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In the Shadow of the Pandemic: Exploring the Intersection of Crisis and Human Trafficking in Kenya

A Qualitative Case Study on the Effects of COVID-19 on Vulnerabilities, Emerging
Trends, and NGO Responses

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe economic and social disruptions in Kenya, which exacerbated vulnerabilities and raised concerns about potential increases in human trafficking. Therefore, this qualitative case study examines how the pandemic affected human trafficking and NGO responses during this period. The primary data was collected through 14 semi-structured interviews with anti-trafficking NGOs in Kenya. In addition, secondary data was gathered to further support the conceptualization of the thesis. The study utilizes Push and Pull Theory and crisis management concepts to analyze underlying factors contributing to potential changes and illustrate vulnerability to trafficking. The results of the study reveal that the pandemic exacerbated underlying structural factors known to foster trafficking. It exposed new human trafficking trends, including online child sexual exploitation, and online recruitment. The study also found indications of reverse migration, and increased vulnerability for children from middle-income backgrounds. Additionally, the study found that the restrictions severely impeded NGO operations. This suggests that combating human trafficking necessitates addressing a variety of interconnected factors and emphasizes the need for comprehensive crisis response plans that consider human trafficking. These findings contribute to the anti-trafficking sector and crisis management and underscore the crucial role of NGOs in providing essential services during crises.

Key words: *Kenya, Human Trafficking, Covid-19, Push and Pull Factors, Crisis Management, NGOS*

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List of Abbreviations

GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

List of Definitions

Globalization

Refers to Ai-Rodhan’s definition, which aims to provide a comprehensive overview that incorporates various aspects of the current understandings of globalization, “*Globalization is a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities.*” (Ai-Rodhan, 2006).

Poverty

Refers to concepts framed in monetary poverty where lack of income prevents individuals from meeting basic needs. It is assessed in income below a specified poverty line. Despite contestants to the term is useful for assessing poverty within populations (Laderchi, et.al., 2003)

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Figure 1: Flowchart of Findings: Disease Outbreak and Human Trafficking Nexus

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a profound impact on societies worldwide, causing significant economic and social disruptions. In Africa, the pandemic resulted in a severe socio-economic crisis with countries facing a range of challenges (UNb, n.d). Without proper social security nets, Kenya got particularly affected with its economy experiencing a substantial downturn, which undermined the sustainable development efforts and resulted in unemployment, homelessness and food insecurities (Ngwacho, 2020). The economic and social disruption raised concerns within the anti-human trafficking sector about the potential increase in vulnerability to trafficking. Human trafficking is a severe violation of human rights that involves abuse and exploitation of vulnerable people, which leads to significant physical and psychological harm (OHCHR, 2014). In an attempt to limit the spread of the virus the government introduced restrictions of movements, social distancing and lockdowns. The lockdowns made million Kenyans lose their source of income, which made more people vulnerable (Wasike, 2021). Vulnerability to human trafficking is often caused by a complex interplay of factors, such as economic deprivation, poverty, gender, age, discrimination, political instability, and marginalization (Stanojovska & Petrevski, 2012; Kara, 2011). These vulnerabilities stem from various sources, such as lack of education and job opportunities, social exclusion, and gender-based violence (Viuhko, 2019; Worsnop, 2019). In regard to the economic downturn and social disruption, the pandemic posed a severe threat to have amplified the already existing inequalities which render people vulnerable to trafficking. Furthermore, since NGOs bear a significant responsibility for anti-trafficking efforts in Kenya (Mondal et.al., 2015), and given the impact of the government's restrictions on their work, it is imperative to comprehend the obstacles they encountered during the pandemic.

Given the potential for the COVID-19 pandemic to exacerbate violations of human rights and undermine sustainable development efforts in Kenya, it is crucial to investigate the pandemic's effects on human trafficking, as well as NGOs responses and their faced challenges. To that end, this thesis seeks to gather insights from NGOs in Kenya, with a focus on understanding the underlying push and pull factors that drive human trafficking, while examining the pandemics impact on vulnerable people. Thus, this research intends to provide valuable insights to inform future anti-trafficking strategies during times of crisis.

1.1 Specific Aim and Research Questions

As the previous section illustrated, the COVID-19 pandemic has raised the potential for alarming impacts on the human trafficking scene in Kenya. Therefore, the thesis aims at examining how the pandemic has affected the prevalence and nature of human trafficking during the time, and the underlying factors that have contributed to potential changes. The thesis will also examine the responses taken by NGOs during the pandemic to shed light on their challenges and responses. Thus, the objective of the thesis is to illustrate the underlying factors that foster vulnerability to trafficking and intends to provide insights into areas of improvements for crisis management to prevent human trafficking in times of future crises.

1.2 Research Questions

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected human trafficking in Kenya?
- How have NGOs responded to the human trafficking situation during the pandemic?

The rationale to focus on NGOs is due to their vital role in protecting human rights and providing services to vulnerable communities in Kenya (Mondal et.al., 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to bring the frontline worker's perspectives to the forefront on how the COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for their continued operation during the crisis.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Given the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic additional research is needed to better understand the pandemic's impacts on the human trafficking scene. The significance of conducting further primary research lies in the necessity to gain insight on how the crisis affected vulnerability to trafficking (UNODC, 2021). Human trafficking is a critical development concern, as it undermines social and economic development, perpetuates cycles of poverty and violates individual rights. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the growing literature on the causes of human trafficking by focusing on the complex relationship between disease outbreaks and trafficking (Worsnop, 2019). An understanding of this crucial nexus is important for crisis management and prevention interventions. The thesis also aligns with SDG 8.7 which aims at ending modern slavery by 2030 (UNa, n.d).

1.4 Outline of Thesis

The thesis is structured into seven chapters. Chapter one introduces the significance of the problem statement and presents the research questions. Chapter two delineates the specific contextual background given the human trafficking scene in Kenya, and the implications the country faced during the pandemic. The third chapter presents a human trafficking definition and a comprehensive review of the drivers known to foster human trafficking, including efforts to alleviate it. It also presents literature specifically focusing on the nexus between disease outbreaks and human trafficking. The fourth chapter describes the methodological structure including methods on data collection and analysis. Chapter five details the theoretical underpinnings of the study to guide the analysis. The sixth chapter analyzes the gathered data and discusses the corresponding findings, while chapter seven draws conclusions and discusses future research to inform future policy.

2. Background

The number of people subjected to modern forms of slavery has risen to an estimated 50 million, which is a significant increase of ten million since 2016 (IOMa, 2022). As rates of human trafficking continue to increase globally, the fight against it faces significant challenges in Africa (Chadwick, 2019). Kenya, in particular, adds to the complexity of the problem as the country serves as an origin, destination, and transition route for human trafficking (STTK, 2020). Therefore, the upcoming section aims at situating human trafficking in Kenya to provide insights into the multifaceted nature of the phenomena, by presenting general trends, recruitment tactics, responsive mechanisms, and the pandemic implications on the country.

2.1 Situating Human Trafficking in Kenya

Both external and internal trafficking is prevalent in Kenya where the latter is most prominent (RMMS, 2013). The two primary forms of human trafficking in Kenya are forced labor and sexual exploitation (U.S Department of State, 2021; 2022). Forced labor is often prevalent in agriculture, fishing, domestic work and construction. While individuals in sexual exploitation are typically found in commercial sex work in the coastal region of the country (UoN, 2021). Girls and women are frequently trafficked to Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu for the purpose of adult entertainment business, forced prostitution, and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation (ibid). In 2020, local NGOs reported that approximately 40,000 individuals were subjected to sex trafficking, with children accounting for nearly half of the figure (U.S Department of State, 2022). The prevalence of child trafficking is alarming, with numerous children being subjected to sexual exploitation, or forced labor in sectors such as agriculture and begging (HAART, 2015; UoN, 2021).

The research on factors causing human trafficking in Kenya is limited. However, the factors believed to impact the occurrence of labor and sex trafficking in Africa include severe poverty, traditional African customs, insufficient vocational, educational and employment prospects, as well as gender roles and inequality (Dottridge, 2002; IOM, 2018; Litam, et.al., 2021; Onuoha, 2011; Salah, 2001; Swart, 2012; UNICEF, 2003). Furthermore, Onuoha (2011) links corruption and poor governance to wars, conflicts, high levels of joblessness, impoverishment, and diseases in Africa, to increase vulnerability to trafficking. Additionally, the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s, and the effects of globalization, are argued to have intensified

these internal issues (ibid). This emphasizes that, to tackle human trafficking and address human rights violations in Africa, it is crucial to address the quality of leadership and the nature of the government in the area (ibid).

In Kenya, 38.7 percent of the population live in multidimensional poverty, which indicates that numerous are vulnerable to trafficking due to poor economic opportunities (UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, Kenya's trafficking vulnerabilities include poverty, migration, lack of safe housing, and limited access to education (U.S Department of State, 2022). To lessen the financial burden, parents commonly send their children away in the hopes of giving them a better life, however, this puts children at risk for becoming trafficked in forced labor and sexual exploitation (Litam et.al., 2021; Salah, 2001). Traffickers often deceive rural parents with false promises of better opportunities for their children in urban households. However, upon arrival the children are often subjected to long working hours, which deprives them of education and endangers their well-being (Litam et.al., 2021; Salah, 2001). Accordingly, there prevails a demand for girl's domestic labor in urban areas as they are sought for their obedience, while boys generally get recruited for their physical strength on farms (Dottridge, 2002). Thus, children from marginalized communities are at risk of being trafficked to urban areas for street begging, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation (Dottridge, 2002; Favour et.al., 2020). Finally, migration to Gulf Cooperation Countries also leads to many semi-skilled or low-skilled individuals being trafficked, which contributes to the prevalence of international labor exploitation and domestic servitude (UoN, 2021).

2.1.1 Modus Operandi of Recruitment Methods

Human traffickers, whether they are large scale organized criminal groups, or small-scale networks (National Crime Research Centre, 2014), utilize a variety of tactics and methods to recruit potential targets. The general modus operandi in Kenya are through deception, manipulation, familiarity, forced recruitment and forced migration (OHCHR, n.d). Recruiters tend to use debt-based coercion to force foreign women, particularly from South Asian countries, to work in dance clubs, where they are forced to pay off debts through commercial sex (U.S Department of State, 2022). Additionally, false promises of fraudulent jobs, education, or marriage are common tactics used to lure individuals into trafficking (U.S Department of State, 2022). Hence, many traffickers prey on individual's vulnerabilities and desires for a better life by manipulation (ibid). Some traffickers exploit their trust and

familiarity to recruit potential targets through personal connections. As such, traffickers are commonly known to be acquainted with the potential target, this is particularly prevalent in informal settings in Kenya where friends or families are often seen to facilitate the recruitment process (HAART, 2015; U.S Department of State, 2022). In some instances, traffickers force the targeted person through the use of violence and coercion by threat or abduction (OHCHR, n.d). Furthermore, another prevalent recruitment tactic is through recruitment agencies or employment bureaus, who help Kenyans find employment opportunities abroad, often in the Middle East. However, these agencies are commonly used as fronts to recruit and evaluate potential targets of human trafficking, where the recruiters exploit their desperation to traffick them abroad (Munania et.al., 2022). Hence, human trafficking is recognized as a sophisticated and a complex crime, where traffickers adapt their recruitment methods to the occurring circumstances.

2.2. Overview of Responsive Mechanisms

According to evaluations by the U.S Department of State, the Kenyan government's efforts to eliminate human trafficking is extensive but insufficient (2022). In response, the Kenyan government has adopted several legal instruments to combat human trafficking. For instance, the Constitution of Kenya informs about the Bill of Rights, which includes the Right to Human Dignity (Article 28), Freedom of the Person (Article 29), Freedom from Slavery, Servitude and Forced labor (Article 30) (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Additionally, the country signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish trafficking in persons especially women and children (Palermo Protocol) in 2005, which led to the enactment of the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010 (CTIP). The CTIP serves as the country's primary legislative framework on human trafficking and outlines measures of prevention, protection and prosecution (Counter Trafficking Act, 2012). Other laws containing provisions on human trafficking are the Children Act, the Sexual Offences Act, the Employment Act, as well as the Victim Protection Act and the Witness Protection Act (UNODCb, n.d). Furthermore, multiple policy frameworks and guidelines have been developed to further aid the elimination of the trafficking issues, such as the National Plan of Action for Combating Human Trafficking and The National Referral Mechanism Guidelines (ibid). Despite the vast jurisdiction against human trafficking in Kenya, law enforcement is limited, and traffickers frequently act with impunity (UoN, 2021). The lack of skills and knowledge on how to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases is one challenge

to properly address human trafficking (ibid). Consequently, the Kenyan government relies heavily on the civil society for prevention and provision of services and support (Mondal et.al., 2015). However, the government's financial support for these organizations is insufficient (U.S Department of State, 2022).

Different types of organizations, such as INGOs and NGOs, provide numerous efforts to combat human trafficking globally. Common ways are through legal-institutional means, direct interventions and supporting programs (Bryant & Landman, 2020). Depending on the organizational focus different means to fight trafficking prevail. General anti-trafficking trends are efforts through awareness raising, advocacy for particular domestic laws and anti-trafficking policies, intervention and reintegration. Furthermore, provision of employment and vocational training assistance are particularly prominent efforts by NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bryant & Landman, 2020; Limoncelli, 2016).

The multitude of NGOs and CSOs operating in Kenya play a significant role in addressing the issue of trafficking since the government continues to rely on them to address the issue (U.S Department of State, 2022). As more organizations continue to join the fight against human trafficking, and despite that almost 20 years have passed since the implementation of the Palermo Protocol, Kenya is still struggling to find good practices to eliminate human trafficking. The trend, rather, seems to keep evolving as the amount of people found in trafficking is increasing globally, which reflects the difficulties for its alleviation.

2.3. Implications of the Pandemic in Kenya

On the 13th of March in 2020, Kenya confirmed its first official case of the novel Coronavirus. In response the Kenyan government introduced restrictions and regulations with severe noncompliance penalties to mitigate the spread of the virus. Among them were social distancing, travel restrictions, closure of schools and borders, working from home, marshaling of essential workers and a dusk-till-dawn curfew (McCabe, 2021; Schmid et.al., 2021). The closure of schools laid bare structural inequalities, particularly in access to education. Distance learning through online means were inaccessible to students from poor, vulnerable, and marginalized households, which exacerbated the existing inequalities in the quality and availability of education (Ngwacho, 2020). The lockdowns regulated movements which

directly led to constrained access to vital services, particularly among vulnerable groups (Schmid et.al., 2021). The restrictions caused disruptions in food systems which led to food inflation and high costs of living (Kunyanga et.al., 2023). More specifically, workers in informal labor were particularly vulnerable, as they found themselves stranded without means to provide for themselves and their families. This amplified the rates of poverty as countless lost their primary source of income (Kansiime, et.al., 2021; Schmid et.al., 2021). According to statistics, approximately 1.7 million jobs were lost in the formal economy and an estimated 5 million jobs were lost in the informal sectors (FKE, 2021; Roimen, 2016; Wasike, 2021). Despite the availability of governmental relief packages, 83,6 percent of the Kenyan workforce operate in the informal sector and could not access these benefits (Roimen, 2016). When basic human necessities are unable to be fulfilled it particularly affects women and children as they are the first to bear burdens that stem from economic insecurities (Pinchoff, 2021). This was further noted in the significant influx of gender-based violence (GBV) cases and domestic violence in Kenya during the pandemic (John et.al., 2021). Since poverty is known to drive people into trafficking, it raises concerns regarding how the pandemic's economic backlash affected the human trafficking scene in the country.

3. Literature Review

This section outlines and discusses the literature of relevance to the thesis. First, a definition of human trafficking is presented, followed by the second part which brings together a comprehensive review of the drivers known to foster human trafficking. The third part explores previous literature concerning efforts to alleviate the phenomenon. The final part presents literature on the nexus between disease outbreaks and human trafficking.

3.1 Human Trafficking Definition

The first internationally recognized and legally binding definition of human trafficking was adopted by the United Nations in November 2000, and was part of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (the Palermo Protocol) defines human trafficking as:

- (a) Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (UNODCa, n.d).

As such, human trafficking is comprised of three distinct elements: *the act* (e.g. employment advertisements, housing individuals in a brothel), *the means* (e.g. false employment contracts, threatening retaliation against the victim or family) and *the purpose* of exploitation (e.g. domestic service, forced agricultural labor, forced prostitution). The targeted person's consent is irrelevant, and no evidence of actual exploitation is required provided the trafficker's intent to exploit can be proven in court. Furthermore, the act of *means* is irrelevant when children are exploited (UNODCa, n.d).

Since the implementation of the Palermo Protocol, concerns about its effectiveness and limitations have been raised. Despite its rather broad definition, the framework has been criticized for being inconclusive, with scholars arguing that it lacks focus on addressing the root causes of trafficking (Hathaway, 2008; Parreñas et.al., 2012). Instead, the focus should be on approaches addressing the underlying driving factors of human trafficking (Parreñas et.al., 2012). Furthermore, previous research argues that only three percent of cases of 'modern

slaves' meet the protocol's full definition of human trafficking (Hathaway, 2008). In response, some prefer to use the term modern slavery as it encompasses all forms of coercive labor or services, including exploitation of bodies (Hathaway, 2008; Kara, 2009).

Against this backdrop, this thesis recognizes the recent shift towards using the umbrella term modern slavery, which encompasses numerous forms of exploitation to allow for further analysis. As such, the thesis also references to the definitions of modern slavery put forth by ILO and Walks Free, which stipulates modern slavery as exploitative situations where a person is unable to refuse or escape from due to threats, coercion, violence, abuse of power, or deception (ILO, Walk Free Foundation & IOMa, 2022; Walk Free Foundation, 2018).

3.2 Drivers to Human Trafficking

Empirical literature on human trafficking is relatively scarce due to the complex and nuanced nature of trafficking, which limits the availability of comprehensive data (Blanton & Blanton, 2020). Legislative and enforcement measures have outpaced social science research on human trafficking, however, more recent academic work offers multiple perspectives on human trafficking drivers (Russel, 2018; Weitzer, 2015: 224). Blanton and Blanton's research found that the literature on human trafficking is typically presented as a criminal activity, a violation of human rights, or as an illicit industry (2020). Although these frames tend to overlap, they provide distinct causes of trafficking and how to structure responsive mechanisms (ibid). By drawing from these frames, Bales (1999) has organized the most salient global factors contributing to human trafficking into three categories; economic, political, and social factors. By examining these dimensions, a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding human trafficking can be achieved.

3.1.1 The Market-Based Industry Frame: Economic Drivers

The market-based approach is used to analyze human trafficking as an illicit industry, with business and economics researchers modeling the market structure of the trade to explain its profitability due to low capital investment, high demand, and low operating costs (Blanton & Blanton, 2020; Kara, 2009, 2011). The approach attributes the challenges in detecting and preventing trafficking to the complexity of global supply chains and the involvement of

multiple private and public actors (Blanton & Blanton, 2020). The economic market system approach is commonly used in academia to understand human trafficking. The approach utilized rational choice to explain the driving factors of human trafficking, where traffickers sell or trade people like commodities to feed different kinds of demands abroad or domestically (Bernat & Zhilina, 2010; Kara, 2011; Rahman, 2011).

Economic influences on human trafficking can be detected on both micro- and macro levels. At the micro level, factors such as border control, criminalization of trafficking, and open borders can influence trafficker's decisions. On a macro level, poverty is seen as a significant determinant of human trafficking, with trafficking often flowing from low-income to higher-income countries. Hence, globalization and neoliberal policies, aiming to increase global economic competitiveness, also contributes to trafficking (Kara, 2009; Shelley, 2010). More specifically, globalization is often explained to foster trafficking since it acts like a catalyst for the demand of cheap labor and products, which in extension, catalyzes a demand of trafficked persons (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014).

3.1.2 The Criminal Activity Frame: Political Drivers

The criminal activity frame views human trafficking as a transnational or domestic criminal activity. As such, trafficking is placed as a problem within criminal networks that transcend national borders alongside illicit enterprises such as illegal trade and money laundering (Blanton & Blanton, 2020; Simmons, Lloyd, & Stewart, 2018, 255). However, the criminal activity approach is often criticized for being too narrow. The approach has been criticized for overlooking broader threats to trafficking, while neglecting economic and social factors influencing trafficking (Blanton & Blanton, 2020; Kreidenweis & Hudson, 2015).

Furthermore, government efforts and policies related to human trafficking can inflict the risk of trafficking as corruption and criminal activity levels are affected by the policies at hand and can, therefore, influence the prevalence of human trafficking (Worsnop, 2019). For instance, crisis, armed conflicts, institutional strength and governmental and NGOs effectiveness are noted to create circumstances conducive to human trafficking (Cho, 2015). Additionally, a

state's revenue sources may also play a role in their capacity to combat human trafficking, as states that rely on taxation are noted to be less likely to be source or destination country for trafficking. Generally, these states are better able to address underlying vulnerabilities to trafficking, such as economic insecurity and education (Blanton, Blanton, & Peksen, 2018; Friman & Reich, 2008; Keo et al., 2014; Mahmoud & Trebesch, 2009).

3.1.3 The Human Rights Frame: Social Drivers

The human rights frame focuses on the impact of trafficking on the individual survivors and highlights the violations of human rights (Blanton & Blanton, 2020). The human rights frame incorporates gendered elements of trafficking, particularly in sex trafficking, where females are considered to be more vulnerable. Approaches based on human rights tend to hold states responsible for their failure to safeguard vulnerable populations from the risk of trafficking. However, policies prioritizing trafficking survivors rehabilitation and care are often less likely to gain political support and resources compared to policies on prosecution (Blanton & Blanton, 2020; Charnysh et.al., 2015). Moreover, social and cultural factors are emphasized to create vulnerabilities that drive people into trafficking (Bales, 2007). For example, social norms accepting child labour has reportedly assisted in the exploitation of children (ibid). Cultural practices and attitudes toward girls are noted to increase their vulnerability to exploitation. For instance, child marriage can feed into trafficking when families receive dowry to relieve economic pressures (UoN, 2021).

Furthermore, traffickers use internet platforms to lure potential targets, with adults being targeted by fraudulent job offers and minors being groomed through deceptive processes of gaining their trust and desensitizing them to sexual contact (Pendergrass, 2018; Winters et.al., 2020). The selection of potential grooming targets is based on specific internal and external vulnerabilities, including exposure to trauma, inhospitable home environments, and unmet basic needs. Studies have shown that a majority of children exploited in sex trafficking typically grow up in environments characterized by different types of violence, such as physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse. These social factors increase the vulnerability of children to sexual grooming strategies (Bruhns, 2014; Cavazos, 2014; Dank et.al., 2014).

3.2.1 Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts

Since the passing of the Palermo Protocol, government and non-governmental organizations have implemented measures on global, regional, and local scales. These measures include devising action plans, providing training, creating policy instruments, and undertaking diverse activities aimed at preventing human trafficking (Davy, 2016). One fundamental international framework is the four P-paradigm: prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership (UNODC, 2012). Prevention efforts focus on awareness raising and providing economic resources to vulnerable communities. Protection refers to recovery and reintegration initiatives. Prosecution includes support to legislation and capacity building of law enforcement and police officers. The fourth “P” emphasizes the importance of partnership to join forces between NGOs and law enforcement to work against the crime (ibid). The paradigm emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches to curbing human trafficking and to protect potential targets as well as foster interorganizational collaboration on anti-trafficking means (Davy, 2016). However, due to lack of rigorous evaluations, there is little understanding of best practices for anti-trafficking policies, and evaluations have been criticized for insufficiently establishing effectiveness and impact. Thus, multiple scholars have highlighted the need for improved evaluations (Bryant & Landman, 2020; Bryant & Joudo, 2017; Hames, et.al., 2010; van der Laan et.al., 2011).

Despite the inability to provide concrete evidence of what works to curb human trafficking, some promising practices inform future projects. First, awareness raising campaigns are frequently utilized in anti-trafficking programs. These campaigns often involve educating the public about the definition and warning signs of human trafficking, and how to report incidents, and implement more targeted interventions that highlight the risks for specific groups (Bryant & Landman, 2020). However, when awareness campaigns are not altered to specific communities, the impact is limited (ibid). Second, governmental support is deemed vital as the passing of legislation can be an effective prevention measure, however, it is stressed that it requires local ownership and sufficient time to account for the duration of implementing legislative and policy amendments (Bryant & Landman, 2020). Lastly, assistance and service to survivors is crucial, but is only effective when it is survivor-centered, incorporates a trauma-focused approach, is long-term, and prioritizes the survivors’s sense of identity (Bryant & Joudo, 2017; Bryant & Landman, 2020; Heffernan & Blythe, 2014; Surtees, 2015). These assertions offer valuable insights that can inform the subsequent analysis of NGO responses.

3.4 The Disease Outbreak and Human Trafficking Nexus

Investigations on push and pull factors for human trafficking is vital for its determination. Worsnop (2019) argues that one under-examined push factor, which could increase the risk of human trafficking, is the connections between disease outbreaks and human trafficking. The author contends that disease outbreaks can amplify numerous well-documented trafficking risk factors, such as poverty, socio-economic factors, political factors and factors related to government efforts and policy (ibid). Previous global health emergencies like the SARS outbreak in 2003, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, Ebola in 2014 and the outbreak of Zika in 2016, rendered vulnerability for trafficking as it caused financial difficulty for families, which subjected more people to trafficking. The Ebola outbreak overwhelmed the government's resources and their ability to continue to address already pressing issues, such as human trafficking (ibid).

Hence, the complex relationship between disease outbreaks and human trafficking is illustrated in increased vulnerabilities caused by the consequences of the outbreak which facilitates new trafficking possibilities (Worsnop, 2019). Disease outbreaks tend to cause economic hardship, disruption in social protection systems and increased poverty. As law enforcement redirects their resources to addressing the outbreak, the efforts to prevent and detect trafficking is undermined (ibid). As Worsnop (2019) notes, the prevention of trafficking is largely absent from disease outbreak response plans. This sheds light on an important gap to consider in crisis management responses, since disease outbreaks and policy responses have the potential to severely impact the human trafficking scene.

Worsnop's (2019) proposed nexus highlights the importance of investigating the impact of crisis responses on human trafficking in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This can help to better understand the effectiveness of policies developed to mitigate the spread of the virus, while exploring the spillover effects on trafficking outflows. Against this backdrop, relevant concepts derived from the crisis management literature will be further delineated in the upcoming theoretical section.

4. Theoretical Framework

To address the first research question this thesis uses Push and Pull Theory to explain the underlying reasons behind human trafficking, focusing on proximate and structural factors. To address the second research question, the analysis is guided by crisis management-related concepts. Specifically, the study draws on the concepts of resource dependency and organizational resilience, with a focus on adaptive capacity. These concepts are explained below and taken together, they provide useful insights into effective strategies for combating human trafficking during times of crises.

4.1 Push and Pull Theory

Push and Pull Theory have been utilized in cross cutting disciplines to explain how internal and external factors motivate action toward certain desires. In simplicity, every motivation can be driven by a will to attain something desired (pull), or to avoid something undesired (push). Push factors are external forces that motivate individuals to make significant effort to avoid undesirable situations, while pull factors are internal incentives that drive individuals towards a desired end result (Airth, 2022). Many scholars have used Push and Pull Theory to investigate driving factors to human trafficking (Bales, 2007; Cho, 2015; Dodsworth, 2000; Eargle, & Doucet, 2021; Jac-Kucharski, 2012; Stanojovska & Petrevski, 2012; Wooditch, 2012). Scholars hold different theoretical stances on push and pull factors that contribute to human trafficking. Some emphasize migration-based and criminal justice-based approaches that prioritize strategies such as legalization and prosecution (Stanojovska & Petrevski, 2012).

In critique, the human rights-based approach situates the root causes of trafficking in corruption, state failure and discrimination, while the feminists approach takes into account the intersectionality of factors such as sex, race, and class. The latter argues that alternative approaches may lack the necessary nuance to fully examine factors contributing to trafficking, and thus calls for a comprehensive analysis (Stanojovska & Petrevski, 2012). Therefore, this thesis departs from the feminist point of view, as it recognizes the importance of treating each case of trafficking as unique in terms of its causes and effects, which underscores the need for a comprehensive and nuanced analysis (Bales, 2007).

This thesis adopts Stanojovska and Petrevski (2012) framework of organizing push and pull factors into structural and proximate factors to identify direct and indirect linkages between

them. The structural factors explain drivers for vulnerability and are exemplified as economic deprivation, attitudes on gender, the effects of globalization, and the demand for sexual exploitation. Proximate factors refer to the immediate and direct factors that foster trafficking and include regimes, poor law enforcement, organized crime, corruption and weak education institutions (ibid). Understanding the conjunction of the structural context and the relationship to proximate factors help explain why and where people are rendered vulnerable to trafficking (ibid). Therefore, the upcoming sector will unpack how categorical factors, such as economic, political and social factors resonate with human trafficking, which will guide the analysis.

4.1.2 Structural Factors

Human trafficking is influenced by a multitude of structural factors. Primarily, economic factors have been identified as significant drivers where poverty and inadequate development have been found to particularly increase vulnerability to trafficking and render individuals more susceptible to exploitation (Worsnop, 2019). Poverty often compels families to seek extra sources of income, which can result in child labor when families let their children work to contribute to the household financially (Stanojovska & Petrevski, 2012). Second, economic vulnerability, including high rates of unemployment and limited job opportunities, is noted to motivate migration and is a significant pull-factor that leads people into exploitative situations. Individuals may be lured by the promise of better job opportunities and improved social amenities, but find themselves getting trapped in situations of exploitation (Bales, 1999; 2007; Chuang, 2006; Worsnop, 2019). Hence, migration can affect human trafficking via indirect linkages, where migration might not determine trafficking exclusively, but has the potential to be of significance, if coupled with other factors such as gender-based violence that impel women to escape from hardship (Cho, 2015; Chuang, 2006). Thus, economic factors play a dual role in human trafficking, functioning as a driver for both supply and demand, with traffickers engaging in the illicit crime for financial gain and targeted individuals being lured into exploitative situations under the guise of better economic opportunities (Hughes, 2004).

Third, human trafficking vulnerability is influenced by a vast of social factors, such as socioeconomic status, family structure, gender, structural inequality, discrimination, gender-based violence, the will to get a better life, and lack of alternatives (Ortega et.al., 2022; Viuhko, 2019). Understanding these underlying conditions is crucial to address human trafficking. For

instance, discrimination based on social status can limit access to education, employment, and social protection, leading to deprivation of basic economic, social, and cultural rights, which in extension, sustains human trafficking (Chuang, 2006). The feminization of poverty is particularly relevant in this context, as women are often more vulnerable to trafficking due to social structures that fail to provide equal opportunities for education and employment (Worsnop, 2019). Furthermore, discrimination against women in the labor market is usually driven by inequality and traditional gender roles, which can limit women's access to economic opportunities. More particularly, structural adjustment policies have been noted to reduce social services to women, which exacerbates their economic difficulties. This pushes women to seek additional sources of income in unregulated and informal sectors known to increase vulnerability to trafficking, such as prostitution, domestic work, and low-wage production work (Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2020; Zimmerman et.al., 2006).

Domestic violence and gender-based violence are seen as vulnerabilities to human trafficking as it impels women and children to flee their homes. Often driven by desperation, they may fall into the hands of traffickers who lure them with the promise of better livelihood opportunities (Chuang, 2006; European Union, 2016). Moreover, the violence inflicts physical and emotional trauma, which increases vulnerability to exploitation (Patil, 2022). Hence, the migration of women lies at the intersection of economic difficulties and a need to escape gender-based oppression, highlighting the multifaceted burden of oppression they face (Chuang, 2006; European Union, 2016). Furthermore, the demand for sexual service is entrenched in a bigger question of inequality and social norms, which dictates how prostitution is perceived. Drawing from radical feminist notions, the increased demand for sexual services is rooted in a patriarchal system that objectifies and commodifies women and children's bodies, which fosters a demand for sexual services and in extension drives trafficking for sexual exploitation (Levy & Jakobsson, 2013).

4.1.3 Proximate Factors

Proximate factors refer to the immediate and direct factors that foster trafficking (Stanojovska & Petrevski, 2012). To fully comprehend the underlying causes of human trafficking, it is crucial to account for the involvement of the state. First, states have a fundamental responsibility to safeguard their citizens, as such, their policies and efforts can significantly

impact the trafficking prevalence (Worsnop, 2019). The rule of law, bureaucratic efficiency, institutional strength, border control, and corruption, is shown to impact the implementation of anti-trafficking laws and policies (Akee et.al., 2014; Barasa Asekenye et.al., 2022; Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015; Jac-Kucharski, 2012; Keo et.al., 2014). Second, crises and conflicts are noted to create circumstances that are conducive to human trafficking (Cho, 2015). This is particularly true for forcibly displaced populations as these individuals are vulnerable to traffickers, who often exploit their lack of resources and desperation (ibid). Hence, the governmental inability to detect, suppress and control human trafficking tends to escalate the issue of trafficking (Hughes, 2004). Finally, these claims become particularly of interest as Worsnop (2019) highlights how diverted governmental attention to mend disease outbreaks, can come at the expense of other sectors, such as human trafficking.

4.2 Crisis Management

To answer the second research question, *how NGOs responded to human trafficking during the pandemic*, the thesis refers to Worsnop's (2019) proposed nexus, which emphasizes the importance of investigating the impact of crisis management on human trafficking. Therefore, the analysis will draw upon conceptual frameworks from the field of crisis management to provide theoretical guidance on how to contextualize the challenges and responses encountered by the organization during the pandemic. Since the field of crisis management is fragmented and lacks a universal hierarchy of values and best practices, due to the specific contextual nature of each crisis, this thesis will focus on the concepts of resource dependency and organizational resilience, with a specific emphasis on adaptive capacity, since it specifically references to NGOs abilities to respond to crises.

4.2.1 Rational and Feminists Crisis Management

When a crisis occurs, it is typically not the only problem that arises. If the management of the initial crisis is not effectively addressed, it can lead to a chain reaction of other crises (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Rational crisis management tends to treat crises as isolated events from boarder contexts and in separation from co-occurring secondary crises (Branicki, 2020). In contrast, feminist crisis management views crisis as multiple, contextualized, enduring, and as an overlapping phenomenon. Hence, emphasis is on how crisis can reinforce existing hegemonies and unintended consequences (ibid). As such, it is essential to acknowledge how

crises can reinforce pre-existing power structures and lead to unintended outcomes (ibid). Rationalist approaches to crisis management often fail to account for pre-existing structural disadvantages, whereas an approach informed by feminist ethics in crisis management would prioritize implication of gender and considerations of care for all individuals impacted by the crisis (ibid). This is of particular significance when analyzing the crisis management of the pandemic and its effects on the human trafficking sector.

4.2.2 Concepts of Resilience and Adaptive Capacity

In the context of crisis management, the concept of resilience is frequently invoked and understood as the ability to adapt to and withstand the impacts of stressors and shocks (Frankenberger et.al., 2014). Within the literature on organizational resilience, adaptive capacity and transformative capacity are important key factors. Adaptive capacity involves an organization's ability to modify responses to sustain operations, while transformative capacity refers to the ability to adapt to new circumstances when existing structures, processes, or events, impede the current ways of functioning (Berkes et.al., 2003; Walker et.al., 2004). Underscored is the organization's operational flexibility, meaning the ability to adapt operation functions to accommodate the changing environment (Li & Song, 2023). Thus, discussing resilience and vulnerability reflects organization's abilities to adapt to the adverse effects of hazards, where resources are integral for the capacity to handle external shocks derived from social, political or environmental changes (Adger, 2000; Akter et.al., 2021). This implies that NGOs could improve transformative capacity through partnering with higher level stakeholders, such as the government and donors (Frankenberger et.al., 2014).

4.2.3 Resource Dependency

The funding mechanisms of NGOs tend to have a significant impact on their resilience. Since, NGOs often prioritize short-term, independent projects, designed to showcase immediate impact, the resilience is often influenced by their relationships with the donors (Frankenberger et.al., 2014). The issue of resource dependency is widely acknowledged in the literature as a significant limitation for NGOs autonomy (Frankenberger et.al., 2014). By utilizing the concept of resource dependency, it is possible to examine the impact on NGOs performance during times of crisis (Arik & Clark, 2016). The theoretical underpinnings of resource

dependency underscores that the level of dependence on a given resource is defined by the degree of necessity for sustained operations (Blau, 1964; Taylor et.al., 1996). This implies how withdrawing funds can have a significant impact on the success or failure of an organization (Brunt & Akingbola, 2019). Therefore, the level of discretion that organizations have in allocating and utilizing their resources plays a crucial role in determining the dependency relationship (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Taylor et.al., 1996). Finally, the availability of alternative resources can also impact the dependency relationship between NGOs and their donors (Brunt & Akingbola, 2019).

4.3 Limitations

While Push and Pull Theory is useful for analyzing factors that contribute to trafficking, it may not fully account for other factors that contribute to the vulnerabilities simultaneously. For instance, climate change-induced droughts have been linked to increase vulnerability to child marriage and commercial sex work in Kenya (Milanowski & Schulze, 2018). However, by gathering the perceptions of NGOs, it may still be possible to understand how the pandemic has influenced human trafficking and other vulnerabilities.

Despite crisis management theories being useful during times of crisis, it is important to recognize that some of these theories may not be applicable to all types of crises as they are originally developed in areas such as public relations or disaster response. Therefore, this thesis draws on other concepts to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the challenges presented by the pandemic and its effects on the human trafficking scene.

5. Methodology

This section presents the research design and methodology, including the research method, data sampling, collection, and processing. Additionally, methodological limitations and ethical considerations are discussed and reflected upon.

5.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative case study research design, utilizing an interpretivist and constructivist approach to draw insights from the experiences of the research participants. The design allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific complex phenomenon, with a focus on how individuals comprehend it (Bryman, 2018: 52, 58). The thesis analytical focus is the specific case of human trafficking in Kenya during the pandemic, which implies an idiographic approach that sets a case study apart from other research projects (Bryman, 2018: 98). The research design will enable apprehension of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected human trafficking in Kenya through gathering insights from NGOs (Bryman, 2018: 96-97). As such, the thesis recognizes that the specific traits of the Kenyan context limits the generalizations of the findings to a wider context, instead emphasis is on the findings relevance to the theoretical claims (Bryman, 2018: 484-485).

5.2 Research Method and Data

The primary data sources were obtained through semi-structured interviews, which will be further delineated below. In addition, relevant secondary sources such as online reports, journals, academic research and news articles, were gathered to inform and support the conceptualization of the analysis.

5.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews and Sampling Process

The thesis seeks to uncover the experiences and perceptions of people working closely with human trafficking, therefore, semi-structured interviews were utilized to capture their experiences. The use of semi-structured interviews is preferred in this study due to its epistemological standpoints, as it provides valuable insights on how interviewees perceive and define their realities (Punch, 2005: 168). Hence, emphasis is on understanding the respondent's comprehension of issues related to human trafficking during the pandemic, such as events,

patterns and forms of behavior (Bryman, 2012: 472). The data collection was retrieved through 14 online semi-structured interviews (see appendix I for the list of respondents) with employees from various organizations working towards alleviating human trafficking in Kenya. While some organizations addressed child abuse as part of their operations, the majority explicitly focused on anti-human trafficking efforts. The organizations were primarily based in Nairobi, with a few located in Mombasa. Thus, the different scope of operational focus, coupled with target areas covering various geographical areas across the country, intends to facilitate comprehensive perceptions of the human trafficking scene during the pandemic.

As the thesis seeks to address specific issues related to human trafficking, an interview guide with open-ended questions was developed (see appendix II for interview guide). The open-ended questions intend to record the respondents point of views as it enables them to respond in their own terms, which derives more in-depth knowledge compared to surveys (Bryman, 2018: 315). Additionally, the flexibility provided by the semi-structured nature is advantageous as it allows the researcher to follow up on leads and clear up uncertainties (ibid). Despite the rather flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, the interview guide ensures structure and credibility by making sure that the same questions are asked and worded in a similar way from interviewee to interviewee (Bryman, 2012: 312). The recorded interviews were obtained with the interviewee's verbal agreement and securely stored to safeguard their anonymity.

With reference to the aim of the research the sampling emerged through a non-probability purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used in this study to strategically select respondents based on specific criteria, with the goal of gathering targeted knowledge on human trafficking that would allow for the research questions to be answered (Bryman, 2012: 418). The first point of contact was initiated with help from a former local supervisor, who specialized in the field of human trafficking, providing valuable guidance to strategically navigate the selection process. The purposive sampling was supplemented with a snowball sampling approach, which allowed the initial participants, who were selected based on their experience in the human trafficking field, to refer to other individuals with relevant knowledge and experience to the study (Bryman, 2018: 245, 499). The sampling process ceased when no new relevant data was obtained, and theoretical saturation was achieved (Bryman 2016, 607).

5.3 Data Analysis and Coding

The thesis employed a thematic analysis to organize and interpret the data, a method which is commonly used in qualitative research designs (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2006). Thematic analysis illuminates and makes sense of shared meanings and experiences, and allows for the identification of patterns relevant to answering the research questions (Bryman, 2018: 707). The method offers flexibility in the way it allows for analysis across the entire data set, of particular aspects in-depth, and the assumptions and ideas behind statements (Cooper et.al., 2012). The transcribed files were uploaded to the software program NVivo to organize, code and analyze the data into themes. First, initial open codes were inductively generated to capture interesting features of the data. The codes got organized into themes which reflected new human trafficking trends and themes associated to foster human trafficking. Second, another round of coding was conducted deductively in accordance with the theoretical framework to capture the information which resonates with Push and Pull Theory. Accordingly, the themes were coded into the following three overarching themes, economic, political and social factors, which laid the foundation of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2018, 703-708). In the third and final round of coding, themes were categorized according to the literature on crisis management concepts to identify the organizational challenges and responses (see coding scheme in appendix III).

5.4 Scope and Limitations

Acknowledging the limitations of this thesis is crucial to gain deeper understandings of the context in which the findings should be interpreted, and to contribute to the advancement of future studies.

Conducting interviews online has the potential to affect the level of trust between the interviewee and the interviewer (Orgad, 2005: 55). Therefore, being transparent with the intention about the study and with my role as a student was imperative to ensure consent and acceptance of my position (Bryman, 2018: 485). Nevertheless, the pandemic led to a shift from traditional methods of data collection to an increase in gathering data online, which created greater flexibility in terms of time and location (Gray, 2020). This shift allowed for a broader and more diverse reach, ultimately increasing the potential for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (ibid). To ensure anonymity, the interviews were conducted

without a camera, which might pose methodological limitations, such as build rapport due to the absence of non-visual cues. This makes it challenging to interpret pauses or silences during the interviews, which may hinder effective communication and understanding (Chiumento, 2018). Additionally, the thesis focuses on NGO service-providers perspectives on human trafficking trends, limiting the scope to one stakeholder group. Including other stakeholder's perspectives, such as the government, could have broadened the scope of analysis. However, given the objective of this thesis, the narrow focus on NGOs intends to provide a more detailed exploration.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Researching a sensitive subject, such as human trafficking, underscores the necessity to pay careful attention to ethical considerations and cultural sensitivity (Duong, 2015). Therefore, during the data collection process special attention was given to protecting the privacy of the participants by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality (ibid). The recordings and transcriptions were stored securely and treated with confidentiality to ensure anonymity (Scheyvens et al., 2014; 184-189). Prior to the interviews the respondents were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and given a briefing on the research objective and their contribution (Duong, 2015). Given that the interviews were conducted online, it was essential to obtain verbal consent from the participants before recording. To further ensure transparency, the participants will be presented with the study's findings upon completion (ibid).

It is important to note that, as a non-Kenyan researcher, my positionality may limit the ability to fully capture the ontology and epistemology of the participants. Despite getting context specific insights as a former intern in Kenya, it would not account for the potential of inflicting bias on the research. Therefore, it was crucial to consider my positionality and potential biases throughout the data collection process (Sheyvens et.al., 2014:196-197). To ensure that the interview process was culturally sensitive and respectful of the interviewee's perspectives, the interview guide was carefully designed with open-ended questions to amplify the respondent's voices and minimize ethnocentric biases (ibid). Moreover, in human trafficking research it is important to avoid causing unintentional victimization or re-victimization. Therefore, the thesis refrained from using the word 'victim' and replaced it with 'trafficking survivors' or 'potential targets' when possible (Duong, 2015).

6. Analysis

In the subsequent section the data findings are presented, analyzed and discussed. The analysis begins by addressing the first research question: *How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected human trafficking in Kenya?* To explore this question, a thematic analysis was conducted, revealing new human trafficking trends, which are discussed in relation to existing literature. Thereafter, Push and Pull Theory was utilized to illuminate potential underlying driving factors behind the emerged trends. The second section answers the second research question: *How have NGOs responded to the human trafficking situation during the pandemic?* This was explored through the application of crisis management concepts, which enabled analysis of the challenges faced by NGOs and their responses during the time.

6.1 Effects of COVID-19 on Human Trafficking

The data provided information on new human trafficking trends that emerged during the pandemic. As drivers to human trafficking are complex and multifaceted, changing trends in the associated factors will also be discussed since multiple factors have a tendency to foster human trafficking. The upcoming section will begin by presenting and discussing the identified trends below, thereafter they will be analyzed through Push and Pull Theory.

Online Child Sexual Exploitation

In response to being asked about new human trafficking trends during the pandemic, a significant share of the respondents reported an increase in online sexual exploitation, particularly for children. Respondent 7, who works for an NGO dedicated to rescuing, rehabilitating, and reintegrating survivors of trafficking, explained that human traffickers would previously target vulnerable populations living in impoverished and marginalized communities. However, since the pandemic, the traffickers have increasingly targeted children with access to phones for online sexual exploitation. The statement echoes reports on how the lockdowns and the closing of schools meant that children were forced to stay at home, which pushed those with computer or phone access online (U.S Department of State, 2021; UNODC, 2021). The data indicates that due to remote learning, during the pandemic, internet usage increased, making more children vulnerable to online sexual exploitation since traffickers recognized new opportunities to target children engaging in online activities. This issue is further supported in reports and literature that highlight a rise in online sexual exploitation of

children in Kenya during the pandemic (Barasa Asekenye et.al., 2022; UNODC, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2022). Furthermore, respondent 3, who specifically works with the protection of children's rights, pointed out that children who are kept out of school are, typically, more prone to abuse. Additionally, the respondent noted that access to technology and the internet made it easier for traffickers to recruit the children. This was further supported by respondent 4, who closely work with anti-trafficking efforts:

It was very easy for the children to be lured to trafficking when the schools were closed. Because parents were stressed and they didn't have anything to give the kids, or they were stressed because of food. The mental health also worsened, most of them didn't have time for their kids. So they gave the kids laptops, and gadgets to be online. These children got friends online because they were looking for somebody who could listen to them. So it was very easy for the traffickers to gain the trust of the children (Respondent 4).

These findings echo Babvey-Capela (2021) who state that the closure of schools and other support systems, raised concerns about child safety during the pandemic. The author noted that children are known to be at a heightened risk of abuse when they are away from school. Cases of abuse, including physical, sexual, and psychological, have previously been reported to spike during school holidays as schools provide a structured environment and meals, which protect children from higher-risk situations at home (ibid). Furthermore, schools reporting of missing children played a crucial role in solving human trafficking cases (ibid). Hence, the influx of online exploitation made the detection of trafficking cases even more complex as it pushed human trafficking activities further underground, which significantly impeded efforts to identify and support survivors (Nkechi & Nkechi, 2020).

New Online Recruitment Tactics

The data revealed that the pandemic brought about a transformation in the recruitment process, with traffickers now using online platforms to target potential vulnerable individuals. Respondent 3 explained that this shift was facilitated by the pandemic as the restrictions in movements enabled a move from physical to online interactions, which changed the avenues of exploitation. Respondent 12, who worked with formulating anti-trafficking policies and overseeing the issue regionally, further emphasized that the pandemic created a new platform for trafficking to thrive. Although online recruitment is a common trend globally, it was not prevalent in Kenya prior to the pandemic (U.S Department of State, 2021). Thus, the data revealed how the pandemic created an unprecedented opportunity for traffickers to alter their

modus operandi by targeting vulnerable individuals online, which resonate with current literature (Junewicz et.al., 2022; UNODC, 2021).

Socioeconomic Background of Child Survivors

As aforementioned, poverty is a prevalent factor known to drive people into human trafficking in Kenya, with women and children, especially orphans, from impoverished backgrounds, being particularly vulnerable to exploitation (Favour et.al., 2020; U.S Department of Justice, 2022). Against this backdrop, the study's findings contradict previous literature as the respondents inform of a changed trend in the socioeconomic backgrounds of the child survivors. This is explained by respondent 7 who stated, *"In the past it was always children and youth from very poor backgrounds, but now youth with access to digital platforms are potentially a victim of trafficking"*. This is further supported by interviewee 11 who informed that traffickers groomed children into exploitation:

Sometimes when you think about trafficking victims in Kenya you think about poor people, but this was more cases of grooming, and in terms of changes if you are dealing with children who have access to phones, you are really talking about a different clientele from what organizations are used to managing in terms of thinking about vulnerability and how to relieve the situation (Respondent 11).

Thus, the pandemic's impact on human trafficking in Kenya caused an influx of grooming cases indicating that people from different socioeconomic backgrounds were affected. This was highlighted by the respondents as they informed that the shift to online recruitment primarily targeted children from middle-income households due to their access to technology for remote learning. Recent literature, such as Faturoti (2022) and Nwacho (2020) confirms that unequal access to technology for online education intensified educational inequalities among individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly those from lower-income households as they lacked access to phones, computers and the internet. This is supported by literature, despite Kenya having the third-highest number of internet users in Africa, with 43 million users in 2020 (Faturoti, 2022; Parsitau & Jepkemei, 2020; UoN, 202). A survey conducted in May 2020, revealed that only 22 percent of children in Kenya had access to online education during the pandemic (Faturoti, 2022). Underscored is the prohibitive cost of internet access (Uwezo, 2020), which provides empirical evidence to the claims made by the respondents, that children from middle income households, with access to technology, were targeted by traffickers.

Migration and Trafficking Flows

The data presented limited information about new human trafficking trends, instead respondents emphasized changed trends in areas known to stimulate human trafficking, such as migration. Several respondents noted that the restrictions of movement affected migration patterns and, subsequently, human trafficking in-and outflows. It is widely supported in the literature that economic factors, such as unemployment and the search for livelihoods enable migration movements (Bales, 1999; 2007; Cho, 2015; Chuang, 2006; Worsnop, 2019). In Kenya, the most dominant forms of mobility are rural-to-urban migration and international migration (IOMb, 2022; NCAPD, 2009; Owuor, 2007). In contrast, the data revealed that the pandemic redrew the circumstances, where the closed borders specifically limited international migration. Instead, respondent 4, specifically highlighted a change in internal migration patterns as more people returned to their rural origins:

Now people are moving from urban areas to rural areas, because they feel that being in a rural setup is a bit safer for them. You will get food since there is a lot of food in the rural parts of the country where people are doing farming. So they thought going back to the village would be safer for them. However, many found themselves being lured to the tea plantations farming where many got exploited in labor or sexually (Respondent 4).

The finding echoes global trends indicating that the pandemic had significant impacts on reversed migration (FAO, 2020; Khan et.al., 2022), which has been conceptualized as a “crisis-return” (Mencutek, 2022). Mencutek noted that the financial crisis, caused by the pandemic, impelled return migration as many migrants worked in sectors most affected by the crisis, such as construction, services and retail (2022). However, reversed migration and its impacts on human trafficking in Kenya is still uncertain due to unregistered movements (Bolliat & Zärhinger, 2020). Nonetheless, Kenyan news articles reinforce the respondent’s claims, reporting on thousands of people returning to their villages, which show indication of a pandemic-induced migration (Bolliat & Zärhinger, 2020; Nunis, 2021). More importantly, as revealed respondent 4 above, individuals seeking employment in plantations were vulnerable to sexual exploitation in exchange for job opportunities. These findings align with the commonly discussed reasoning that migration can drive human trafficking, as migrants are often vulnerable to exploitative offers while searching for employment opportunities (Cho, 2015). This trend will be further scrutinized in light of economic push factors in the upcoming section.

Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Exploitation

The data informed increased rates of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. This echoes the growing international recognition stating that domestic violence is seen as a ‘shadow pandemic’ to COVID-19 (Gottert, et.al., 2021). This is further consistent with John et.al., (2021) who found that the pandemic led to a significant increase in cases of GBV and domestic violence in Kenya. The increased cases of abuse were explained by the respondents to be caused by the pandemic lockdowns, which resulted in families being enclosed, in turn, aggravating frustrations which resulted in abuse. Their claims are consistent with Wilke et.al., (2020) which stated that social isolation was noted to increase domestic abuse. These findings are of importance since GBV and domestic violence are known to foster conducive environments for trafficking (Chuang, 2016). These connections will be further analyzed in the upcoming section.

6.2 Push and Pull Factors Behind the Changing Trends During the Pandemic

To better understand the emergence of trends discussed in the previous section, and address the first research question, the gathered data presented valuable insights. The analysis through Push and Pull Theory revealed the conjunction of structural factors with impacting proximate factors (Stanojovska & Petrevski, 2012), as visualized in figure 1.

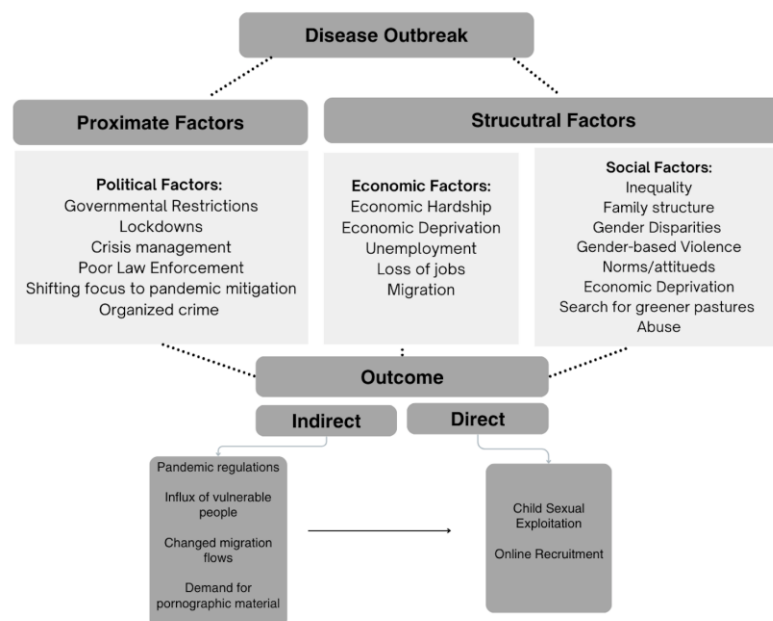


Figure 1: Flowchart of Findings: Disease Outbreak and Human Trafficking Nexus

Source: Author's construct, 2023

The study's findings demonstrate that the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities in Kenya. These results align with Worsnop's (2019) nexus between disease outbreaks and human trafficking, as the findings illustrate how the Covid-19 outbreak magnified several well-established risk factors for trafficking. For instance, the lacking governmental capacity to efficiently deal with the pandemic, and still manage the prevention of human trafficking, indicate how proximate political factors, coupled with structural factors, such as inequality and economic hardships, explain how the pandemic affected human trafficking during the time. To delve deeper into this complexity, the subsequent section is organized into three parts aligned with the theoretical framework: political factors, economic factors and social factors, and serves as a guiding structure for the analysis.

6.2.1 Political Factors

Shifting Focus to the Pandemic

To recall the theoretical framework, governments have a crucial obligation to protect their citizens. Therefore, policies, governmental action, or lack thereof, can have a significant impact on the prevalence of trafficking (Hughes, 2004). During the pandemic governments had to reprioritize their focus, placing an emphasis on controlling the spread of the virus, while also trying to sustain economic stability and social welfare. As a result, less attention and resources were allocated to the prevention of human trafficking (UNODC, 2021). Through the interviews it is apparent that the Kenyan government took insufficient efforts to combat human trafficking during the time period. The data finds that the government shifted their focus to curbing the spread of the virus, which diverted attention and effort away from addressing the issues of human trafficking. In response respondent 6 informed how the shifting focus provided opportunities for traffickers to operate under the radar:

“The traffickers really took advantage of how the government had shifted their focus on trying to reduce the exposure of Covid and could more easily transport victims unnoticed” (Respondent 6).

Shifting focus to mitigate the effects of the disease outbreak has previously been noted during the Ebola crisis, where Worsnop (2019) highlighted that law enforcement redirected their resources to address the outbreak, in turn undermining the efforts to prevent and detect

trafficking. Furthermore, almost all the respondents reported that they did not receive any governmental assistance during the pandemic and that the government's efforts to mitigate a secondary social crisis were insufficient. For instance, respondent 10 reported that the government's social support was primarily focused on urban areas, resulting in limited coverage in rural regions. Moreover, the restrictions of movement severely impacted the respondent's abilities to continue their operations. This further underscores Worsnop's arguments on the lack of consideration of trafficking prevention in disease outbreak response plans. It also highlights a critical gap in crisis management, since disease outbreaks and policy responses can significantly impact human trafficking efforts (ibid).

The respondents' concerns are further echoed in other studies conducted on frontline organizations challenges during the pandemic. Akmal et.al., (2020) stated that although it is understandable that the health and economic effects of COVID-19 were prioritized, policymakers and donors reprioritization should not come at the expense of support in other sections. This was noted to be particularly crucial in low- and middle-income settings, where, for example, the closure of schools could have a greater impact on the children than the direct health consequences of the disease (ibid). This resonates with the theoretical framework regarding political push factors, as it provides empirical evidence that the governmental restrictions severely lacked sensitivity on how it would affect the human trafficking scene in the country (Hughes, 2004). These claims will be further unpacked in the upcoming section discussing the role of NGO responses, where it will be discussed and referenced to crisis management.

6.2.2 Economic Factors

Traffickers Modus Operandi: Online Recruitment

The thematic analysis noted new online trends in trafficker's recruitment methods. To further unpack the underlying causes to this trend, the data explained that economic drivers were significant contributing push factors. The respondents informed that the loss of jobs, coupled with governmental lockdowns, severely limited Kenyans abilities to secure new sources of income. As previously stated, millions of Kenyans lost their jobs during the pandemic (FKE, 2021; Roimen, 2016; Wasike, 2021). Consequently, the respondents note that many found

themselves desperate to secure their livelihoods. Respondent 6, who worked for an NGO which prevent and protect children from all forms of abuse, reflected the desperation by stating:

There was a need for survival, imports and exports were affected and the business people had to reduce their expenditures, people got laid off, and those who were not laid off got their salaries reduced. So as a result to provide for their family sufficiently, these people had to look somewhere else to get extra income, and this is something that the traffickers took advantage of (Respondent 6).

Respondents 3 and 4 further highlighted that people's desperation to improve their financial status and provide for their families led them to take up exploitative job offers without considering the potential consequences. Hence, the data suggest that desperation drove people to explore other sources of income, and with the upswing of online engagement, numerous looked for job opportunities online. This indicates that the pandemic made people particularly vulnerable to trafficking as many of the online offers were false and used by traffickers to facilitate exploitation. Additionally, the participants also highlighted lacking awareness about the warning signs for false job offers, resulting in individuals getting trafficked by, unknowingly, accepting these offers. Furthermore, the respondents also reported that the trend of online recruitment continues to persist today, underscoring the need for targeted prevention efforts. Until date, there is a scarcity of empirical research on this shifting trend in Kenya, however, the findings correspond with reports noting global trends, where traffickers would capitalize on the pandemic by advertising false jobs offers on social media (OSCE ODIHR & UN Women, 2020; UNODC, 2021).

These findings are consistent with the theoretical framework, explaining that the loss of jobs and unemployment are major drivers known to push and pull people into exploitative situations, where the potential targets are usually driven into trafficking due to the promise of better job opportunities (Bales, 1999). Hence, the findings illustrate a twofold implication of the pandemic, resulting in exploitation. On the one hand, the loss of income drove desperation which pushed people to find alternative sources of income online. On the other hand, traffickers recognized this new supply opportunity and started to use online platforms to lure people into trafficking. The intersection of these factors underscores the theoretical underpinnings of this study, where individuals who are searching for employment opportunities, to escape an unwanted situation, may accept fraudulent job offers and get trafficked (Bales, 2007).

Reversed Migration and Exploitation

As previously stated, respondent 4 emphasized that the rise in the number of people seeking employment in rural plantations exposed people to risks of sexual exploitation. The respondent detailed that the plantation employers would exploit their desperation and ask for sexual services in exchange for a job. The occurrence of sexual exploitation in exchange for employment has previously been documented in Kenya. Lowthers (2018) illustrated how female labor migrants, working in flower farms in Kenya, exchanged sex for employment, labeling it as ‘institutionalized sexual economy’. The author contends that investigating the continuum of sexual trade reveals broader concerns of employment, migration and gender relations (ibid). In relation to these claims, the pandemic triggered reversed migration that exposed people to sexual exploitation. This highlights broader issues of economic hardships, migration, employment opportunities and gender, where these intersecting factors exacerbate vulnerability and existing power imbalances, which can facilitate sexual exploitation, especially in unregulated sectors.

To further unpack the pushing factors behind the reversed migration, the data noted that economic factors influenced the decision to migrate back to rural areas. Respondent 8, who worked for an organization providing on-the-ground assistance to trafficking survivors, explained, “*Due to the hardship of the high cost of living, there were some who migrated from the towns back to their rural communities*”. The statement reflects findings from Kunyanga et.al., (2023) study, which shows that the governmental restrictions caused disruptions in food systems which led to food inflation and high costs of living. Taken together with the high unemployment rates (Wasike, 2021), this may have led to larger pools of vulnerable people where some chose to migrate back to their rural origins in search of more affordable livelihood opportunities. This reasoning is further supported by previous studies emphasizing that deteriorating urban employment markets, increased rates of unemployment, increased costs of living, and inflation foster return migration (Andersson, 2001; Agesa, 2004). Hence, the thesis findings further reinforce previous studies indicating that return migration to rural areas in Sub Saharan Africa, is driven by a combination of socio-cultural, political, micro-and macroeconomic factors (Falkingham et.al., 2011).

It is evident that the economic consequences of the pandemic align with the existing economic risk factors outlined in the theoretical framework, where unemployment and lack of livelihood

opportunities can drive individuals to migrate in search of better economic prospects, which can increase vulnerability to exploitation (Bales, 1999; 2007; Chuang, 2006; Worsnop, 2019). Hence, the findings illustrate how migration can increase vulnerability to human trafficking via indirect linkages. Since migration might not determine trafficking exclusively, it has the potential to be of significance, if coupled with other factors, such as gender and employment opportunities delineated above (Cho, 2015; Chuang, 2006).

6.2.3 Social Factors

Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Exploitation

As previously stated, the pandemic led to a significant increase in GBV and domestic violence in Kenya (John et.al., 2021). Aligned with Wilke et.al., (2020) the respondents explained that the increased cases of abuse was caused by the pandemic lockdowns, as a result of families being enclosed. Respondent 3, further explained that when enclosure was coupled with dysfunctional family structures, and added stress due to economic hardships, the frustrations increased and got projected to children and women, resulting in a rise of domestic violence and GBV. The data further suggested that gender-based violence often impel women to run away from abusive husbands, and while doing so, they can become vulnerable to exploitation. This reinforces claims from Patil (2020) who state that women who attempt to escape abusive environments are at higher risks of traffickers, who specifically target those in destitute situations, as GBV often causes physical and emotional trauma that increases an individual's vulnerability. The connections between abuse and human trafficking were further elaborated by respondent 1 below:

... it was a double tragedy for them because they were being subjected to gender based violence and at the same time set up for human trafficking, she is literally at the point in her life where she would settle for anything as long as she is taken away from her abusive partner. So it acts like a push, you are being pushed into trafficking (Respondent 1).

The data highlights a specific sense of desperation that stems from the intersection of multiple factors. To better understand the root causes behind the rise in abuse cases and the increase in vulnerability to exploitation, the explanations provided by the respondents are in line with scholars who suggest that particular constructions of masculinity can lead to high levels of stress. This stress can occur when the male breadwinner fails to fulfill his role, such as through

job loss (Barasa Asekenye et.al., 2022; Krishnan et.al., 2010). The findings are further consistent with previous studies, where the loss of jobs, or failure to provide children with the technology needed for school, suggests that men may resort to violence to restore their threatened social status and family power hierarchy (Heilman & Barker, 2018; Jewkes, 2002). This is reinforced by previous scholars around the world reporting how economic stressors increased domestic violence during the pandemic (Morgan & Boxhall, 2020). More importantly, the data revealed that traditional gender roles and inequality are social factors that render, specifically females and children, vulnerable to trafficking. Since the lack of financial independence among women poses significant challenges for them to leave abusive situations. Consequently, the data informed that they may turn to fraudulent job offers on social media as a means of escape. Which further perpetuates the aforementioned issue of online recruitment.

These statements echo how different types of disaster disproportionately affect women in times of crisis. Hence, the findings are consistent with the theoretical framework indicating how gender-based violence is a major contributing factor to trafficking. Where underlying factors, such as social norms, abuse, traditional gender roles and inequality intersect to create vulnerability to trafficking (Ortega et.al., 2022; Viuhko, 2019; UNODC, 2021). The gender-disparity is often explained by the failure of social structures aimed to provide equal and just educational and employment opportunities for females (Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, 2020; Worsnop, 2019; Zimmerman et.al., 2006). Thus, the governmental measures implemented to mend the spread of the virus, exposed women to GBV which, in extension, fostered vulnerabilities to trafficking due to the underlying social factors rendering their vulnerability.

Demand For Pornographic Material

As aforementioned, many got recruited into sexual exploitation, where children were particularly targeted by recruiters online (UNODC, 2021). When the respondents were asked about the causes to the increased influx in online child sexual exploitation, the following response were given:

During that time people were more online so the demand for pornographic material was high. The higher the demand, the higher the supply (Respondent 4).

...one could argue that the pandemic created a new demand for pornographic material. Pedophiles who would normally come to Mombasa or Malindi to abuse children, when they were stuck at home abroad then maybe they would look for another way to gratify their needs and look for online solutions (Respondent 10)

These statements are consistent with the existing reports explaining how the idleness of lockdowns, coupled with the limited physical interactions during the pandemic, increased global demands for child abuse material (INTERPOL, 2020; UNODC, 2021). It is evident that the demand for child sexual exploitation materials such as, live-streaming child sexual abuse, exacerbated child exploitation globally (UNODC, 2021). By guidance of the theoretical framework these claims are entrenched in a bigger question of inequality and social norms dictating how prostitution is perceived. Drawing from radical feminist notions, the increased demand for sexual material is rooted in a patriarchal system which objectifies and commodifies women and children's bodies (Levy & Jakobsson, 2013), which foster demand for pornographic material that drives sexual exploitation (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014). Hence, the pandemic enabled intensification of these dynamics as more ventured online for sexual gratification and entertainment.

6.5 Managing Human Trafficking During the Pandemic - The Role of NGOs

The data provided insights on the organization's faced challenges during the pandemic. Presented below are the most prominent challenges discussed in light of relevant literature, which will situate the organizations responsive efforts to help answer the second research question: *How have the NGOs responded to the human trafficking situation during the pandemic?* By drawing on concepts from the crisis management literature, discussing resource dependency and organizational resilience in terms of adaptive capacity, this discussion will examine factors contributing to the struggles faced by organizations during the time period. First, the impact of limited resources will be discussed, followed by an examination of government restrictions, and finally, an analysis of the NGOs responses.

6.5.1 Inability to Provide Adequate Services

Lack of Resources

One significant issue that emerged from the data was the financial burden placed on organizations as a result of the pandemic, which had a substantial impact on their work. Most of the respondents reported how they lacked financial resources during the time, which was partly due to pulled donor funding. This was further presented by respondent 7, who's works holistically to curb human trafficking:

A big chunk of our funding was pegged taking children to school. When the pandemic struck it meant the donor partners pulled their fund or suspended it because there was no school for almost two years. So we lost close to 60% of our immediate funding (Respondent 7).

The statement resonates with the study by Barasa Asekenye et.al., (2022), which reported that the pandemic caused donor grants to be rescinded or postponed, leading to decreased financial support despite increased demand for NGO services. This is further underscored by UN Women (2020), which states that funds in the humanitarian sector do not prioritize building institutional capacity (2020). This aligns with Njeri & Daigle's study which noted that conditional funding limits organizational autonomy, creating vulnerabilities from constantly seeking new funding opportunities (2022). In contrast, respondent 10, who specifically works with grant applications for one major anti-trafficking NGO in Kenya, informs how their organization learned the importance of accessing unrestricted funding to support survivors in case of future crises. They realized that donor-funded projects with specific guidelines can limit their ability to respond effectively to crises. As a result, they sought to explore grant opportunities that would allow for more flexibility in their response efforts. This reflects the organization's adaptive capacity to the pandemic's changing environment, highlighting the importance of resources to stay resilient to external shocks (Akter et al., 2021; Li & Song, 2023). These findings echo the theoretical framework as it highlights the detrimental effects resource dependency can inflict on an organization's ability to fulfill their mission and goals (Brunt & Akingbola, 2019). This further highlights the need to diversify and access unrestricted funding since resource dependency can severely limit an organization's adaptive capacity, which can impede effective responses to crises (Brunt & Akingbola, 2019).

Governmental Restrictions

The data provided insight on how the pandemic's restrictions made it challenging for the organizations to intervene in cases of human trafficking. The nature of service-provider's work requires physical interaction through interceptions, rescues and provision of shelters, which indicates that the lockdowns completely disabled their abilities to continue working. As aforementioned, the government's primary focus was on preventing the spread of the virus. Additionally, the data informed that even if trafficked survivors were rescued the government shelters denied entry to new admittances due to the fear of spreading the virus. As a result, it

was difficult to rescue and support the survivors during the time. This is further delineated by respondent 4 below:

Giving victims assistance virtually or even rescuing them virtually was a challenge. So that affected our way of doing things and giving support to our victims. We found that during the pandemic, especially in the Middle East, people were not coming back, and we got many cases of girls being exploited in the Gulf area, and now this person, no matter how you would like to help them come back, you can not. So we had a rise of people dying there (Respondent 4).

The data provided insights echoing Branicki's et.al., (2020) study which reported how the government's crisis management interventions, such as border closures, lockdowns and marshaling of essential workers, threatened both lives and livelihoods and severely limited organization's abilities to continue delivering anti-trafficking efforts. The study by Barasa Asekenye et.al., confirms the impact of the pandemic on interventions by highlighting the shutdown of referral systems and service centers, and the limited access to shelters (2022) Furthermore, respondent 11, who work for enabling a survivor centric anti-trafficking movement, informed that the government should have coordinated with organizations involved in rescues and rehabilitation, and allowing them to operate freely despite the restrictions of movements. Further claiming that the disorganization led to survivors remaining in situations of harm without support (Respondent 11). These findings clearly illustrate how governmental efforts and policies can impact human trafficking efforts (Hughes, 2004), which is further underscored in reference to Barasa Asekenye et.al., (2022) as their findings indicate that the insufficient governmental support exacerbated the problem of modern slavery. Their study revealed that Kenya's state capacity was inadequate to withstand shocks as the government lacked the responsiveness and flexibility necessary to mount a comprehensive emergency response (ibid). More specifically, the government-led response to the pandemic left the human trafficking sector in a precarious situation as budgets for anti-trafficking services got redirected during the time (ibid). These findings further align with the theoretical claims of this study where feminist crisis management would argue how rational crisis management tends to treat crises as isolated events, ignoring broader contexts and potential secondary crises that can co-occur (Branicki, 2020). Hence, the restrictions implemented by the government caused a severe socioeconomic crisis in Kenya, which underscores the need for the government to reevaluate and reflect on the impact the restrictions had on the anti-human trafficking sector.

Respondent 6 provided additional details on the restricted movement between counties, which exclusively permitted travel to those defined as essential workers. This severely impeded their ability to reach their target area and effectively proceed with their work. To mend this, the organization demonstrated adaptive capacity as they overcame the restrictions of movements by forming a partnership with another organization that focused on combating human trafficking in their target county. Through Zoom meetings, they planned and developed activities to have the partner organization deliver work on their behalf. These actions underscore the claims in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act stating “*Fighting trafficking is not a static exercise. Rather, it is an ever-evolving, comprehensive endeavor requiring the investment and coordination of time and resources between multiple groups*” (Sheldon-Sherman, 2012). These claims are further supported by Barasa Asekenye et.al, (2022), who emphasized the importance of partnerships and collaboration for effective responses to the pandemic. Hence, the responses taken by the organization indicate operational flexibility in accordance with the concepts in the theoretical framework, where they demonstrated ability to adapt operation functions to accommodate the changing environment caused by the pandemic (Li & Song, 2023).

Online Adaptation

The governmental restrictions forced the organizations to move operations online. Consequently, all respondents reported introducing online awareness campaigns. The data revealed that the internet provided cost-effective means for reaching a wider audience, compared to organizing physical events, which can be costly and require community mobilization that may need financial resources to encourage attendance. Furthermore, respondent 12 also reported how they refocused their prevention efforts to inform about the changed recruitment methods of traffickers through monthly newsletters online. Respondent 8 shared that they relied on Zoom meetings as a means of communication, which was an eye-opener for them. However, they did not have a specific strategy in place to combat human trafficking during the time, and instead, they exclusively focused on raising awareness about the issue. The statement informs how a large share of their work got reduced to solely focus on awareness raising online. In accordance with the theoretical framework, this reflects a lack of ability to develop strategic plans, which illustrate challenges in adaptive capacity as the pandemic severely impacted their efforts to continue operations (Li & Song, 2023).

When discussing the limitations of the online adaptation, respondent 2 and 9 informed that they were unable to reach all their target groups online. As such, the inability to reach the illiterate and people without internet access came to the fore. This highlights that the already structurally disadvantaged people were disproportionately affected by the governmental measures put in place to control the spread of the virus, as they were unable to access the awareness campaigns since it required both literacy and online access. This is consistent with findings from Wilke et.al., (2020), who highlight that the people lacking access to technology got little to no support during the pandemic. This further echoes the theoretical framework where feminists criticize rationalist approaches to crisis management for often overlooking pre-existing structural disadvantages, which could lead to secondary social crises (Branicki, 2020). To mend such consequences, feminist ethics in crisis management would guide care-based concerns for all people affected by the crisis, since emphasis is on how the crisis can reinforce existing hegemonies and unintended consequences (ibid).

To draw from the literature review, awareness campaigns were stated to be most effective when they were altered to the specific target communities (Bryant & Landman, 2020). Against this backdrop, the fact that the pandemic pushed exploitation online, indicates that conducting awareness campaigns online can facilitate direct engagement with at-risk individuals to inform of the changed trends and provide guiding assistance. Expanding upon this notion, another organization did illustrate the ability to refocus their efforts and employ strategic projects adapted to be conducted online. Respondent 9 informed that their organization developed during the pandemic and launched their first program during the time. Accordingly, they focused on being techno-forward and managed to create a safe online community for survivors with the aim to limit re-trafficking. Although their online efforts meant limited access for those at a technical illiteracy, their methods provided imperative support systems for survivors of trafficking who could access the internet.

Having a community that you came to meant that people could share skills and knowledge and avoid sliding into higher rates of vulnerability and, in extension, that people could prevent being re-trafficked (Respondent 9).

The respondent further delineated how virtual support coupled with financial aid gave their beneficiaries some of the necessary tools to thrive. These claims are further reinforced in Wilke et.al., study which presented how efforts helping people to feel connected, competent and supported through virtual training, was considered as good supportive practice during the

pandemic (2020). Moreover, since the organization was newly established, they were able to adapt to the current situation and tailor their projects accordingly. The respondent highlighted that their existence was a result of the pandemic, which indicates their adaptive ability to develop projects that addressed the specific needs that arose from the pandemic. Despite having a different experience, compared to the already established organizations, their capacity to strategize and operate in the new environment reinforces the importance of flexibility and adaptive capacity emphasized in crisis management concepts.

7. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact globally, causing significant economic and social disruption. Considering the pandemic's potential to exacerbate human rights violations and undermine sustainable development in Kenya, this thesis aimed to investigate its impact on human trafficking. To answer the first question, the empirical findings highlighted the emergence of new human trafficking trends, such as online child sexual exploitation, and a shift in traffickers recruitment tactics to the online sphere. The study also sheds light on growing cases of grooming which illuminated new areas of vulnerability in the socioeconomic background of the targeted children. The thesis drew connections between the influx of people migrating to rural communities and increased risks of exploitation. Additionally, the analysis highlighted the interconnection between increased cases of abuse and vulnerability to exploitation. Guided by the theoretical underpinnings of Push and Pull Theory, coupled with the analytical review of the existing literature, the thesis confirms that the pandemic exacerbated the already existing disadvantages in Kenya, and increased the pool of vulnerable people, which exposed more people to the risk of exploitation. Indicating that Push and Pull Theory provides a useful framework to understand the underlying economic, political, and social factors that foster trafficking. Thus, the study shows that human trafficking is influenced by the complex and intertwined structural and proximate factors, where governmental restrictions, unemployment, demand for pornographic material, GBV, and social norms intersect to create a conducive environment for human trafficking. This suggests that combating human trafficking necessitates addressing a variety of interconnected factors that contribute to human trafficking.

To address the second question, the study utilized concepts from crisis management to explore the adaptive and transformative capacities of organizations in response to the challenges they faced. The findings indicate that despite some indication of good response practices, the governmental policies significantly impeded anti-human trafficking efforts during the pandemic. Thus, the findings indicate that continued provision of essential services by NGOs was crucial, underscoring the importance that adequate resources are continued to be allocated to NGOs to support the realization of Agenda 2030, particularly SDG 8.7. Hence, the government must invest significant efforts to ensure that relevant organizations can sustainably provide crucial services and support to prevent and respond to human trafficking, even during times of crisis. The study also emphasizes the need to devise crisis response plans that take

human trafficking into consideration. Finally, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the intersection of disease outbreaks and human trafficking, making a significant contribution to the ongoing efforts to combat trafficking during times of crises.

7.1 Consideration for Future Studies

While this thesis provides an overview of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on human trafficking in Kenya, more detailed research, involving multiple stakeholders, is needed to provide in-depth understanding of these challenges. Such research would be beneficial for donor agencies, policy makers and civil society actors in developing strategies to minimize the impact of future crises.

The study further underscores the importance of future researchers investigating the root causes of vulnerability to human trafficking in Kenya, particularly in the context of external factors that, simultaneously, may exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities. Further studies should, therefore, explore how other external, such as climate change and political elections events impact the human trafficking scene in Kenya, to better understand forces that drive vulnerabilities during crises.

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of Respondents

Respondent	Participant Role
1	Project Officer
2	Monitorer
3	Project Officer
4	Founding Director
5	Project Manager
6	Legal Adviser
7	Executive Director
8	Program Manager
9	Learning and Development Officer
10	Project Manager
11	Chief Executive Officer
12	Chief Executive Officer
13	Outreach Care Manager
14	Senior Programme Manager

Appendix II: Interview Guide

Warm-up questions:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How long have you worked at the organization?2. What is your position at the organization?3. What are the main tasks that you work with?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Have you experienced any changes in human trafficking trends since the start of the pandemic?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Probe: Any differences depending on the type of exploitation, forced labor, debt bondage or sexual exploitation? Child trafficking?- Probe: Did new demands for trafficking emerge during the pandemic?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Have you experienced any changes in who the victims are during the pandemic?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Probe: What is the victim's background, any specific characteristics?- Probe: Who are the most vulnerable to trafficking?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. What pushed the victims into trafficking during the pandemic?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. What were the risk factors for trafficking before the pandemic?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- How has the pandemic affected the risk factors for trafficking?- Probe: How has the post-pandemic period affected risk factors for trafficking in Kenya?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">5. What pushes someone to become a trafficker? What is a traffickers socio-economic background?6. Who is the typical trafficker? What is normally their background?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Probe: Did this change during the pandemic?- Did more people become traffickers during the pandemic in your experience? How is it now?

<p>7. Can you describe what changes you have noted in the trafficker's recruitment methods during the pandemic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Probe: Has this shifted back now, or are they still using the new ways to exploit?
<p>8. How did your organization respond to the altering ways of recruitment?</p>
<p>9. What were the biggest challenges your organization faced during the pandemic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Probe: Before the pandemic?
<p>10. How did the lockdowns affect your ability to prevent and respond to trafficking?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did the travel restrictions impact human trafficking? If so, how? - <i>How did your organization handle the new challenges caused by the pandemic?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Did your organization make any changes in terms of how you work? If yes then what, if no why not?</i>
<p>11. What tools developed during the pandemic are you still using today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was most difficult? Was anything made easier? - Has the pandemic had any positive impacts on how your organization works with human trafficking? - What are your biggest takeaways/learning experiences?
<p>12. Reports state that gender-based violence and domestic violence increased during the pandemic, was this noted in the victims you met during the pandemic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Probe: In your experience, have you noted a connection between gender-based violence and human trafficking? - Probe: Is it common that victims have experienced violence prior to being trafficked?
<p>13. What role does the Kenyan government have in addressing human trafficking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Probe: How was the governmental support during the pandemic?

- How is it now?
- How was it before the pandemic and how is it now?

14. In the shadow of the pandemic, what are the biggest challenges you are facing now?
(Medium-term effects)

15. What do you think the long-term effects of the pandemic will be on human trafficking?

Appendix III: Coding Schemes

First Thematic Coding Scheme: Inductively coded

Coding Scheme Human Trafficking Trends				
Primary Category	Subcategories	Files	References	Example
Human Trafficking Trend	Online Child Sexual Exploitation	6	8	we've seen an increase in cybercrime, you know, so online sexual exploitation, focus on children
Associated factors to human trafficking	Reverse Migration	5	6	due to the hardship of the cost of living, there are some who came from town and migrated back to communities
	GBV domestic violence child abuse	6	8	during the pandemic there was a trend in the raising of child abuse
Modus Operandi: Recruitment	Online Recruitment Grooming	11	20	now people are using the technology as a mean to get people and children into the trafficking business

Second Thematic Coding: Push and Pull Theory- Deductively coded

Coding Scheme: Push and Pull Theory				
Primary Category	Subcategories	Files	References	Example
Political Factors	Governmental Restrictions	14	27	this restrictions of movement where we were supposed to be in the house before 7 pm or something of that sort, so even going to work was difficult, so yes we had victim but we did not know where to take her, what to do with her because she was just here and there was restrictions

	Lockdowns	7	14	there was lockdown, so there was an issue of moving people from one place to another, and I think that is why the online child trafficking started
	Lack of governmental support	10	14	the government they were generally struggling with everything else that was going on during the pandemic, to my knowledge they didnt do anything extra to assist survivors
Economic Factors	Unemployment	3	4	most of the times, the arent employed, the children, because of the poverty also is a bit high
	Loss of jobs	8	14	they were unemployed, because most of them they lost their jobs
	Low income/Poverty	12	21	coming from very poor backgrounds
	High cost of living	3	4	Because of the high cost of living, especially during the pandemic and after the pandemic
	Access to technology	7	21	During the pandemic people are more active on online engagement. There was an increased usage of telephone, of whatsapp messaging, a lot of transactions happening online
Social Factors	Gender-based violence	12	24	maybe 90 percent of the victims that, survivors I have worked with have gone through some form of gbv before they were trafficked
	Greener Pastures	3	3	when someone wants to travel abroad for a better opportunity
	Inequality Norms/Attitudes/Gender Roles	4	7	the main foundations for becoming a victim of trafficking is inequality, so it could be that you are poor or that you are a victim of gender based violence or domestic violence, you are usually vulnerable in one way or another
	Demand for pornographic material	4	4	because of the new situation there was an increased demand

				for online sexual trafficking
	Desperation	8	13	the economy was a bit down so everybody wanted to put food on their table,so anything, any offer that could come a cross, for them to take care of their families, they would go, without even thinking
	Increased stress/frustration	8	10	When they are at home they are, stressed, maybe a parent out of frustration that they don't have money

Third Thematic Coding: Crisis Management Concepts: Abductively coded

Coding Scheme: NGO Responses and Challenges				
Primary Category	Subcategories	File	References	Example
Responses	New ways of working	14	24	So what our organization did was to send relief packages, that was the most that we could do during the corona pandemic period educating on economic financial resilience of families and households
	Online adaption	12	16	We have a learning management system that we use, that means that people can take self based online learning from where ever they are which we have redesigned our awareness campaigns
	Partnerships	4	6	we also collaborate

				with one organization in Tanzania, to create awareness
Challenges	Restrictions	8	12	To be honest, during the pandemic it was very hard, especially to come up with how to cope with the restrictions
	Lack of resources	8	10	due to lack of funding primarily