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The Experiences of Albanian Women Living in London That Have Been Trafficked: Constructions of Female Identity within a Patriarchal Culture

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Abstract

Human trafficking, exploitation, and modern slavery have long been persistent, and deeply rooted problems, consistently drawing attention due to their ongoing prevalence. Albania has been recognised and highlighted as a key country for human trafficking, for both source and transit (Farruku & Özcan, 2020). The NRM (National Referral Mechanism), now referred to as the SCA (Single Competent Authority) reported that there was a total of 10,613 potential trafficking victims in the UK for the year 2020. Of this number, 1638 individuals (over 10%) were recorded to be Albanians, the highest figure for non-UK citizens (United States Department of State, 2021). Whilst these statistics portray an image of the current situation, there is a lack of the individual stories and the experiences of these victims. In particular, there is a lack of the aftermath that such events have caused on these individuals. When considering the case of Albania, previous literature has been very one-sided on the topic of portraying the Albanian society as a highly judgmental and stigmatising society upon such topics. This qualitative research attempts to uncover and explore the experiences of 15 Albanian women living in London, and how centuries-old traditions and customs, in a patriarchal dominant home culture, have encompassed and impacted their lives. By using an explorative approach via a thematic analysis and in-depth interviews, key themes will emerge, such as "Shame", "Honour" and "Dishonour", which are found to largely contribute to fear of familial exclusion, and societal stigmatisation (Ramaj, 2021) due to being sexually exploited and "Trafficked". The aim of this study is to creating insights into the construction and reformulation of identities, as they emerge on the other side of a complex "Asylum" process, followed by a moral aim to create a space where these survivors are given a voice. The findings suggested

that the main two factors contributing to the impairment and construction of the female identity in Albania range from a socio-economic perspective, more specifically the imbedded patriarchal structures, and the economic instability in the country. Limitations and future recommendations are discussed. For the purpose of this research, the acronym of NRM will be used in relation to the emerging themes of the participants, all of whom have received their "Conclusive Ground Decision".

Keywords

Albanian Female, Victims of Trafficking, Tradition Beliefs and Custom, Honour Code and Law, Kanun, Constructions of Identity, Westernisation

1. Introduction

To gain a better perspective of the rise of "Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery" associated to Albanian women in recent years, a holistic approach to this research has been considered paramount, to tease out the social, political, and psychological factors that are integrally linked to this phenomenon. Hence, working towards understanding these layers is crucial for therapists and other professionals in order to avoid cultural biases, which can create assumptions that are situated in "Westernised" perceptions, and beliefs related to gender, equality, and culture.

It is important to endeavour the factor of psychosocial influences that inform the uniqueness of individuals, gender roles and expectations of social groups. In this instance, that of Albanian culture, failure to take it into account increases the risk of being drawn into political rhetoric-rhetoric that denies and seeks to impose a universal meaning based on assumptions. This generalisability approach only works to minimise and dehumanise individuals and their lived experience. To better understand the phenomenon of the exploitation that these women have been through, and its aftermath, it is paramount to understand the person's experience from their own standpoint. In this way, cultural values that may have remained hidden can emerge. Hence, the voices of these women and the repetitive themes that are constantly reported, can be observed. Cultural awareness should be demonstrated when working with these individuals, in a way that allows their experience to be communicated, so that the factors influencing trauma are not dismissed or denied, which inevitably runs the great risk of re-traumatising an individual and normalising them again. The concepts and philosophies that historically supported the notion that human beings are collateral (Martin, 2010).

In exploring the complicated web of traditional values in the present time, without dismissing and relegating it to the past, as the political arena would rather, it becomes possible to see how heavily influenced the emerging democratic society remains, and how its citizens continue to straddle public and private spheres that are contradictory to democratic values. Whether in the city or in its rural villages, the authority of many stone-set traditions remains (Xhaho, Çaro, & Bailey, 2021).

Moreover, in consideration of the influences of "Traditional Albanian Cultural Values and Beliefs", the phenomena of "Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery", must most importantly, be considered in relation to the country's historical and political backdrop (Dow & Woolley, 2011). This, in turn, allows the complexity of the factors and influences that may have contributed towards the rise of trafficking to emerge.

Furthermore, examining the strength of the traditional values and beliefs allows us to observe more clearly, the formulated identities of the female participants, most specifically the gendered expectations within their roles. Mental health issues associated to the trauma experience become exacerbated due to the women being confronted by the gender-based traditional values and beliefs of their home culture while, at the same time, having their embedded constructions of femininity challenged within UK society that embraces and attempts to promote, protect and support the rights of women per say.

Another factor that challenges these women are the struggles they face in relation to their mental health needs and their lack of understanding of it. Part of this issue is also related to the very real stigma that is associated to "Mental Health", within Albanian society. These effects have been caused by decades of isolation under Communism until its fall in 1991. The limited exposure to the development of medicine in the western world, led to a lack of understanding of mental health, which was further slanted by communist party ideology which criminalised, pathologised and persecuted any person who acted in contradiction to party lines, and labelled them as insane (Dow & Woolley, 2011). Hence, part of the stigmatisation of mental health that remains prevalent in Albanian society, is the remanent of fear that was associated with mental health at that time.

Consequently, this gives insight into the construction, deconstruction, and reconstructive process that these women go through in reformulating their identities as they become emersed and assimilated into UK society, having been given the opportunity to work through their complex trauma and, being granted their "Leave to Stay", in the UK. Being mindful of the enduring influence of gender expectations that emerge in relation to social and cultural norms, the reconstruction of the identities of this social group remains a source of challenge. The impact of which continues to categorise Albanian women as "Other", in society (Beauvoir et al., 2010).

Beyond the experience of trafficking, embedded cultural values give rise to factors of increased vulnerability which in turn, affects the choices that the women make when it comes to child rearing; notions around positive parenting; choosing healthy relationships; ideals around equality; respect; and marriage. Remaining mindful and not dismissive of the complexity of the construction of female identity, the confrontations faced through their trauma experience, in relation to their learnt gendered expectations and the reconstructive process, exposes this group to vulnerability factors that are an important consideration for the professionals are supportive roles (Xhaho, Çaro, & Bailey, 2021).

If we adopt a top-down strategy—more frequently employed by the Albanian government—the topic becomes less obvious. In order to observe the reality of the female experience in many settings that impact it, this research will employ a bottom-up method.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Human Trafficking, a Global Dilemma

The concept of "Human Trafficking", comes from the definition used by the United Nations (1956, 2000) and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS, 2020), which states that: *"The Act of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation".* With a further update with the "Modern Slavery" Act (2015), consolidating all forms of modern exploitation.

According to the United States Department (2021) and Refworld (2018; both of whom have produced countless trafficking in persons reports directedly related to Albania), Albania is considered to be a source, a transit and a destination country for men, women and children exploited in the form of sex trafficking and forced labour.

The number of trafficking victims received by the UK from Albania has been steadily increasing in a third wave of asylum seekers since 2013, and at present sits at its highest level when compared to the pre COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The Refugee Council (2019; 2021) has stated that Albania continues to sit high on the list of top 10 countries globally due to large numbers of its population continuing to seek asylum each year.

According to the Human Rights in Democracy Centre (www.hrdc.al, n.d.), who recently prepared their application of recommendations to GREVIO (2021), it has been concerningly noted that, when presented to the "Council of Europe", the recommendations have been dismissed the genuine concerns that NGOs made in an attempt to reflect the real and lived experiences of women and the vulnerable individuals in their society. Further, this document also contradicts UK government statistics that reflects asylum increases as well as globally recorded figures, stating that "Trafficking" has fallen by 66% (GREVIO, 2021).

The Home Office (2021) has stated that, according to their figures, Albanian nationals are most commonly reported as having been exposed to sexual exploitation. For a population of less than 3 million people, these figures are alarming.

However, while this research explicitly focuses on the experiences of women, this does not negate the experiences and plight of "Men and Trafficked Boys" or children who have been exploited. The Home Office (2021) statistics are broken down into categories of unaccompanied children which concerningly make up 294 of the above figures. Further, according to Asylos and the ARC Foundation

(2019) while "Men and Trafficked Boys" become part of the asylum process in the UK, there continue to be major, gaps and barriers in policy that fails to recognise their vulnerability and exploitation.

2.2. Invisible Codes Kanun and the Strength of Traditional Values and Beliefs

The longevity of traditional values and beliefs suggests that it is important to consider the implications of such historically embedded ways of being and, how this may have impacted and continues to impact Albanian women who have been "Human Trafficked". Therefore, in terms of this research, the constructions of female identity would be better understood through the lens of Eastern European Patriarchy, more commonly known as Balkan Patriarchy which, suggests that "Kinship, in the form of Balkan Patriarchy, includes many different elements, such as the dominance of patrilineal decent, patrilocal or Patri virilocal residents after marriage, power relations that favour the domination of men over women and the older generations over younger generations, customary laws that sanction these patterns" (Gruber & Szołtysek, 2012: p. 3).

This becomes particularly apparent when we consider gendered expectations of Albanian women and, how this is constructed around the concept of "Besa", code of "Honour", which serves to completely inform their way of being. "Besa", defines women in relation to their birth family and future chosen betrothed (husband). The code states "The girl is born in a foreign house and dies in her own home", "Vajza lind në shtëpi të huaj dhe vdes në shtëpi të vet". The traditions and values of which across time have created social cohesion, binding individuals to family and in turn society which, have undoubtedly been fundamental in the survival of an indigenes Balkan peoples that are considered to be one of the oldest groups of peoples in Europe, (Miller, 1997).

According to Sadiku (2014), Albanian traditional values and beliefs in the form of "Customary Codes and Honorary Law" are situated in the form of multiple Kanun, "Codes of Honour" that date back over 2000 years. "Kanun" signifies the rules and structures by which individuals were bound to family and tribe. According to Kanun law BK, 3 (25) "she is to obey and go where the head of the house orders', (33) she is to submit to domination". In this context head of the house is always a male, if not father, then brother, or husband.

In order to understand the inherent construction of Albanian female identity, it is important to acknowledge that each region in Albania follows a version of their own honour code, all called Kanun, meaning "Customary Code and Honorary Law", of a given tribe. Across Albania, these codes and traditional values are the fundamental under-pining that inform the behaviour of each individual and social grouping. The Kanun of Leke Dukagjini, which is more commonly known Kanun, was converted to text in the early 20th century and specific to the Northern tribal regions of Albania (Lugaj, 2018).

However, population movement within Albania has meant that while people

are no longer confined to their original municipalities, traditional codes have travelled with these social groupings creating stability in times of instability hence, for Albanian men and women traditional values and belief system have continued to remain in a psyche of the population irrelevant of locality, geographic movement, and geopolitical influences. Further, research suggests that the Kanun represents the only independent tradition that Albania has ever had.

Hence, the concept becomes that Kanun, and the relationship to traditional values and beliefs gives rise to Albania and Albanians identity (Aliu, 2021; Lugaj 2018). Moreover, this highlights the influence and power the Kanun still holds to this day in relation to gender expectations, even as the country attempts in public and political spheres to eradicate it out of existence by suggesting that this code is only existent in the realm of poverty, ignorance, lack of education, rural areas, or the Northern territories. However, research suggests that "The Kanun was stronger than it seemed. Its power reached everywhere, covering lands, the boundaries of fields; it made its way into the foundations of houses, into tombs, to churches, to roads, to markets, to weddings" (Kadare, 2003: p. 10)

Everywhere in Albanian society inherent gendered expectations infiltrate every aspect of society. This is reflected in early marriage; gender violence; unequal pay and lack of employment opportunities; the saturation of women in domestic and agricultural roles; unpaid labour; lack of access to medical care; forced marriage; rape; assault; lack of education in relation to mental health and sexual health; inheritance rights, expectations in relation to virginity and the escalation of gender selective abortions, due to the emulation of male children, all of which continue to exist because of the rootedness of centuries old traditions (Gjonça & Thornton, 2019).

While initially, the constitutional values appear to provide a legal framework to support women in addressing the inequality related to gender, as pointed out in the "Human Rights Democracy Centre" recommendations (2021), one of the major obstacles to equality is not the production of law which, has been numerous but, more the inaccessibility of it due to fundamental failures to meet agreed targets at every level of society and across all municipalities as per the agreements in the Istanbul Protocol (1999), European Commission (2020), to name but a few.

When we use a bottom-up approach, the actuality of the female experience can be observed in multiples of spaces, all of which, affect female experiences. Experiences continue to act as innate barriers to women and their ability to reformulate and negotiate ways of being that reflect contemporary versions of female identity.

This becomes more evident when we consider the phenomena of "Selective Abortion". According to the British Medical Journal (2021), sex selective abortions have been observed in 12 countries globally, Albania included. This is with the increase of secretive surgeries that reinstate virginity for women before marriage. The procedure known as hymen recontraction surgery, or "Hymenoplasty" feeds directedly into the expectation that Albanian patriarchal attitudes, continue

to perpetuate. Further to this, the number of women who own property remains at 8% which currently fuels debates in relation to land ownership and the traditionally fast view that property and inheritance follow from father to son.

2.3. Communism and the Visibility of Women

The Communist regime in Albania came into power in (1944) under Enver Hoxha. However, it was not until (1967) under the guise of an emancipatory process that Albania became the first country ever to have religion and traditional values and beliefs stamped out (Dow & Woolley, 2011). Consequently, the Communist Manifesto created a spiritual void that meant that methods used to seek solace, maintain and create hope in times of challenge and trauma, were unavailable as a way of coping. The impact of which becomes particularly pertinent when we consider the benefits of religious counsel when working through and coming to terms with the difficulties that are faced in day-to-day life. Further, with the stigma associated with mental health due to ideologies that moved the boundaries that determined criminal constructs, mental health issues as we understand them had to remain hidden (Lear, 1987).

While it is difficult to assume why the persistence of stigmatised attitudes towards mental health within Albania continues to exist, perhaps this is also related to the countries' mental health history. The first indicator might be, the only psychiatric hospital before Communism, dates back to Vlore, 1921 although, there is no data recorded. Further, the evidence of human rights abuses within Albania, that emerged after the collapse of the Communist regime, is perhaps significant of the stigma associated with mental health. A third indicator might be demonstrated in the fact that the first law on mental health was the law No. 8092, dated 21.03.1996 (Frasheri & Dhamo, 2016: p. 178). Coupled with this, in the past 5 years, while information suggests that government initiatives are working to inform the population and destigmatise mental health, only 2% of submitted research focuses on this area (Loli-Dano, 2019). Thus, from such historical background, we can derive the idea that Albania's communist past has created a viod in mental health awareness.

Within the Communist process, the early emancipatory framework focussed on developing the countries workforce which, in the public sphere created the illusion of women being equal to their male counterparts. However, as has been explored in other research, due to the invisibility of traditional values and beliefs women became double burdened in terms of expectations related to their gendered roles that were hidden from public expectations and roles (Xhaho, Çaro, & Bailey, 2021). Consequently, this research will be mindful of the apparent misunderstanding that has suggested that Albanian women, were emancipated under communism. Instead, what is being highlighted is the similarity of methods used in the "Top-Down Approach" again being used in contemporary Albanian political rhetoric, in its attempts to divert attention away from the abysmal inequality that Albanian women face and which, serves to severely influence their vulnera-

bility within an Albanian societal context.

Instead, what will be demonstrated is how the private spheres of women continue to be heavily regulated by the same gendered assumption and expectations that assign women in the present as "Less Than", their male counterparts due to the continuation and unfaltering customary codes that saturate the Albanian psyche. Hence, leaving Albanian trafficked women in a position whereby their whole way of being is challenged.

2.4. The Influences of Communism and Its Collapse

Albania appears to have faced two main phases of large numbers of its population seeking asylum. The first phase in (1991) triggered by the fall of Communism (Loli-Dano, 2019). From (1991), Albania attempted to move towards developing a free-market economy based on western ideologies of democracy. It appeared to be motivated to embrace the ideals that were the cornerstones of Europe, which formulated the foundations of these communities. In these early years, there appears to have been a concerted effort to commit towards ensuring a more humanitarian stance on policies that are integral to social and economic growth.

However, there is a wealth of research that more accurately charts Albanian journey from the fall of Communism in 1991 and while it is important to note positive attempts of the newly emerging democracy, it is important to not forget the lived experiences of the Albanian population that tend to be silenced and dismissed at a political level (Dow & Woolley, 2011), particularly related to the experiences of women.

Following the fall of Communism, Albania was faced with cultural traumas including financial collapse followed by Civil War in 1997, which led to the rise of organised crime Perlmutter (1998), due to weak government at local and national levels, giving rise to the birth of a new phenomenon in the form of "Human Trafficking". According to, Campbell (2013), "Across this period poverty, state collapse, and newfound potential for mobility contributed to what intergovernmental and UN agencies estimate as the trafficking of 100,000 Albanian women and girls through the port cities of Vlorë and Durrës" (p. 8). It is worth noting that prior to the fall of Communism that "Human Trafficking", sexual crimes, rape and murder were virtually unheard of. Following the fall "a series of crises created economic and social turmoil affecting lives of Albanian citizens and benefiting the perpetrators of sex trafficking who were reaping huge profits. The following circumstances have increased the risk of sex trafficking in Albania" (Van Hook et al., 2006: pp. 29-40). Movement at this time is possibly best understood in terms of a mentality that grew out of inflicted confinement and intergenerational cultural trauma.

The second phase of mass movement in (1997), was triggered by the collapse of pyramid schemes, (Korovilas, 1999) that left hundreds of Albanian investors poverty stricken. Approximately, 1.2 billion American dollars which amounted to 43% of the country's GDP, disappeared (International Monetary Fund, 2000) with

catastrophic results. Unfortunately, the uncertainty created, provided some of the conditions necessary that eventually provoked civil war, resulting in the death of approximately two thousand people (www.globalsecurity.org, n.d.).

The rise of asylum at this time undoubtedly arose from fear, political instability (Korovilas, 1999), and instantaneous poverty that threatened the very existence of vast numbers of Albanian families. It is particularly mindful to acknowledge that the traditions within Albania that were openly practiced at that time meant specifically that men were the main bread earners within the households, according to Kanun Code & Honorary Law (Dow & Woolley, 2011). With public unrest, and fear growing in relation to people being able to protect their family, property and business, arms depots were raided, and army munition could be taken freely (Arsovska, 2014).

Across this period of huge uncertainty, the safety of Albanian citizens was under threat, leading to horrific crimes including kidnaping and raping of women and girls, with the intention of trafficking. This undoubtedly was instigated by the growth of an organised crime mentality (Perlmutter, 1998) that sought to find profit in the political instability of the country. According to research women gained economic value and the concept of women as assets, created a perverted understanding of the traditional values and beliefs that underpinned "Kanun Code and Honorary Law" (Arsovska, 2014).

2.5. The Rise of Democracy, Policy and Politics

After this period of uncertainty, the country worked hard to again initiate the introductions of laws that could move the society forward as a democratic society. However, within the introduction of legislation associated to protection, health, wealth and gender equality, it becomes difficult to fathom the continued rise of trafficking in human beings who have been exposed to what can only be explained as a breach of "Human Rights", in a third wave of movement from (2013) to the present day. This creates an opportunity with the target group of participants within this research to tease out and develop a deeper understanding of the humanitarian issues that Albanian women are without a doubt, continuing to be exposed to. Clearly, if the country was implementing the vast number of laws and updates, that it has introduced into its constitution, the predominant gendered related issues that remain rife, would not be occurring (Bashkurti, 2019).

Irrelevant of the rise of the democracy (1991) and the introduction of laws to ensure the humanitarian rights of women in constitutional law from (2004), followed by the Albanian government implementation of the "National Strategy for Gender Equality" (2007), as well as a string of updates to protect these rights, the last being, the rights of women remain highly questionable. According to (United States Department, 2021), Albania still remains a tier 2 country that has not met the requirements to enter the European Union.

The implementation and enforcement of law continue to be thwarted with issues of endemic corruption and lack in terms of state funding United States De-

partment, 2021, WHO (2020), leaving NGO organisations with the burden of trying to support the vulnerable and pushing for reform. On top of which, success has been measured in culturally specific terms that take no account of the complexity of gender norms and how these norms are specifically linked to traditional values and beliefs that cannot be measured according to the assumptions that are held in the West. A recent example of this was when WHO (2020), made a bold statement that suggested that Albania sat at number 34 out of 190 counties in terms of creating economic opportunity for women. Surpassing for example countries are such as Canada, the USA, Switzerland, Japan, Denmark.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020), Albania should be praised for its largely female government under Prime Minister, Edi Rama who was re-elected this year. However, while more women participate in government women in Albania continue to struggle in their day to day lives due, to the continued severity of gender inequality (United Nations Albania, 2019).

According to the "Human Rights in Democracy Centre" (HRDC, 2021), a leading organisation who works to support women's and girls who face "Domestic Violence" in Albania, "Women's, prognosis of surviving outside the constructs of family or, marriage is unjustifiably harsh due to lack of access to work, housing, schooling for children and the ability to meet basic needs". This is heavily influenced as previously stated, due to the lack of implementation of Law that is supposedly meant to support the needs of "Women" and the "Vulnerable", in Albanian society.

In its ongoing assessments of Albania's progress, the European Commission has identified violence against women and girls (VAWG) as a persistent and pressing societal issue, calling for greater prioritisation and action to address it (European Commission, 2024). Deeply rooted patriarchy perpetuates and justifies violence, abuse, and discrimination, creating major obstacles to achieving real equality between men and women, boys, and girls. Available data shows that at least one in two women have experienced some form of violence, including domestic or sexual violence, harassment, non-partner violence, child and/or forced marriage, and stalking. 26% of women aged 18-74 believe a woman should be ashamed to talk to anyone if she is raped, while 21% think that if a woman is raped, she probably did something to put herself in trouble. 60% of sexual crimes are committed against children, with nearly one in two suffering from physical or psychological aggression (UNICEF, 2020).

Evidence also reveals a strong correlation between child sexual abuse and gender-based violence in adulthood. Coordinated Referral Mechanisms (CRMs) and Child Protection Groups in municipalities are not fully functional, with support services understaffed and under resourced, and not tailored to address all forms of gender-based violence and all groups of persons in need. The legal definition of rape in the Criminal Code remains a force-based definition, with the burden of proof falling on the victim (HRDC, 2021).

The United Nations Report (2019) has stated that, Effective leadership and co-

ordination of actors at central and local level are essential to ensure that gender gaps are consistently addressed across areas of government action. Law 9970/2008 on Gender Equality established a dedicated mechanism including the "National Council" on Gender Equality, a Gender Equality Unit in the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, as well as a network of gender focal points in ministries and institutions. However, the overall setup has various limitations in terms of political empowerment and clarity of roles and responsibilities, insufficient funding, weak capacities, and lack of systematic inter institutional collaboration, both among central level actors and with local government units. Against this backdrop, ensuring effective coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes becomes very challenging (HRDC, 2021).

The United Nations Albania (2022), while acknowledging that Albania has made important progress on gender equality, especially by developing a comprehensive set of laws to promote, enforce, and monitor non-discrimination on the basis of sex and gender identity, continues to be called into question with endless accounts and concerns raised by NGO's, UN Women (2020) and the European commission (2020). The concerns raised state that the country needs to strengthen implementation of laws and policies, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the achievement of all gender related targets in the "Sustainable Development Goals" (United States Department, 2021).

2.6. Embedded Cultural Attitudes, Movement and Migration

The maintenance of the Albanian identity is strongly tied to patriotism. This has been ensured through the continuance of traditional values and beliefs that bind individuals, family and social honour inextricably together, across Albania. The long-standing traditional values within the culture have stood the test of time and have travelled within the psyche of individuals. This is demonstrated in traditional songs that sing of "honour, pride and their sacrifice for their families and their well-being". (Pistrick, 2015), songs that are still known today. What has become evident, is that through migration, the threats that occupations as well as Communism have posed to the traditional ideals of individuality, family and society, the influence of traditional values, codes and beliefs, have ensured that Albanian identity continues to remain intact. Occupations and many unforeseen social shifts, have undoubtedly caused cultural trauma. According to (Sztompka, 2000), Cultural trauma is understood as a "culturally defined wound in the very same culture" (p. 458).

As a nation, Albania across history, ensured the survival of population by men migrating for the purpose of trade for economic betterment. Historically, this phenomenon was not unheard off according to research migration, movement, resettlement as well as isolation and enforced resettlement are novel phenomena of the 20th century for people living in Albania (Vullnetari, 2012).

2.7. The Drive to Entre the European Union

In the case of Albania with its drive to enter the European Union (2020), a prerequisite has been set in terms of particular conditions that must be met before entrance is guaranteed. While the list is substantive and the requests not unreasonable in terms of joining a collective of nations that attempt to mirror conditions that are deemed appropriate to promote economic growth and therefore, the conditions for a population and country to thrive. It appears that in the case of Albania that while "Constitutional Law", has clearly been radically overhauled with numerous laws passed in order to address the severe and longstanding inequalities that are endemic in the society, gender inequality remains a deeply contentious issue.

Laws have been produced within the constitution of Albania, that are meant to support those that are vulnerable of protentional exploitation. However, the WHO (2020), has reported that Albania still spends a substantially low percentage of GDP on health care than counties with comparable incomes. Some of the concerns raised by the WHO specifically highlight the deficiencies in reporting, requests for protection orders and the disparity between prosecution conviction and sentencing rates (HRDC, 2021). Further to this, there continues to be a lack of implementation of training for first responders dealing with victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, including spousal rape which, to date authorities do not disaggregate data on prosecutions for this offense. Moreover, according to the recommendations put forward by the HRDC, to be submitted to GREVIO, spousal rape remain, exempt from prosecution, as the marriage rights of a husband demand that a wife complies in this matter, willingly or not. Hence, the concept of spousal rape is not well understood, and authorities did not consider it a crime.

While penalties for crimes related to "Violence Against Women", with "Girls" only being recently added are reflected in law, again prosecution and conviction rates remain low. Further, to this courts were unwilling to evict abusers and women were left when having been successful in court with court fee and bailiff fees that have to be paid before conviction can move forward. When we consider that due to low employment rates of women, low pay and traditional values and beliefs that demand that if a woman works then her earnings and labour contribute towards the house, meaning father, or husband.

Consequently, it is clear across Albanian society that Albanian women continue to face institutional and societal discrimination (INSTAT, 2021). Based on this study for it was reported that 52.2% of respondents stated that they were experiencing one of the five forms of violence against women during the interview period. Further, United States Department (2021), recently stated that while Albanian constitutional law, prohibits sexual harassment, officials rarely enforced it while, further advising that women are only harassed if they are unaccompanied. Placing the onus of responsibility on women to be responsible for the actions of perpetrators.

According to OHCHR (2021), within less than a two-month period, a woman

or girl was murdered every 8 days. The murders have been committed by male family members. Albanian female identity is clearly complex and comprised of multiple layers hence, working towards understanding these layers is crucial for professionals in the UK to be able to actively engage with this group from a more informed viewpoint, which is not bound in westernised assumptions of gender.

Across Albanian society, the implementation of legislations does not accurately reflect the real issues that continue to plight women. The growth of organised crime has been recorded from the lowest to the highest institutional structures, including police, judiciary, bureaucrats and politicians. According to (Fouladvand & Ward, 2019), "In the case of Albania, there is evidence that security forces, and former security service members who retain close ties to the state, have been active in human trafficking". (p. 45).

According to the European Commission (2021) in order for Albania to make headway into the European Union, the address of corruption and organised crime has been demanded as a prerequisite. If we consider corruption across these levels then it is hardly surprising, that women remain highly vulnerable within the course of their everyday lives due to a complete depletion of safe and secure spaces. Clearly, when we consider the facts related to the plight of women within the Albanian context, it can only be reported as "Human Rights Violations".

A further backdrop to understanding the complexities that form Albanian female identity and the struggles that this group faces as it engages with the UK asylum process, is that at no point have these women been expected to survive by themselves without being strictly controlled, whether that be through their family, community, or husband.

It is necessary to be mindful that due to the prevalence of traditional marriage, engagement and marriage are not necessarily bound in legality. In fact, in the majority of cases marriage would be translatable in terms of what we in the UK consider "Common Law" marriage. Moreover, one of the influencing factors in this is reported to be, related to the changes in law that state women should have equal access to property and inheritance. Thus, the implication becomes that men remain embedded in the traditional values and beliefs that dictate that women and girls are not entitled to any money or equity that is considered to be her fathers. Therefore, men take the precautionary measure of ensuring that marriage by and large remains linked to "Traditional Customs".

The result of all these influencing factors means that women and girls remain highly exposed and vulnerable, placing them at ever increasing risk of being a targeted group who are vulnerable to the manipulations of traffickers.

According to Alice Taylor, "below the layer of political glitter, another reality does not get the attention it deserves. Despite the progress made in recent decades, evidence suggests that the level of women's rights and women's well-being in Albania is still, to put it mildly, utterly appalling" (Exit - Explaining Albania, 2021).

3. Methodology

The occurrence of trafficking has been rapidly increasing around the world. Tak-

ing into consideration the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and how this may have led to a more rapid increase in the incidence of victims being trafficked. It was found that the level of human trafficking occurring worldwide has been soaring compared to pre-pandemic levels; with possible reasoning attributed to victims becoming more vulnerable as a result of financial difficulty and reduced employment levels (Coxen, Castro, Carr, Bredin, & Guikema, 2021). The purpose of this chapter is to provide rationale and reasoning in regard to the research, sampling and recruitment, data collection, ethics and coding/analytical approach.

3.1. Research Design and Rationale

The research conducted was to address the research topic: The experiences of Albanian women living in London that have been trafficked: constructions of female identity within a patriarchal culture. As the goal of the research was to understand lived experiences, the research took and explorative focus. The paradigm which was selected for this particular topic is qualitative research using thematic analysis. Qualitative research as a paradigm allows for the experiences of individuals to emerge in the data, while giving rise to appreciation of the perspectives, culture and "worldviews". This is well-suited to the research topic as it allows for a deeper insight into the experiences of participants, thus allowing for more breadth of content to explore, and providing an accurate portrayal of the lived experiences of the women who have been trafficked. A Quantitative research approach was not selected for the purpose of this study as to apply this approach would immediately minimise and narrow the richness of data. As such, due to the nature of the evaluation, this research cannot be addressed through the sole measure of numerical figures (Kyngäs, 2020).

3.2. Sampling and Recruitment

The sample was drawn from a population of women who have been referred to the NRM (National Referral Mechanism) and received a positive conclusive grounds decision which means that the UK government recognises that, on the basis of the evidence available, the individual in question is a victim of trafficking (Currie & Young, 2021). A total number of 15 participants took part in the study. All subjects were Albanian females due to the nature of the study and the aim of the research. All participants of the study were aged over 18 as the exploration of research and data was focused on adult women and their experiences.

Participants were selected using snowball sampling, a type of purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020). This allowed for subjects to be selected based on the characteristics we were searching for (Albanian, female, over-18, living in London, received a conclusive grounds decision from NRM). Furthermore, snowball sampling allowed the researcher to recruit individuals known to their pre-existing subjects, creating a basis of trust and communication. This form of recruitment for the participants was judged to be the most suitable due to the sensitive nature of human trafficking and victims who have experienced and may find it perhaps

more difficult to trust (Mumey, Sardana, Richardson-Vejlgaard, & Akinsulure-Smith, 2020).

A small sample of 15 was used in order to establish a meaningful relationship of trust and open communication. It was important that participants felt valued and empowered in the process of sharing their experiences and that any pre-identified triggers or re-traumatisation were approached in a trauma-informed manner. Working with the participants using the trauma-informed approach allows them to feel validated in their experiences, as well as assist with their healing (Ladd & Neufield, 2018). Even though a larger sample size could provide a broader insight, the decision to limit participation was made in consideration to ethical considerations and due to the focus on detailed, qualitative depth, rather than a generalised approach.

The subjects were all originally from different locations within Albania, ranging from rural villages to cities. Their economic status and level of education varied.

Further to this, I am also conscious to the fact that, I, the researcher, as an Albanian National and a woman, the potential arises for bias in my analysis, potentially meaning that my findings could possibly be affected in terms of their reliability and generalisability due to the area being very familiar to me. As a result, I sought literature to corroborate my findings. I also had no direct relationship with any of the participants that represented a conflict of interest, although I work with trafficking victims in my job role as a trauma-informed psychotherapist, none of my subjects were known to me beforehand.

3.3. Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, the data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews which were all audio recoded.

Core questions were developed and devised before-hand, however, as they were semi-structured, the researcher had the ability to expand from the initial question list where felt necessary and based on the response given by the participant. Further, data was able to emerge more naturally, enabling the participants to also expand where they felt they wanted to, which worked to create the necessary conditions for a therapeutic relationship, allowing the participants to feel heard.

Semi-structured interviews also allow for questions to be asked to probe feelings or thoughts in regard to a particular response, giving more detailed answers and more insight, such information which would not be possible solely through the use of other, possibly more restricted methods, such as questionnaires (Adams, 2015). As a result, it was of paramount importance that the participants felt as comfortable as possible, and any stressors were reduced. Participants were not told how long the interview process would last in order for them to not be distracted by time constraints, and thus, limit any possible responses to the questions provided (Risan, Milne, & Binder, 2020). This further worked to highlight the importance of being culturally sensitive and aware of the nuances of the culture.

Interviews with participants were held face-to-face and adhering to COVID-

19 regulations, they only took place once government restrictions were lifted and with the agreement and comfort of the subjects. Whilst considering the manner or which data could be collected, an online interview was considered, however, considering the sensitive nature of the subject at hand and how this may impact the subjects, face-to-face was decided as the suitable option in this case (Muthanna, 2019).

Interviews took place in a secure office place in London, away from public places which can be overheard to ensure confidentiality. Thus, avoiding homes or places which could be triggering to participants, due to feeling unsafe, or exposed. Themes emerged from the subjects' own testimony, as the researcher was mindful to what the subjects may want to explore, ensuring to the best of their ability that the participants accounts remained uncontaminated. Therefore, working to ensure the integrity of the data.

This helped build trust and allowed the participants to feel that they were in a safe space where their story would be handled sensitively. When also weighing the fact that the subjects would have the option of therapy afterwards to ground them, it was important for them to create a sense of familiarity and acceptance with the researcher. Furthermore, subjects felt uncomfortable with possible exchanging personal information online with fear that people within the community may find out, although anonymity was guaranteed (Pascual-Leone, Kim, & Morrison, 2017).

This set the tone for one of the themes to be introduced later on, of "Shame", "Stigma", "Honour" and "Dishonour". The researcher was aware of the fact that an online interview may result in limited information and not go as into-depth and therefore, not draw out an open and honest account of the participants experiences. In order to ensure congruence, throughout this process the researcher was aware that their acute understanding of traditional values and beliefs, Kanun and the reality of lived experience within Albania culture, was necessary in being able to glean data that did not become misunderstood due to lack of cultural understanding.

3.4. Ethics

This research was conducted in line with the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO, 2018). The documents provide a comprehensive list of the manner of which research should be conducted, whilst it accepts that one publication of research should be expected to cover all the points; it merely acts as a guide for both supervisors and researchers to maintain standards.

As human trafficking and sexual exploitation are extremely sensitive matters, the researcher ensured that participants and their data were treated according to data protection guidance, through GDPR.

In terms of the recollection of traumatic events, the researcher was sensitive to the fact that it may be difficult for participants to recall these experiences due to experiencing PTSD or Complex PTSD and their trauma symptomology as per In-

ternational Classification of Disease (ICD 11). All communication with the subjects was approached in a trauma-informed manner. They were given a range of contacts afterwards, as well as being signposted to charities and NGO's. They were offered six no-charge therapy sessions for psychoeducation and emotional regulation the safety and stabilisation. Hence, working towards empowerment and heightened sense of self through person-centred, trauma-informed therapy. Regular pauses and breaks were taken throughout the interview to ensure subjects did not feel "rushed" or "forced" to share their experiences. In general, the sessions lasted for approximately 3 hours.

Throughout the process of research, the researcher comprehensively used the guidelines and standards set out, such as, to "ensure the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of all involved in research and avoid unreasonable risk or harm to research subjects, patients".

This was enforced by giving all participants an information sheet prior to the commencing of the study which gave details of the study at hand as well as the purpose of the research and what the researcher would aim to achieve. The researcher ensured that participants were aware of their rights to confidentiality, making sure that any identifiable information would remain anonymous and be handled with care (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). All the above information was also detailed in the informed consent letter.

Participants of the study were informed before the research started that there would be no monetary gain and that all participation was voluntary in the exploration of the phenomenon stated in the subject title. All information and data were stored in a password protected file on my computer, which also required a separate code to access. Subject names in all correspondence were referred to using client codes, so that anonymity was ensured. All criteria were met to ensure that the participants identities were protected their identity remained confidential at all times. Further, the researcher was the only point of contact across the research, which gave the participants greater assurance. Upon the examination and analysis of the interviews, all the information was deleted to preserve anonymity. To preserve anonymity the actual interview will not be published in the research.

In order to reduce the possible chance of triggering the clients and re-traumatisation, they were also offered therapy and aftercare post-interview in order to ground them and work through any thoughts and feelings the interview process could have triggered for them, not only as victims of trafficking but also as individuals who have been/or are going through the rigorous and extensive process of gaining asylum within the United Kingdom.

In addition to this, the interviewer's training and experience allow for the development of the skills necessary to carry out this designed study. The researcher was able to work through, with the subjects, their experiences and perspective in a trauma-informed manner, ensuring their life experiences are communicated as clearly and as sensitively as possible. Further, the fact that the researcher is bilingual and knows the culture means that the participants felt able to participate in

the research in a way where the onus of having to explain traditional customs, values and beliefs did not fall on them and therefore diminish the validity of the research data.

3.5. Data Analysis

The use of open coding was used in order to identify themes. This approach was used with the raw data; allowing for themes and codes to transpire and emerge by reviewing the interviews. Phrases were highlighted relating to their corresponding coding colour. Phrases which referred to one of the six chosen themes ("Shame", "Honour", "Dishonour", "Ostracised", "Kanun", "Stigma") were coded and all phrases/feelings similar were collated under the same theme. This allowed for patterns to emerge from the interview responses and the data collected (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). For example,

Participant Quote: "I felt ashamed and as if I had lost the honour in myself."

Code assigned: Shame, Honour

From the coding process, six key themes emerged in relation to the interviews and all responses which were then analysed. Reflexive thematic analysis was the form of analysis used in this research. It allowed for the identification of repeated patterns within the body of research and thus, allowing for the construction of themes as the second part of the process (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Reflexive thematic analysis allows for the familiarisation of data (reading and re-reading the data), allowing for immersion and familiarisation of the content. This was decided as more suitable due to the delicate and sensitive themes which could be generated; also taking into consideration the complexity of the culture. After which, the generation and definition of themes continues, refining them and ensuring they accurately represent the data set at hand (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). By following this approach, the integrity of the data was preserved, ensuring that the findings were related to the participants' own words.

4. Results and Discussion

As highlighted in the introduction section, human trafficking and exploitation have become a huge issue for Albanian nationals in general, but in particular for Albanian women. While there are many statistics and facts associated with Albania being an extremely economically poor country, with 25% of women facing poverty (Biscione, 2020), there seems to be a missing link in explaining how these women have become some of the most vulnerable individuals in Europe in terms of been trafficking and exploited within the UK.

Hence, using a bottom-up approach allowed for this research to understand the lived experiences of the women in relation to any emergent links that would start to reveal the risks and vulnerability factors between being Albanian and the increased chance of being trafficked. Further, this allowed the women to explore what it meant to them to be a woman in relation to the patriarchal society, they had been born into, exploring education, employment, family, social mobility for

women and its nationals in general. Further, how the prospect of escaping Albania is too attractive of an opportunity to turn down, which in turn, makes these women the "perfect" victims for trafficking (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019).

4.1. Albanian Patriarchy

When investigating the minimal change of gender norms of ethnic Albanians who were part of the mass migration in the 90s, it was found that the female share of resources is substantially lower with respect to the male share, and that sons receive a larger share of resources than daughters. As reported in one of the interviews: "In Albania I feel like I have less rights or freedom than a man does. My family set a plan for me, to get married, to have children, and be happy, and I never really thought past that." Furthermore, the time spent abroad by the husband had little influence on woman's relative position within the households. To deny that the Kanun and age-old traditions no longer impact Albanian women lives to this day, irrespective of migration, is to ignore their continuous vulnerability and core factor in the contribution to why they are more likely to be trafficked openly and become vulnerable (Mangiavacchi & Piccoli, 2022).

4.2. Social Immobility within Albania

According to Fouladvand & Ward (2019), "Albania, by a combination of corruption, economic mismanagement and a failure to respond to the needs of women, has done much to create and perpetuate conditions in which Albanians are vulnerable to human trafficking" (p. 47). While it is suggested that the state takes on financial responsibility for its citizens, studies produced by WHO (2020), reflect huge out of pocket payments that the population is responsible in relation to medication. Medication and access to doctors, psychologist and psychiatrists require a financial contribution. Irrelevant of what is stated as "State Subsidised", the lived experiences of Albanians are that the state does not provide enough financial support to suffice for these services. "I don't have enough financial support in Albania to feed myself and my child, the prices are too high and I know I would not get a substantial salary" was one of the answers provided by one of the participants. Lack of access to medications that the state subsidises leaves patients in positions that if they are to present the need for the prescribed medication, then they are responsible for the huge costs associated with private pharmacies (WHO, 2020).

It is worth being mindful that one of the main reasons along with the continued refusal to implement the laws that form the constitution is the on-going concerns raised by the European Comission (2020) and the United States Department (2021) which continue to highlight the lack of disability rights, as well as legislations that is meant to support women and girls from domestic violence. The notion of VAWG's is a new concept within Albania (VAW) and as can be seen from the HRDC (2021) report, NGO's seek funding through external donors, and "Government State Shelters" face constant decreases in funding and have never met the targets for bed capacity that the Albanian government has constantly

agreed to do, in numerous prompts from the European Union. This was further followed by the recent incident involving the disappearance of three minors from one of the social centres in Albania (Shqiptarja, 2024), which raises further concerns regarding the safety of such establishments.

Limited resources that such organisations face highlight how difficult it is to implement the support that those exposed to "Gender Based Violence", are supposedly entitled to receive. This is not related to the amount of women who have been returned as a result of "Human Trafficking" as, shelters for "Domestic Violence" and vice versa, are expected to cater for both groups (European commission, 2020; WHO, 2020; U.S. Department of State, 2020), but it is as a cause due to the lack of implementation of education in schools, minimal training of police and social services in the fast majority of municipalities including political issues; organised crime; corruption within the education system; lack of specialised training for medical professionals, and persistent cuts in funding. A further push factor in this crisis is the lack of psychologists and psychotherapists who are trained in the area of "Trauma" or, who even have the ability to attend formal training or "Continued Professional Development", unfortunately these options are limited in the case of Albania. These findings aligned with the new analyses on the study where nearly all of the participants reported feeling and/or being misunderstood when sharing their experiences to individuals and specialists back home. One of the individuals reported that she "was looked with such despise and people would tell me that it was my fault, which made me even more scared, and I felt like it was my fault because of what they said and how they said it, I didn't know who to open to afterwards."

Another factor that complicates the situation is the corruption aspect of the country. The European Commission (2020) has stressed the need for Albania to fight corruption at all levels of society; governmental and administrative. It is concerned about the existing practice of allowing the state police to receive private donations and sponsorship; notes with concern that corruption allegations continue to undermine the public's trust in the government, and democratic institutions more generally. The difficulty of implementing law when there is no public trust is a huge issue and a huge push factor alongside lack of societal education in matters related to the human rights of individual within the society. Thus, for most of the individuals, especially women who have been trafficked, the aspect of feeling like they can rely on the law policies in Albania is heavily diminished.

Coordinated Referral Mechanisms (CRMs) and Child Protection Groups in municipalities are not fully functional, with support services understaffed and under resourced. The legal definition of rape in the Criminal Code remains a force-based definition, with the burden of proof falling on the victim.

4.3. Shame and Psyche of Trafficked Women

According to the interviews, it was found that these women are scared of power and confused of their identity which creates a massive wall in the therapy session combined with the lack of English; shame; confusion; suppressed anger; fear of

dishonour and insecure immigration status. Many of the participants in the interview shared that "I was never taken seriously compared to my brothers which I felt like were more heard than me."

As research has reported, traffickers use varieties of strategies to gain control over their victims. Survivors also report how as victims, they were exposed to functional and structural isolation. All of which, is understood as common practice in de humanising and cohesively controlling the intended trafficking survivors (Hagan et al., 2021). Further to this, the trauma that is experienced by these women becomes a double burden due to the traditional values and beliefs within the culture that not only causes a victim to feel responsible but labels them as responsible, with attitudes that are endemic in the society, labelling a woman as responsible if she is abused, beaten or violated. "What hurt the most was the fact that after everything that happened, my family still blamed me". Consequently, embedded cultural codes trigger "Shame", in the victim. The result of which is that she is automatically labelled as having brought "Dishonour", on a family name.

As a result of long-term trauma, many survivors suffered from somatic symptoms such persistent pain and digestive problems. In order to assist survivors in processing and releasing trauma from their bodies, therapies including body scanning, EMDR therapy, and somatic experiencing are essential (Rees, 2024). These physiological manifestations are consistent with results in trauma research.

4.4. Identity

According to the current research findings, the experience of human trafficking triggers complex, emotional, physical, and psychological reactions. Barriers to life that in this society, are largely taken for granted, become determining factors in aggravating this already highly traumatised group. The presenting clinical issues are complex, and treatment and services are scarce (Gabriele et al., 2014). Lack of specialised services leads to difficulties on supporting this complex group. This includes stigmas that the group carries from their home culture which, manifests in what may be perceived as resistance to treatment. However, this is tied to cultural assumptions of mental health as the perceived resistance does not mean that support is not wanted, it purely means it is not understood. Hence, the practical challenges involved to assess and evaluate are complex and have the potential to further traumatise the clients (Paivio & Pascual-Leone, 2010).

Due to their hard-wired cultural mechanisms, as well as traditional values and beliefs Albanian women tend to deny or normalise the past traumas they have experienced. Within the culture male violence is normalised: "*I beat you if I love you and if I really love you, I will kill you*"

Survivors of human trafficking require cultural sensitivity to the trauma that led them to experience isolation from their culture of choice and identity, whether in an emergency situation or long-term care. A community-based approach that allows individuals to feel connected and validated in their experience by the pro-

vider is necessary in alliance building at every step. Further, as has emerged within this research, understanding of culture is absolutely necessary in order for society to not make assumptions, which can unintentionally seep through in professional practice due to further assumptions made from a position that is narrow and biased because of western beliefs related to equality and what it means to be a woman in UK culture.

Similarly, cultural background can be comforting to a client (Paone & Malott, 2008). Conversely, it can be discomforting, specifically around issues of confidentiality as there is little to no understanding of such things being issued in Albanian culture, even in area where we would consider confidentiality to be an ethical issue in relation to professional practice Thus working with victims of human trafficking can potentially pose a risk to psychotherapists for compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatisation (Canfield, 2005).

According to our findings, the research suggests that when it comes to culture, it is the job of the therapist to be curious with the client about their culture as well as the range of possible reactions to the therapist and the interpreter whether or not they do or do not share the same cultural background. According to trauma studies, survivors' identity reconstruction is a non-linear process (Rees, 2024). When talking about their future goals, study participants exhibited hesitancy, which was a sign of internalised shame and self-doubt. According to research from trauma-informed interventions, survivors need to reintegrate into society gradually with the help of structured community participation, employment assistance, and skill-building programs. These kinds of therapies aid in redefining identity in a way that goes beyond the victim's prior experiences.

4.5. Overall Conclusion

It is important to highlight that whilst the survivors of trafficking are safer within the UK, their trauma and experiences will impact them for the rest of their lives. As a result, it is an integral part of the research to understand and emphasise the support they receive via a bottom-up approach.

The patriarchal society within Albania has been found to be a key contributing factor to many social issues within Albania, such as substance abuse, divorce rates, and this is due to "to the patriarchal nature of Albanian society where 'Man of the house' or father is the one who takes the decisions without asking anyone." (Mucaj & Xeka, 2015) The old attitudes have manifested and heavily influenced many of the region's attitudes and reactions towards women, where single and unmarried women are persecuted against and ostracised from society (Kocaqi, Plaku, & Wittberger, 2016).

Albania, being one of Europe's poorest countries (Betti, Bici, Neri, Sohnesen, & Thomo, 2018), is highlighted as another core factor. Citizens are faced with social immobility, lack of employment, especially for women, prospects are extremely poor (Betti, Mangiavacchi, & Piccoli, 2020). Expectations of marriage and children education tied to status. As a result, outside prospects, such as going to another country and working are seen as viable; leading them to be extremely vul-

nerable and potential victims for human traffickers who aim to prey emotionally vulnerable on those who want to change their life (Moore, Houck, Hirway, Barron, & Goldberg, 2020).

4.6. Limitations and Recommendations

Whilst the small-scale study could be a core limitation of this study, it is important that the experiences of these subjects are not seen as an "anomaly", but to encourage a wide-scale to study to gain further and deeper insight into more women and their experiences and to make their stories and voices known and heard. A larger project would bring more awareness to the generalisability lives of these women, as well as trafficking and its effects, the "covert" and "secretive" nature of trafficking would be brought to light and the subjects would feel more accepted after years of ostracization cultural stigma and judgement.

Each subject's lives is as complex and intricate as the next, as they begin to explore and "realise" their identities, they conclude that they may have never truly been allowed to be themselves. By continuing their life outside of the societal norms of Albania and begin to break through the glass ceiling covering them their whole lives, they continue their journey on being working towards independence, being accepted self-acceptance and finally being given the opportunity to study, to work and to be who they are. Work towards positive outcomes being able to make positive contributions to UK society.

Lastly the research would also like to highlight upon the topic of the workers who help with these services as a possible outlook on future research. According to O'Hara et al. (2011) "Interpreters reported feeling 'burnt out' by hearing trauma-laden stories of forced migrants". It is mindful to consider how huge the emotional and psychological impact is on interpreters when working with this client group. As they have no access to the vital therapeutic support and supervision that is mandatorily and ethically provided, for other front-line workers.

The hope of this research is that a deeper understanding on how Albanian female identity is exposed to factors that impact the formulations that initially constructed their identity, affectively exposing them across the asylum process to the challenges of our culture that work to deconstruct their identity, before they can start to attempt to reconstruct their identities as, they become immersed in UK culture, once they receive their "Leave to Stay". Further to this, a discussion will emerge within this shift that highlights how traditional beliefs and values continue to inform their ways of being.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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