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### The Role of Poverty and Social Inequality in Facilitating Human Trafficking in the United Kingdom

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#### Abstract

The research is a study of the causes of human trafficking in the United Kingdom (UK) with poverty and social inequality as major determinants. The researcher highlights that economic hardship, the quest for migration into the UK, force labor and others could create experiences in peoples be ascertained as components that causes human trafficking. Some of these negative experiences makes people to become vulnerable to trafficking and as a result, this researcher highlights the view that with resilient, the human trafficking victims can be made to transit from survivors to becoming victorious. The research is literary research that uses the theories of narrative methodology to suggest that

the experiences of survivors of human trafficking in the UK can be converted into obtaining the natural potentials in them. The research answers the question that pertained to the contribution of 'survivors' to societal development through a leadership development technique called *crucible* whereby experiences are used to discover and sustain leadership skills. This also attests to the primary purpose of this research in which the determinants poverty and social inequality are interconnected to human trafficking in addition to the reintegration of survivors. Negative perceptions against survivors are recommended to be discarded by the public.

**Keywords:** Crucible, Survivors, Reintegration, Slavery, Victims

#### 1. Introduction

Humans are social beings that have a long historical connection with other humans, animals and their various environments. During social interactions, classes among humans are created and societal values are designed whereby others live better than the rest and geographical differences are also set as a result (Agai, 2016)<sup>[1]</sup>. Poverty is one of the results of societal differences and is prevalent in many parts of the world. It is not surprising that leaders around the world have made several efforts to end poverty by 2030 through the sustainable development goals (SDG's) (UNDP, 2017)<sup>[27]</sup>.

More so, poverty according to *The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica* suggest a state in which a person or persons lacks the usual basic acceptable materials possessions or an acceptable amount of money or a situation whereby a person cannot satisfy his or her basic needs. The question of what constitutes a basic need is relevant and from the same source, a basic need is defined as items necessary for survival "those reflecting the prevailing standard of living in the community" or "those necessary for survival."<sup>1</sup> The lack of these items necessary for survival have become a reason that made so many people to embark on human trafficking around the world. Salah (2001)<sup>[19]</sup> noted that poverty is a major factor that promotes human trafficking among children, women and other poor people. He ascertained that Africans play a great role in human trafficking because vulnerable people can be taken from Africa and be trafficked to the UK.

Poverty and inequality are concepts that are interconnected. Both concepts' cuts across countries, region, religion, beliefs and other factors. They all pertained to social status between the rich and the poor. Inequality determines an individual's strength and qualities to basic services like transportation, health care, housing, nutrition and other factors. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recorded that in many societies including the UK and Africa, income inequality is on the rise. As at 2017, it was noted that the richest 10 percent earns up to 40 percent of the global income while the poorest 10

<sup>1</sup> *The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica*, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

percent earns between 2 and 7 percent of total global income. Between 1990 and 2010, it was observed that there was an increase of 11 percent of inequality in developing nations (UNDP, 2017)<sup>[27]</sup>.

It is also important to note that humans are unique and are meant to enjoy equality. It is not surprising that the British Parliament in 1807 abolished the practice of slave trade after which other nations like France, Spain, and others followed a similar pattern in order to promote human equality. The slave trade encouraged inequality, poverty, dehumanization, forced labor, and forced individuals to live against their wills (Agai, 2022)<sup>[2]</sup>. Similarly, human trafficking, a global and ongoing practice involves a deceitful and forceful luring of persons from one community to another or from one country to another whereby victims or trafficked persons are exploited into these activities: Sexual commercialization, force and unpaid labor, organ harvesting, illicit use of drugs, forceful marriages and childbirth, forceful recruitments into various gangs and groups and where other fundamental rights of trafficked persons are denied. The practice of human trafficking like that of slave trade is criminal and liable to severe penalties (Cockbain and Bowers, 2019)<sup>[11]</sup>, yet in many cases, wealthier offenders are not prosecuted as they should (Chuang, 2014)<sup>[9]</sup>.

Chuang (2014)<sup>[9]</sup> stated that the 2014 global statistics provided information according to which 27 million people were in the bondage of human trafficking. It added that out of the 27 million people, only 1% are ever rescued leaving behind 99% of human trafficking victims not rescued. He further added that, traffickers often go without being convicted, and that there is a 1-2% conviction rate for traffickers. Furthermore, he stated that, in Africa for example, four out of every hundred persons are victims of human trafficking with 74% of these victims being adults (and 26% children). Most trafficking victims (55%) are female. Chuang (2014)<sup>[9]</sup> concluded by stating that, each year, nearly 2 million children are exploited in the global sex trade. However, this statistic has either been questioned or rejected stating that it is impossible to accurately count the numbers of affected victims of human trafficking in the world (Weitzer, 2015)<sup>[30]</sup>.

The United Kingdom is a part of the global community that must not be exempted when it comes to the practice of trafficking in persons. A popular UK organization that assists in identifying organizations and victims of human trafficking (survivors) so they can receive relevant support the *National Referral Mechanism* noted that human trafficking in connection with modern slavery have increased immensely to the point that in 2023, about 8,377 referrals were concluded mainly for exploitation in the UK which is an increase to about 4.6% compared to the 2022 referrals. The referrals indicates that the United Kingdom is one of the herbs that trafficker's eye for their business activities (NSA, 2024)<sup>2</sup>.

It is also important to note that the practice of human trafficking in the UK is not only carried out by migrants but by the UK citizens themselves. The *National Strategic Assessment 2024* reported that UK citizens have high number of traffickers in 2023, and the report shows that they suffer both as victims and as perpetrators and this is followed by other migrants like the Vietnamese, Indian, Romanians and Albanians: "UK nationals are the most

commonly identified victims of modern slavery and human trafficking" (NSA, 2024)<sup>[25]</sup>. There is also a report that African migrants are also engaged in human trafficking in the UK and that is why certain promulgations are made the check the practices. For example, the criminalization of trafficking in persons is in tandem with the Transactional Organized Crime Convention in Trafficking in Persons Protocol and in particular Article 5 of the Trafficking Protocol.<sup>3</sup>

This research is a study of the influence of poverty and social inequality in enhancing human trafficking especially in the United Kingdom. The researcher mirrored into some socioeconomic determinants that might have contributed to the study of human trafficking in the UK. The researcher emphasized the view that the experiences of survivors could be used in transforming their perceptions about life to the point that they can be fully reintegrated into the society. In other words, the researcher answers the questions that pertained to how survivors can be transited from becoming victims to pro-social leaders. Recommendations were made on checking the influence of human traffickers in the UK and some of the models suggested could be applied in other parts of world where relevant.

## 2. Literature Review

With reference to a general statistic on human trafficking, Bales (2007:269)<sup>[4]</sup> noted that there is a statistic that is known regarding the age-range of those trafficked. He said that the boys involved are 12%, women 49%, girls 21% and adult men 18%. The UNODC (2014)<sup>[28]</sup> also reported that in most of the parts of the world, sexual exploitation is a common phenomenon where people exploit others for certain gains. The modus operandi of human trafficking may differ from one region to the other but that it all involves a practice that dehumanizes certain individuals and exploit their integrity (Bales, 2017:269).

After over 140 years of legally abolishing slavery, human trafficking emerged as a new form of modern slavery, enslaving humans into cheap labor and commercial sex through deception, threat, and force (Farrell & Fahv, 2009)<sup>[13]</sup>. Baldwin *et al* (2015) said that the illegal business of human trafficking generates billions of dollars to the traffickers worldwide, meanwhile causing long term and sometimes irreversible physical, social, and psychological damage to the victims. Nevertheless, Alaleeli (2015)<sup>[3]</sup> noted that poor social and economic conditions play to the advantage of traffickers as victims are deceived by traffickers with job offers, exploited to accept minimal pay jobs and others coerced into commercial sex work to generate money for traffickers. Thus, human trafficking contradicts Kantian theory which offers that no human should be used as a mere thing, or as a means to an end. This is because human beings are of intrinsic value, and are therefore an end in themselves (O'Neill, 1993)<sup>[16]</sup>. Importantly, the aforementioned point that human beings should not be used as "things" excludes some commercial sex workers who willingly choose to work in prostitution, or even more specifically, prostitutes who choose to work as professional submissives. Professional submissives "submit" to having their bodies used sexually as a means to an end,

<sup>3</sup> "National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons" <https://naptip.gov.ng/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup> National Strategic Assessment is abbreviated as NSA.

however, will do so in specific consensual and pre-determined contexts (Holt, 2015) <sup>[14]</sup>.

With regard to understanding the concepts of human trafficking, Cockbain and Bowers (2019) <sup>[11]</sup> conducted mainly a conceptual and phenomenological research with specific interest on the context of the United Kingdom where they thought that there are different forms of human trafficking, yet many people seemed to lay emphasis on sex trafficking. They said that sex, labor and domestic servitudes for human tracking are different concepts. They emphasized that the ratio that determines a particular type of human trafficking is not definitive rather the region or the context of the region determines the type of trafficking in persons that is most frequent or more visible. The application of the meaning of human trafficking to our daily lives is vital for this research whereby the experiences of the survivors count a lot more.

Human trafficking is an important subject that is written by various authors and researchers. This has contributed to making the subject relevant among governments agencies, non-governmental organizations and certain individuals. The media and many other influencers are also playing a role in checking the menace of human trafficking. There is a seriocomic effect that pertained to the experiences of the survivors. Beyond writing for survivors which is commendable and beyond recovery for survivors which is very important, Stephen-Smith (2007) <sup>[21]</sup> thought that reintegration of survivors into the society should be the most prioritized. His view of reintegration includes the monitoring and the provision of mental and social support for survivors. This is also a view that forms one of the goals of this research.

There are many reasons why human trafficking is prevalent. In some environments, polygamy which leads to the rise of many children that may not be catered-for and it also result to a rise of divorce are causes people to be vulnerable to being trafficked. One of the impacts of this is fosterages where certain children are given in care to other people for many reasons that includes poverty, cultural obligation, inequality and many more (Verbeet, 2000) <sup>[29]</sup>. Other reasons include economic hardships, ethnic conflicts, political instability, natural disasters, psychological challenges, greed and so on and so forth. Bales (2017) stated one of the reasons for human trafficking to include the notion that HIV/AIDS patients should have sex with children that are innocent and that they might be cured as a result. These and many more have damaged many family ties and many more have decided to join traffickers deliberately.

With reference to the United Kingdom, it is important to note that the region serves as one of the centers for economic growth. It is for this research that people around the world look into going to the UK as economic migrants. There is a general perception among many developing nations that the UK can serve a beautiful 'greener pasture' and many migrants prefer to go to the UK. The large number of people intending to migrate to the UK makes it possible for the people of UK to take certain hard decisions regarding their migration policies. The Supreme Court in its November, 15 ruling made it clear that asylum seekers and refugees and all other migrants that are not properly documented be sent to Rwanda where they will either live or be dispatch to their respective countries. Brexit was also introduced by the Parliament all in an effort to check the influence of migrants in the United Kingdom. The policy

was meant to support the UK to exclude themselves from the European Union. This was to enable them enact their independent migration policies that they will contradict EU's migration policies (Reuters, 2024) <sup>[18]</sup>.

Migrants play a great role in enhancing the activities of human traffickers because of their vulnerability. A number of migrants that travel to the UK do not have proper documentation and even when they travel with proper documents, it does expire to the point that they become illegals migrants. The rules for visa extension are a lot of more difficult for them and as a result, they would prefer to live in the UK as illegal immigrants. These will expose them to force labor, force marriages, prostitution, hunger, poverty, inequality and many more. These factors can at the same time expose migrants and other poor people in the UK to be vulnerable into human trafficking (Agai, 2022) <sup>[2]</sup>. This researcher has been able to demonstrate that both migrants and UK citizens are highly engaged in the practice of human trafficking in the UK (NSA, 2024) <sup>[25]</sup>. The discuss mentioned above is relevant because it highlights some of the major reasons as to why poverty and inequality is vital in the study of human trafficking in the UK.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

There are two major demographics or concepts that inform the theoretical framework of this research. First, the study will be influenced by the narrative theory terms "*Looking Back, Looking Forward*" (Riessman, 2008:1) <sup>[17]</sup>. This narrative frame work was written by Catherine Kohler Riesman when she was illustrating how a teacher of secondary graders of diverse ethnic groups in the United States of America was teaching her students about how to write a narrative and the qualities of a good narrative. According to Riessman (2008) <sup>[17]</sup>, the graders were taught to write narratives as a normal event which happened or are happening in the narrator's life. This means, including the personal experiences of the narrator with specifications of what has happened or is happening, when it happened or is happening and where it occurred or is occurring. Furthermore, Kohler theory stated that a narrative gives identity to the narrator as quoted, "individuals must now construct who they are and how they want to be known" (Riesman, 2008:7) <sup>[17]</sup>. Moreso, it is important to note that a narrative does not only refer to past experiences but also create experiences for the listeners, and on the other hand it can persuade and mobilise others into action (Riesman, 2008) <sup>[17]</sup>.

Catherine Kohler Riesman was a research professor in the Department of Sociology at the prestigious Boston College. She was also an Emerita professor at Boston University. It is important to note that she served as a visiting fellow in the centre for narrative research, University of East London. She earned a Ph.D. in sociomedical science from Columbia University. Riesman has authored four books and numerous articles in book chapters in medical sociology and qualitative methodologies (SAGE, 2017:1) <sup>[20]</sup>. Her views are important for this research because the narrator's experiences can serve as a determinant for further engagement or disengagement in the human trafficking.

Secondly, the researcher proposed that using Bennis and Thomas conceptualization of the term *crucible* (Bennis and Thomas, 2002) <sup>[7]</sup>, the leadership potential bestowed upon each and every victim of human trafficking can be harnessed for the benefit of the general society. This discourse may be

achieved by advancing the debate on the theoretical discusses regarding two concepts: Firstly, the theories according to which leaders are born, and secondly, the theory according to which leaders are made through their experiences of training and nurturing. At this stage, it is pertinent to discuss the backgrounds of Bennis and Thomas in addition to what informed their decision.

Warren Bennis was a distinguished professor of management at the University of Southern California and the author of the book *Still Surprised: A Memoir of a Life in Leadership*, with Patricia Ward Biederman (Jossey-Bass). Meanwhile, Robert J. Thomas was a managing director of Accenture Strategy. He is the author of eight books on leadership and organizational change, including *Crucibles of Leadership*, *Geeks and Geezers* (with Warren Bennis), and *Driving Results through Social Networks* (with Robert L. Cross). What informed their decisions or views was the fact that leadership is not an external attribute neither are leaders born, but leaders can be made from a personal experience. Be it negative or positive, it all depends on one's attitude towards his or her experience.

More so, it is important to note that crucibles meant a conversion of the traumatic experiences of victims of various situations for the good and well-being of the general society (Bennis & Thomas 2007). This concept was derived from the idea of "how defining moments shape the leaders of today and tomorrow as they draw their leadership skills from a personal life experience for the benefit of another with the same experience and for the benefit of humanity at large" (p.1). Bennis and Thomas (2002) [7] concluded that "one of the most reliable indicators and predictors of true leadership is an individual's ability to find meaning in negative events and to learn from even the most trying circumstances. In other words, the skills required to conquer adversity and emerge stronger and more committed than ever are the same ones that make for extraordinary leaders" (Bennis and Thomas, 2002:1) [7]. It might be recalled that one of the importance of this research is to find relevance in the experiences of the survivor for the good of the society. The idea is to attempt to convert the negative experiences of the survivor that will be beneficial to the survivor and the public at large.

Lastly, during this study, the theory of narrative by Riessman: *Looking back, looking forward* and the crucible leadership theory by Bennis and Thomas will be used to investigate the contributions of survivors of human trafficking to other survivors in the United Kingdom. Riessman (2008:5) [17] stated that "narrative can refer to an entire life story woven from threads of interviews, observation, and documentations." It is important to state that, this study is more interested in two things: First, the socioeconomic impacts of human trafficking generated by poverty and inequality in the UK and second, the contribution of survivors to the society. To achieve this, the narrative and crucible theories will be used as major influences.

#### 4. Methodology

The research is literary because the author depended on literatures that writes about the experiences of people that have been trafficked yet survived the menace of human trafficking. In other words, the researcher depended on the narrative method based on results of the experiences shared by three major authors in this research. It is for this reason that the researcher outlined the theory of recovery for

survivors termed "*Looking Back, Looking Forward*" developed by Catherine Kohler Riesman and that of the principles of crucibles developed by Warren Bennis and Robert J. Thomas. Catherine Riesman interviewed survivors thus making her view highly relevant in this research. The researcher is deliberate about using the terms "survivors" and "victims." It is important to differentiate these terms due to the focus of this research. The word survivor is used to describe a person who survives and moves on despite hardships or traumatic experiences (Ben-David, 2020) [6]. On the other hand, a victim is used to describe a person who suffers because of being subjected to a destructive and a traumatic experience (Busch-Armendariz *et al*, 2011) [8].

#### 5. Result Obtained

In this literary study, the researcher found out that poverty and inequality are major contributors to the causes of human trafficking in the United Kingdom. The researcher pointed out that UK citizens are mostly victims and survivors. The contribution this researcher made is that, the researcher pointed out that migrants in the UK stand vulnerable to being trafficked and that the major reason for this pertained to the perception that UK is a greener pasture and also due to internal problems within the migrants' respective countries of origin. The experiences of most migrant-survivors are not mostly recorded or known because many of them are undocumented and because of pressing demand for them to be richer or make money so they can assist their families in their respective countries. This research is important because it considers the view that trafficked survivors can be rehabilitated and the best can be made out of them. Many other authors agree to the view that survivors can be reintegrated into the society and the best can be found in them.

Uwafiokun Idemudia, Nnenna Okoli, Mary Goitom and Sylvia Bawa (2021) [15] wrote on *life after trafficking: Reintegration experiences of human trafficking survivors in Nigeria* in which they provided an update on the subject of the reintegration of survivors. Their research is centered on the current governmental and non-governmental organizations' efforts in providing support for survivors who were at one time trafficked and rescued. They admitted that there is a poor funding and rehabilitation effort on survivors and that this has led to many women being re-trafficked and many others traumatized. Their major research goal is to provide and suggest ways at which survivors can be reintegration in the society more effectively so they can be relevant to the society and to themselves.

The authors (Idemudia, Okoli, Goitom and Bawa, 2021) [15] further expatiated that there is a need to provide both mental and physical care for survivors so that they can be sustained. They mentioned other aspects that requires urgency for the provision of support to survivors. The areas mentioned include the need to cater for the economic well-being of survivors, the educational and skill development among survivors, safety and security of survivors, the need to create a social environment for the survivors where they can develop their interpersonal skills and finally the need to reconsider and satisfy the living conditions of survivors (Idemudia, Okoli, Goitom and Bawa, 2021) [15]. In general, the results obtained from this research indicates that survivors could be assisted and that if given the proper support, they could become society builders rather than society destroyers.

## 6. Discussion of Result

Human trafficking in the UK can be equated to modern slavery where victims are forced into forced labor and sexual abuses. The experiences many victims have been harsh and the researcher pointed that poverty and inequality are major factors that contributes to human trafficking in the UK. Among many of the researches done, it has been found that victims find it difficult to come up and reveal the pain of their experiences due to shame and other cultural reasons. This made it difficult for researchers to come up with the exact estimate of human traffickers in the UK thus researchers had to depend on reported, referral and revealed cases. The main idea behind this research targets creating more awarenesses on the activities of perpetrators and survivors as this can help promote studies regarding the subject.<sup>4</sup>

Greater awareness, increases in reporting and improvements in police recording are likely to have contributed to the increases seen in potential victim numbers since the introduction of the modern slavery Acts across the UK in 2015. For example: The Modern Slavery Helpline received a 68% increase in calls and submissions in the year ending December 2018, compared with the previous year. There were 5,144 modern slavery offences recorded by the police in England and Wales in the year ending March 2019, an increase of 51% from the previous year. The number of potential victims referred through the UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM) increased by 36% to 6,985 in the year ending December 2018. Collecting legal evidence for modern slavery offences can be difficult, and the cases are among the most challenging and complex to prosecute.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the researcher emphasized that though human trafficking might be caused by poverty, inequality and other socioeconomic factors, the experiences of the survivors can be used in making them have a new life away from trafficking. The researcher pointed that survivors could be reintegrated into the society. A support is required from both government and affected communities where a sustained monitoring of survivors is vital.

Moreso, this research is an emphasis on resilience as one of the best support systems that can help survivors. It is on this note that Kendra Cherry (2023) <sup>[10]</sup> explained that people that choose to be resilient are not naturally immune to difficulties or anxiety or grief but that they prefer to apply skills that resist their dependency on the problem, instead, they look for healthy ways to addressing their problems. This research also studies the process of reintegration with emphasis on the survivor's self-esteem as he/she values himself/herself internally or intrapersonally and extrapersonally. This makes the idea of monitoring survivors important.

In a presentation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, an emphasis has been made on the subject of monitoring trafficked survivors using a toolkit or guides and regulations to aid their reintegration process. The target of the research pertained to listening to survivors so that their reports and recommendations could be used to address their

needs and develop a guide for subsequent reintegration procedures.<sup>6</sup> The challenge of this approach is that the guides or tenets for reintegration produced may hardly be contextualized for the use of survivors in other regions of the world apart from the UK. This research target possible survival techniques for victims in the UK and perhaps other European nations.

## 7. Conclusion

The researcher pointed out that the UK is one of the centers that traffickers find good for their illicit activities. The research added that while UK citizens are involved in human trafficking. One major contribution of this researcher is that the involvements of migrants in human trafficking are emphasized. The research is basically library research in which theories of experiences are emphasized. The research focus on the views that experiences can be used to discover, develop and nurture leaders. The view to reintegrate and support survivors is also promoted. The research is aimed at teaching that survivors that remain resilient can be supported into realizing their full potentials in life. Most important, their experiences that have been negative could be used to find reasons into making them realize their leadership potentials. The experiences of the survivors create blocks, instinct, techniques and abilities that serves as resistant and guides to life challenges. The "will" of the survivor is important in this regard. If the survivor is willing, he or she can use his/her experiences to teach and help other survivors to grow and contribute to societal development. The 17<sup>th</sup> century writer John Donne noted that "no man is an island" and this phrase can be used to encourage survivors that each and every one of them can have positive contribution to make to the society.<sup>7</sup>

## 8. Recommendations

The government and other non-governmental organizations should provide support for survivors and provide facilities for their reintegration into the society. Both formal and informal media agencies should support the reintegration of survivors into the society and this can be achieved by continues education of the general public on the need to accept all survivors with a view that they can contribute to societal development.

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