verbal gestures and body language.

5.1   Target group

The participants selected for the interviews had all been trafficked to work in the sex industry in Copenhagen under the control of a criminal network of human traffickers. HopeNow

identified these persons as trafficked years ago and has assisted them ever since. For the past years these women have all been assisted by HopeNow with legal and psychological counselling and supported on different matters from physical wellbeing to housing. Fortunately, the women have gotten away from sexual exploitation and they have all been settling in Denmark for at least a year.

The reason why the topic and these specific women were selected as the research group, was the possibility to collect data from longer integration and empowerment processes and to understand the different elements related to them. This way the results of the study can hopefully benefit the future work of HopeNow and lead to more stories of successful recovery, empowerment and integration. The legal, psychological and social conditions of the participants vary and provide a broad overview of different situations on the lives of sex trafficked persons in Denmark.

The potential participants of this thesis were contacted only after the research plan was accepted and completely ready to be implemented into practice. A few women, who have been legally living in Denmark for a longer period of time and who were first thought as potential interviewees, refused to the request to participate in the study. The refusal did not come as a surprise but gave a stronger reason to consider clearly how to present the nature of the study and gain the trust to find voluntary participants. A request to join a research about personal matters by a previously unknown person does not sound appealing to many, especially when having such experiences of exploitation and deceive, like the target group. This occurrence also proves how difficult it is to study such a vulnerable target group and might explain the low amount of research done with trafficked persons.

Fortunately, Mildwater has frequent contact with several women, who meet the requirements of the target group of the study and was able to find three women who were willing to participate. As the topic of this research is delicate and it is likely that the women have told their stories to different authorities and officials numerous times, it was understandable that going back to these hurtful memories would be tough. Therefore, questions related to their past were avoided and the focus of the interview was in their current life situation instead. As Mildwater works closely with these women, she was able to decide who were most keen on participating in the research without having to be afraid of any negative impacts afterwards.

The women were chosen as a study group also for the potential to provide new, valid information of a scarcely researched topic. Managing to reach trust between the participants during the interviews was a hard task, as the women suffer from severe trauma, which presumably appears as mistrust and doubt towards strangers. Therefore, the interviews happened in comfortable and safe circumstances with the presence of Mildwater. The setting of the interviewing situation was considered and practiced carefully prior to meeting the participants.

As for the vulnerable situation of the women, this thesis will protect their identity with extreme care. All participants originate from Sub-Saharan Africa, but specific countries were decided to keep in secrecy for safety reasons. One of the women has settled in Denmark legally, but two others are still in the country undocumented. The ones who have decided to stay without a valid visa have both met a local man, who they wish to marry but their legal situation does not allow it. The human trafficking cases of all these women have had severe consequences for them, such as kidnapping of a child as a threat to pay off the debt or having to lie to the traffickers to be imprisoned in order to escape the exploitation. The consequences of the events in the empowerment and integration will be further analyzed in the results.

5.2   Qualitative Research

The reason of this qualitative research was to deepen the understanding of how the trafficked persons experience different factors affecting their empowerment and integration. The objective of the semi-structured interviewing, was to learn how these events are seen through their perspectives, documenting the data for a later analysis. Semi-structured interviewing was seen as the best way for collecting data, to gain the essential information to answer the research questions and to further achieve dependable results. According to Brinkman (2013, 53) face-to-face interviews present the standard choice for collecting qualitative data as it gives the researcher an advantage with an interpersonal connection, context sensitivity and flexibility during the inquiry.

Studying a group of three previously sex trafficked African women, all in the process of integrating to Denmark, has elements of a case study (Saldana 2011, 8 -9), due to the similarities between them and so the results of this thesis must not be considered to directly reflect situations of all persons in a comparable position, but as a tool to understand. Even that the setting might seem alike, the participants of this study are understood to be diverse, with diverse experiences, perspectives, backgrounds and stories. After a thorough content analysis, it was possible to achieve results that can benefit the future work of HopeNow.

This study consists some features of a narrative inquiry, which according to Saldana (2011, 11 - 12) have the goal of data transformation from the participants into structured charts for a further analyze, which in spoken language can be referred to as "creative nonfiction". When using narratives as a source of data, it is taken into account that humans tend to share their stories through their perception and actual facts might sometimes get blurred along the way. However, this did not affect the research as the purpose was to discover factors that the persons have personally *experienced* valuable or hindering.

The topic of this research could have been investigated with several different qualitative methods and genres. After assessing different possibilities and the available resources, the

approaches chosen were seen to give the most relevant results regarding the experiences and perception of the sex trafficked persons. Nevertheless, when analyzing the data, based on different narratives, it was essential to be aware of the cultural differences, values, discourses and assumptions to avoid misunderstandings and wrong interpretations. Also, the process of constructing information from the collected raw data is influenced at least subconsciously by the worldview and other factors such as age, gender or ethnicity of the researcher and therefore a qualitative research can rarely be considered completely objective or bias-free. However, there are guidelines to increase the credibility of the knowledge construction. (Saldana 2011, 23 – 24)

Many qualitative researches, as well as this one, target to observe and interview people to investigate their social world and experiences with all its complexities. In order to build an understanding of this framework, the classic principles of ethic must be followed, not every method can be exercised to achieve the goal (Saldana 2011, 24 – 25). A primary objective of this thesis is to improve the situation of the sex trafficked persons through the work and therefore it is necessary to consider ethical principles before, during and after the interviews and process. The persons interviewed for this thesis must not be recognized to protect their privacy and to ensure their safety, especially due to their generally vulnerable situation.

5.3   Semi-structured Interviewing

The interview questions (attachment 1) inquire some necessary background information but otherwise the rest were open-ended questions, divided into sections depending on which research question it targets to find an answer to. Even though English is not the mother tongue of any of the participants, it was used in the interviews as it is the only commonly shared spoken language. The interviews were recorded simultaneously by two phones to ensure that the data was saved for later transcription and analysis.

Before starting the interviewing, the participants were handed a cover letter (attachment 2) in which they agreed to the conditions of the research. The cover letter provided all the necessary information related to the study, such as the protection of their privacy, publication of the results and their rights in the case of wanting to withdraw from the study. It is not typical that Mildwater contacts the women for study related purposes, but as this research will hopefully bring added value for HopeNow and the clients, she made an exception, but it also meant that the women were more likely not used to such situations.

It was acknowledged that due to cultural differences and possible linguistic misunderstandings, it was important to be ready to elaborate the key concepts, such as empowerment and integration with more common terms. In case the questions were not properly understood there were some support questions to help ask the question in other words. It is common that cultural differences appear in other than linguistic matters too, such as facial and bodily

gestures, different understandings of values, or even unspoken taboos. The preparation for the cultural encounters was precise and the spoken language used in the interview was easily understandable. To increase trust with the participants during the interviewing, it was important to be transparent on the research questions and methods.

Data collected through individual interviews differs from the data that is collected with methods of group interviewing. The different characteristics of the used interviewing methods affect the ways the data should be analyzed. The semi-structured interviewing situation can be perceived as a discussion where the participant is actively producing the material for the research. Before being able to analyze the collected data, it's important to assess the factors and framework influencing the interaction during the interview. Power relation and the participants' overall understanding of the situation will affect the discussion. The way the participant perceives the interviewing situation, orientates the way and the direction the questions are answered. (Alasuutari 2001, 147 – 151.) Understanding the dynamics of the situation were therefore also considered in the analysis along the collected material.

5.4   Data Assessment & Content Analysis

Structured methods are needed to dismantle, organize and analyze the transcripts and observations for further construction. As for purely human nature, also for a qualitative research, it is instinctive to bring order and to find patterns in the collected data. In this point it is time to start reconstructing the data and finding factors in relation to the research questions. Sometimes different factors might interact and correlate with each other or it might be difficult to tell the cause from the effect. To understand the data, the transcribed interviews should be organized. (Saldana 2011, 92 – 94)

Content analysis is a systematic method used to examine the collected texts and observations to analyze the prominent and latent meanings of the qualitative material. When starting the analysis, the prominent meanings are usually the most obvious findings on the surface and easy to discover from the material. Latent meanings are more suggestive and can be perceived for example only with deeper understanding of the cultural framework and context. (Saldana 2011, 10.) Because these meanings are harder to notice, Proper orientation on the theoretical framework and key concepts is essential. This systematic way of analyzing is specifically practical when dealing with such rich verbal data, which needs interpretation (Schreier 2012, 6).

Before the content analysis, the data collected with the semi-structured interviews was transcribed, among other observations, such as remarkable facial and bodily gestures. The first step of content analysis was to review and to make preliminary notes on the transcription, before starting a more structured analysis. This phase included coding the points of data, with descriptive words or simplifications, which were relevant in relation to the research

questions. The aspects from which the data is examined is determined by the research questions. (Schreier 2012, 4) In this case, all the data that was coded was information describing any kind of factors are affecting or have affected the empowerment or integration.

Original expression	Simplification
I like challenges. Someone asks, "this is the situation, what are you going to do about it?" They are not willing to change the language because of me, so I'm kind of the only one who can try to adapt to how the system is.	Wanting to adapt to the system by learning the language
I have not been able to learn Danish by going to a school, so everything I've learned is through an app. It's very good! I've just renewed the subscription.	Being enthusiastic about learning the language
I want to be here, I met someone that I am actually in love with! I never thought this could happen, ever! I'm having a baby! This is my life now. It's best to just integrate.	Starting a family in Denmark gives a reason to integrate

Table 1. How simplifications were formed during the analysis

Simplifications with similar subject matter, are then organized under different subtopics describing the content (Saldana 2011, 108 – 110.) After this, the table is then organized to find themes describing the similar subtopics. The themes are used to make key findings for the research questions. However, in this point it is important not to construct any universal findings or hypotheses, as the sample of participants is so small that the results are unlikely to be widely applicable. (Brinkman 2013, 54.) The analyzing does not end in categorizing the subtopics and themes, but it is done to form an understanding of possibly existing regularities and similarities among the data.

Generally, the data can be assessed in an inductive or abductive way. The difference between these ways to deduce results, is that the inductive way is more oriented by the collected data and the abductive way includes already some theories prior to the research, which the researcher seeks to prove with the collected data (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 136). Analysis of the qualitative data can be typically described speculative, as the researcher seeks to find elements that might not be directly impressed in the interview (Hirsjärvi &

Hurme 2015, 137). Instead summarizing up the material, it tends to expand when discovering the latent and prominent meanings.

Some content analyzes can be both qualitative and quantitative, meaning that the frequency of a certain observation becomes meaningful (Saldana 2011, 10). Even though the most valid data for the research is finding the different factors answering the research questions, also the frequency of them might indicate the importance of it on an individual level, therefore it is good to mention these remarks in the findings. The content analysis of this thesis takes the frequency into account in the results, especially if the same factors are mentioned by all the three participants.

The achieved findings can often be found to be way more abstract than the concrete information in the original material. Even though it might first seem as an illogical direction for the data transformation, it is essential in order to compare the different parts of the material with each other and cluster the data in broader results. (Schreier 2012, 7). The basic principal of a qualitative research is the absoluteness of the observations: based on single observations, new rules, which applies to the entire data without any exceptions, must be formulated (Alasuutari 2001, 191).

Simplification	Subcategory	Theme
Finding a partner who loves, made it easier to settle	Finding a partner in Denmark	Starting a family
Going to give birth to a baby with a Danish nationality, hopefully makes it possible to stay in Denmark	Having a child who is going to be a Danish citizen	
Finding a man to marry in Denmark	Finding a partner brings a sense of belonging	
Denmark started feeling like home after finding a boyfriend		
Boyfriend and the baby are the biggest reasons to integrate	Starting a family gives reason to integrate	

Table 2. How subcategories and upper categories were formed during the analysis

In general, the individual differences affect the understanding of specific meanings of the content. In a qualitative content analysis, the interpretations must go beyond this, and the findings must be consistent. A good tool to make sure of the consistency of the results, is to have at least two different individuals go through the same material and see if they both end up with the same understanding of the data. As this thesis is conducted by only one person, the consistency and reliability must be assessed particularly carefully. The best solution for this, would be to analyze the material with the same coding frame again later and if the results remain the same, they can be considered stable and reliable. (Schreier 2012, 6, 166 – 167) Unfortunately, the timeframe of this research doesn't allow this prior to publication, therefore this must be considered as a lowering factor for reliability of the research as the validity of the whole study rests strongly on the data analysis.

6 Results

The findings for the four research questions of this thesis will be introduced in this chapter. The results for each question will be first viewed on its own. The results were then used to make conclusions in order to reach the objectives of the study; to form suggestions which would benefit HopeNow's work. The results were conducted from the material collected during the semi-structured interviews with the three participants.

6.1 Factors supporting empowerment

The first research question that this study aimed to find answers to, was "*what factors are supporting the empowerment of sex trafficked persons in Denmark?*". In order to answer this question it is important to remember the complexity of the term empowerment, therefore Adams (2008, 6) definition should be looked in again: "*the capacity of individuals, groups or communities to take over the control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives*". This definition covers several interrelated areas, which means the answer for the research question is not simple but needs to take various aspects into account.

The results for this question were first investigated according to this definition and after investigated as a more holistic way. This means, that to find satisfying results for factors supporting the empowerment, the findings need to describe what factors supports the capacity of individuals taking over control of their circumstances, how they exercise their power and achieve their own goals and in which ways they are able to help themselves to maximize the quality of their lives. Assessing these areas separately helps us to understand the overall process of empowerment.

6.1.1 Social interaction with peers

Having a group of peers, to join for events or meetings together, was felt empowering. A group of women, who have all gone through similar experiences, share the mutual understanding of the difficult situation, which is hard for others to internalize. In these groups, the women can let go of the disempowering fear of stigmatization and experience the feeling of not being alone. It was mentioned that after getting away from the exploitive situation, but still struggling with a severe trauma and fear, it gave hope to see, that other women have survived the same situation too.

> *"So many people have gone through this, you have time, try to forget these things. Just don't stay home alone. Go to places..."*

A few years back, HopeNow was still organizing events with beauty, sports or cooking activities, for the women to gather and to meet other trafficked women. These events were a success but due to the lack of resources, are rarely organized anymore. The events were felt as a safe and a comfortable place for the women to share their feelings and experiences.

> *"And sometimes when you go with them to fitness, maybe you are in sauna or something and that's when somebody always feels to open up. Talk out, what she is experiencing in her life."*

Other than organized events, also churches function as a place to meet peers. Religion is felt as a strong binding factor between the women. Other than the strengthening element of religion itself, it is important to have a peaceful surrounding for people to gather, which as a place has nothing to do with the context of human trafficking. This also supports the women to build their own communities, where they feel safe experiencing the feeling of belonging with the same time being able to freely express themselves.

> *"When you actually have someone, who understands the perspective and understands what the other has gone through, it is really different. Sometimes when I talk to someone and tell them: this is what it is, I get the reply, "" But why? You can change that? It doesn't have to be like that!" I don't want to talk with someone like that who has no idea what I'm talking about. Of course, if I could've changed it, I would have, and we wouldn't be having these conversations."*

6.1.2 Psychological and physical support

In the interviews, all the women mentioned the importance of receiving support, both for physical and psychological problems. Even though talking about their previous experiences is hard, they also said that being able to open up, has brought relief. The supportive platforms, such as HopeNow, seems to have great importance in the empowerment processes of the

women. Having a safe place that provides psychotherapy, counselling both for psychological and legal matters and assists to medical services if acute physical problems appear, was felt as a supportive safety net that helped the women recover and feel empowered.

> *"She just helped me relax both physically and psychologically and also emotionally, and also Michelle* (Mildwater) *is always there when I need to talk to someone"*

Some of the participants experienced the trauma recovery to be the hardest problem to combat in the current situation, therefore things that are easing the emotional and psychological distress, such as finding a partner who supports the journey of emotional recovery, being listened by someone with cultural understanding or helped with patience and without forcing, were felt relieving and helped to increase the quality of life in the current situation. Also praying and going to church were felt to support with the psychological wellbeing.

Experiencing love, from a partner in Denmark or from family back home, was mentioned as a relevant supportive factor, bringing positive feelings and making it possible to slowly forget the past and to empower. Generally, the feeling of having people, who are there for you, was mentioned several times as an uplifting factor, and was not only a major prominent, but also latent observation from the data. Sometimes, also the partner initiated the search for psychological help.

> *"I'm somewhere buying food and she* (Mildwater) *calls me: "where are you, are you okay?" "I'm okay!" "If you need to talk, I'm here for you!""*

6.1.3 Feeling of freedom

In order to be empowered, the feeling of freedom acts an essential role. The participant who is settled in Denmark legally, expressed that most of the time she feels free in her new home country, and feels liberated that she has got nothing to do with the traffickers anymore. It has helped her to gain control of her own life and achieve her personal goals, without having something external on the way. Unlike the two others, who are living in the country undocumented, feel that only by obtaining distance to the traffickers, who they both still are in debt, makes them feel free.

> *"The first thing we did, is we lied to the traffickers that I'm arrested, even though I wasn't really arrested, I just had to go hide myself somewhere else. They wouldn't have stopped looking for me. The fact that they thought I'm arrested, made them think that "she is at the police station, that's why she is not where she is supposed to be". That was the first thing gave me some space. But even at that point I was still very worried, very scared. Even that I was in the house I couldn't talk out loud, because I felt so paranoid, I felt that someone could hear my voice and maybe recognize me."*

The quote above shows, that the circumstances were still not optimal after managing to get distance from the traffickers, but it helped to free herself from the exploitation and to move somewhere safe. This space gave her the possibility to start the life, that she is now grateful for, even though she is still working to achieve total liberation from the organized network of traffickers. At this point she does feel free in the safety of her home, likewise the other two participants.

6.1.4 Possibility to plan the future

As part of the empowerment is to be able to achieve personal goals and regain the power over own life, one meaningful finding of the analysis was the strengthening impact of being able to set plans for the future and to work towards them. All the women had some goals set for the future, that they were looking forward to. The planning can be seen as a tool to increase control over ones' life as well as to achieve a dream. The goals were mostly related to work or family and included a hope of better circumstances in life in the near future.

> *"I believe I can become who I wish to be, which is a midwife!"*

For one woman, the possibility of going back home was a relief and brought a lot of hope in her life. If everything goes as she had planned, she is hoping to get officially identified as trafficked to receive the assisted voluntary repatriation back to her family in Africa and start a new business with the support money from the Danish return program. Though, before this is possible, she wants to pay off the debt to the traffickers in order to make sure her reunification with her family will be safe, therefore she is working in the black market. Due to the legal counselling provided by HopeNow, it was possible for her to make this well-informed decision, as she was aware of the options possible for her. This is also considered being part of the general process of empowerment.

> *"Maybe open a small office, sell some hair products, something like that. And another idea is to do farming. You take care of that and farm there"*

6.1.5 Internal coping strategies

All the previous factors supporting the empowerment can be seen as external matters. The individual coping strategies as the last finding of the first research question is more internal and highly subjective. To understand the inner resources of the persons who have been exposed to such terrible experiences and exploitation, must be assessed individually without any generalizations, as these resources and coping strategies can vary a lot: given exactly the same experiences to two different individual, even in the same environment they might deal completely differently. Anyhow, there were several observations on the data, that can be at

this point best explained by internal resources and strategies to cope with the harsh surroundings.

> *"I don't care what happens next, whatever happens, happens, and I never thought I would be this happy as I have been this past 2 years. It's the happiest I've ever been in my life. If these two years is all that I get, I'm fine, it's okay. I don't want to be pessimistic thinking that it's going to go bad, I'm hoping that it goes good. but also, with these experiences and everything this life has thought me, you have to expect that something goes wrong."*

Being able to find even the slightest bit of positiveness in their own circumstances, and concentrating on that, instead of all the negative, was one characteristic that was found empowering. Believing that the situation can be better and finding the small trust, even in the most desperate moments has helped the women to slowly recover. The trauma recovery process was also perceived differently among the women, but it seemed to be important to be able to find the strength within and devictimize themselves.

Of course, getting to this point of recovery is strongly correlated with the previous finding, but cannot be only seen as a result of external support, such as psychotherapy. The whole empowerment process goes strongly hand in hand with also the internal factors and resources, that are more latent and abstract and harder to concretize. The external factors seem to support the internal resources and other way around, the internal resources make is easier to benefit from the external factors. Where one person could have already given up, another might still have the strength to carry on trying.

The coping strategies can be seen to also include ways to protect oneself from the traffickers or the past experiences of sexual exploitation. As mentioned earlier, it might take an unspecified amount of time before the trafficked person is ready to talk, or even accept the past exploitive situation, even when she is no longer directly affected by it. Being careful who to trust, who to talk to and where to go safely are all examples of self-protection. Also, the *motivation* to adapt to the new system and society were seen as signs of empowering and taking the situation under own control.

> *"I knew Michelle (Mildwater), I knew she helps trafficked women, but I didn't trust her. Even when we started, I didn't trust her, the trust came slowly, there are still some things that I cannot help, but wonder, what if this is not right, what if it goes wrong? I think that will always be there, until everything is sorted out. So far it's better than where we started out."*

6.2   Factors hindering empowerment

The second research question of this thesis *was: what factors are hindering the empower-ment of sex trafficked persons in Denmark?* The results show similar themes compared to the findings from the first research question but from the opposite side. In other words, a lack of the supportive factors can be felt disempowering. The analysis shows that the trauma recovery is one of the major difficulties to overcome in the process of empowerment. Other findings for the question were: not experiencing freedom, fear of stigmatization and mistrust towards self, others and the environment. These findings are closely intertwined and correlate one another and have different significance depending on the individual.

6.2.1   Trauma

As a hindering factor of empowerment, probably the most prominent finding of the data was the effect of trauma. One of the participants expressed that the trauma "hunts" as a reminder of the past. The ways of how the trafficking has affected the mind are so complex and challenging and hard to unwind. Even after the exploitation itself is over, there are still obstacles to overcome that might add more to the already existing psychological pressure; such as, receiving a permission to stay in the country, possible danger of the organized network of traffickers and how to survive in the unfamiliar new country. The experiences of exploitation, deceive, and insecurity affects the mind in a way that at first it might not be able to see a way through it. All participants mentioned the trauma recovery taking a long time and it exhausts a person physically, psychologically and emotionally.

As the trauma affects their lives in multiple ways, there are ways that the participants are trying to deal with it. One effective way was to receive psychotherapy and counselling, but there were two problems seen in this. First of all, HopeNow was the only platform which the participants had received supportive psychological assistance on a professional level, and secondly even talking about the past traumas was felt very exhausting.

> *"When you talk about these things to someone who has this experience, even for 5 minutes, the energy that is needed is the same as if you had done ten hours job. It will exhaust you so much. Just few minutes, your mind will always go to what you have gone through."*

According to the analysis, at times the trauma pulls the participants down to desperation and hopelessness. Struggling with the trauma was seen as a barrier on the way to wellbeing and empowering. It was also noted, that other than those, who have actually gone through the horrific experiences, cannot properly understand what it is like, so receiving efficient help is hard.

"Someone who has been subjected to that kind of fear, it's hard for them to explain this to people, who have absolutely no idea what it is about, so they get frustrated."

6.2.2 Oppression

As a finding for the first research question the feeling of freedom was found to play an important role. The absence of this feeling was felt disempowering and it is considered as the second finding for the second question. This finding includes various dimension of oppression; not experiencing liberty, such as a legal right to be in a country, not feeling safe to walk the streets alone, being caught or controlled by the network of traffickers and having to worry for the safety of oneself and loved ones.

"It's not easy, they are always on your neck, make you pay for taking me here. When I came, they took my passport and it was only given back, when the visa was expired. They monitor you, it's like they have their network."

One participant talked about her experiences, how she wanted to stop doing sex work, but had to continue paying off the debt to the traffickers by doing other jobs in the black market. She felt oppressed and anywhere she was, she had the feeling of being observed by the traffickers. Having to "look over your shoulder" and to be afraid in public was felt oppressing and reducing the freedom of the participants. One woman was still hiding from her traffickers, because of unpaid debt, therefore she did not feel free and safe anywhere but home, knowing that the traffickers will not let the case rest.

"I'm comfortable at home now, I just still fear about the neighbors, I fear going out. I'm not comfortable going out by myself."

In this case, the fear of traffickers doesn't only limit the feeling of freedom and safety for oneself, but for loved ones too. Knowing that the traffickers are dangerous, but as you are in the country undocumented, the fear of deportation restricts the seek for official help. Having to live with the constant fear and lacking the feeling of being free, because of the criminal network and being illegally in the country were clearly factors that disempowered the participants.

"…how scary it was, especially for my boyfriend. He could get in trouble with the authorities and also with the traffickers, he could be a target, they could kill him just for talking to me."

6.2.3 Fear of stigmatization

Stigmatization and the fear of it, is a relevant problem associated with those doing sex work. According to the analysis, the prejudices and judgmental discourses of sex work, interfere with the empowerment of the participants. In many countries in Africa, the approach to sex

work is even more conservative and stigmatizing. Therefore, the participants don't feel comfortable revealing their family what is going on in their lives and instead prefer to lie about their situations.

> *"Your family thinks that you are doing well here, they don't know what you are doing, you can't tell them. If they knew they wouldn't understand. You are just lying, saying things are okay."*

Even though the stigma must not be seen only as a psychological process, but also as a social phenomenon resulting from structural factors, it still mostly only affects and complicates the lives of those doing sex work. It was said, that even when searching for help from places which help trafficked persons, the fear of stigmatization prevented them from admitting the exploitive situation. This fear stands on the way of the trauma recovery and receiving proper help.

> *"I was so scared, I was thinking 'what will this person think about me?'"*

6.2.4 Mistrust and Paranoia

At some organizations the social workers helping trafficked women were experienced unprofessional, which resulted the participants not trusting the place and the workers. The women had experienced that some of the professionals were lacking cultural understanding, and the feeling of unskilled labour extended the gap of searching for help. When the people who are supposed to be able to help, lack skills, and don't manage to build trust with the trafficked persons, it made the participants even more desperate and sceptic about their future. One of the participants mentioned that when she was seeking for help, she was just showed a map and asked to tell the employees through which route she was trafficked, this made her feel like her situation would be underestimated.

> *"If I couldn't read or write, like 90 - 95% of the trafficked women can't even write their names, they can't talk in English, and you give them a map! What do you want them to do with that? That's the extend that they knew, like if someone comes to you and tells she is trafficked, you show them a map. And that's the way they thought they can actually identify someone as trafficked. I was staring the map like uhm yea…. here or here …. I actually knew, because I can read a map. I didn't want to tell them anything."*

Experiencing the social workers incompetent in a situation, where the client must be extremely careful what to talk and who is listening, did not improve the prevalent paranoia, which was occurring because of the current, difficult circumstances in life. The paranoia has a strong connection with the fear of traffickers and stigmatization, which was also addressed in the previous finding of not experiencing freedom.

"I was asked if I was trafficked, and I said no, because I wasn't sure who was listening and what were they going to do with the information, it was so casual for them, but this is a life and death situation to me."

The seek for help is not simple when being in a new country and the only people the participants knew, were the traffickers and other trafficked women. The hope in escaping the situation and a dream of a better future was sometimes very low, if not even nonexistent. The lack of hope in a better future, when the trauma, difficult conditions and mistrust are surrounding the participants, has a highly disempowering effect. A participant mentioned, that in her situation one must always be prepared for the worst outcomes.

"With these experiences and everything this life has thought me; you have to expect that something goes wrong."

6.3   Factors supporting integration

The third research question of the research was: *"what factors are supporting the process of sex trafficked persons integrating into the Danish society?"* Integration, as a broad concept, covers the institutional factors, as well as the feeling of adapting to the values and culture of the surrounding society and environment. The results for this question were, finding a way to integrate institutionally, starting a family and finding a place where feeling of belonging can be experienced.

6.3.1   Institutional integration

The analysis showed, that institutional integration, such as finding a job or going to a language school, increased the overall feeling of integration into Denmark. Institutional integration was a way for the participants to experience being somehow part of the system. Two of the participants had found work, the other one as a peer group worker with other trafficked women and the other, undocumented participant, working in the black market. Even though working in the black market cannot really be seen as integrating into the system, the job is in fact provided by a legit company, which allows the participant to make her own income. A significant risk in this, is of course the possible exploitation of the labour, but at least during the interviews, the participant gave no reason to assume that she wouldn't receive a proper compensation for her work. Both participants expressed that the work made their life in Denmark more meaningful.

According to the analysis, also learning the Danish language and being able to communicate at least with simple everyday phrases, increased the feeling of belonging. Being enthusiastic about learning the language, shows the motivation to settle into the country and seeing effort, for it being possible. For those, still undocumented, the language skill might be also an asset when they come forward with their cases and apply for a permit to stay.

"Well it's just part of the challenge, I'm like okay what can you do about it? I'm going to learn it! ... I like challenges. Someone asks, this is the situation, what are you going to do about it? They are not willing to change the language because of me, so I'm kind of the only one who can try to adapt to how the system is."

Being aware of their own legal rights was also considered as a part of the institutional integration. For example, being aware that even when undocumented, anyone can seek for acute health care, has been a major help for some of the participants. The legal counselling, provided by HopeNow, has assisted the participants on being well informed of their possible options and making their own decisions accordingly. This has helped them to both empower and to integrate, as they have been able to navigate through the system finding the best suitable options for them. For example, most language schools require so called CPR-registration, which functions as a social security number and is received when a person has officially got a residence permit in Denmark. Unfortunately, not all of the women have got this CPR-number and have therefore been assisted by HopeNow to find suitable Danish language schools, which anyone can attend.

6.3.2   Starting a family

According to the analysis, starting a family was seen as a relevant supportive factor in the integration process. Through a local partner, it was easier to integrate to the society and understand the unfamiliar cultural dimensions and differences. Even though, while being undocumented in Denmark, getting married is not possible, the hope of finding a way to build up a shared future and a family together was relieving. One of the participants was hoping to receive a resident permit by giving birth to her baby (a few months after the interview), who is automatically going to be considered a Danish citizen, once born. The fact of getting a Danish baby, was an important factor for her personal integration process and made it possible to imagine the future in Denmark, together with her partner and the future child.

"There is really no way back, that's what people sometimes forget. I don't have any other life on top of the one I have here now with him. What you see now, is all that I have, I don't have anything else. If I would be depressed about it all the time, I would actually shut myself down, and restrict being happy."

The analysis showed that Denmark started to feel more like a home, after some of the participants met their boyfriends. Finding a partner brought a stronger feeling of belonging along experiencing love, support, stability, happiness and safety. All these feelings influenced the motive to integrate and find ways to settle in Denmark.

"I want to be here, I met someone that I am actually in love with! I never thought this could happen, ever! I'm having a baby! This is my life now, it's best to just integrate."

6.3.3   Sense of belonging

Environments, where the participants experience the feeling of belonging, were analyzed to be a meaningful factor supporting the integration. Such places, that the participants mentioned were churches and social activities, like at a friend's place. Social activities with peers and with people with common interests, were analyzed to also have an empowering affect, as well as increasing the feeling of belonging. To have the feeling of home and integration, it was important for the participants to have found places to feel safe and comfortable with the sense of belonging.

"Like if a friend has a party, you go there, and you mingle!"

6.4   Factors hindering integration

"What factors are hindering the process of sex trafficked persons integrating into the Danish society?" was the last research question this study aimed to answer. For this question, the results are both internal and external factors, that limit the participants from taking integrative actions. Integration is always a matter of both migrant and the non-migrant parts of the society making effort on getting the newcomer integrated. From the side of the participants, the integration is hindered due to the psychological difficulties, caused by the past experiences, which make it hard for them to work through the integration process. The external factors were found to be the unfavorable legal situation and the fact that Denmark itself might be experienced too overwhelming.

6.4.1   Psychological issues on the way of taking integrative action

The cultural, social and institutional integration require a lot of effort and energy from the part of the immigrant. The analysis shows, that the psychological issues and trauma caused by the trafficking, influence the wellbeing, motivation and the level of energy, which is required to start adapting to the surrounding environment and society. After the past experiences, life feels hard and before finding energy to start figuring out the future, it's only logical to first channel the existing resources to get through the trauma.

According to the conducted data, when a trafficked person is identified, the help provided is much concentrated on the physical side and on concrete matters, not so much on the psychological wellbeing. If there is no help to manage the fear, trauma, uncertainty and mistrust, the integration is hard, even with concrete support, such as housing or legal counselling. The *only* place where the participants mentioned that they had received psychological help, was HopeNow.

"the focus is a lot in; okay we will give her a home or taking them back home, but what they don't concentrate on, is how do we feel, the therapy part!"

6.4.2 Legal situation

On top, of an unfavorable legal situation being disempowering, it is also hindering the overall integration process. Being undocumented and therefore illegally in the country, makes the institutional integration extremely hard, as finding a legit job or getting into a school is not an option. The strict immigration policies of Denmark create a huge threshold also for those illegally in the country to apply for a residence permit or an asylum, as it is likely to be rejected, leading to the voluntary return being the only option. A lack of a valid visa makes it forbidden for the participants to get married to the Danish men they are in a relationship with.

Being illegally in the country also results in a situation where the undocumented participants have to avoid interaction with the police. This leads to the situation, where they cannot rely on receiving adequate protection if needed, for example in a situation where threatened by the trafficker. Having to constantly navigate through the legal system and finding ways to integrate, despite the prevalent unfavorable laws towards anyone being outside the Europe, it is extremely difficult to take integrative action in the situation, where one cannot even feel safe in public areas.

"Other than the legal situation, the only thing that is the other huge challenge is the organization of the traffickers, because we know more or less where the legal situation is heading, but we don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. I might get deported by someone that will recognize me and report me back or probably chase me back to where I'm going. I'm paranoid like that. There is a chance that it can actually happen. That's the only thing that is restricting me and placing me in this little bubble until everything is sorted out, because then if I have the legal situation sorted out, then I won't be so much afraid of the organization, because now I have a place here and a home here and if something comes up and I feel actually threatened I can actually just call the police, I feel protected. But that's not how the situation is right now."

6.4.3 Denmark feels too overwhelming

The last finding of this research is the feeling of experiencing Denmark as too overwhelming and different, to believe in being able to properly integrate. Even after years living in Denmark, the climate is experienced too cold and harsh, to comfortably settle. The chilly and dark winters influence the mental and physical wellbeing so much, that sometimes it makes the participants wonder why they live in such a country.

Also, other Danish cultural and social factors in the society make it hard to feel integrated. As the participants come from countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the ways of social interaction are very different. Danes are not experienced to be as open and welcoming, and it is hard to fit in. The participants seem to miss their social networks.

> *"It's not like Africa, where you see family, friends, say hi to everyone, if you have a problem you go to someone. But here… people are not like that!"*

The lack of social interaction with Danes, makes the participants feel like they would be living in a parallel society, very different and aside the dominant society. The fundamental differences in their life circumstances make the participants feel disconnected from the dominant society.

> *"We all live in this world, but we have very, very different lives that we are living, even though it is intertwined its very different"*

The analysis shows, that the interaction between the participants and the dominant culture is very low. Sometimes the existing interactions are felt very negative and even racist, which lowers the motivation to connect with the dominant society. One participant describes a casual situation in a grocery store, where the cashier did not want to serve her due to her ethnic background. The participants described a few examples in their everyday life situations which were experienced discriminative or racist. These moments reflect the dominant anti-immigrational discourse and decrease the feeling of integration.

> *"It was just racist! Some of them (Danes) are good, but some of them, when they see an African sitting in a bus, they don't want to sit next to you."*

In Denmark the cost of living is experienced so high, that the idea of returning home is sometimes considered a better option, like it's mentioned by one of the participants. Starting a new life in a country, where all the expenses are sky-high compared with their country of origin and making money is extremely difficult. The participants mention the discrimination towards immigrants in the labour market, which complicates the already difficult situation of making a reasonable income.

> *"Life is so expensive, especially for people like us. Living here without anything. Like the food, home. Now I will go back home probably this year or next year."*

6.5 Summary of results

For the four research questions there were 3-5 findings for each, making fifteen altogether. The findings were based on the narratives of the participants told during the individual semi-structured interviews taking place at HopeNow's office during March. In the results of the analysis, the effects of the long-term psychological consequences from the trafficking experiences are emphasized. According to the results, the trauma and the psychological vulnerability have a strong influence in the empowerment and the integration processes of the participants. The long processes of empowerment and recovery from the trauma have been supported by the peers, psychological and physical support, feeling of freedom, individual coping mechanisms and with the possibility to plan the future. In the analysis, these factors were restoring the capacity of the participants to take over the control of their own circumstances and exercising power in order to achieve their individual goals, at the same time maximizing the quality of their lives.
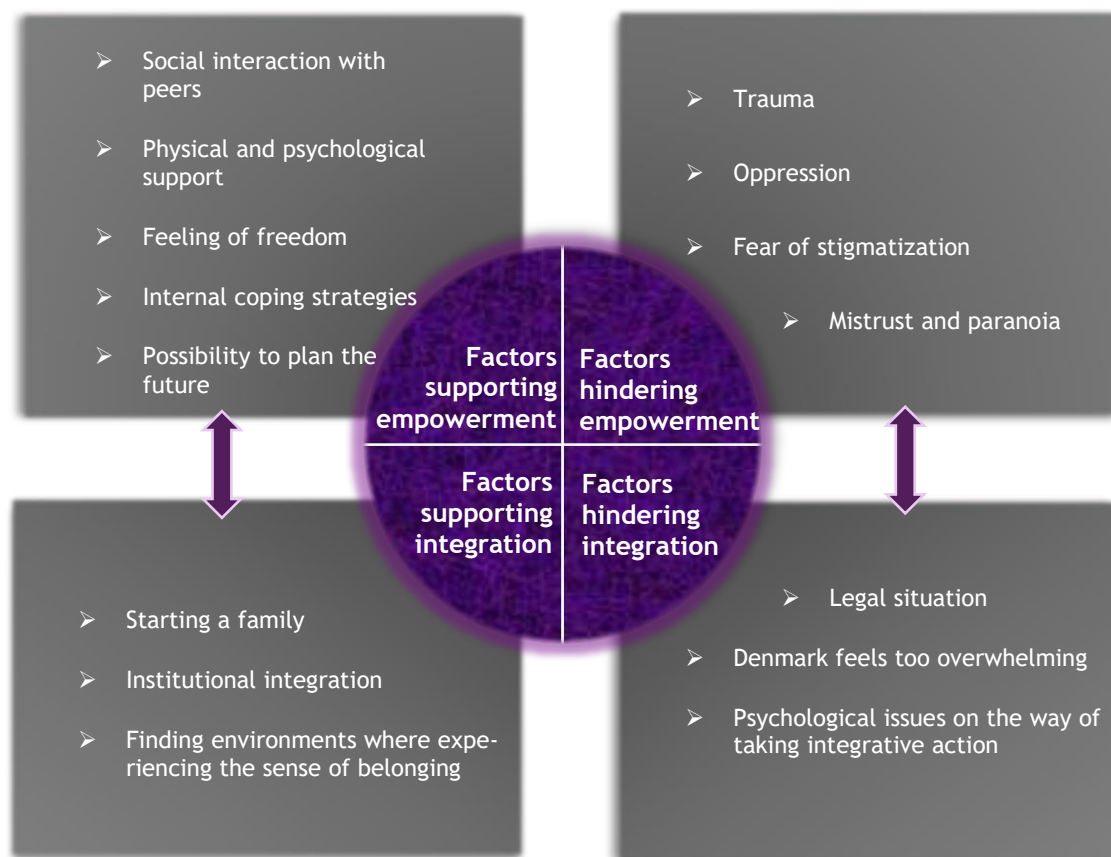

Table 3. Summary of results

Among the results there were several external factors, which the participants are unlikely or not able to affect. These factors were related to the legal situation of the women, the common prejudiced discourses towards sex work and immigrants and, also the local climate. From the legal aspect, being undocumented hindered both the integration and the empowerment

of the participants. The general biases from others, led to the women being stigmatized and further traumatized as well as facing racism. The harsh climate made it hard for the women to settle in Denmark. All the results are summarized in the table below.

What was surprising from the results, was the constant fear of the perpetrators affecting the overall empowerment and integration processes of the women. The lack of adequate witness protection makes the women unlikely to testify against to perpetrators, and without the witnesses, the traffickers are unlikely to be caught and prosecuted. Being undocumented in the country with the risk of conflicts with the traffickers, is a powerful disempowering factor, also hindering the integration by preventing the freedom of movement.

Even though, empowerment is fundamentally seen to happen from within and no one can directly make anyone empower, the process can still be supported by others in various ways. Same logic can also be used when considering integration. According to the results, having platforms to receive help, religious groups, peers and family around was a strong factor in supporting the integration and the empowerment. The participants were grateful for having found HopeNow to receive psychological, legal and physical assistance, that was not pushing them to act against their own will and taking their personal goals into account. Finding a group of peers or a partner in Denmark was also a supportive factor in the processes.

7 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a qualitative research of different factors affecting the empowerment and integration processes of sex trafficked women in Denmark. The objective was to find results that HopeNow could benefit from, in their work of supporting the empowerment of trafficked persons. The designing phase of this qualitative research included careful assessment and decision making with selecting the specific topic, composing the purpose and objectives, getting familiar with the previous literature, theories and researches among the framework, drafting the focal research questions and selecting suitable research methods. A proper plan sets the fundamental base for a successful and reliable study.

In addition to the theoretical framework, it was important to familiarize with the personal epistemological premise, which is based on the personal worldview, and affects the knowledge construction throughout the study. Some of the noticed factors were the decriminalizing approach towards sex work, the standpoint of a social worker, the conceptual ideas of non-victimizing and anti-oppressive practice, and other values, beliefs and attitudes related to the topic. Disagreeing with the current orientation of the immigration policies in Denmark was also noted as a factor which might affect the study.

Finding the appropriate participants, assessing the ethical dilemmas and getting prepared for the interviews were also considered, before applying the theories into practice and starting

the data collection. After familiarizing with the necessary literature and finishing with the research design, it was relevant to critically evaluate and reflect on the plan before the final execution. Being prepared as well as possible and being aware of the complex factors influencing the upcoming research were a major help throughout the process and supported achieving significant results. The qualitative content analysis was based on three transcribed semi-structured interviews. The interviewing situations were planned and practiced well ahead in order to receive valid information and achieve reliable results.

The quantity of the transcribed text per interview, was varying depending on the participant. Two of the participants felt very open to share their experiences and were even talking about their trafficking situations, though this was not something the interview was intentionally heading for. Anyhow, most of the topics the participants were willing to share, were found to be relevant during the analysis, as they helped to form an understanding of their situation and the way they perceived it. One of the participants was more reserved and to her it was difficult to talk about her current situation, as she experienced it bringing her back to all the negative memories. The amount of transcribed text was not as much as from the others, but as a briefer interview it was a good reminder, how challenging it is to conduct a research about the topic with people suffering from a multiple trauma.

For a broad and vulnerable research topic, the assessment was done with extreme care. After the study was finalized and the results ready to be published, it was relevant to generally evaluate the research process of this bachelor's thesis. Generating conclusions based on the research results in order to fulfill the purpose of this study, as well as the ethical matters, reliability and validity are also assessed in these conclusions.

Firstly, things that would be done differently, would be to concentrate only on either empowerment or integration of the target group. Four research questions made this thesis very broad and the timeframe did not allow the results to be assessed in enough detail and depth. Also, for a bachelor's thesis the topic was quite vulnerable and challenging. The timeframe was tight, and, in the beginning, there was no guarantee to reach the goal of HopeNow finding three women from the target group to volunteer for an interview. Originally the target group was supposed to be formed from three persons, who were legally settling in Denmark, but there weren't enough voluntary participants, so the target group was expanded to also cover undocumented women. This made it more difficult to analyze the research questions regarding integration, as the question rose if their integration could be even investigated as they must live "underground".

Eventually, satisfying results were achieved for all four research questions without any major setbacks. The interviewing situations with all the participants went well and followed the strong ethical consideration of a social worker and a researcher. The participants were

thoroughly informed with the purpose of the study, the protection of their identity and the publication by handing a cover letter and making them aware of the conditions. These matters had high importance for HopeNow, therefore the ethical consideration was thorough.

7.1   Reviewing the results

Similarities and overlaps connecting results of the different research questions were noticed. Many of the factors affecting the empowerment and integration were interrelated. For example, the finding of the empowering effect of the peer groups also supports the integration process, through establishing social networks and helping to find places where the feeling of belonging can be experienced. An example of the hindering factors could be how the disempowering fear of stigmatization and trauma were on the way of taking integrating actions.

When the results from the first two research questions, regarding the factors affecting the empowerment, are compared with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (figure 5) a clear connection with the theory can be detected. Maslow's theory of motivation assumes, that each stage needs to be relatively well gratified, before a person proceeds into to the next category of needs. The first step of the pyramid covers the core physiological needs, such as water, food and clothing. From there, people proceed to the stages of safety, love and belonging, esteem and finally to self-actualization. When Maslow's theory is compared with the results of the study the findings are easy to understand.
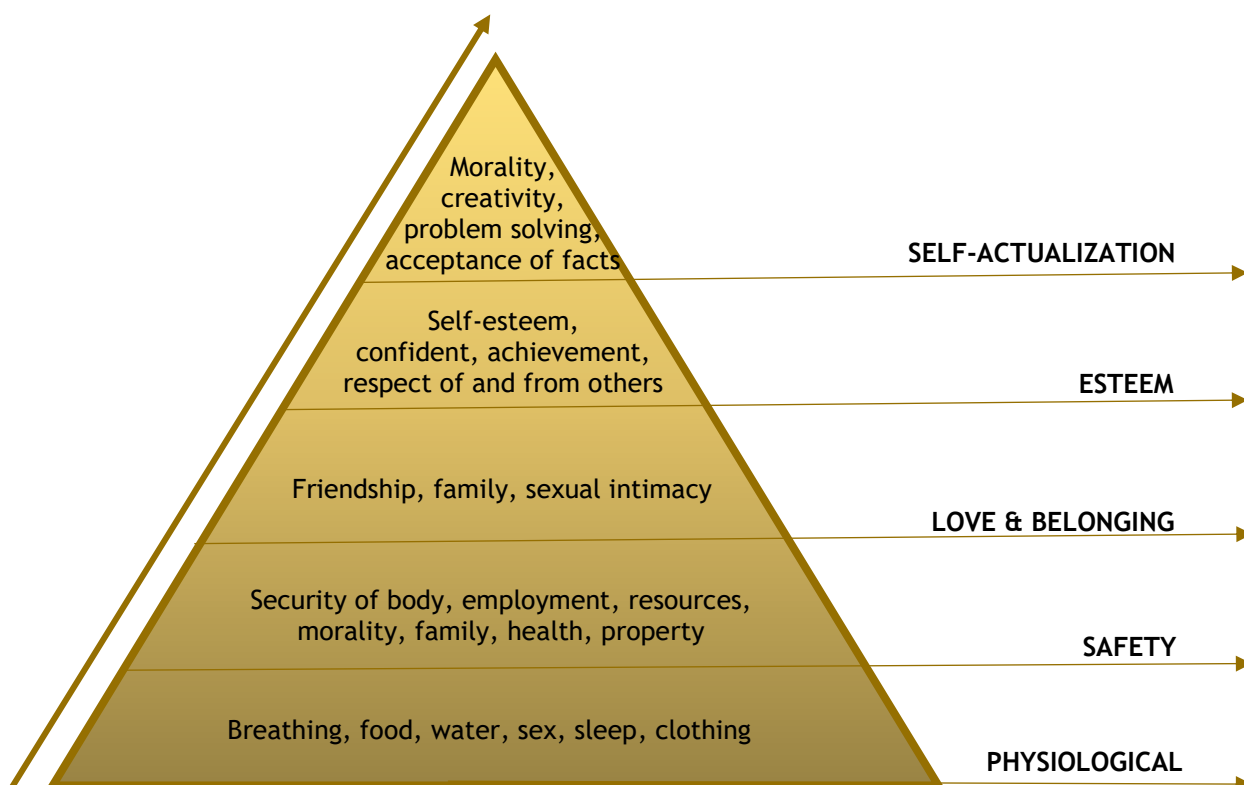
Figure 3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1943)

During the sex trafficking, the participants struggled on the first stage of basic physiological needs. An effective empowerment, with women who have gone through such harsh experiences, proceeds on the Maslow's pyramid from bottom to top, keeping in mind the persons subjective values and goals. According to the analysis the women expressed the feeling of safety and freedom, as well as psychological and physical support to empower them. These factors are strongly connected with the second stage of the pyramid and are currently part of the relevant goals in the womens' lives.

The objective of this study was to further benefit the services provided by HopeNow to hopefully answer even more efficiently to the needs of the trafficked persons. The results of this thesis will aim to help HopeNow with their work among the target group. The findings of this study might benefit the work with the clients who are in a similar situation in their life as the participants: out from the exploitation and integrating into Denmark. Therefore, it is important to assess every client's situation by its own and as a part of the empowerment, recognize the individual goals and values. Working in this field has required HopeNow a very different approach and development of special social work methods, understanding the psychology of the traffickers and how it impacts the victims.

As the focus of HopeNow's work is empowerment and counselling, it is important to keep in mind the Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a tool to progress with the clients. It's essential that the clients have access to basic needs, such as food, shelter and clothing, before proceeding to further goals with them. Empowerment with a goal for a better self-esteem or confidence wouldn't be relevant in a situation where the persons health is in risk or food is not accessible. Once the basic needs are covered, the psychological and legal counselling will be more relevant as it is a tool to increase the safety in the client's life. Working with empowerment is a slow task and often taking a long time and a lot of patience, especially from the side of the client.

As the analysis shows, there are many factors that the participants hold meaningful and supportive during their process towards empowerment and integration. One new idea that evolved from the results, is for HopeNow to include Danish lessons in their work with the persons who are integrating into Denmark. This would include the empowering aspect of being around peers, simultaneously eliminating the fear of stigmatization. It also supports the integration by forming a place for the clients with a sense of belonging and contributing to the institutional integration by teaching the language. The lessons could be led by volunteers, due to HopeNow's low finances.

HopeNow's priority to support the empowerment of the trafficked persons, can be done on both individual level and among a community. Creating peer groups and communities of trafficked persons with a goal to restore the control and autonomy of their lives back to

themselves, is a way to empower. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) a community is a group of people, with common interests, concerns or identities. In community empowerment, the role of the external agent, in this case HopeNow, is to catalyze, facilitate or "accompany" the community to acquire power. (Community Empowerment 2019). According to the research results, support from the peers was experienced empowering, consequently facilitating peer groups, would work as a mean to promote this factor.

As an asset to avoid suppressive social work, HopeNow holds a strong cultural understanding of the past and current situations of the trafficked African women. "Talking the same language" strengthens the mutual understanding and decreases the fear of stigmatization, which occurs in the women often even around many professionals. The disempowering mistrust and paranoia seemed to slowly move aside, when a bond was established, by the social worker sharing the understanding of the clients social and cultural background. To underline the importance, the participants emphasized the fact that, because Michelle Mildwater had travelled several times in their home countries and had seen the circumstances where the women were trafficked from, it made it easier to establish trust. Mutual trust turned out to be a fundamental base for the psychological and legal counselling, also helping the women to work with the psychological issues hindering the integration.

7.2   Ethical concideration

In the planning of this study many questions of relevant ethical factors had to be kept in mind. As this qualitative research was based on data not accessible for the reader, a fundamental ethical judgement was taken when analyzing the collected information; not to add or subtract anything to change the reality of the study (Brinkman 2013, 51 – 52). As this work was conducted as a final assignment of the bachelor studies of social services, it was relevant to ask in which ways will this study be beneficial or bring improvement to the lives of humans? How to protect the participants confidentiality and can there be any negative consequences for them, resulting from this study? Even though a contract to conduct the research had been made in the common understanding with HopeNow, it was still essential to reflect on the possible ethical issues.

Credibility and trustworthiness are factors that are important to consider throughout the data collection, while analyzing it and when presenting the findings of the research (Saldana 2011, 135). When a research of a delicate topic is made, the ethical consideration must be heavily featured. Also, careful assessment of the theoretical framework supports the interviewing situation and the quality of data, the analysis of it, which consequently has an effect on the results and findings.

Due to the delicate topic of traumatized participants from a different cultural background than the interviewer, the semi-structured interviewing situation proceeded subtly with strong

situational awareness. The interview progressed in a most natural possible way and with the pace of the participant to avoid any uncomfortable feelings which might occur from the discussion. The dilemma in academic interviewing of strongly traumatized participants is that open-ended questions might either be felt too direct or not properly understood, strongly depending on the interviewee. Too broad questions might be hard for them to answer, but on the other hand, making the questions more concrete can be guiding the answers in a certain way, which will also affect the results. Alasuutari (2001, 149) states, that during semi-structured interviewing, before answering any questions the participant tries to form at least a rough understanding what the question is going for. Therefore, too broad open-ended questions, without a clear meaning will not correspond to the purpose of the research as they will probably not be answered.

After assessing the semi-structured interview questions with Michelle Mildwater, the questions were modified in common understanding to be less personal and more concrete for the participants not to feel invaded and to help them answer the questions. It was decided to start the discussion by concentrating on the help HopeNow has offered them and how this has supported the empowerment and integration processes from a psychological, physical and legal aspect. This was the best way to take the focus away from their previous conditions and events in life and to concentrate on the current understanding of their situation. This was seen mandatory in order to avoid any trauma related reactions and disempowering consequences from occurring.

After the interviews, the recorded conversations and the transcriptions were saved for a short period of time, before deleting them. Before the publication of this thesis, Michelle Mildwater read the research through to ensure it contained no delicate or inconsiderate information that should be deleted.

7.3   Validity and Reliability

The plan for a trustworthy study is based on relevant literature and theories from reliable sources. As this research is conducted in Denmark, printed literature in Finnish and English was at times hard to find, so most of the theory is based on e-books and other e-sources. Nowadays finding relevant information through different online platforms is easy, but the shift from printed literature to e-sources might cause issues with reliability on the research and must be taken into account. One issue that was faced during the planning phase was not being able to mark the e-references as precisely compared to the printed literature. Many e-books miss the page numbers due to the form of publication and even though these sources were marked as precisely as possible, the lack of missing page numbers affects how trustworthy this thesis appears to the reader.

To achieve valid material for the analysis, the situation of data collection must be well prepared (Schreier 2012, 27). The interviews for this study were conducted at HopeNow's facilities, with the presence of Michelle Mildwater. Her joining the interviews was seen important for the participants to feel more comfortable and relaxed, but her presence might have also had an effect in the reliability of some of the questions, especially regarding HopeNow. This was considered prior to the interviews, but the best way was to keep her in the situation as a silent observer. During two of the interviews, she also left the room intentionally on some point when the conversation was natural, so that most questions regarding HopeNow could be presented with her being absent and to guarantee most unbiased answers.

During the interview it was paid careful attention not to lead the participants to any answers. The questioning went smoother than thought beforehand, probably due to proper preparation. Having previous working experience in Kenya, also with a similar target group, was an asset, building a bridge to the participants by sharing a mutual understanding of some cultural and social factors related to Africa. This also enabled the participants to get straight to the point with their answers, as it was not necessary to explain many of the social or cultural factors in the context of their home countries.

In addition to assessing the research plan, theoretical framework and data collection, it is relevant to look back to the conducted study and recognize the possible deficiencies on reliability of the analysis and new conducted data. As this thesis is planned, analyzed and written by only one person, it can affect the reliability of the findings. A qualitative study can be usually considered reliable, if between two different times of research the results remain the same or if two researchers end up with the same results using the same data (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2005, 186). Unfortunately, the timeframe for the study was tight and did not allow to study the participants twice or to go through the data again later. It is important to notice that this lowers the reliability of the study.

7.4   Further research ideas

For further research ideas it would be interesting to explore more into the sex trafficked persons own and collective coping strategies, which were also shortly presented as a finding in this thesis. To understand, what kind of psychological abilities make it possible to empower after the horrific experiences. What qualities make other women more resistant to the psychological oppression and what strategies support the mental health and well-being of the women after the exploitation is over?

One interesting research idea would also be to investigate the situations of the officially identified trafficked women, who agreed to the voluntary return. Denmark supports the program of voluntary repatriation as a part of their "Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human

Beings 2015 – 2018." Is the plan sufficient enough, in supporting the women's lives after the return and are they safe from the traffickers and re-trafficking?

Many of the relevant research questions needing the participation of the trafficked persons might be difficult to study but would also give important information of the needs and protection of the victims of trafficking. The knowledge would have interdisciplinary benefit in the work with the trafficked persons, conducting new policies to protect the victims of trafficking, persecuting the perpetrators and combating human trafficking. Conducting a study of the effects between an abolitionist and a decriminalizing stance might give us important information about the most effective policies and how they affect the general image of sex work, if a goal of a country is to decrease the stigmatization of the sex workers.

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Tables

Attachments

Questions for semi-structured interviewing

Background inquiry:

- Country of origin?

- How long have you been in Denmark?

Questions to find answers for the four research questions:

- What services has HopeNow provided you?

  o How has it helped?

- What information has HopeNow provided you?

  o How has it helped?

- What kind of counselling have you received?

- How has the trust been established?

- Do you have the feeling of freedom in Denmark?

- How has HopeNow supported your empowerment?

- What would you have hoped from HopeNow?

  o Why would you have needed help/support in these matters?

- Which factors do you think supported your integration? Why?

- How did HopeNow support your integration?

- Which factors do you think made it harder to integrate? Why?

- In which ways do/don't you feel like belonging into the Danish society?

Cover letter

Thank you for taking part in this research. It is conducted as a thesis of my bachelor studies in social sciences at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

During this interview I will ask you questions about factors related to the empowerment and integration processes you have experienced in Denmark. If on any point you feel uncomfortable and want to withdraw, you are free to do so.

The interview will be recorded, and the answers will be used anonymously in the research with your consent. Your identity will be protected during and after the process, and you won't be recognizable from the written study.

Some of your answers might be quoted in the research, but that will be done anonymously as well.

In case you want to read the research through, prior to the publication and request any changes, you can do so.