Unwelcome: a study on the employees’ perspective on Sex Trafficking in the Hotel industry in Amsterdam.

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Declaration of Authorship

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Abstract

Sex trafficking is a form of modern slavery which includes the sexual exploitation of individuals for personal gain. It currently affects 4 million people globally, and around 9 thousand in Europe. Although it affects individuals of all genders, races and sexual orientations, women and young girls have been recognised as the most vulnerable segment, accounting for 72% of victims in Europe. Along these lines, the majority of suspected and convicted sex traffickers in Europe are male individuals. It has been described as a discrete and subtle crime, hidden in plain sight, affecting every facet of society. In the tourism industry, the most affected segment is the hotel sector, which possesses some characteristics which act as enablers of sex trafficking. However, previous research has failed to properly identify such characteristics. In fact, sex trafficking is generally a highly neglected topic in research. To fill the current research gap, the thesis aimed at identifying, from employees´ perspective, the factors of the hotel industry which act as sex trafficking enablers in Amsterdam. The latter was chosen as focus area mainly because of its legislation on prostitution, which was legalised in 1999. Previous research has recognised such legalisation as a challenge for institutions fighting sex trafficking, and various authors have recognised the importance of scientific research to solve the issue in the area. Through 15 individual interviews and two online questionnaires, this thesis identified 15 factors which act as crime enablers in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. They have been divided into macro, meso or micro level, depending on their nature. Among the main findings there are: the impact of current legislations, the police, hospitality and transiency, training and ease of access. These findings stand out because redeemed as having the most potential in contributing to fighting the issue, if properly taken into consideration. They summarize the need for a proper support system designed by the police and the government, which takes into consideration hospitality and transiency as characteristics of the hotel industry exploited by sex traffickers and takes a closer look at hotels with inappropriate training and ease of access to the hotel rooms, as these might be more susceptible to sex trafficking. The thesis is descriptive in nature; thus, it does not aim at finding solutions to the findings. The thesis concludes by giving suggestions of further research, such as adopting a strategic approach to find solutions to the identified factors.

Keywords: Sex trafficking; Hotel Industry; employee´s perspective; Netherlands; Amsterdam
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Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis discusses the factors which act as crime enablers for sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. The following sections set the scene for the thesis by providing background, context, research area, aim, objectives, and research questions.

1.1 Background

The word “slavery” is usually used when discussing the possession and trade of human beings, abolished circa 200 years ago (Reuters, 2007). However, nowadays’ society is pained by a contemporary form of slavery, hidden in plain sight: human trafficking. Human trafficking is defined as the exploitation of human beings for commercial gain (The European Parliament and the Council, 2011). It is an umbrella term which includes begging and petty crimes; forced labour and sexual exploitation (European Commission, 2014). The latter, also referred to as sex trafficking, is the most common and lucrative. Sex trafficking is defined as a commercial sexual act where the person performing it is being forced, or has not yet reached 18 years of age (Lusby, 2015). In other words, a victim of sex trafficking is performing sexual acts – such as prostitution – against his/her will. Definite statistics on sex trafficking are unobtainable because only cases that come to attention to the police are known, but most victims go undetected (Graaf, 2018). In Europe alone, between 2017 and 2018, 14,145 victims of human trafficking were registered, of which over half (60%) were trafficked for sexual purposes. About three-quarters (72%) of victims were women and young girls. On the other hand, 73% of the suspected and 69% of the convicted prosecutors were male. (European Commission & Directorate General fr Migration and Home Affairs, 2020). In 2014, in the most developed member states of the EU, human trafficking produced an annual profit of 46,9 billion US$ (ILO, 2020), making it the biggest source of income for criminals operating transnationally in Europe (NRM, 2013). These statistics are important because sex trafficking is usually portrayed as something that happens elsewhere, in less-developed countries. Contrary to public belief, sex trafficking is a global issue that affects any facet of society (Hillman, 2019).

Prostitution, on the other hand, is the act of freely choosing to sell sex for compensation, usually of monetary nature. While sex trafficking is considered a crime globally, there are different views and legislations regarding prostitution, depending on the state. Some argue that the legalisation of prostitution equals sexual liberation, while others think of prostitution as a form of violence (Batsyukova, 2007a). To escape unnecessary biases, the research will focus the discussion on what is globally illegal: sex trafficking. In fact, the thesis does not have the aim of convincing the reader on whether or not prostitution should be legal and will discuss prostitution only in relation to how its exploitation affects sex trafficking. This concept will be further addressed in the literature review.

In the tourism industry, the hospitality and hotel sector are the most affected by sex trafficking (Lusby, 2015). In Europe alone, it is estimated that 1.14 million victims are trafficked through the hospitality industry, of which 80% are trafficked for sexual exploitation (Sowon, 2020). As the US National Human Trafficking Hotline, Polaris, (2018) pointed out, sex traffickers, are usual to exploit certain characteristics of the industry to commit their crimes, such as pricing.
or allowance of privacy. Paraskevas and Brookes (2018), in fact, go as far to define the hotel industry as “vulnerable” to sex trafficking.

1.2 Rationale and Research Gap

In literature, the topics of human and sex trafficking have been lacking because the scale of the issue has been neglected for years (Weitzer, 2012) Only in the last decade, research on the issues has increased, focusing mainly on eastern or southern Europe (Surtees, 2008) or Asia (Huda, 2006).

Similarly, the awareness regarding issue of human or sex trafficking in the hotel industry has recently increased. However, the topic has been tackled mainly through secondary data, through the analysis of previous newspaper articles or reports, such as the study by Carolin, Lindsay and Victor (2015), who discussed sex trafficking in the tourism industry globally. Similarly, Graaf (2018) investigated sex trafficking in the hotel industry in the Netherlands, but based his research on a similar analysis of secondary data.

Researchers have also been investigating the characteristics of the industry that allow human or sex traffickers to exploit victims. For example, Bales (2006) studied the tourism industry’s characteristics which enable human trafficking and identified the increasing level of corruption as an incentive of human trafficking in the tourism industry. Moreover, Crane (2013) has studied the characteristics of the hospitality industry that act as crime enablers for human trafficking. Tavella (2008), on the other hand, studied the characteristics of the industry and their implications on sex trafficking, but focused on one major event: the 2006 World Cup in Germany. The most in-depth study was carried out by Paraskevas and Brookes (2018), on which this thesis is based. They studied the characteristics of the hospitality sector that act as crime enablers for human trafficking in Romania, Finland, and the United Kingdom. Little to no research, utilising primary data, has been carried out in the Netherlands. Therefore, to narrow the focus and try and fill the current research gap, this thesis focuses on the hotel industry in Amsterdam and its relation to sex trafficking, from hotel employees´ perspectives.

Hotel employees such as front-office receptionists or managers have been recognised as the one who most come in contact with the issue of sex trafficking in the industry (Skarhed, 2010), thus their perspective on the issue is particularly valuable.

1.3 Research Area

Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands, which is one of the nine European Countries where prostitution is entirely legal (Cho et al., 2013; Scoular et al., 2008; Skarhed, 2010). Since 1999, when prostitution got legalized, sex crime rates have decreased (Bisschop et al., 2017). However, the current laws have been recognised as challenging for institutions fighting sex trafficking (Huisman & Kleemans, 2014). In fact, the Netherlands is one of the five member states of the EU with the highest number of registered victims (European Commission & Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2020). As Huisman & Kleemans (2014) point out, the Netherlands is currently in need of further research-based solutions to fight sex trafficking in the Country and, arguably, in its hotel industry.
Moreover, Amsterdam’s destination image is highly dependent on its sex business (Dai et al., 2019). Its red-light district is the main sex tourism destination in Europe, and one of the most notorious in the world (Valenta, 2019). Therefore, considering the legality of prostitution; the need for further research, and its destination image, Amsterdam was particularly chosen as Research Area for this thesis.

1.4 Aim and objectives

The thesis aims to investigate the factors which act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry in Amsterdam, from an employee’s perspective.

To fulfill the aim, the thesis will tackle the following objectives:

- Investigate the opinions and level of knowledge of hotel employees in Amsterdam regarding the environmental factors that have an impact on sex trafficking in the hotel industry (macro level)
- Investigate the opinions and level of knowledge of hotel employees in Amsterdam regarding the characteristics of the hotel industry that facilitate sex trafficking (meso level)
- Investigate the opinions and level of knowledge of hotel employees in Amsterdam regarding the characteristics of the hotel they work in, that facilitate sex trafficking (micro level)

The tourism industry, like any other industry that involves the interaction of people, is affected on three different levels: macro, meso and micro. The objectives cover all three levels of analysis. Macro refers to the large systems, such as legal systems, the environment, and the economy. The meso level regards the medium systems, such as the interaction between people, communities, or ethnic groups. Lastly, micro refers to the small systems, such as the study on individuals (Dopfer et al., 2004). These concepts will be further explained in the literature review, in section 2.1.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to fulfil the aim and objectives, the study will aim at answering the following research questions:

1. From a hotel employee’s perspective, what are the environmental factors (macro level) which act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry in Amsterdam?
2. From a hotel employee’s perspective, what are the factors of the hotel industry (meso level) that act as sex trafficking enablers in the industry?
3. From a hotel employee’s perspective, what are the characteristics of the single hotel (micro level) that act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry?

The research questions will be answered using a qualitative approach, which is the most appropriate when studying a phenomenon relative to the studied group (Lowhorn, 2007), as in this case. The data was gathered through 15 semi-structured interviews and two online questionnaires. The rationale of the methodology will be further explained in Chapter 4.
1.6 Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of the research, sex trafficking in Europe and in the hotel industry, and identified a research gap. It also set the context of the research by outlining the research area, aim, objectives, and research questions. It provides some background and context, necessary for the understanding of the following chapters. Chapter two is the literature review chapter, and Chapter three outlines the Theoretical Framework of the thesis. In Chapter four, the methods used in the research are discussed. Chapter five is the findings and discussion chapter before Chapter six concludes the thesis.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the key concepts related to the aim of the research. At the end of this chapter, the reader should have an understanding of all the topics that are at the base of the research, and the correlation between them. This understanding is essential in order to understand the rest of the thesis.

2.1 Macro, Meso and Micro

“Micro”, “meso” and “macro” refer to the levels of analysis utilised in research. Micro-level analysis refers to the study of individuals, and individual-level interactions such as their feelings or intentions. Meso-level analysis studies the interaction between people, such as groups or teams. Lastly, macro-level analysis focuses on political or administrative environment such as cultures or regulations (Maxwell, 2019).

In tourism studies, the micro-level aims to explain individual tourist behaviours or interests, relating them to existing theories of psychology or motivation. At the meso level, tourism researchers seek to explain the behaviour of tourists as aggregates, such as the use of social media for travel. Lastly, the macro-level in tourism studies relates to the environmental factors that influence the movement of people for travel (Cooper & Hall, 2008).

This study applies the micro-meso-macro framework to layer and structure the findings of the research into three different levels. As the objectives and research questions outlined (see section 1.4 and 1.5), at the micro section will be placed the factors of hotels in Amsterdam that sex traffickers exploit to force women into prostitution. At the meso level, those factors related to the hotel industry as a whole, and non-associable to any specific hotel. Lastly, at the macro level, those factors that are external to the industry, but that impact it directly.

Understanding the three levels of analysis is essential because this study will utilise them to give a structure to the findings. The next section will continue explaining the concepts which are at the base of the research by giving a broad overview of what the hospitality and hotel industry are.

2.2 The hospitality and hotel industry

The most traditional definitions of the hospitality industry describe it as “the provision of food and/or drink and/or accommodation in a service context” (Lashley, 2000). The industry therefore includes restaurants, as well as hotels of all scales and bed and breakfasts (b&bs) (Xotels, 2020). The hotel industry is a major segment of the hospitality industry, and it can be divided into four additional segments: (1) full-service structures, such as resorts and 4 or 5-star hotels, able to provide a variety of services to the guests; (2) select-service structures, which include 3 or 4-star hotels, bed & breakfasts and airport hotels, which deliver a selective number of services; (3) limited service hotels, such as hostels or motels, which provide limited services and, lastly (4) themed hotels, which aim at delivering a specific kind of service, such as Casino hotels or Cruise Hotels (Soeg, 2020). Moreover, some hotels are part of a hotel chain, which is a company that administrates a series of hotels (Xotels, 2020). In that case, they are referred to as “Chain Hotels” or “Chain-affiliated hotels”.

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The previously stated definition focuses on the economic dimension of the hospitality industry and limits it to its exchange of goods – in this case, the services – between suppliers and consumers (who, in the industry, are often referred to as “guests”). However, the industry’s nature is not merely commercial. The referral of consumers as guests hints at the second nature of the hospitality industry, which differentiates it from other industries. In fact, as researchers point out, the industry’s core goes beyond the economic and commercial activity but is also based on anthropological and social values. In other words, hospitality is about welcoming strangers, sharing and exchanging, and being altruist (Lusby, 2015).

Moreover, Darke and Gurney (2000) define the hospitality industry as commercialised domestic labour where the relationship between host and guests is particularly fragile, because the guest is continuously scrutinizing and judging every action of the host, who, in counterpart, holds the burden of risk and impression management (Darke & Gurney, 2000). Considering that the interaction between the two parties determines the success or failure of the business, it is no surprise that hospitality leaders have been trying different strategies to strengthen the relationship between guest and host and ensure a satisfying service.

The Dutch hotel industry is considered to be one of the most successful and flourished. As a result of over-tourism, a partial “hotel-stop” has been implemented. Moreover, in the Netherlands chain penetration is high in scale, with 60% of hotel rooms belonging to a Chain (Horwath HTL, 2019). Amsterdam’s hotel industry is characterised by different types of demand, both leisure – concentrated in the city centre – and commercial, in the business districts in the outskirts of the city. That allowed Amsterdam’s hotels to achieve an aggregate of around 80% of occupancy rate in 2018, which was one of the highest rates in Europe (Hotel Valuation Index, 2021). The hotel industry in Amsterdam is therefore boomed and flourished, even despite the COVID-19 pandemic. As a tourism destination, Amsterdam mainly relies on interregional and domestic tourism, which will allow for the market to recover from the pandemic rather rapidly compared to other destination in the Netherlands and in Europe (CBRE, 2021).

The thesis’ aim focuses on the factors of the hotel industry in Amsterdam which act as enablers of sex trafficking. Therefore, understanding its intricacies, structure and characteristics is essential in order to understand the findings. The next section will continue explaining the base concepts of the thesis by giving definitions and statistics on sex trafficking.

2.3 Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking is defined as a commercial sexual act where the person performing it is being forced, or has not yet reached 18 years of age (Lusby, 2015). In Europe between 2013 and 2014, there were about 16,000 registered victims of human trafficking, of which over half (67%) were exploited for sexual purposes (European Parliament, 2017). Between 2017 and 2018, more than 15 thousand victims were registered, of which 60% were trafficked for sexual purposes. Although from 2013 to 2017 there has been a slight decline, the issue persists. The five EU member states with the highest number of registered victims were France, Italy, Netherlands, Germany and Romania. According to the European Parliament (2020), the most targeted segment is women and young girls, which currently account for 72% of victims of sex trafficking in Europe (ibid), while male have generally been recognised as the majority of sex
traffickers (Olsson, 2019). Although such statistics can be used to give an idea on the size of the issue, they are not entirely accurate. As Cruyff et al. (2017) highlight, having accurate statistics on human and sex trafficking is extremely difficult, as many victims go undetected. In criminology, such issue is known as “hidden figures in crime” (ibid).

The account of women and young girls being the main target of sex traffickers has sex trafficking a highly gendered issue. Women tend to be more vulnerable to sex trafficking if found in a situation of poverty or unemployment, have low levels of education or have been previously suffered from physical or sexual violence in a domestic context (Meshkovska et al., 2015). However, women may not be in a situation of poverty but still end up being trafficked when searching for a way to make more money. Recruitment is therefore highly dependent on the level of vulnerability of the victim. Studies have recognised two main kind of recruitments: the first includes a pimp – the recruiter, or sex trafficker – who gains the woman’s trust, offers to be her boyfriend or take her hand in marriage. Her emotional vulnerability then gets exploited when the pimp will ask her to perform sex work to support the couple. Although it may seem initially consensual, the pimp often uses intimidation, manipulation, threats, coercion and violence to keep the victim in the sex business (Meshkovska et al., 2015). On the other hand, in the second scenario the victim is offered employment. In this case, the vulnerability exploited is merely economic. However, despite the promises, the victim never gets monetary retribution for her work, and is forced to remain in the field against her will (Department of State, 2019; Meshkovska et al., 2015).

Having an understanding on the meaning of sex trafficking is essential to understand the meaning of the thesis. To highlight such concept, the next section will discuss the concept of prostitution – correlated to the concept of consent. In fact, sex trafficking and prostitution are terms sometimes mistakenly thought as synonyms (Batsyukova, 2007). Therefore, the next section aims at providing a clear view on what prostitution is, in order to understand its difference from sex trafficking.

2.4 Prostitution and consent

Prostitution is the act of freely choosing to sell sex for compensation, usually of monetary nature (Chriskas, 2017). While sex trafficking is considered a crime globally, there are different views and legislations regarding prostitution, depending on the state. In Europe, prostitution legislation is highly diverse. In eight European Countries, prostitution is completely legal. In the other states, the degree of legalisation varies (Cho et al., 2013; Scoular et al., 2008; Skarhed, 2010). In the Netherlands prostitution is completely legal and, since its legalisation, the level of sex crimes in the Netherlands reduced (Bisschop et al., 2017).

Whether or not prostitution should be legalised is a topic of discussion of every government. Some researchers argue that legalising prostitution means giving women sexual liberation and protection. On the other hand, others believe that prostitution is a crime on women, and that legalising it does more harm to them than good and normalises a form of oppression on women (Carson & Edwards, 2011).

The main discussion focus is therefore on the concept of consent. By definition, sex trafficking and prostitution differ because the victims of the former do not consent on being prostitutes but
are rather forced into it. In the case of the latter, on the other hand, consent to sexual performances is given (Batsyukova, 2007). In other words, prostitution turns into sex trafficking when the prostitute is performing his/her job without giving consent. However, the debate stems from the idea on whether people in the sex industry – mostly women – are actually emotionally consenting to their work. In other words, can consent to sex be given because of economic needs? Or is economic instability another way women are forced into prostitution? As Gallagher (2010) points out, the debate is on ‘whether non-coerced, adult migrant prostitution should be included in the definition of trafficking’. However, those who believe that consent can be given to prostitution reiterate the idea that women are indeed capable of making their own choices. In media and literature, there is a tendency of describing women as deprived of the ability to make choices. Pro-prostitution literates try to dismantle this idea, and highlight the power of women to freely choose on their body (Meshkovska et al., 2015).

Finally, there are those who sway from the conversation on consent and base the discussion on prostitution and sex trafficking on the presence or absence of violence. They suggest that exploitation occurs at different levels, and each level should be treated distinctively. Therefore, a prostitute might not be considered a victim of sex trafficking, but still suffer violence and thus be in need of help (Meshkovska et al., 2015).

Prostitution is therefore an intricate and debatable topic, both in literature and criminology studies. In this paper, prostitution was outlined because clearly interconnected to sex trafficking. However, to escape unnecessary biases, it will not aim at convincing the reader whether prostitution should be legal. Instead, it will focus on sex trafficking, and discuss prostitution only in relation to how its exploitation affects sex trafficking. In fact, as Batsyukova (2007) stated, prostitution itself does not have any implication with sex trafficking, it is rather the exploitation of prostitution to be problematic. This concept will be further explained in the next section, outlining the links between sex trafficking and prostitution.

2.5 Links between sex trafficking and prostitution

Despite the above-mentioned differences, sex trafficking and prostitution are linked by different aspects and for different reasons. The following subsections will go through the existing literature that explains the correlation between the two factors.

2.5.1 Prostitution increases gendered demand.

Trafficking involves all sexual orientations and identities, but women are the most affected segment. Leidholdt (2004) defines sex trafficking as “the merchandising of women’s bodies for the sexual gratification of men”, because the demand is constituted by basically only men (Olsson, 2019). The discrepancy in demand is the result of pre-conceived, patriarchal, and sexist opinions. Women are the most trafficked because in society they are seen and portrayed as sexual objects to take advantage of (Garrick, 2005). This image is supported and encouraged by the excessive rate of prostitution, and therefore needs to be monitored and diminished as much as possible in order to solve the issue. As O’Connor and Grainne (2006) state, if men stopped thinking they have the right to buy women’s body as a commodity, sex trafficking of women would probably cease to exist. Stopping the exploitation of prostitution and the continuous portraying of women as sexual objects is an effective way in combating and
diminishing sex trafficking. Prostitution and sex trafficking are therefore directly correlated because the image of women portrayed by the former increases the demand for the latter.

2.5.2 Prostitution creates a safer environment for sex traffickers.

Limoncelli (2009) stated that the legalisation of prostitution does not interfere with the increase or decrease of sex trafficking, because there is no link between them. However, studies prove that legalised prostitution can actually increases sex trafficking (Cho et al., 2013) because it creates a safer environment for sex traffickers to commit their crimes. As the Swedish Government stated “International trafficking in human beings could not flourish but for the existence of local prostitution markets” (Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment, and Communications., 2004). In this sense, prostitution is linked to sex trafficking because it allows sex traffickers to commit their crimes hidden in plain sight. In a utopic world without prostitution, identifying cases of sex trafficking would be much easier. The fact that prostitutes exist at such high rate, and the fact that they are visibly very similar to women being trafficked, makes it easier for sex traffickers to commit their crimes. As previously mentioned, it is not the single prostitute that is the cause of increase of sex trafficking, rather the exploitation of prostitution.

In other words, taking both of these factors into account, the presence and exploitation of prostitution allows and increases human trafficking for sexual purposes. Moreover, as Harvard Law School’s (2014) reported, in countries where prostitution is legal, the sex market expands. As a result, human trafficking inflows are also higher, especially in higher-income Countries (ibid) such as the Netherlands. To reiterate, throughout this study, prostitution will be discussed only in relation to sex trafficking. However, to understand the findings and discussion in Chapter 5, it is important to keep in mind that the presence of prostitution in a place, Country or industry directly affects the presence of sex trafficking in that same place, Country or industry. In other words, any factor which increases prostitution, also increases sex trafficking.

The previous sections covered the concepts of human and sex trafficking, prostitution and consent. Having understood these concepts, the next sections will relate them to the thesis’ research questions and discuss sex trafficking in the hotel industry and in Amsterdam.

2.6 Sex trafficking in the hotel industry

Within the tourism industry, the hospitality and transportation industry have been recognised as the most susceptible to sex trafficking. Lusby (2015) described them as conscious or unconscious participator to sex trafficking, highlighting their potential contribution. In fact, stakeholders are usually unaware of the fact that victims of sex trafficking are often brought to hotels and moved through the industry (Carolin et al., 2015). In Europe alone, 1.14 million victims of human trafficking are trafficked through the hospitality industry, of which 80% are trafficked for sexual exploitation (Sowon, 2020).

Polaris, the U.S. Human Trafficking hotline, explained that hotel rooms are usually used as confinement places for victims, so that sex traffickers can bring clients in and out easily (Polaris, 2018). Contrary to common knowledge, these instances do not necessarily happen in cheap motels, but they can affect even big-chain or luxurious hotels, that allow a good balance between quality and price, are usually positioned in a convenient location, and ensure safety.
and anonymity (ibid). Another hotel characteristic that has been recognised as a crime enabler for sex trafficking is the privacy and secrecy that hotels allow, which is exploited by traffickers to keep the crime discrete (Banks, 2020; Coughlan, 2019; Sowon, 2020).

The previous sections had the aim of introducing the base concepts of the thesis. By discussing sex trafficking in the hotel industry, this section went in-depth on the specific topics at the base of the research questions. Lastly, next section will discuss sex trafficking in Amsterdam, and sex trafficking in the Dutch hotel industry.

2.7 Sex trafficking in Amsterdam

The Netherlands is one of the eight European Countries where prostitution is completely legalized (Cho et al., 2013; Scoular et al., 2008; Skarhed, 2010). Section 2.5 already discussed the links between sex trafficking and prostitution, and how the exploitation and presence of the latter causes an increase of the former. In this section, however, the paper considers the level of sex trafficking in Amsterdam (or, more generally, in The Netherlands), in order to relate it to the research area of the thesis.

In 2018, the Walk Free Foundation published their most recent Global Slavery Index report, which discusses most Countries’ individual efforts in reducing human trafficking. The Netherlands was placed as the Country with the most government respond to the issue (Walk Free Foundation, 2018). Such recognition was also supported by the 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report, which placed The Netherlands as “Tier 1”, thus highlighting the government’s efforts in investigating cases, delivering victim assistance and shelter, and increasing resources to fight the issue (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Nonetheless, sex trafficking in the Netherlands still happens. In fact, as Huisman and Kleemans (2014) highlighted, fighting sex trafficking in a legalised prostitution market such as The Netherlands is particularly challenging, because it makes it harder to think that prostitutes could be victims of sex trafficking. In 2017, CoMensha, the Dutch national Coordination Centre against Human Trafficking, reported 958 victims of human trafficking, of which the majority (72%) were women, and of which the majority (58%) were trafficked for sexual exploitation (European Commission, 2021). In 2012, the police registered 1711 victims of human trafficking in the Netherlands, of which 1455 cases were related to sex trafficking (Graaf, 2018). Furthermore, as Graaf (2018) stated, it is assumed that out of the 20,000 people working as prostitutes in the Netherlands, 9,000 are exploited, which accounts for nearly half of them. As these statistics show, even in a Country where the Government is fully meeting the minimum requirements in the fight against sex trafficking (Walk Free Foundation, 2018), sex trafficking still happens, and it still mainly affects women.

To summarize, sex trafficking in the Netherlands is an ongoing issue, which makes it an issue in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. As previously discussed, retrieving accurate statistics on sex trafficking is nearly impossible because most victims go undetected (Cruyff et al., 2017). As a result, statistics on sex trafficking in the hotel industry in the Netherlands are also very difficult to collect.

The Dutch National report on trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes stated that prostitution in the Netherlands is shifting from more visible forms such as window prostitution
or brothels, to less visible forms of prostitution such as hotel and home prostitution (NRM, 2013). Considering Graaf’s (2018) claims that almost half of the prostitutes in the Netherlands are exploited – it should be safe to assume that sex trafficking in the Dutch hotel industry is a current and growing issue. This issue was also recognised by the Dutch authorities, who have asked hotel sector stakeholders for help in the fight against sex trafficking. Among the forms of help is the continuous raise of awareness, training and education on the issue, since most stakeholders seem to still be unaware of the signs (NL Times, 2020).

2.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined the areas of literature relevant for this research. To summarize, it has been shown that the hospitality industry is an economic activity that provides accommodation and/or food and/or drink away from home (Lashley, 2000). The hotel industry is the main medium sex traffickers use to commit their crimes. The factors which act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry might derive by the external environment, by facets of the industry or by the single characteristics of the hotel chain unit. These three levels are respectively characterized as macro, meso and micro, which are the three levels of analysis utilized in research (Maxwell, 2019). In Amsterdam, such factors may vary because, differently from other countries, prostitution is legal (Cho et al., 2013; Scoular et al., 2008; Skarhed, 2010). Although opposite concepts, prostitution and sex trafficking are interconnected. While the former implies some sort of consent to sex work, victims of sex trafficking are forced into prostitution (Batsyukova, 2007). However, the presence and exploitation of prostitution still affects sex trafficking by increasing the gendered demand (O’Connor & Grainne, 2006) and creating a safer environment for sex traffickers to operate in (Cho et al., 2013). Although legalised prostitution lowered the amount of sex crimes in the Netherlands (Bisschop et al., 2017), Harvard Law School (2014) found that in Countries where prostitution is legal, sex trafficking rates increase. However, the Netherlands has been found to be the Country with the most governmental response to the issue, placing it as “Tier 1” by the 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Nonetheless, sex trafficking in the Netherlands still happens (European Commission, 2021) and, although current reports are lacking, it can be assumed that the hotel industry in the Netherlands is also enabling sex trafficking (NL Times, 2020).

The lack of proper reports remarks the need for more scientific-based research on the sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. This thesis utilises qualitative methods to identify the factors of the hotel industry in Amsterdam which act as crime enablers of sex trafficking. Before going in-depth on the adopted methodology, the next Chapter will discuss the Theoretical Framework of the thesis.
Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework

The literature review aimed at outlining the concepts at the base of the research, in order to deliver the reader with the necessary knowledge to understand the following Chapters. In this Chapter, the Theoretical framework aims at outlining the theories that explain why the research problem exists (Abend, 2008). In this case, the theoretical framework will discuss displacement theory and feminist theories, to explain why sex trafficking of women happens in the hotel industry. Lastly, it will perform a comparative analysis of the two theories and outline their advantages and disadvantages.

3.1 Displacement theory

Guerette and Bowers (2009) describe displacement theory by “the relocation of a crime from one place, time, target, offense, tactic, or offender to another as a result of some crime-prevention initiative”. In other words, it tackles the intricacies of crimes, and explains how criminals change their tactics continuously in order to not be caught. Repetto (1976) outlined the five most common types of displacements: time, tactic, target, place, and crime type.

Displacement theory can help identify and explain the intricacies of hotel characteristics related to sex trafficking more in depth. For instance, Paraskevas and Brookes (2018) mention that smaller hotels have a harder time controlling sex trafficking, probably because of lower resources or help from external organisations. On the other hand, the Human Trafficking Foundation (2018) mentions that the fact that different hotels have different organisational structures makes it harder to implement a cohesive plan to fight the issue. In particular, they mention how some hotels, mostly bigger hotels, use outsourced labour – i.e. housekeeping services – which might make it harder to implement cohesive managerial practices to fight sex trafficking. In other words, both bigger and smaller hotels have their own individual struggles when fighting sex trafficking in the hospitality industry. Displacement theory helps further analyse this notion, and explains how, after exploiting a certain hotel’s characteristic – i.e. a small hotel’s lack of resources - sex traffickers will change their location and exploit i.e. big hotel’s struggles in applying cohesive managerial practices.

Based on this theory, any hotel can possess factors which sex traffickers will exploit to commit their crimes. Such notion is important to remember throughout the reading of Chapter 5, especially when the Findings at the micro level are displayed because, as displacement theory points out, two hotels with opposite characteristics might be equally enabling sex trafficking.

3.2 Feminist theory

Literature which discusses violence against women is usually derived from feminist theories. Feminist theory is a perspective which aims at understanding roles and experiences of individuals based on gender (Miriam, 2005). As previously discussed, sex trafficking is a highly gendered issue: not only it affects women at a disproportionately higher rate, but it is also perpetuated by men at a just as disproportional rate. In this sense, sex trafficking stems from other systematic issues, and is the consequence of the current patriarchal society. Historically and systematically, women are portrayed and perceived as less than men on an intellectual, social and personal level (Donovan, 2012). As Donovan (2012) explains, the US – and arguably, the European – fundamental basis of society are built on the idea that the male
should dominate the family, and the woman is consequently inferior. Such power dynamic will then translate to society, where women still currently do not possess equality. Sex trafficking reinforces this idea. As a gendered issue, it needs gendered solutions. Avoiding feminist debates when discussing sex trafficking, in order to include all genders and sexual orientations means averting from the right path towards proper solutions to solve the issue. Based on this concept, feminist theories are at the base of the whole thesis, mainly Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion, as it will revolve around the concept of women being the victims, and men being the perpetrators.

In sex trafficking-related literature, feminist theory has been largely used in defence of radical feminists’ abolitionism views. In fact, feminist theories divide into two main currents: liberal feminists, who advocate for pro-sex or sex positivism: a current which advocates for a woman’s free choice of sex work. On the other hand, radical or neo-abolitionist perspectives argue that prostitution cannot be entirely consensual (Gerassi, 2015). Such concept was already previously discussed in section 2.4 and is at the heart of feminist theories when discussing sex trafficking. Liberal and radical feminists usually have opposite views on most feminist debates. However, as feminist theorists point out, most population does not fully associate with either, but rather considers both views as equally valid (Gerassi, 2015). In fact, although legalised prostitution eases and increases sex trafficking (Harvard Law School, 2014), a more controlled and legalised sex market has been proven to lower cases of rape and sex crimes (Bisschop et al., 2017).

Based on these notions, to reiterate, this thesis does not aim at defining the most appropriate legislation for prostitution. It discusses prostitution only because highly interconnected to sex trafficking. In Chapter 5, feminist theories on prostitution will be mainly adopted at the macro level. Section 5.1 is based on the notion that factors which possibly increase prostitution in Amsterdam – can also be considered as factors which increase and facilitate sex trafficking in hotels. Such interconnection would not be possible but for the notions acquired from feminist theories, which were previously discussed.

3.3 Comparative analysis of theories

The previous two sections analysed and described the two theories at the base of this thesis. As stated, displacement theory helps better understand why sex trafficking happens at a certain hotel, and which characteristics of that hotel sex traffickers exploit to commit their crimes. In particular, it gives a reasoning for why hotels with opposite characteristics might be equally susceptible to sex trafficking (Human Trafficking Foundation, 2018). On the other hand, feminist theories are at the base of the thesis because the latter is mainly based on the trafficking of women for sexual purposes, which is a phenomenon caused by other factors such as prostitution and the patriarchy, which feminist theories highly discuss. While displacement theory explains why sex trafficking happens in a certain hotel, in this thesis feminist theories explain why the trafficking of women for sexual purposes happens in Amsterdam. As explained in section 1.3, the legalisation of prostitution and the image of Amsterdam as the ultimate sex tourism destination (Dai et al., 2019) are some of the factors which pushed the choice of Amsterdam as research area. Feminist theories help understand why these factors are impactful on the level of sex trafficking in Amsterdam and, consequently, in hotels.
In this sense, the two theories also differ in the way they are applied in the Results and Discussion Chapter of this thesis. Displacement theory is mainly used at the micro level, when showing and discussing the results on the single-hotel characteristics that allow for sex trafficking to happen. On the other hand, feminist theories are at the base of mainly the macro section, explaining the environmental factors that act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry. At the meso level, both theories may be used, depending on the factor’s relation to either the external environment or the single-hotel characteristics.

However, despite their advantages in utilising such theories in research, they also hold certain disadvantages to take into consideration. Heil and Nichols (2014) argue that displacement may be a response of rational offenders who try to not get caught. However, as they explain, criminals might also be irrational. According to criminal psychology studies, an individual choosing to involve themselves in criminal activity might be doing so for a need of conquering personal irrational goals, such as personal appraisal. Therefore, the choice of modifying the offending pattern might be derived by further irrational thinking, rather than a rational and methodological approach, as the one displacement theory suggests (Heil & Nichols, 2014). Moreover, Weisburd et al. (2006) also argue that altering components of a crime is too risky, and criminals might choose to cease to commit that certain crime, rather than taking the risk of displacing it. However, considering sex trafficking is one of the most lucrative crimes (NRM, 2013), this notion may not apply, since the choice to commit a crime is based on both risk and reward (Hughes, 2005). Displacement theory may help understand why different hotels are equally receiving cases of sex trafficking. However, considering the above-mentioned arguments, the theory should not be considered a certain rule, but rather a possible explanation. Different options and theories should also be taken into consideration, as displacement theory may not always be the right answer. Considering this notion, in this thesis the theory will also be addressed as a plausible or possible explanation to the phenomenon, rather than a certain fact. Future studies could focus on providing alternative theory-based explanations to the same phenomena.

Multiple previous sections have already discussed the debate in feminist theories between liberal and radical feminism and their views on sex trafficking and prostitution. As explained, most individuals fall into neither of the categories, because both debates have valuable ideas (Gerassi, 2015). In itself, such debate is a disadvantage to utilising feminist theories in research on sex trafficking by potentially making the discussion seem ambiguous or even biased. Moreover, Vilhena (2019) argues that feminists do not really have a clear picture of the power they possess in legislative grounds, and end up infiltrating personal ideas into general grounds. In this sense, sex trafficking studies based on feminist theories are used for the purpose of winning the debate on whether or not prostitution should be legalised (Vilhena, 2019). Considering both limitations, feminist theories may push the researcher to a tunnelling view, neglecting other perspectives which may also be impactful to research. To limit this disadvantage, feminist theory in this research was merely used to explain the interconnection between sex trafficking and prostitution. However, the debate on whether or not prostitution should be legal is excluded, in order to escape unnecessary biases. Moreover, to avoid tunnelling vision, the interview guide was composed using mainly gender-free pronouns and questions, in order to effectively see if gender holds a significance over sex trafficking in this
thesis. However, it should be remarked once again that sex trafficking does affect all genders and sexual orientations, thus further research on, for instance, the sex trafficking of men, should also be carried out.

This section outlined the two theories at the base of this research, displacement theory and feminist theory. It gave a broad overview of their differences in sex trafficking-related research, and a specific view of their differences when applied to this thesis. Moreover, it went in-depth on the advantages and, mainly, the disadvantages of applying displacement theory and feminist theories to research and explained how such limitations will be overcome in this thesis. Having that understood, the current chapter concludes. The following Chapter will therefore outline the Methodology of the thesis.
Chapter 4. Methodology

This chapter will outline the method used in this thesis, from the research design, research approach, data collection and data analysis. Ethical issues, limitations, validity, and reliability are also addressed in this Chapter.

4.1 Research Design

As Islamia (2016) outlines, there are three different types of research designs: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. In short, exploratory research aims at filling a hypothesis or theoretical idea which has not been researched before; descriptive research helps further fill the understanding of the exploratory research’s idea, and it is built on the latter. Lastly, explanatory research further develops those ideas and aims at connecting them to understand cause and effect (Islamia, 2016). This research will adopt the descriptive approach because the study aims at describing a phenomenon related to a specific situation, that being sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. Descriptive research is used to study the current situation of a specific phenomenon, and outlines the characteristics of a particular group (Islamia, 2016). The thesis will outline the factors which act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry in Amsterdam, from an employee perspective. The findings will describe a current situation, and it will therefore undertake a descriptive research design.

4.2 Research Approach

Once understood and outlined the proper research design, the researcher should focus on defining the most appropriate research approach. Qualitative and quantitative are the most common research approaches. As Lowhorn (2007) outlines, there is an essential difference between quantitative and qualitative studies. The former focuses on taking a sample and making assumptions on the population based on that sample. On the other hand, qualitative studies aim at describing an event at its natural setting. The participants of a qualitative study do not represent the entire population, but rather describe a situation related to them (ibid). Bryman (1984) compared the two research approaches and stated that qualitative studies are “considered to be much more flexible than quantitative research in that it emphasizes discovering novel or unanticipated findings and the possibility of altering research plans in response to such serendipitous occurrences” (p.78). In fact, while quantitative research deals with numbers and statistics, qualitative research focuses on observations and descriptions. In the case of the former, data can be measured, whereas in qualitative studies data is only observed. Quantitative studies typically use close-ended questions and a large sample population. On the other hand, qualitative studies typically opt for open-ended questions and a smaller sample population (Bryman, 2012).

Despite the differences, quantitative and qualitative methods both aim at answering research questions while at the same time preventing errors and ensuring validity (Bryman, 1984). Along these lines, both methods have advantages and disadvantages. Quantitative studies have the advantages of producing results which can be expanded to the entire population and are considered overall more objective. However, they usually fail to explain and go deeper on the topic’s fundamental meaning. The participant’s personal experiences and perspective and how
these may affect the results is overlooked, as quantitative research mainly focuses on statistics rather than explanation of a phenomenon (Bryman, 2012).

On the opposite end, qualitative studies have the ability and advantage to go in depth on the studied topic. The participant’s characteristics are usually taken into account, and the phenomena is described in detail. However, disadvantages include the fact that qualitative studies are often more time consuming and can be considered less objective because the researcher’s perspective may shape the way the data is interpreted. Lastly, differently from quantitative research, qualitative studies cannot be generalised to the entire population, but are highly dependent on the study group (Bryman, 2012).

Having understood the differences, similarities, advantages and disadvantages of both methods, the choice of the research approach is highly dependent on the research question(s) (Bryman, 2012). This thesis aims at investigating the employee perspective on the factors which act as crime enablers for sex trafficking in the hotel industry. The findings will be related to the selected sample. They will describe a current phenomenon through the interpretation of the data, which was collected through individual interviews and online questionnaires from hotel employees. Lastly, the participants’ personal experiences and perspective will also be considered in the analysis of the data. Considering the research questions and adopted methods, a qualitative approach was chosen.

4.3 Data Collection

The following sections will cover the methodology and reasoning behind the data collection process, which includes the stipulation of a consent form, interview guide, and online questionnaire, the recruitment of the participants and the interviewing process.

4.3.1 Consent form

The first step before conducting the interviews was the development of a consent form (Appendix A). A consent form is a document that states that the interviewee is freely choosing to participate in the interview and ensures them anonymity and confidentiality (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Firstly, it stated the aim of the study and the names and contact information of the researcher and her supervisor. Secondly, it explained the fact that the names of the individuals will not be mentioned anywhere, that the recordings or transcripts will not be published anywhere, that the participants can withdraw participation at any moment or decide not to answer any of the questions. By signing, the participants gave consent to being recorded and using the answers as analysable data for the project. Through the Consent form, the research complied with the European GDPR regulations, which will be further addressed in section 4.7.

4.3.2 Interview guide

An interview guide is a tool that researchers use to structure and guide the interview (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide used for the thesis (Appendix B) contained a list of questions, the aim, the research questions, and some reminders, such as mentioning the concept of anonymity and confidentiality. Being the interview semi-structured, the interview guide was used as a support tool rather than a strict structure to follow. As Kallio et al. (2016) state, in
semi-structured interviews the researcher can improvise follow-up questions based on the participant’s response.

The interview guide was written by following guidelines and knowledge retrieved by a literature study. For example, most questions were open-ended because they allow the start of more in-depth conversations and therefore a better understanding of the topic of interest (Wildavsky, 2018). Moreover, following Jacob and Furgerson’s (2012) guidelines, the questions were designed to be initially easier to answer and later go more in depth about controversial topics. Firstly, participants would be asked what their work position is, how long they have been working there and where their hotel was positioned. These questions were asked in order to create a profile of the participant, shown in Table 1. Later, following Paraskevas and Brookes’ (2018) methodology, interviewees were asked what their general opinion on sex trafficking was. Since the interview is semi-structured, as previously mentioned, the rest of the questions were not followed orderly, but dependent on the response of the interviewee, so that the conversation would be more fluid and allow a better understanding of the research questions (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). At the end, each participant was asked if they had anything to add.

4.3.3 Participants

The interviewees were selected through a Google search of hotels in Amsterdam, following voluntary sampling. That is, a non-probability sampling method which allows the voluntary participation of participants (Murairwa, 2015). As Murairwa (2015) stated, voluntary sampling allows a higher response rate and gathered quality. Furthermore, considering the delicacy of the topic, voluntary sampling allowed the researcher to interview only individuals who are willing to share experiences on such delicate topics. Following the Google Search, 69 hotels were individually called, of which 17 asked for an email for further details, 10 asked for the questions to be sent through email in the form of the online questionnaire, 23 declined the request of being interviewed, 7 were closed or unavailable due to Covid-19, and 14 accepted to be interviewed, either by first contact or by answering to the email sent. Of the 10 individuals who requested the Online questionnaire, 2 of them replied.

As a result, the data was gathered through 15 individual interviews, and 2 online questionnaires, for a total of 17 participants.

In the emails, the researcher presented herself, the aim of the study, and asked for participation to interviews. To higher the response rate, the email stated that the interviews would last for about 30 minutes, or as much time as available. Furthermore, participants were allowed to choose the interview platform which would suit them best: phone call, Zoom or Skype.

The selected participants were front-office receptionists, front-office supervisors, general managers, duty and reservations managers, management trainee and a doorman. These positions are among the ones who most come in contact with sex trafficking in hotels. Their involvement in the fight is redeemed necessary (Sarkisian, 2015), thus making their point of view valuable in this research.

To respect the anonymity and confidentiality research ethics, the names or specific location of the hotels are not revealed anywhere in the study. Similarly, the names or any personal
information that might make the individuals identifiable are not mentioned anywhere in the thesis. However, to make the findings and discussions more easily understandable, Table 1 displays the general information of the participants, general information of the hotel they work in, and the code that was assigned to them, which will be used to refer to them in the findings and discussion sections.

**Table 1 - Participants table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Job Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Type of hotel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Front-office Receptionist</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Management Trainee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>Front-office Supervisor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>Doorman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>Front-office Supervisor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>Front-office Supervisor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9</td>
<td>Front-office Supervisor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A10</td>
<td>Reservation Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A11</td>
<td>Duty Manager &amp; Trainer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A12</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A13</td>
<td>Senior duty Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A14</td>
<td>Security Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A15</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Outskirts</td>
<td>Mid-size</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Duty Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Chain-affiliated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The hotels are all situated in Amsterdam, which is the main focus areas of the thesis. Furthermore, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, according to displacement theory, sex traffickers will often change location or type of hotel to diversify the crime and lower the chances of being caught (Guerette & Bowers, 2009). Therefore, different types of hotels, with diverse sizes and locations were obtained. As previously mentioned, hotels were selected randomly, thus such diversification was not planned. However, as displayed in Table 1, the research benefits from a high diversification in participants’ genders, locations, size, and type of hotels. As Gibbs et al. (2007) state, sample diversification can help the research discover alternate themes, thus increasing data saturation. The concepts of data saturation and research validity will be further addressed in section 4.5.

The information displayed on job role, location and size of the hotel was gathered throughout the interview (see interview guide, Appendix B). The information on the type of hotel was gathered through an online search of each participant’s place of work. As shown, this category fails to be as diverse as the previous ones. In fact, most hotels are affiliated to a Hotel Chain, rather than being independent hotels. Although this factor lowers the level of
diversification of participants, it is not believed to be a limitation, since chain-affiliated hotels have been recognised as the most susceptible to sex trafficking (Polaris, 2018).

The second column displays the gender of the participants. However, such characteristic was not posed as a question during the interview. The displayed gender is based on the voice and adopted pronouns of each participant. However, this information may vary if the participants were to be asked the question on which gender(s) they identify with (if any).

Lastly, the voice Code displays the referral code which will be used to aid the reader throughout Chapter 5, Findings and Discussion. The codes vary depending on the type of data-gathering tool: from A1 to A15, the participants who were individually interviewed. Q1 and Q2 represent the participants who answered the online questionnaire.

4.3.4 Interview process

The decision to carry out individual semi-structured interviews was taken because, as Miles and Gilbert (2005) stated, they allow a deeper understanding of the research questions, and are more appropriate when discussing sensitive topics such as sex trafficking: as Kallio et al., (2016) state, they allow the participants to express themselves verbally more easily.

All interviews were conducted in English. They were carried out either by phone or through the online platform Zoom. As previously mentioned, interviewees were allowed to choose which platform suited them best. Researchers argue face-to-face interviews are the most appropriate source of data collection in qualitative study (Stephens, 2007). However, as Cachia and Millward (2011) stated, telephone interviews have what they call “convenience factors” (p. 270), meaning that, while face-to-face interviews are methodologically stronger, telephones have other kind of benefits, such as the provision of access to interviewees who would otherwise not be contactable (ibid). Considering the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the time restrictions both of the researcher and the participants, telephone interviews were the most appropriate means of communication. Moreover, similarly to what Cachia and Millward (2011) experienced, interviewees felt more committed to the research because they had the freedom to schedule and, if needed, reschedule the interview to their liking (p. 271).

As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted following the interview guide (see section 4.3.2). All interviews lasted from 20 minutes to one hour, with most interviews lasting 45 minutes. As mentioned above, the length of the interview was determined by the availability of the hotel employees. As Harvey, (2011) stated, asking interviewees for the right amount of time is crucial. In fact, if the time is too much, they might refuse to participate. On the other hand, if the time is too little, the quality and quantity of the data can be impacted (ibid). Therefore, asking for 30 minutes allowed them to be more likely to agree to participate. Furthermore, the length of the interviews was highly dependent on the individual experiences of the participants. In other words, the shorter interviews have been the result of interviewees having less experiences to share. Nonetheless, even in those instances, the time was enough to go through the questions and gather their point of view. As Appleton (2006) stated, the length of the qualitative interview does not interfere with validity and reliability if the time was necessary to investigate the topic in-depth.
Once completed, interview data was saved and stored in a designated folder. The interviews were transcribed into a Word document. The transcription files were then stored in the same folder as the interview audios. The transcription process followed standard orthography, which means that the words and sentences were transcribed following the spelling given by the English dictionary, which facilitates an unbiased and comprehensive analysis (Flick, 2014).

4.3.5 Online questionnaire

Online questionnaires are a common data collection method in qualitative studies. Although individual and group interviews are methodologically stronger, online questionnaire allow the collection of a larger amount of data efficiently, with less time constraints (due to the lack of need to transcribe the interview onto a document) and less room for error (since the text is not transcribed (Regmi et al., 2017). To increase the response rate in consideration of the time constraints of the research, participants were allowed to answer the questions in the form of an online questionnaire (see Appendix C), if requested.

The stipulation of the online questionnaire followed the guidelines by Jacob & Furgerson (2012), and was therefore emulating the interview guide, in order to gather the point of views on the same issues in both methods. Furthermore, the design followed the guidelines by Regmi et al. (2017), who suggest a user-friendly layout and avoiding multiple-choices questions to get better data quality. Respondents to the online questionnaire were also encouraged to answer any question at-length.

4.4 Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying and organizing themes of a given data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (1996) stated, thematic analysis allows the researcher to search for patterns or themes related to human behaviour, attitudes and actions. Through thematic analysis, the data is coded to create themes which efficiently explain the depth of the research problem (ibid).

Thematic analysis follows six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2012), which were applied to the data of this thesis:

1. Familiarization: which took place through the reading and rereading of the data
2. Generating initial codes: while reading the transcriptions, the researcher would highlight interesting sentences and assign them a code. The codes would therefore be written into a separate notebook. The codes were found inductively, meaning that the researcher had no previous expectations of which codes the data would generate, but rather found them while reviewing the transcription. At the end of this phase, there were 26 initial codes.
3. Searching for themes: the initial codes were then revised and turned into themes, which are topics that strictly relate to the research questions. In this phase, some of the initial codes were grouped into 19 themes.
4. Reviewing potential themes: in this phase, the researcher reviewed the initial themes and either grouped them together or eliminated those that did not aim at answering the research questions. For instance, one of the initial themes would have discussed the fact
that hotels are a business as a potential sex trafficking enabler. However, upon review, the theme was joined with the factor “autonomy”, at the meso level, because inherent to that discussion, as will be visible in section 5.2.4. The initial 19 themes, therefore, became 15 themes.

5. Defining and naming themes: in this phase, the researcher re-named the themes to turn them into section titles and defined them. The definition phase consisted in the division into macro, meso and micro level, depending on the nature of the theme. The division into the category will be justified in the discussion.

6. Producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

4.5 Validity, Reliability and Data Saturation

Validity and reliability are the two key concepts in research which allow the researcher to prove that the research is trustworthy. As Brink (1993) outlined, there are two main types of validity in research: internal and external validity. The former relates to the extent to which the findings of the research are a true reflection of reality, rather than the result of “extraneous variables” (p. 95). On the other hand, external validity is defined as the degree to which the research is applicable across other groups. In fact, as Saunders et al. (1996) stated, semi-structured qualitative interviews may produce socially desired responses, which therefore lack internal or external validity. Furthermore, the limited sample size of the interviews may also impact internal validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Lastly, Saunders et al. (1996) also mention that, in certain cases, interviewees may be reluctant on sharing sensible information, and the researcher recognises that sex trafficking in hotel may be included in one of these cases.

To reduce the above-mentioned limitations which may impact the validity of the research, the selected participants fill different job positions within the hotel, thus allowing different points of views. Furthermore, in the findings, the quotes will be distributed somewhat equally, to ensure each participant’s point of view is taken into account. Finally, to reduce the possibility of interviewee response bias, the interview questions were firstly presented to the participants during the interview, rather than sent out in advance.

On the other hand, there is the discussion on researcher bias. Researcher bias is defined as the process by which the researcher influences the results to portray the desirable outcome (Shuttleworth, 2020), and it can highly impact internal validity. Researchers argue that, in qualitative studies, researcher bias is unavoidable (Cowles, 1988, p. 176). However, as Cowles (1988) pointed out, researchers also argue that complete objectivity is never achievable regardless of the methods (p. 176). Moreover, being objective is even harder when dealing with sensitive topics because the researcher is “involved in the lives of the subjects” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, as cited in Cowles, 1988, p. 176). Therefore, this study does not ensure complete objectivity, but aims at delivering reliable and credible results through the use of quotes from the interviewees and proper references, which are mentioned by Cope (2014) as effective methods in reducing researcher bias and increasing internal validity.

Finally, Bryman & Bell (2011) argue that, in qualitative research, re-applying the results across groups is impossible, making external validity an utopia in qualitative research. On the other hand, internal validity can be met according to the researcher’s practices. In this research,
internal validity was addressed by the inductive gathering of the themes for the results. In fact, the researcher had no preconceptions on what themes the interviews would generate, which make the results less likely to be impacted by “extraneous variables” (Brink, 1993, p. 95).

Validity and reliability may also be impacted by social desirability bias, which therefore needs to be also addressed and limited. As Krumpal (2013) and Saunders et al. (1996) stated, when interviewing participants about taboo or sensitive topics, such as sex trafficking, the answers could be characterised by social desirability bias, which is the tendency of participants to only report positive aspects of the topic, and hide the negatives. In order to limit social desirability bias and increase data quality, the participants were informed, from first contact, that all the information they would release would remain anonymous and confidential. Furthermore, they were informed of their right to not answer any question without repercussions. They were then reminded of such rights throughout the interview, whenever a sensitive question was posed. In the online questionnaire, these rights were stated at the start. These tactics allowed the participants to feel more comfortable in the interview or online questionnaire which, as Krumpal (2013) pointed out, can help decrease social desirability bias and allow more reliable responses, thus increasing data quality.

Through 15 individual interviews, and 2 answers to the online questionnaire, data saturation was achieved. Furthermore, the interview guide allowed multiple participants, regardless of their job role, to be able to answer the same questions, which increases data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). As Guest et al.’s (2006) study pointed out, code definition is fairly stable after twelve interviews. In other words, the analysis of 12 interviews is sufficient to identify 98% of the total themes of the research, which tended to repeat themselves from the 13th interview on, Similarly, in this research, the majority of themes were identified in the first 9 to 10 interviews, and they tended to be the only ones re-appearing throughout the rest of the interviews. Such aspect is an indicator of data saturation (Guest et al., 2006).

4.6 Limitations

4.6.1 Time constraint and Online Questionnaire

As previously discussed, through the 17 participants, data saturation was achieved. However, due to time constraints, the recruitment and interview process of more participants was not possible. Time is considered to be a limitation because it caused the research to use mixed methods, instead of focusing on individual interviews, which are generally more time consuming (Stephens, 2007). In fact, while the online questionnaire increased the response rate, and allowed for further data saturation, it did not allow the researcher to go in-depth on the topic as with the semi-structured individual interviews (Regmi et al., 2017). In fact, although the online questionnaire was designed to encourage lengthy responses, the answers were rather short, and did not allow for an in-depth interpretation of the topic.

4.6.2 Google Search

As previously stated, the sampling procedure was initialised through a Google Search of Hotels in Amsterdam. The Google Search conveniently provided the contact information of each hotel, thus speeding the sampling process. However, on the other hand, there are some
implications to be considered when using Google as a search engine. As Drake et al. (2012) outlined, Google searches are, most often, based on ads and revenue. In fact, when searching hotels in a specific destination, the most luxurious and popular are the first listed. However, as stated in the literature review, the researcher aimed at selecting hotel employees working in hotels of different sizes, budgets, and locations. However, the fact that the search engine Google is based on ads and revenue might have impacted the selection of hotels, and reduced the differentiation that the researcher aimed at achieving.

4.6.3 Covid-19 and Response Rate

As previously addressed, Covid-19 also impacted the research by not allowing the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews, which are considered to be methodologically stronger. Overall, the distance from the potential interviewees was believed to be a limitation in the sampling of the participants.

Covid-19 is also believed to be an impactful factor in the response-rate of the participants. In fact, initially, the research was supposed to have both Berlin and Amsterdam as focus areas. However, due to the inexistent response rate from Berlin, the research focused on Amsterdam, which instead displayed a rather high response rate. Such phenomena could be caused by a series of factors, including, for example, the language barrier between the interviewer and the participants. However, Covid-19 is believed to be one of the main impactful factors, since Germany was faced with stricter regulations than the Netherlands.

However, the response rate in Amsterdam also underlies a limitation. Although most hotels were eager to help and share their point of view, the selected participants were all from hotels that are already fighting the issue. Whenever a hotel in the red-light district in Amsterdam was contacted, the request was denied. Being the red-light district the main area in Amsterdam where prostitution – and, consequently, sex trafficking – is happening (Humanity in action, 2021), gathering the point of view of employees working in such hotels would have possibly produced further themes. However, their participation was denied, impacting the response rate in Amsterdam, which is also believed to be a limitation to the research.

4.7 Research Ethics and GDPR regulations

To respect the European research regulations (European Commission, n.d.), the research did not include the involvement of victims, but instead discussed the topic with stakeholders of the hospitality sector, who are not seen to be directly affected by the issue and are therefore not considered a ‘vulnerable’ population. The research did not discuss sensitive personal data.

Furthermore, considering the writer’s residence during the research was in Sweden, the research complied with the Swedish Research Ethics Committee (Forskningsetiska nämnden, FEN) guidelines:

a. The research allowed voluntary participation to non-vulnerable population.
b. The researcher handed out a consent form through which the research subjects will receive full information about the research and the possibility of denying participation.
c. Through the consent form, the researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity.
d. The research did not involve physical intervention, such as the studies on biological materials. The research did not affect the researcher physically or mentally.

e. The research did not process any sensitive personal data of the interviewees.

Lastly, the research complied with the European GDPR Regulations by delivering a signed Consent Form (see Appendix A) which ensured that:

a. The data was collected only for the intended purpose.
b. No information related to children was shared.
c. The researcher informed the participants on who the data was being shared with.
d. The storage period was stated and followed accordingly.
e. No aggregated personal data was collected or shared.
f. The researcher allowed privacy by default, and modifications if requested.
g. The participants were allowed to obtain the erasure of the data without undue delay.
h. In the event of data breach, the researcher will inform and notify the participants.
i. The researcher will inform in a transparent and understandable way if and when privacy policies are changed (Tefsay et al., 2018).

Such claims were also re-instated in the Online Questionnaire, which therefore also complied with European GDPR regulations.

4.8 Summary

This chapter covered the rationale and methodology behind the research, and explained the process of preparing for the interviews, conducting them, and analysing them. Similarly, it explained the process of the stipulation of the online questionnaire. Lastly, it discussed the main limitations encountered through the research. The next chapter will list and discuss the findings from the interviews.
Chapter 5. Findings and Discussion

This chapter will display and discuss the findings from the interviews and online questionnaires. To answer the research questions, the factors have been divided into three levels: macro, meso and micro level, which will be each described at their corresponding section. Lastly, section 5.4 will go deeper into the discussion of all three levels.

The research design is descriptive, meaning that it aims at describing the phenomenon of sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam (Islamia, 2016). It does not aim at finding solutions to the described factors, but rather only describe and discuss them. Further research could focus on finding strategic solutions to the reported sex trafficking enablers.

Below, Figure 1 displays the factors, or sex trafficking enablers, divided into their corresponding level:

![Factors - Macro, Meso and Micro level](image)

### 5.1 Macro-level characteristics

To answer the first research question, this section will display and discuss the macro-level factors that arose from the interviews and online questionnaires. These factors relate to environmental characteristics or external stakeholders which directly influence sex trafficking in the hotel industry, and act as enablers of such crime.

As displayed in Figure 2, these include: The Patriarchy, The Police, Legislations, The city of Amsterdam and Hidden Crime.
Figure 2 – Factors - Macro Level

5.1.1 The Patriarchy
As displayed in the Appendix B, the questions of the interview guide were mostly gender-free. However, the conversations with the participants revolved mainly around women being the victims, and men being the perpetrators, thus reinforcing the notion of the demand for sex trafficking being disproportionately gendered (ILO, 2020). The most representative quotes were from A1 and A4, who stated:

“Women are the basis of these guys who promise them a lot of things and then they end up being the sex traffickers. So, it is gross because of what men do, because I do imagine that women do not have much of a choice” (A1)

“There is an intrinsic structure that is tailored to make women... to objectify women, to make us less human, and less citizens, and available for men. So, I wonder, in a society where you had your material conditions met, so you can easily transport, you can work, you have medication, you have security... I wonder if prostitution would exist at all. And I think it might, as someone that has a fetish and that would be entirely up to her choice, but as I see it now, I don’t see it as a real choice, and I am very sorry for a world in which women have to sell their labour like this [...] I think sex would be amazing if there was no patriarchy, wouldn’t it be great to have sex with someone that you know is doing it because they want to? Even if you are paying for it” (A4)

As previously stated, the demand for sex trafficking being gendered is not a coincidence. Women are the most targeted and vulnerable segment because sex trafficking is a result of the patriarchy, which has its roots on pre-existing practices of commodification of female reproductive labour, including prostitution, domestic service and forced marriage. Through that, women’s movement, control and employment are controlled (Brysk & Maskey, 2012). As Brysk and Maskey (2012) stated, literature on sex trafficking and its gendered demand mainly focus on poverty and the legalisation of prostitution, but little to no attention is given to the role of the patriarchy which, as they state, should be taken into consideration as well. Through the quotes of A1 and A4, and through the overall gendered discussions with the participants, the patriarchy is considered a factor that facilitates sex trafficking in the hotel sector in Amsterdam, because it reinforces the gendered demand and the notions of power over women. It is placed at the macro level because it is external to the industry, but it affects it directly by increasing sex trafficking globally, and consequently increasing sex trafficking in the hotel industry.
5.1.2 The City of Amsterdam

The previous theme discussed the patriarchy and gendered demand as a factor that acts as enabler to sex trafficking globally, and in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. As stated, the discussion with the participants mainly revolved around women being the victims, and men being sex traffickers or sex buyers which, as previously stated, is the result of a patriarchal society which considers women as lower than men (Donovan, 2012). Along these lines, the participants recognised the role of Amsterdam as a sex tourism destination, in increasing its sex trafficking. They stated:

“It is constant especially because it is Amsterdam. Everyone coming here thinks that Amsterdam is the place where you can buy prostitutes” (A1)

“Here, it’s just a fairy-tale of whiteness and festivals and alcohol and drugs [...] I am 100% sure that for a city that prides itself for its sex business and has a lot of tourists, sex tourists, [...] that does enable sex trafficking” (A4)

Among the core dimensions of Amsterdam’s destination image, sex is one of, if not the most mentioned and agreed upon by tourism stakeholders (Dai et al., 2019). The legalisation of prostitution, among all factors, facilitated the growth of sex tourism in Amsterdam, which is therefore both portrayed and perceived as the ultimate sex tourism destination in Europe (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). As previously mentioned, considering the contrasting opinions and theories on prostitution, this research does not aim at convincing the reader whether prostitution should be legal, but it aims at only discussing its impact on sex trafficking. In fact, through these quotes, the participants aimed at expressing the idea that Amsterdam’s destination image being dependent on its legalised prostitution and sex tourism does enable sex trafficking in the city, and consequently in the hotels. Such claims are also supported by the fact that Amsterdam’s red-light district, which used to pride itself on delivering safe and healthy conditions for prostitutes, is now mostly run by sex traffickers, who exploit the workers – mostly women – who can no longer be considered prostitutes but are mostly victims of sex trafficking (Abdul, 2019; Manning, 2018). Such vision is brought by A12, who stated:

“We see a shift in the sex tourism in this Country, which is legal, the legal part of it officially, basically is becoming more and more illegal because of the methods behind the sex industry in this Country, so I think it is getting worse than it ever was [...] the legal form of prostitution is now being fed by the illegal sex trafficking industry. [...] With the borders and the way the European community has developed, and the amount of people trafficked mainly from Eastern European Countries to the sex industry, means that the system that once worked, doesn’t work anymore. Even the red-light area is no longer regulated, but is more and more young girls with passports taken from them and forced into the sex industry for the wrong reasons, so most of the sex industry – if you can call it normal – is no longer existing” (A12)

Besides being a General Manager, A12 is also an activist in the fight against sex trafficking in Amsterdam. Her claims are based on years of experience fighting the issue. Moreover, reports also show that there has been a shift and increase in sex trafficking in the most notorious area in Amsterdam. As Caldwell (2010) reported, up until 1960, human trafficking in Amsterdam’s
red-light district was not an issue. However, nowadays most of the prostitutes in Amsterdam are actually victims of sex trafficking (Abdul, 2019; Caldwell, 2010; Manning, 2018). As the advocacy coordinator of Proud, a sex-worker-led organisation stated: “Sex work is constantly conflated with human trafficking” (Velvet December, n.d., as stated in Abdul, 2019). In this sense, as the participants reported, the legalised prostitution and the image of Amsterdam as a sex-tourism destination enable and increase sex trafficking generally and, consequently, in the hotel industry. It is therefore considered a factor which contributes to sex trafficking at the macro level because, although destination image is connected to the tourism industry, it is external to the hotel industry in Amsterdam, but it affects it directly.

5.1.3 Legislations
The previous section already discussed the link between the legalisation of prostitution and sex trafficking in Amsterdam. Besides that discussion, participants were asked if there was any law they would make, or change, as a politician, to better help fight the issue, to which some responded:

“I think leaving contact details is a lot more easier, if that would be mandatory. Because, a lot of the times sex traffickers do not want to leave any information, and they do not want to be contacted, afterwards or before. So I think if it would be mandatory to register yourself, then it would be easier” (A2)

“Ask “how long have you known each other? Oh wow, nice” or “have you known each other for just a week? That quick on holiday?” and see what they respond. If you have to do it by law, you can always say so, and you don’t have to feel... it could be an embarrassing question for a couple that has been together for 30 years, but if the government requires it to all the guests, then you don’t have to do it with any sin [...] You can ask for what kind of way people are connected with each other. So, if a couple comes, is it because they are married? Living together? Or rental? [prostitution] ask these questions from the government, maybe they will be offended, but it is to fight sex trafficking” (A5)

“There should be tools that you are able to share those kind of information without breaking any laws” (A11)

Through these different quotes, the participants expressed the same feeling: the lack of support from the government in helping hoteliers fight the issue. In particular, A2 and A11 explained how the current laws and regulations allow sex traffickers to remain anonymous. Along these lines, A5 would like to have a law which would enable him to ask uncomfortable or personal questions, to reduce the privacy of the guests and gather more information to fight sex trafficking. All these quotes highly relate to the topics of privacy and anonymity, which will be further discussed in sections 5.2.1, at the Meso level. However, what these quotes express is the lack of proper support to help hoteliers in this fight. Q2 also mentioned that he would like the government to “give more rights to investigate when there are signs” (Q2), thus reiterating the lack of proper legislations. This factor is particularly important because it is highly interconnected with many other factors, such as the Police, which will be discussed in the next section. It is placed at the macro level because, similarly to the previous sections, the
governmental legislations are external to the hotel industry, but they directly affect hoteliers and their fight against sex trafficking.

5.1.4 The Police
The relationship between the participants and the police is quite contrasting. In fact, some reported a good relationship and felt supported:

“We can always inform the police and request to investigate” (Q2)

“Every hotel has a neighbourhood cop, and they are connected straight to the office where they work, or the location, so they are really quick” (A13)

“There is a special department for it, and we are in good contact with the police, and when we are suspicious [...] I know who to call, and there is a lot of attention for it, it is good” (A14)

“We have a dedicated police officer we can always call [...] it is like the police officer for this neighbourhood, of course it is not for serious cases, then we can call the emergency number, but for other cases you can call the dedicated police officer. She also comes by to see how it goes, to meet new people in the hotel…” (A15)

On the other hand, other participants expressed a feeling of dissatisfaction with the current work from the police. Similarly to the discussion on legislation, participants reported feeling like they do not receive enough support from the police in the fight against sex trafficking. For instance, A1 suggested being more involved:

“Just look around a bit more and ask suspicious men that would make me feel unsafe, ask them how they are doing, how their day is, just to make sure that nothing, nothing bad is happening. I think that’s what I would do. And second of all, I would just randomly go into the hotel and ask “hey, is there someone that seems a bit suspicious?” because, as I said, it happens” (A1)

Along these lines, other participants reported how, despite doing their part on fighting the issue, and spotting the signs of sex trafficking, the police is unsure and demands solid proof of the crime happening in order to act on it:

“I did call the police, and I said “hey, I don’t know what I have to do about this situation, this is going on, I don’t feel comfortable with these men in the room towards me, so I am leaving it up to you guys: do you wanna come, yes or no?” and then the police called me back and said “we are not coming over because the girl is not a minor, but she is an adult” and for me it was “ok, if you guys don’t care, I did my part I recognised things, I discussed it with the police, now it is kind of out of my control because I am not going to put my safety somewhere [at risk]” (A8)

“Often, when we did ask, or shared information with police, they are very hesitant to act on it, because they really need very hard facts, and they will not listen to gut feelings and observations, they want very hard facts. If I would like to see something else, I would like to see that they would trust the judgement of hotel professionals a bit earlier, and maybe just show up and be present, they don’t have to do a full investigation
immediately, but give more attention to those things that are not backed by facts yet, because we have to work on interpretations, and it is very difficult for a hotel to get a fact “yes, in this room it is happening in”. There are observations that tell something might be happening” (A11)

“We are still convinced that there was a lot not right with the situation, but we couldn’t prove anything, and we had no backup [...] We at the hotel have several points of interest: when we get 2 or 3 of those, for us it is a red flag, but for the police it is still not enough” (A12)

Through these statements, the participants expressed a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction, linked with the fact that while they are doing their best to spot the signs and fight the issue, the police seem to not give enough support. As A11 hinted, hoteliers usually utilise a series of tactics to spot signs of sex trafficking. As section 5.3.2 will discuss, this is the result of extensive training. As A8 reported, by spotting the signs, they are doing all they can, and finding hard evidence is nearly impossible. This section therefore expresses the lack of engagement from the police as a possible factor enabling sex trafficking in the hotel industry. However, it is important to point out that different participants had contrasting opinions on the matter. For example, A13 reported a very good relationship with the police, and felt like the communication and support from the neighbourhood cop is essential and effective to fight the issue. It therefore seems like this factor is only felt by certain hotels and it is highly dependent on their location, which will be further discussed in section 5.3.5. This factor is placed at the macro level because the Police represents an external stakeholder to the hotel industry.

5.1.5 Hidden Crime

The previous section discussed the role of the police, and how the lack of support is viewed as a factor which increases sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. In particular, some participants discussed how the police usually needs hard evidence in order to deliver support. However, such hard evidence is hard to achieve. Such notion on sex trafficking being a hidden crime was also reported by other participants. For example, A5 stated:

“I think that almost all hotels in Amsterdam have such cases, but you are not always aware of it” (A5)

Or, as A13 repeatedly stated throughout the interview:

“It is hard to recognise” (A13)

Similarly, A8 explained how sex trafficking comes in varies forms:

“It is hard to notice when it is right and when it is wrong, and it is because it is so invisible. I mean, when you see movies to make people aware of the situation, they mostly present it like: there is a guy checking in, showing his passport, paying cash, and puts the lady on the couch and then they go up, but there is a whole different thing going on while the girl is just checking in with her identity card, if it is fake or not we cannot check that, and when she is expecting men she just walks down to the men, gives
them a kiss upfront and take them upstairs and then when you are busy with checking in guests, you will not notice” (A8)

This statement is in alignment with Displacement theory, which was previously discussed in the literature review, explaining how criminals will usually change their tactics to avoid being caught (Guerette & Bowers, 2009). Similarly, A13 and A9 state how sex traffickers are continuously developing and getting better at hiding the signs, which makes the crime harder to recognise:

“It is very hard to recognise because people who are doing the sex trafficking, they also know how to mask as a regular guest” (A13)

“They are very smart nowadays. They don’t ask for many towels anymore, because they know that if they are asking for a lot of towels, we know that there is something going on in the room which is actually not ok. So they are coming to be smarter as well” (A9)

In addition to these factors, contributing to the invisibility of sex trafficking there is the fact that victims of sex trafficking and prostitution look alike. As Flamtermesky (2013) pointed out, one of the most common mistakes when fighting sex trafficking is thinking that the victims are all bruised, silent or badly dressed. In reality, to mask the crime, victims are usually, in appearance, very similar to prostitutes, and distinguishing the two is one of the main challenges for hoteliers fighting the issue. For instance, A10 and A12 stated:

“I don’t know if this was forced or not, only there was somebody in the hotel prostituting and a lot of men went up, etc… but we never know if this person was forced or not” (A10)

“There is no way of confirming the rights and the reasons why somebody is involved in this industry, you can’t prove if it was forced or not” (A12)

“Since prostitution is legal, there are quite a lot of young girls who are forced to work in the prostitution even if they don’t want to, and since it is legal here, it is hard to recognize who wants it and who doesn’t want it” (A15)

As the participants pointed out, sex trafficking is a very subtle, hidden crime, which is hard to recognise and have hard evidence on. Such characteristic is amplified by the expertise of sex traffickers, and the fact that prostitutes and victims of sex trafficking look alike. As A15 pointed out, being that prostitution is legal, it allows sex traffickers to hide in plain sight. This theme therefore reiterates the need for the police to listen and trust hotelier’s suspicions, without demanding hard evidence. Such factor is considered a sex-trafficking enabler because it places hotel employees in a harder position. It is placed at the macro level because it is inherent to the very crime of sex trafficking, but it affects its fight in hotels.

5.2 Meso-level characteristics

Factors at the meso level refer to factors which are internal to the hotel industry in Amsterdam but are not associable to any specific hotel. This section will therefore answer the second research question and discuss the factors that ease sex traffickers in committing their crimes in the hotel industry in Amsterdam.
As displayed in Figure 3, these are: Privacy and Anonymity, Hospitality, Transiency, Autonomy and Hierarchy.

![Figure 3 - Factors - Meso Level](image)

### 5.2.1 Privacy and Anonymity

As previously mentioned, sex trafficking is a discrete crime, in the sense that it happens behind closed doors, and its signs are hard to spot (Guardian Group, 2019). Such nature is amplified by the privacy and secrecy hotels promise to allow, which is exploited by traffickers to keep the crime even more discrete (Coughlan, 2019). Overall, participants discussed the direct link between privacy and anonymity, and the level of sex trafficking. For instance, A5 stated:

“*When a couple comes you don’t know if they are really a couple, or good friends, or come here to... well, if they are a couple from Amsterdam, they want to come, you don’t know if he has hired her, or if he abuses her, you cannot always see it, it’s a bit hard to see if there is an equality in relationship or if there is any kind of payment*” (A5)

And, when discussing about the characteristics of the hotel industry which enable sex trafficking, he reiterates: “*It is an anonymous place, just make an appointment and get in. Nobody knows you in the street, there is a low chance that you will be caught*” (A5). As A5 stated, hotels allow individuals to remain somewhat anonymous, which lowers the chance for sex traffickers to be caught. Such anonymity is increased by the fact that, in the Netherlands, not all individuals are required to check-in. As A9 and A12 explain:

“*the only person checking in is the booker, and it is not the person coming with you*” (A9)

“*The person checking in may be the one providing all the details, and in my experience the girls tent to be somewhere in the background, and be checked in by someone else*” (A12)

These statements are in line with the previous conversation on legislations, and how the lack of proper laws facilitates sex trafficking in the hotel industry. Overall, participants reported how the more privacy and anonymity the hotel allows, the easier it is for sex traffickers to operate in that hotel. When questioned on why they do not receive any sex trafficking, Q2 stated “*our hotel is very personal, and guests are not anonymous*” (Q2). Such anonymity and privacy are therefore dependent on a series of factors, which will be analysed at the Micro level. However, at the meso level, privacy and anonymity are considered sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry because, although the level may vary from hotel to hotel depending on single characteristics, privacy is still inherent to all hotels, and it has been recognised as potentially increasing sex trafficking (Banks, 2020; Coughlan, 2019; Sowon, 2020).
5.2.2 Hospitality

When asked on his general opinion on sex trafficking, A11 stated:

“Of all sorts of crime, this one really goes against any form of hospitality, which is warm and inviting, based on proper human interaction, and this whole sex trafficking is exactly the opposite of that” (A11)

Through this quote, A11 highlighted the contrast between the hotel industry being hospitable, welcoming, and inviting, and the exploitation of such hospitality by unwelcome individuals, such as sex traffickers. To confirm this view, A1 explained:

“We try to encourage them not to buy our room [...] whenever we have these kind of shady people coming up, we try to be as less welcoming as possible. Not that we are not hospitable, but we ask... because, our prices are quite high, so let’s say that for one night it is 100-150, and extra to that we ask for a deposit. And most of the time if we say “150 euros, and 100 for a deposit”, they just go, because of course there are cheaper options [...] This is one of the things that us girls in the team have talked about, agreeing to giving them bigger prices, to make them feel unwelcome. But I wish I could just ask them to leave straight away when I feel threatened” (A1)

A1 therefore explained how she will tend to make certain individuals unwelcome, whenever she would feel threatened or suspicious of them. Similarly, A8 reported:

“When we do suspect something, we write down the ID number, and then say: “it is obligatory, and we need it” we make a nice story [...] then we just give one key like, “no, we just only give one key, and otherwise someone has to report to us”, to make it less attractive” (A8)

Both A1 and A8 reported adopting different strategies to make suspicious or threatening individuals unwelcome. However, A1 also stated: “I wish I could just ask them to leave straight away when I feel threatened” (A1), thus expressing frustration with the methods she needs to adopt, because of the hospitable nature of the hotel industry. On the other hand, A11 decided to use hospitality as a way to fight the issue. He explained a simple rule him and his staff adopted to fight any kind of crime in hotels:

“10 to 5 rule [...] a very simple rule [...] : whenever someone is within 10 feet of you, make eye contact, acknowledge them. Whenever they are within 5 feet, a verbal greeting, make sure you have that connection, because, guests who are here for the right reason, they love it, all good, you provide hospitality, and you get the experience. But people who are up to no good, they will hate it that they are being seen, and they will stay under the radar, they don’t want to be detected, so the more open you are, you will create hospitality and a safe environment at the same time” (A11)

A9 reported a similar tactic. When asked why he believes the current hotel where he works in does not receive as much sex trafficking as his previous, he stated:

“We already ask more personal questions than in a normal check in, because we would like to be more personal, so we already ask questions like “oh, you look so nice with
In this sense, hospitality is used as a tactic to spot sex traffickers or unwelcome individuals in hotels. Recent reports and literature fail to recognise its actual efficacy, thus future research could focus on these managerial practices and their efficacy in fighting sex trafficking in the hotel industry. However, relevant to this thesis, is the hospitality of hotels as a potential factor enabling sex trafficking because, even when practices are adopted, as A11 stated, “Sending somebody away and telling “no” can be challenging” (A11), and sex traffickers may exploit such hospitality to commit their crimes in the industry. This factor is placed at the meso level because it is inherent to the whole hotel industry, rather than to specific hotels.

5.2.3 Transiency
Along with hospitality, transiency is another characteristic inherent to the nature of hotels. It relates to the hotel’s allowance of receiving visitors for a short amount of time and have a continuous flow of guests (Fick, 2017; Hayner, 1928). Q1 recognised transiency as a potential enabler to sex trafficking in hotels. He stated:

“The transiency [...] enables them to hide in the masses” (Q1)

Such characteristic is highly interconnected to the level of ease of access of each hotel, which will however be discussed in section 5.3.4, at the micro level. However, transiency is a characteristic of the whole hotel industry and, as Q1 pointed out, it can be considered an enabler of sex trafficking in itself. Such factor can also be connected to employees having different shifts during the day and night, as A4 experienced:

“There was this girl, and she was staying in a room and then she renewed the room for another night, but then there was a guy who apparently paid for the room, and then the next day it was another guy who paid for the room, but as we work on shifts, right? So I was on shift in the morning and the other person was in the evening... and she was doing that for three or four days, and then we realized that, you know, in a very informal conversation with colleagues, like “oh that girl renewed her room, weird that guy who renewed her room, right?” and then this person was like “oh, but my guy was a different guy”, and then we realized, when we started talking to each other that there were so many different guys paying for the room, and we were like “fuck, that shouldn’t be the case”” (A4)

A4`s experience points out the allowance of hotels to be transient, as this girl was able to renew her room daily and allow other people to pay for it. As A4 explained, they later realised that she could have been a victim of sex trafficking because other men were paying the room on her behalf. However, because of different work shifts, employees were unable to recognise the issue in time, and were able to spot it only in a later moment through an informal conversation. The girl in question was only able to renew her room because of the transient nature of hotels, which is therefore recognised as a sex-trafficking enabler. However, such factor is amplified by the fact that hotels have different employees with different work shifts, which therefore makes it harder to be able to recognise when sex traffickers are using such transiency to commit
their crimes. Transiency is placed as a factor at the meso level because, similarly to hospitality, it is inherent to the nature of the hotel industry, and not associable to any specific hotel.

5.2.4 Autonomy
Section 5.1.3 pointed out how some employees wish for the government to stipulate more laws that would help them fight sex trafficking in the hotel industry. For instance, A5 wishes there were a law that would require him to have a more personal check-in, asking uncomfortable or personal questions, which would help him lower the level of hospitality, which was recognised in section 5.2.2 as a sex-trafficking enabler. However, section 5.2.2 also reported A11 and A9’s quotes stating that a higher level of hospitality can help fight the issue in question. They explained how, in their hotels, they are able to fight the issue by having a more personal check-in. The three quotes are all in alignment with each other and remark a very specific issue: because of the lack of legislation, and perhaps the lack of support from the police experienced in certain cases, hotels have a lot of autonomy to fight the issue on their own. Besides governmental training, which will be discussed in section 5.3.2, hotels receive little to no support on this fight. Consequently, employees have complete autonomy on how to fight the issue. As some participants stated:

“Hotels have the responsibility to participate in preventing sex trafficking” (Q2)

“It is our job to recognise small things because they are coming into the hotel, they are renting our rooms from our site. It is not our job to solve the problem, but it is our job to recognise it” (A9)

“I think what we are doing is basically making sure that our part of the bargain are met and we are not allowing these people to work in our establishments” (A12)

What these quotes remark is that employees recognise that it is partly their responsibility to fight the issue. However, because of the lack of support from other stakeholders, such responsibility is highly dependent on single employees’ empathy and interest in the subject. For instance, A4 stated:

“I was the one always annoying, sending everyone individual messages saying “please, follow the course” (A4)

In the interview with A4, she explained how she is particularly invested in the fight against sex trafficking and pushed for everyone in her hotel to inform themselves, follow the training, and be invested as well. In general, she felt the weight on her shoulder, stating:

“I know it is not my fault, but you do get this feeling that “what could you have done that may make a difference in that woman’s life? […] Throughout these bad times when I was really stressed out… I mean, you don’t understand, stressed out as in crying in my bike, trembling riding home, feeling horrible about the possibility of one of those women being trafficked and I was unable to do anything” (A4)

As A4 point out, because of the lack of support from police and the government, the fight against sex trafficking in hotels is completely dependent on single hotels’ interest in it.
However, despite such autonomy, employees feel powerless. Although hotels have the responsibility and possibility to fighting the crime by spotting the signs, they still need a proper support system to help them (Wilson & Dalton, 2008). Such factor is also amplified by the fact that hotels are a business, and their main priority remains economic income (Lashley, 2000).

“We try to keep quietness in the hotel and to be mindful of everyone and of course with those kind of men, we just can’t allow sex traffickers to join them, it would not be mindful of the other guests if they can disturb” (A1)

“It is not like one person can receive multiple persons during the day, because then you have a constant flow of strangers walking in and out of your hotel, which is undesirable” (A3)

Differently from A1, A3, and A4 seem to be interested on fighting the issue of sex trafficking because it may be damaging for the hotel’s business and reputation. However, what the difference between A4, A1, and A3 remarks is the fact that the fight against sex trafficking in hotels is dependent on the single hotel’s decisions and empathy. In other words, other hotels have the liberty to ignore the issue, because not pushed by any third party. In this sense, autonomy is considered a sex-trafficking enabler in the hotel sector in Amsterdam because it is caused by a lack of support system, which allows hotels to choose if and why they want to fight the issue. If a system was placed, and such autonomy was removed, hotels would collectively fight the issue, which would potentially have a bigger impact on the fight (Paraskevas & Brookes, 2018). This factor is placed at the meso level because all hotels in Amsterdam have autonomy to decide if and how to fight the issue.

5.2.5 Hierarchy
The previous section discussed the autonomy hotels have to fight the issue of sex trafficking. Such autonomy is given by external stakeholders to mainly general or security managers. On the other hand, inside the hotel, the autonomy of lower-level employees is sometimes decreased by upper-level management, who established hierarchy in the hotel. For example, A6 stated:

“There is the management that has the power to do it, so if there is anything like that we take it to them […] I give the information to the management to react, but I cannot stop it because it is about my work, but I can only inform the management team, and then they will take measures. Personally, I cannot stop it, it is not my job to do that” (A6)

The main issue with hierarchy and instances of sex trafficking is that it lowers the level of autonomy of employees, who consequently have lower individual initiative (Raub, 2008). By reporting to the managers, front-desk employees are reporting to someone who will possibly not understand the gravity of the situation. Front-desk employees are the ones with the ability of detecting red flags thanks to their contact with the guests (Polaris, 2018), and should therefore be given autonomy to act when necessary. To confirm this view, the experience by A4, who spotted a victim of sex trafficking in her room, and rushed to her manager to report it:
“I just came down from the elevator and straight to my manager, and in telling the whole story – because you have to tell the whole story so she believes you - [...] they were already gone” (A4)

As reported by A4, the hierarchy in the hotel, and the consequent lack of autonomy of some employees, slows down the process. On top of that, as A11 points out, it is important that an employee “feels comfortable to say something if they see it” (A11). However, hierarchy creates the risk of lower-level employees not reporting issues because feeling unsure, or uncomfortable. In this sense, hierarchy is considered a factor which acts as a sex trafficking enabler in the hotel sector because, by lowering individual autonomy and initiative, it may slow down the process, and may cause employees to not report certain instances because unsure. It is placed at the meso level because, although there are different levels to it, all hotels have some level of hierarchy.

5.3 Micro-level characteristics

Lastly, factors at the micro level refer to factors which are dependent and related to specific characteristics of each hotel in Amsterdam. This section will therefore answer the third research question and discuss which specific characteristics of the hotels in Amsterdam make it easier for sex traffickers to commit their crimes.

As displayed in Figure 4, these include: Pricing, Training, Size, Ease of Access and Location.

![Figure 4 - Factors - Micro Level](image)

5.3.1 Pricing

One of the only factors participants agreed on, is the idea that lower pricing of hotels is more inviting to sex traffickers. For example, in explaining why they do not receive many cases of sex trafficking, A1 and A7 stated:

“Not much happened, just because it is quite an expensive hotel” (A1)

“I think in cheaper hotels you will see it more often” (A7)

When discussing sex trafficking in hotels, a common misconception is the idea that sex traffickers will only choose cheap 1 or 2-star motels. In reality, sex traffickers usually take pricing into consideration, and pick hotels where guests will feel comfortable, but the pricing would not be too high, so that their revenue would still be substantial (Polaris, 2018). Such notion is also supported by A9 who, when asked why sex traffickers would choose his hotel, stated:

“We are not a budget hotel, we are an economic hotel, that is also a big reason why these kind of people come over here, because we are not too expensive, and we are not cheap. So, in our room you have your own bathroom, your own facilities, but on the
right pricing […] I think this hotel and the previous hotel were already a cool place to come for these people because it is a reasonable price for what you get in the hotel” (A9)

The first factor at the micro level which is recognised as a sex trafficking enabler of single hotels is pricing, specifically prices which are convenient for sex traffickers, and offer a good price-quality balance. Based on research, and according to the participants, these hotels are more susceptible to sex trafficking. This factor is placed at the micro level because it only effects hotels which have a pricing deemed convenient by sex traffickers.

5.3.2 Training
Previous sections have already mentioned the fact that hotel employees usually receive training on sex trafficking to be able to spot and report the signs. Recognising such signs can also help employees differentiate cases of sex trafficking from prostitution, which has been reported as one of the biggest challenges. As A9 stated:

“In the stories I know, there are some things you can recognise, like, “ok, why is this happening at x moment? Why is this guy coming without going through the reception? Without any pass or anything, just picked up by a lady? Or going in front of the stairs to go and pick them up?” so these are small things that can mean anything, but most of the time they mean something that is not right. […] They are always being picked up by a guy, they are always set up at the hotel by a big guy, so I don’t think they are doing it because they want to” (A9)

Along these lines, participants reported the training to be successful in helping them fight the crime in the industry:

“We receive a lot of training on it, so we do know what we have to look out for, and we know how we have to act” (A2)

“With the training that we have we can at least identify one, and then we know the measures to take” (A6)

“I am almost 100% sure if it happens in my hotel the staff will know about it, and they will alert me, because they are all well trained” (A14)

A10 also goes as far to mention training of the staff as a potential factor that sways sex traffickers away from his hotel:

“We are so trained to recognise people who don’t belong here […] so we really can spot people that don’t belong in the hotel, so this makes it uninteresting [for sex traffickers] to come in” (A10)

Moreover, when discussing an experience he had with potential sex trafficking in his hotel, A5 stated:

“we didn’t have a good feeling about it, but we didn’t have the course yet, right now we know a bit more about it through the course, and we have learnt our lesson” (A5)
Through this statement, A5 reiterates the importance of being trained by specifying that before the training, he was not able to properly spot the signs himself, and he has learnt his lesson once the course was followed by him and his staff. Along these lines, other participants mentioned the importance for all employees in the hotel to be trained on the matter. For instance, A4 stated:

“Reception is the one that is dealing with these issues mostly, but it could be that you are just going upstairs to bring the pizza and then you see something, you should be able to identify, technical department should be able to identify...” (A4)

Throughout these quotes, the feeling that transpires is the agreed-upon idea that training is the best tool to fight the issue. In literature, training has been recognised as the most essential and effective tool to fight sex trafficking in the hotel industry (Hotel Management, 2020). Skarhed (2010) mentions front-line employees and managers as the one who most come in contact with sex traffickers and their victims. They are therefore the ones who should be the most trained on the issue. However, as A4 stated, it is important for all employees to be able to spot the signs and know how to act accordingly. In this sense, the lack of training in hotels is considered a factor which helps sex traffickers in their crimes. As A8 stated: “People definitely need to be more trained in it to keep the issue from going away” (A8), thus remarking how some hotels are currently not trained on the topic, which is an issue when trying to fight the crime globally.

However, in order to be effective, training needs to be continuous and intersectional. When asked about the precautions he takes to fight the crime in his hotel, Q2 stated: “Awareness training annually, keep the topic alive by taking about it monthly” (Q2), thus remarking the need for training to be constant. As previously stated, sex traffickers “are coming to be smarter as well” (A9). Their tactics are continuously changing and adapting (Guerette & Bowers, 2009), thus continuous research and training is essential. Along these lines, A9 stated

“I have never seen in a training, good examples of boys being victims as well, there are some things, but I think there can be more clear as well” (A9)

Although A9 discusses cases of Child Trafficking, and this thesis focuses on sex trafficking, his quote mainly expresses a sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of intersectionality of the training hotels receive. In literature, socially disadvantaged segments are recognised as at a higher risk for sex trafficking than any other group of people. Cultural oppression, racist and ethnic biases are only some of the characteristics which make some individuals – mainly women – more vulnerable to sex trafficking (Bryant-Davis & Tummala-Narra, 2017; Davidson, 2004; Miriam, 2005). The fact that training in hotels fails to recognise such vulnerability, is considered as a further crime enabler for sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam.

The lack of proper, continuous and intersectional training is recognised a factor which acts as a sex trafficking enabler in the hotel industry at the micro level because its degree, consistency and intersectionality varies from hotel to hotel.
5.3.3 Size

Section 3.1 discussed displacement theory, and explained how, in literature, both bigger and smaller hotels have their own struggles. However, in Amsterdam, multiple participants seemed to agree that smaller hotels are less susceptible to sex trafficking than bigger hotels. When questioned on their opinion why sex traffickers do not choose their hotel, some participants responded:

“We are a small hotel, with only a couple of employees, and we have a good overview of all the rooms. So, if one person would receive multiple guests during the day, it would be very obvious for us” (A3)

“You know everyone that is in house, you know? The manager is there behind your back knowing every step of everyone and I would highly doubt that something like that would pass unnoticed” (A4)

“The size of your hotel, because when it is a bigger hotel you are more anonymous than a smaller hotel because in here, if someone is checking in, we really recognise people, we really know which room number somebody is staying in, and we remember that Mr. B. is staying in room 101, for example, but in the larger hotels, I also worked in a larger hotel, people are just walking in and out and you don’t even know which room number they are in, because they have like 400 rooms, you don’t remember all the guests of course” (A10)

As A4 and A10 hinted, this factor is highly tied with the previously discussed concept of privacy and anonymity. Such view was confirmed by other participants, who stated:

“The scale of our hotel enables them to hide in the masses” (Q1)

“Because it is a big hotel we didn’t notice that there were a lot of guys coming into the room already [...] You don’t really get a view of who is coming into the hotel and who is going out, so that is the typical place where these things will happen. Because it is a big hotel, so you are invisible” (A9)

“They mainly aim for bigger hotels because, if they are full, it is hard to spot them” (A13)

However, A14 exposes a completely different point of view, by stating:

“I think the bigger hotels, they have their prevention methods better than the smaller hotels. The staff is well trained, there is a security department, a lot of cameras. I think the smaller hotels have not so many staff members, so I think they are more anonymous than in the bigger hotels” (A14)

A14’s statement is in alignment with Paraskevas and Brookes’ (2018) study, which recognised smaller hotels as more susceptible to sex trafficking because of their limited resources. As Janes (2005) stated, providing training in small-sized hotels can be challenging. The previous section recognised lack of training as a major factor affecting sex trafficking in hotels. Thus, smaller hotels having less access to training, makes them enable sex trafficking. On the other hand, as participants pointed out, bigger hotels usually allow for a higher level of privacy and
anonymity (Coughlan, 2019), which has also been recognised as a sex trafficking enabler. In this sense, hotel size has been recognised as a factor affecting sex trafficking in the hotel sector, which is highly linked to other factors. As the participants pointed out, different hotels have different internal struggles due to their size. Based on this notion, support to fight sex trafficking should be given to the hotels according to their specific characteristics such as size, pricing and location, which have been and will be discussed in the following sections. This factor is placed at the micro level because, although each hotel size has its internal struggles, such size varies from a hotel to another, and is therefore dependent on single hotel’s characteristics.

5.3.4 Ease of Access
The previous section recognised the size of the hotel as a potential sex trafficking enabler. As most participants pointed out, bigger hotels usually allow more privacy and anonymity, which is exploited by sex traffickers to commit their crimes. Along these lines, A11 stated:

“The more entry points you have, the bigger the chance of someone getting in without being seen, or sneak in places that are less visible” (A11)

Through this statement, A11 points out the number of entry points as another way for sex traffickers to seek and exploit anonymity. Similarly, A12 and A13 stated:

“What happened in the South a couple of years ago, in which this young underage girl was used by many many men, it was a hotel with another entrance, which has suites or apartment-style rooms, which meant you had less access to the rooms from the housekeeping, which makes the anonymity of the person even more achievable” (A12)

“They are also searching for hotels which have an entrance which is not right in front of the reception […] some hotels in Amsterdam have a reception in the first floor and the entrance in the ground level, straight to your room. If it is possible, then you can avoid the reception or staff” (A13)

Through different entry points and entrances, sex traffickers are able to avoid the front-door staff. As A12 states, this is also eased by the presence of a lift with an open door – meaning that you do not need a key card to access the corridors. Similarly, the presence of a parking space which is directly connected to the hotel room, as A4 stated:

“It was a hotel where you could easily go up with the lift, there were a lot of guests and the doors would stay open so a lot of guests would visit and jump on the lift” (A12)

“You can access the parking, and some of the parking goes straight to the room […] you don’t have to make everyone go through the front door, you don’t have everyone to be in the cameras, so that could be inviting” (A4)

As participants pointed out, the ease of access to the hotel rooms allows sex traffickers to avoid contact with the front-desk employees or managers and remain more anonymous. Ease of access is given by, for instance, multiple or disconnected entrances, the presence of a nearby parking area, or the presence of a lift which directly connects to the room, avoiding the front-desk. Little to no current research takes such factors into consideration when researching sex
trafficking in hotels. However, in this research ease of access to the rooms is considered a sex trafficking enabler because it allows sex traffickers to avoid the front-desk employees who, through proper and constant training, would possibly be able to spot signs of sex trafficking. By avoiding them, sex traffickers can also remain more anonymous and further exploit privacy to commit their crimes. This factor is placed at the micro level because the listed characteristics – entrances, parking and elevator – are dependent on the single hotel’s structure.

5.3.5 Location

In Amsterdam, the location of hotels is highly linked to their size. Participants pointed out how, generally, the centre of Amsterdam is characterized by mostly small-scale hotels, while bigger hotels are usually located in the outskirts. Although some exceptions apply, that is the general structure of hotels in Amsterdam, and Table 1 confirms such view. Therefore, location is highly linked with the size of the hotel, which the previous section recognised as a potential sex trafficking enabler in the hotel industry. Along those lines, A10 and A4 stated:

“My opinion is that it is happening more outside the city centre, in more quieter areas, than in the city centre, that is my experience [...] I think people are more anonymous outside the city centre [...] We are in the middle of the city, for us it is very busy here. If I look outside I see so many people now, so to enter this building you are not anonymous at all, there is a big terrace next to it, trams, etc., so this location is not a really good location, I think, for sex trafficking” (A10)

“For the ones in the city centre, I think it is not very convenient, because they are so small, one had 21 rooms and the other had 16 rooms, or something like that” (A4)

From A10 and A4’s point of view, sex trafficking is mainly experienced by hotels in the outskirts of Amsterdam because their larger size, and the lack of affluence of people allows for higher levels of privacy and autonomy which, as discussed, are highly exploited by sex traffickers. Moreover, A12 and A14 explain that hotels in the outskirts usually provide parking, which increases the ease of access, already discussed in the previous section. They stated:

“If it is on the outskirts, it means you can park easily, whereas in the centre you can hardly park anywhere, you are in the main spotlight, there are more cameras in the streets, I think that’s a great deal of difference within the locations, centrally-located hotels and hotels in the suburbs and at the airport” (A12)

“We can see that most of them go outside the centre because people can easily park there” (A14)

As explained in the previous section, ease of access to the hotel rooms is one of the sex trafficking enablers in hotels. The easier the access to hotel rooms, the more susceptible the hotel will be to cases of sex trafficking. Location is tied to this concept because, differently from hotels in the city centre, hotels in the outskirts usually provide better parking options, which increases the degree of ease of access to the room. Therefore, hotels in the outskirts are considered by some participants as enablers of sex trafficking. On the other hand, A11 provided a different point of view. He stated:
“Our hotel is situated in the business district of Amsterdam, and I think those up to no good, it could be either a walk-in or a booking in advance. However, people that show up as a walk-in in our hotel are much more likely to be up to no good than those who book in advance, because if somebody at 11 o’clock at night, in the business district, two young people... why are you here? What are you doing? It makes no sense, it is already a strange thing to be walking around in the business district, an older guy and a young lady, or two young guys, what are you doing here? So that already puts us on chart [...] for a city centre hotel, that will be completely different, because it will be completely normal that people have no idea where they sleep during the night” (A11)

From A11’s point of view, the positioning of his hotel in the business district – which is in the outskirts of Amsterdam – allows him to receive a selected customer segment. Therefore, spotting people who do not belong to such segment is usually easier, than for a hotel which targets multiple customer segments. From this point of view, hotels in the centre are more likely enablers of sex trafficking. Similarly to hotels of different sizes, hotels of different locations are all potentially enabling sex trafficking, for different reasons. This remarks the idea of the need for training to take into consideration these different factors and provide support to hotels based on their specific case. This factor is placed at the micro level because location varies depending on the hotel.

Remarks

5.4 Further Discussion

The previous three sections have displayed some quotes from the participants who, through their statements, identified factors which act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry in Amsterdam. However, what all factors together highlight, is the lack of a proper cohesive system aimed at aiding hoteliers in the fight. As Gibbs et al. (2015)´s research highlighted, in order to fight any kind of trafficking, a support system is in need. However, the participants showed high inconsistency in most themes. For example, while A14 reported good communication with the police:

“There is a special department for it, and we are in good contact with the police, and when we are suspicious [...] I know who to call, and there is a lot of attention for it, it is good” (A14)

On the other hand, A11 reported the complete opposite:

“Often, when we did ask, or shared information with police, they are very hesitant to act on it, because they really need very hard facts, and they will not listen to gut feelings and observations, they want very hard facts” (A11)

From this perspective, it seems like the two participants were from completely different Countries or cities, which highlights the inconsistency of the city of Amsterdam in the way the police acts. The same inconsistency was reported throughout almost all themes, for instance when some participants pointed out how hotels in the outskirts are more inclined to receive cases of sex trafficking:
“We can see that most of them go outside the centre” (A14)

However, as previously discussed, A11 proposes a completely different view, and mentions how hotels in the city centre probably have more difficulties identifying cases because of the variety of guests they attract. Once again, participants disagree within themselves and, in doing so, report the lack of a proper system which considers all these facets of this crime. As previously discussed, training is essential in fighting the issue. However, training can only be effective if constant and intersectional – meaning that it considers every instance through which the crime can develop. What the analysis of the participants´ respondents further highlights, is the improper training. Firstly, the police should be aware that sex trafficking is a hidden crime – as discussed in section 5.1.5 – thus hoteliers should be believed and assisted even without hard evidence. Along these lines, the police should also be trained on the characteristics of hotels sex traffickers exploit to commit their crimes. A closer look should be taken on the level of privacy and anonymity of the guests, which may be increased by the size and ease of access of each singular hotel. Ease of access may also increase the transiency of the hotel, which sex traffickers exploit to commit their crimes. In Amsterdam, police should also have a closer look at the location of each hotel and aid them respectively. As the participants pointed out, hotels in different locations have different struggles, and they should be assisted according to such struggles.

Hotel employees also play a major role in fighting the issue. What the participants´ inconsistency in the answers highlighted, is the need for hotel employees to have a cohesive plan to fight the issue. Because of the lack of legislations – discussed in section 5.1.3 – hotels are given a lot of autonomy, which is usually kept at the higher levels of hierarchy, while lower-level employees usually have the opposite problem and need to report to higher-level employees. Again, such inconsistency remarks the lack of cohesiveness in the fight on the issue. As A13 stated: “every hotel has these situations in Amsterdam, I am pretty sure about it” (A13). Therefore, every hotel should be somehow involved in the fight, according to its single characteristics – discussed at the micro level. Autonomy should not be allowed on whether or not a hotel wants or does not want to fight the issue. Everyone should be properly trained and involved. Furthermore, in order for the training to be effective, it should take into consideration the hotel’s ease of access which, to reiterate, increases privacy and anonymity; its location and struggles related to it, and its size. The only agreed-upon factor by the participants is pricing: hotels with a good quality-price ratio have been recognised as more inclined to receive sex trafficking. Thus, these should be the most involved in the fight. Once trained, lower-level employees should be given the power and autonomy to act on their suspicions.

As (Kubasek & Herrera, 2015) pointed out, it is now time for a new approach to the fight of sex trafficking. As showed, different stakeholders are involved. In the case of sex trafficking in hotels, and in the case of this research, the police and hotel employees seem to have a higher impact on the issue. As this section discussed, both parties are in need of further and proper training in Amsterdam. Although the Netherlands was classified as the Country with the most governmental response on the issue (U.S. Department of State, 2020), this thesis highlights the lack of response when it comes to sex trafficking in hotels. What is most needed, overall, is a
cohesive training and plan, which considers every facet of this intricate crime, in order to
dismantle it effectively. If each party is properly and cohesively involved, the impact is
potentially higher (Gibbs et al., 2015).
Chapter 6. Conclusions

This final chapter will conclude the thesis by summarising the findings, discuss the limitations and suggestions for further research, as well as how the thesis contributes to existing literature.

6.1 Summary of the findings

The study aimed at investigating the factors acting as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry in Amsterdam, from an employee’s perspective. Through individual semi-structured interviews with 15 hotel employees, and two answers to an online questionnaire, the study identified 15 factors, respectively divided into one of three levels: macro, meso or micro, which represent their nature. At the macro level were placed those factors that are external to the industry but affect it directly or indirectly, at the meso level those factors that are internal to the industry but not associable to any specific hotel. Lastly, at the micro level, those factors that are relevant and associable to single hotels in Amsterdam.

Through the division into the macro, meso and micro level, the findings have answered all three research questions: they identified five environmental factors (macro level) that provide opportunities for sex trafficking in the hotel industry, five hotel industry characteristics (meso level) that act as sex trafficking enablers in the hotel industry in Amsterdam, and five characteristics of hotels (micro level) that enable sex trafficking in Amsterdam. Among all, there are findings that are redeemed most relevant and having the highest contribution to society. At the macro level, legislations and the police; at the meso level, hospitality and transiency and, at the micro level, training and ease of access. These findings stand out because, along with being the most discussed by the participants, they are believed to have a high potential in contributing to solving sex trafficking in the hotel industry, if taken into considerations by involved stakeholders. The police and the legislations should adapt proper measures and be more involved to support hotels against their fight, while having the limitation of hospitality and transiency as their priority, and taking a closer look at single hotel’s level of training and ease of access as potential contributors to such issue.

6.2 Limitations and future research

As previously mentioned, the data was gathered through 17 participants, which were enough to reach data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). However, since the thesis adopted the voluntary sampling method, all interviewed participants were, at least to some extent, involved in the fight against the issue. On the other hand, other hotels have denied encountering such issue. A hotel in the red-light district went as far to reply to the email of request by stating “we have not experienced it in our hotel”. However, as A13 stated: “every hotel has these situations in Amsterdam, I am pretty sure about it” (A13). Considering the contacted hotel in question is located in the red-light district, the heart of the sex business in Amsterdam, where most prostitutes are being forced and exploited (Abdul, 2019; Caldwell, 2010; Manning, 2018), it is unlikely for them to not be susceptible to such cases. The hotel in question is just an example of the inconsistency of the response rate. In fact, the latter was characterised by a very high eagerness to share from hotels who are actively fighting the issue, and denial by other hotels, especially those situated in the red-light district. Therefore, future research could try and gather data from employees working in the red-light district, or individuals who have previously
worked there, in order to produce further themes, or add more points of discussion to the already-existing factors. For instance, the micro-level factor “location” would perhaps discuss further implications on how being situated at the red-light district impacts the level of sex trafficking in the hotel.

Moreover, the research helped identify other suggestions for further research, such as using a personal check-in and increased hospitality as a tool to sway off sex traffickers, or the level of ease of access as a factor which makes a hotel more susceptible to sex trafficking. Moreover, since the research was descriptive in nature, it had the aim of describing the phenomenon of sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam (Islamia, 2016). Future research could focus on finding solutions to the discussed factors. Lastly, considering the research is based on the hotel employee’s perspectives, further research could include other stakeholders’ perspectives on the same issues and factors, such as the police.

6.3 Contributions

Being the thesis inspired by Paraskevas & Brookes (2018)’s study, it contributed to current research by identifying further factors that make the hotel industry “vulnerable”, as they describe it. Furthermore, the thesis contributed to current research by filling the current research gap and identifying factors which influence sex trafficking in the hotel industry in Amsterdam, from an employee’s perspective, utilising primary data.

In literature and media, sex trafficking is portrayed as a crime that happens “somewhere else” (Hillman, 2019). As this thesis showed, not only sex trafficking happens in the most developed Countries in Europe, but it is also more common than one might believe. As Weitzer (2012) stated, sex trafficking and, more generally, crimes in the sex industry are currently in need of further research. This thesis is only one of the steps necessary for shedding light on a topic often neglected because deemed too sensitive. Although the thesis surely did not solve the issue of sex trafficking in the hotel industry, it contributed to current research and society by further raising awareness, and highlighting the degree of the issue in Amsterdam, in the hope that other stakeholders will also contribute to the fight against the issue.

6.4 Conclusions

Sex trafficking is a form of modern slavery that currently affects around 4 million individuals globally (Internationales Arbeitsamt et al., 2017), of which 9 thousand are being trafficked throughout the European continent. As the thesis pointed out, it is a subtle and hidden crime, affecting every facet of society. In the tourism industry, the most affected sector are hotels, who possess certain characteristics which act as crime enablers to sex trafficking. As this thesis showed, such characteristics may be external to the industry, such as the patriarchy, or the police; or be inherently connected to the industry, such as hospitality or transiency. Lastly, these characteristics may also be dependent on the single hotel’s characteristics, such as its size or location. Therefore, by identifying 15 of these characteristics, at the macro, meso and micro level, the thesis contributed to current research by filling the current research gap, and potentially raising awareness on an issue that is often neglected. Raise of awareness and education are, in fact, one of the first necessary steps to fighting the issue.
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Appendix A

Consent Form

Consent to participate in the study: Sex trafficking in the hotel industry: the case of Berlin and Amsterdam.

I have been informed about the study in writing and I consent to participating. I am aware that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation in the study without providing a reason. My signature below indicates that I choose to participate in the study and consent to Södertörn University processing my personal data in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation and the information provided.

..............................................
Signature

.............................................. Name in print Place and date

All personal data that come to our knowledge will be processed so that unauthorised persons cannot access them. The personal data will be stored until the thesis has received a pass grade and will then be destroyed.

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Researcher´s signature Date

23/03/2021
Appendix B

Interview guide

Aim: investigating the vulnerabilities of the hospitality industry that sex traffickers exploit to force women into prostitution and Amsterdam

- Explain the aim of the study
- Explain that they will remain 100% anonymous
- Explain that everything they will say will be confidential
- Explain that no legal repercussions will be made from what they say
- Everything is written in the Consent form

1. What is your position in the hotel you work in?
2. How long have you worked there?
3. Do you have any previous experience in the hotel industry in Amsterdam? (If yes, feel free to relate to that if any question applies)
4. Where is the hotel positioned? Is it in a big city, countryside, etc...?
5. Is the hotel big? How many guests can it welcome?
6. What is your general point of view on sex trafficking?
7. Did it ever occur that, while working, you were wondering if the women you were coming in contact with were being trafficked? Why did you think/not think that? Can you give me examples?
8. Have you ever seen anyone suspect, who could be acting crimes such as sex trafficking? Can you tell me the story?
9. Did your management or supervisor ever warn or taught you about sex trafficking in hotels? Have you heard it from anyone or anywhere else?
10. In the training for sex trafficking in hotels, were you informed on the statistics of immigrant women and WoC being more likely to be trafficked?

11. What were your managers’ or superiors’ position regarding sex trafficking in their hotel? Did they care?

12. In your opinion, why would sex traffickers choose the hotel you work in?

13. In your everyday work life, are there precautions you take to stop sex trafficking in the hospitality industry?

14. If you ever feel like taking those precautions, would your management ever let you do that?

15. Considering your work experience, what would you do to stop sex trafficking in the industry if you were a manager?

16. If you were your manager, what would you suggest to receptionists/cleaning staff to do?

17. Considering your work experience, if you were a politician, is there any law you would change?

18. Have you noticed an increase in sex trafficking during any particular occasions or times during the year?

19. Considering your work experience if you were a policeman, what would you do about the issue?

20. Is there anything you wish you could do, but don’t? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix C

Online Questionnaire

The following questionnaire was formulated as data gathering for the fulfilment of the Master’s dissertation on Sex Trafficking in the hotel industry in Berlin and Amsterdam. By answering the questions, you consent on the data being used and analysed in the Master’s dissertation. You are free to not answer any of the questions or withdraw consent whenever desired. The data will be kept 100% anonymous and confidential: no personal information or information on the hotel will be shared or utilised. Any information shared in the document cannot and will not have any legal repercussion. Feel free to contact the researcher for any question or concern.

Thank you in advance,

Eleonora.

1. What is your position in the hotel you work in?
2. How long have you worked there?
3. Where is the hotel positioned (city centre, rural area…)?
4. How big would you consider the hotel to be?
5. What is your general opinion and point of view on sex trafficking?
6. Did it ever occur that, while working, you wondered if the women you were coming in contact with were being trafficked? Why did you think/not think that? Can you give me examples?
7. Have you ever seen anyone suspect, who could be acting crimes such as sex trafficking? Can you tell me the story?
8. Who have you first heard about sex trafficking in the hotel industry?
9. In the training for sex trafficking in hotels, were you informed on the statistics of immigrant women and WoC being more likely to be trafficked?
10. In your opinion, why would sex traffickers choose/not choose the hotel you work in?

11. In your everyday work life, are there precautions you take to stop sex trafficking in the hotel industry?

12. As a manager, what are your suggestions to the receptionists/cleaning staff?

13. Considering your work experience, if you were a politician, is there any law you would change?

14. Considering your work experience, if you were a policeman, what would you do about the issue?

15. Have you noticed an increase in sex trafficking during any particular occasions or times during the year?

16. Is there anything you wish you could do, but don’t? Why?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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