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Rituals as a Control Mechanism in Human Trafficking: Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Literature

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual rituals have potential for misuse as a form of control in human trafficking. A lack of understanding of this process can lead to challenges in supporting trafficking survivors. This article is a metasynthesis of systematically reviewed qualitative literature on ritual use in human trafficking, providing insight into ritual practices and their impact. Relevant qualitative research was identified via blind screening. A total of 3087 studies were screened; twenty-four met inclusion criteria. Data were analyzed using thematic synthesis, yielding eight themes incorporating twenty-seven sub-themes: These were 1) background vulnerabilities that make a ritual a powerful control mechanism, 2) trafficker intention to exploit, 3) power and consent issues in agreement to a ritual and contract, 4) powerful and often frightening ritual experiences, 5) control mechanisms arising from the ritual experience, 6) impact of the ritual on the victim, 7) challenges for the victim in leaving and getting help, and 8) successes in helping survivors who have escaped exploitation. We offer an illustrative framework for considering the relationship between rituals and human trafficking. We discuss implications for policy making that empowers trafficking survivors and promotes just outcomes within legal, governmental and health-care systems.

KEYWORDS

Rituals; juju; human trafficking; modern slavery; coercion; control; psychological abuse

Introduction

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking or trafficking in persons as

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (United Nations General Assembly, 2000)

Traffickers use many strategies to coerce and control their victims to exploit them (Van der Watt & Kruger, 2020). Examples include restriction of movement, false promises for a better future, creating a sense of debt bondage, cultivating anxiety and fear, and degradation (Baldwin et al., 2014; Van der Watt & Kruger, 2020).

Spiritual and religious beliefs and their associated rituals are known to be misused as a form of control (Purcell, 1998). Spiritual abuse is broadly defined as a person in a position of spiritual power bolstering their position at the expense of a person in need (Johnson & VanVonderen, 2005). For the purposes of this paper we are referring to “juju” as a traditional belief system, as practiced mainly in West Africa. The terms “voodoo,” “witchcraft,” “spirits” or “black magic” are also used to describe this

practice (Taliani, 2012; Van der Watt & Kruger, 2017; Van Dijk, 2001). There is widespread cultural belief in West Africa in the power of rituals to control and punish (Oba, 2008) and “juju priests” have undeniable roles in society not only related to religious functions but also judiciary and social functions (Apard et al., 2019). This belief system and cultural norms can be distorted and abused by traffickers, who may draw on elaborate spiritual oaths in local shrines to seal promises and engender longstanding fear and spiritual bondage in victims (Braimah, 2013; Carling, 2006; Ikeora, 2016). The fear arising after oath taking can limit victims’ ability to disclose information about their traffickers (Van der Watt & Kruger, 2017), causing challenges for authorities responsible for investigating and preventing trafficking crimes (Dunkerley, 2018; Ikeora, 2016; Kigbu & Hassan, 2015). Extending beyond West Africa, there are reports of other magical/witchcraft practices being used as a means of control (Kelly et al., 2016; Sarson & Macdonald, 2016).

Our research aims were:

- (1) To review systematically the qualitative literature across a range of disciplines including psychology, anthropology and criminology on the use of juju and similar ritual practices as a means of psychological control of trafficking victims.
- (2) To identify how widespread ritual practices are in relation to human trafficking, and in particular whether the use of rituals in this context extends beyond West Africa.
- (3) To analyze the themes underlying juju as a mechanism of control in human trafficking and propose a qualitative framework for structuring these themes, thereby amplifying the often unheard voices of trafficking survivors who have been silenced by rituals (Kigbu & Hassan, 2015).

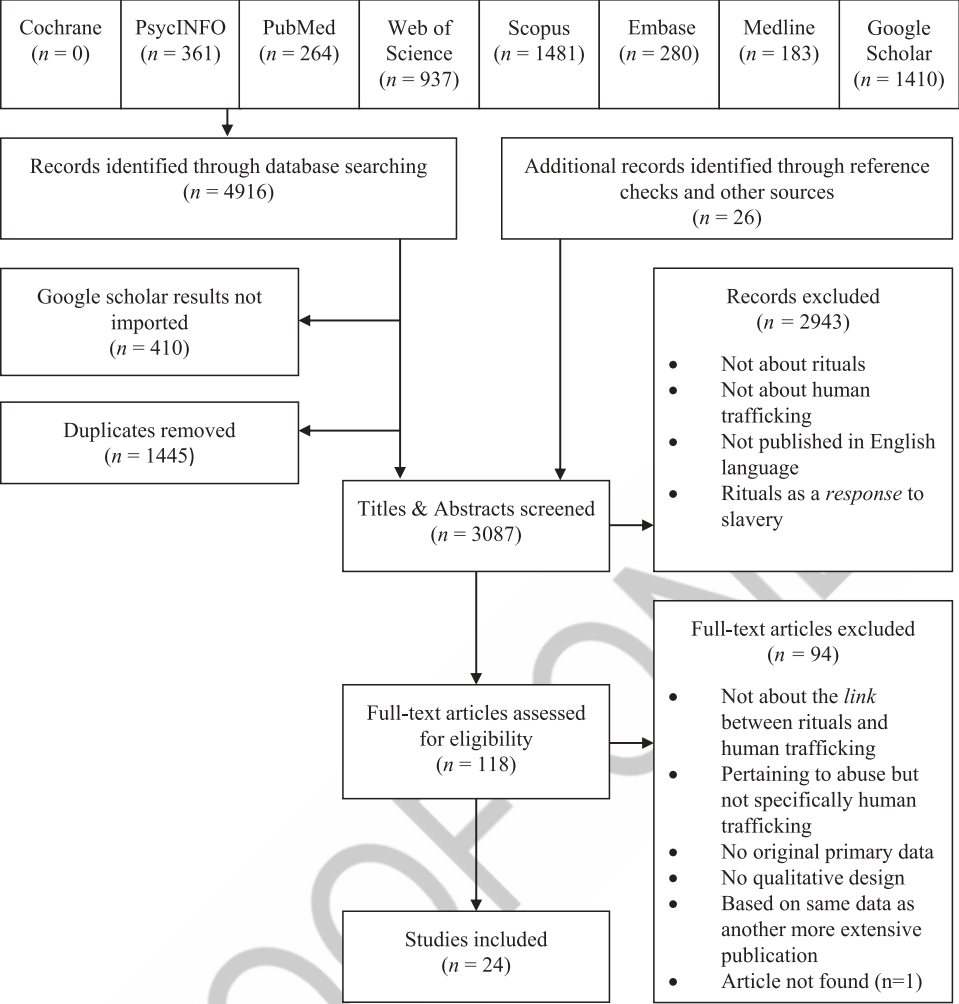
Method

In developing a higher-order thematic understanding of the current literature, we were guided by the qualitative metasynthesis research procedure outlined by Lachal et al. (2017). This incorporates: 1) defining the research question and selection criteria, 2) selection of the studies, 3) assessing quality, 4) extracting and presenting formal data, 5) analyzing data, and 6) expressing the synthesis. In reporting we have been guided by the ENTREQ transparency criteria for qualitative research (Tong et al., 2012). This is a tool that researchers can use to report on the stages associated with synthesis of qualitative research including searching and selecting qualitative research, quality appraisal, and methods for synthesizing qualitative findings.

Varied terminology exists for many of the issues discussed in this paper. We use the term “ritual” to refer to a ceremonial spiritual practice. The terms “victim” and “survivor” of trafficking are used interchangeably, using “victim” for those who remain in exploitation, and “survivor” for those no longer in a situation of exploitation. The term “ritual administrator” refers to the person who undertook the ritual with the trafficking victim. A wide range of terms including “priest” and “witchdoctor” has been used to refer to these people.

Systematic Literature Search

An extensive scoping search was undertaken by two health librarians to inform the search strategy and terms. We then searched systematically and comprehensively in the following databases on 14 July 2019: Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science, Embase, Medline and Cochrane. Title, abstract and key terms were searched with no date restriction. Gray literature was included, and Google Scholar was searched to enhance inclusivity (Haddaway et al., 2015; Paez, 2017). Google Scholar returned 1410 results but only the first 1000 results were screened due to the practical limitations of importing results into reference management software. While recognized as a limitation, the last few hundred of the 1410 screened results from Google Scholar were not English language, so would in any case not have been included in this synthesis. Two search term



Q3 Figure 1.

categories were combined using Boolean operators: rituals and human trafficking. “*Ritual*” terms included: juju, “ju ju,” voodoo, vodou, vodun, voodoo, vodon, vodu, hoodoo, candombl*, santeria, brujeria, witch*, ritual*, “African traditional religion,” “ritual abuse,” diabolism, syncretism. “*Human trafficking*” terms included traffick*, slave*, prostitut*, exploit*, “sex trad*,” smuggl*, coerci*, servit*, “forced labo*,” recruit*. Reference lists of relevant studies were manually searched for additional papers. Figure 1 illustrates the search strategy and process for selecting studies in a PRISMA diagram (Moher et al., 2009).

Selecting Studies

Inclusion criteria were: (a) literature content that covers both religious/spiritual rituals and human trafficking/modern slavery, b) pertaining to the use of rituals in facilitating human trafficking, c) based on original primary data (i.e., not an opinion or discussion article), and d) qualitative methodology or mixed methods with qualitative results reported separately. Exclusion criteria were: a) literature in languages other than English, b) pertaining to the use of rituals as response to ancestral experiences of slavery, c) literature on the use of rituals in the context of abuse more generally (not specifically

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regarding human trafficking), and d) based on the same primary data as another source (in which case the article with more primary data was analyzed). We considered including case studies and anthropological observations in the synthesis, but when the most relevant articles were scrutinized, they not give rise to any additional themes. The decision was therefore made only to synthesize data from formal qualitative research. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were initially applied to select relevant studies, screening titles and abstracts of all records identified. This was undertaken independently and blind by two authors (AC and IM). Rayyan software was used (Ouzzani et al., 2016). Disagreement on whether to screen the full article occurred for 229 out of 3061 articles (7.4%); agreement was reached via discussion. A total of 118 articles were selected for full-screening and were shared between the four researchers for full screening. Uncertainty arose about inclusion for seven articles and was resolved via full team discussion. Twenty percent (24 of the 118 articles) were independently screened by a second member of the research team. No discrepancies arose from this independent screening. Twenty-four articles were selected for final inclusion.

Quality Appraisal

The methodological quality and rigor of the twenty-four studies included was assessed by AC or IM using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) 2010 and given a rating of high, moderate or low methodological quality (following the example of; Fox et al., 2017). However, given the secrecy inherent in rituals and human trafficking and the aim of giving influence to unheard voices, no studies were excluded based on quality rating. Sensitivity analysis was undertaken; all themes were endorsed by at least one study of moderate or high methodological rigor (Carroll et al., 2012). Quality ratings are available on request.

Data Synthesis

Included articles were imported into NVivo 11 software (QSR International, 1999) for storing, coding and searching qualitative data (Houghton et al., 2017). Information relevant to the concept of ritual use in human trafficking was extracted from each of the papers jointly by two authors (AC and IM). Extracted information comprised both primary data and interpretations drawn based on primary data. Primary data included: 1) quotes from trafficking survivors, traffickers, and professionals, 2) case studies written by survivors or presented by the author, 3) quotes from document analysis including legal documents. Interpretations included researcher observations based on this primary data, and formal qualitative results. The two authors reviewed the extracted data again to jointly decide on relevance for inclusion in the study.

Data were analyzed using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), employing thematic analysis techniques with a meta-ethnographic aim to translate concepts between papers into common themes, and to go beyond the primary data with a higher-order analysis. This explorative approach was chosen to enable consideration of heterogeneous data, allowing for the best understanding of all material. Synthesis was undertaken by a team of health professionals affiliated with a charity working with survivors of trafficking. Three were white British, one Black African. All authors have first-hand experience working with survivors of human trafficking who have been exposed to spiritual rituals. To overcome bias as best as possible, the coding was done in an inductive manner, allowing themes to emerge from the ground up.

The first stage involved line-by-line “free coding” of data regarding the use of rituals in relation to human trafficking (undertaken jointly by AC and IM). A total of 151 codes were generated before saturation was reached. The second stage involved organization and summary of these codes into 34 groups of themes (drafted by AC and amended via team discussion). The final stage involved further development via team discussion, which generated 27 themes with eight analytic over-arching groups. Once an organized and summarized list of themes was agreed upon, two authors (IM and SU) re-read the original data to ensure that all extracted data was reflected in the final thematic framework. Finally, a higher-order diagrammatic framework of the relationships between themes was drafted as a team, extending understanding beyond pure review of the primary studies (see, Figure 2).

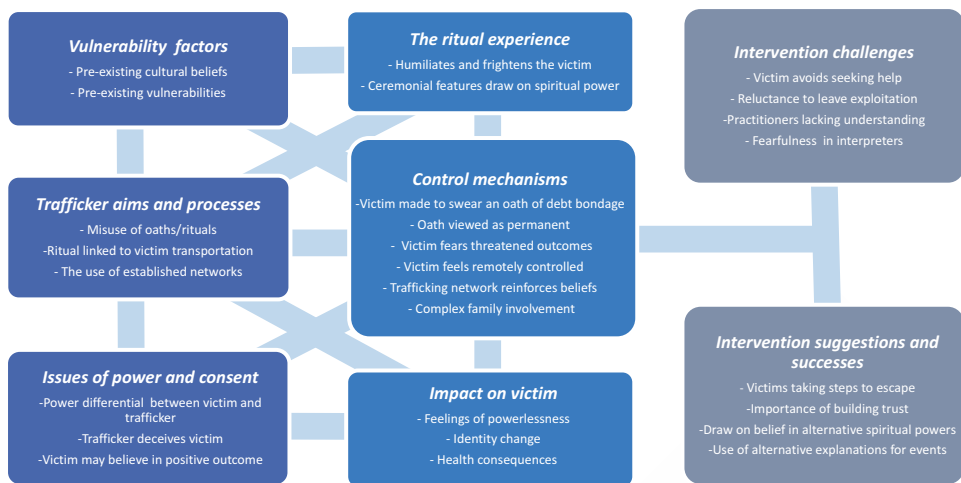


Figure 2.

Results

Characteristics of the Included Studies

The initial search yielded 3087 studies, 24 of which were included in the review. Twenty-two of the studies pertained to juju rituals in relation to human trafficking from African countries. One highlighted witchcraft rituals used during abduction of child soldiers into the Lord’s Resistance Army in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC; Kelly et al., 2016), and one pertained to “ritual-abuse-torture” in Nova Scotia in which human trafficking also occurred (Sarson & MacDonald, 2008). The studies gathered data from a range of sources, with many studies drawing on multiple sources and commenting on the need to draw a wide net due to difficulty in ensuring the safety of participating survivors. Sixteen studies drew on direct interview with survivors of trafficking. Sixteen studies involved interviews with or observation of professionals working with trafficking survivors such as law enforcement agencies, charity/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sector representatives, government representatives, health professionals and community leaders. Seven documented interviews with academic experts. Interviews were conducted with traffickers in one study and with people in the wider community in two studies. Data were collected from legal documents in three studies, including arrest warrants, police records, and court case files. The country of origin of the trafficking survivors varied. Nigerian survivors of trafficking formed the largest group (discussed as the sole or part-focus in fifteen studies or 62.5%). Key characteristics of included studies are shown in Table 1.

Thematic Synthesis

Thematic synthesis yielded eight themes incorporating 27 sub-themes, as outlined in Table 2. All eight themes were endorsed in both the papers pertaining to juju and in the two papers pertaining to other rituals. Nineteen of the 27 sub-themes were endorsed in both the juju papers and the papers pertaining to other rituals. Each theme was present in at least one paper considered to be high quality according to CASP rating. Themes are elaborated below with illustrative quotes from the researchers or the participants of the primary studies. Participants quoted include both trafficking survivors and professionals working with trafficking survivors. Due to the predominance of studies related to juju, most of the quotes pertain to juju rituals; where this is not the case it is indicated.

Q4

Table 1.

Study	Authors and Date <i>Organization</i>	Aim	Participant Information	Type of Sampling	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
1	Alpes (2008)	To explore migration experiences of West African women working in prostitution in Paris	10 women from Nigeria and Cameroon considered to be trafficking survivors, previously working in prostitution. A 'period of observation' whilst based at a Paris-based NGO is referred to (unclear number of participants).	Unspecified - assumed convenience.	Interviews with survivors of trafficking, unclear type. Observation/document analysis	Unclear
2	Aluko-Daniels (2014)	To explore how practitioners in the field of human trafficking make sense of consent in the movement of Nigerian women for prostitution	40 experts in the area of sex trafficking from Nigeria and Italy, including law enforcement and criminal justice practitioners, governmental and non-governmental organizations, scholars, journals.	Purposive and snowballing	Semi structured interviews	Thematic
3	Aronowitz et al. (2010)	To assist policy makers in better appreciating the market and business variables as well as interconnections between human trafficking and other illegal enterprises and legal actors	Case analysis of 25 victims of trafficking from various countries, including expert interviews and reports from the criminal justice sector, governmental and non-governmental agencies, or the media. Expert interviews (unclear number) with police, military and government officials, academics, analysts, and NGO representatives.	Purposive	Case analysis via checklist, semi-structured interview with experts	Not specified
4	Baarda, (2016)	To explore the role of voodoo in the functioning of Nigerian human trafficking rings/networks	65 police files of Nigerian trafficking survivors, including containing information from police interviews, wiretapped phone conversations, lists of money transfers and phone calls, and intercepted text messages and mail, part of an investigation of a human trafficking ring	Purposive	Document analysis	Content

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Study	Authors and Date Organization	Aim	Participant Information	Type of Sampling	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
5	Brotherton (2012)	To provide insight into how the UK investigates and prosecutes human trafficking crimes, focussing on how a victim-centered approach can lead to successful prosecution	7 staff-members from organizations which provide direct assistance to trafficking victims throughout the course of a criminal investigation (including NGOs, police, solicitors)	Purposive	Semi-structured interviews (face-to-face and telephone)	Thematic/content
6	Carchedi et al. (2010)	To assess any changes that have taken place in the overall cycle of trafficking and exploitation (follow-up study)	In depth interviews with 95 key informants and 7 minors under the care of protective services in Italy (total: 102 interviews). 10 reports of case studies of Nigerian trafficking survivors within social services	Unclear	Narrative interviews with 'biographical approach'	Not specified
7	Cherti et al. (2013)	To identify areas for action and opportunities for collaboration on trafficking (policy research)	Interviews of 40 people (39 women and one man) that had been trafficked from Nigeria to the UK, 27 stakeholders in the UK, 29 stakeholders in Nigeria (a range of representatives from the voluntary sector, statutory services, government officials and trafficking experts), a representative poll (n = 1036) of the Nigerian population on awareness of and attitudes to trafficking, a review of available literature and policy documents.	Unclear	In-depth qualitative interviews	Unclear

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Study	Authors and Date <i>Organization</i>	Aim	Participant Information	Type of Sampling	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
8	Cole (2006)	To explore the activities, successes and limitations of an anti-trafficking project in Palermo, Sicily	Conversations with 'a handful' of former Nigerian prostitutes in Italy, as well as individuals who work with prostitutes and trafficking victims (within street teams, legal consultants, representatives from cultural organizations and investigators)	Not specified	No clear interview strategy	Unclear
9	Dunkerley (2018)	To explore how juju affects victims of human trafficking and what considerations this raises for criminal investigations	7 experts involved in the criminal process or in supporting 3 Nigerian survivors of human trafficking in which the use of juju had been identified (criminal investigators, expert witnesses, NGO workers, safe house workers)	Purposive	Semi-structured interviews with experts	Thematic/content
10	Fernandez Rodriguez de Lievana & Soria Montanez (2015).	To promote understanding and advocacy for Nigerian women and girls who are survivors of trafficking	Various participants: 63 interviews with Nigerian women and girls as well as field research in Nigeria involving trafficking experts, legal professionals, a psychologist, and attendance at juju ceremonies.	Unclear	Unclear but appear semi-structured	Not specified
11	Helfferich et al. (2011)	To determine what factors affect willingness of victims of trafficking to make a statement to the police. Developing on the results of an original study	53 trafficking survivor interviews, mediated by a specialized counseling service combating trafficking in women	Unclear	Interviews in semi-narrative/biographical manner	Various: content/conversational

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Study	Authors and Date <i>Organization</i>	Aim	Participant Information	Type of Sampling	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
12	Kelly et al. (2016)	To examine the processes related to child abduction, recruitment into the Lord Resistance Army and subsequent control. Includes exploration of the use of ‘gri gri’ (witchcraft).	34 informants from Democratic Republic of Congo: 7 formally abducted children, 3 family members, 11 community leaders, 19 service providers	Snowball	Semi-structured interviews with survivors and experts	Content/ thematic
13	Kemp (2017)	To examine human trafficking and trafficking vulnerabilities amongst African migrants in Malta	60 stake holders, NGOs, politicians and African migrants from various countries. Participant observation over a 12-month period whilst working at a migrant open center	Unclear, presumed convenience	Ethnographic, explorative and ‘open-ended’ interviews as well as participant observation	Unclear
14	Lo Iacono (2013)	To analyze the multiple female roles in the trafficking industry and the gray area between victim/ perpetrator dichotomy: how trafficking victims become involved in the network as perpetrators	Interviews in Italy of 2 trafficking survivors, and 23 others involved in the community including public officials, experts, journalists and NGO providers	Snowball	Documentation and ‘in-depth’ interviews, type not clear	Content
15	Millett-Barrett (2019)	To provide data on how juju can be used as a control mechanism in trafficking Nigerian women to Italy	51 surveys, 28 interviews with Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking, 15 interviews of experts.	Unclear	Semi-structured interviews and observational data	Unclear
16	Nankobe (2018)	To understand the motivations of Nigerian women who end up as sex workers and migrate to Italy and to assess whether these women are survivors of human trafficking	12 Nigerian sex workers and trafficking survivors from one group based in Italy	Convenience/ random	Semi-structured interviews and observational data	Thematic

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Table 1. (Continued).

Study	Authors and Date <i>Organization</i>	Aim	Participant Information	Type of Sampling	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
17	Okojie (2003)	To provide relevant data to guide the programme of action against trafficking in minors and women from Nigeria to Italy for sexual exploitation.	A variety of participants related to Nigerian trafficking survivors: 29 interviews and focus groups (with trafficking survivors), 12 interviews with NGOs, 32 interviews with experts, 30 interviews with law enforcement agents, 27 case files selected (2 High Court cases, 15 Customary Court cases, 10 police cases)	Unclear, presumed purposive	In depth interviews (narrative) and focus groups	Not specified
18	Osezua (2013)	To examine the changing roles of traditional religious institutions in Benin (Nigeria) and explores how these have been misused to support sex trafficking.	A variety of participants: 15 interviews with Nigerian survivors of trafficking. 120 interviews with family/household heads, interviews with 5 key informants, 18 focus group discussions. Also includes observation of a burial ceremony and a wedding ceremony. Secondary data obtained from the internet and newspapers.	Snowball and purposive	'Life histories' taken from trafficking victims. Unclear interview technique used with other informants. Vignette stories of a trafficking 'happy ending' and 'tragic note' were used in focus groups	Content
19	Oyebanji (2017)	To produce meaning from lived experiences and understand the social impact	5 participants- Nigerian survivors of human trafficking: 3 face to face interviews and 2 on the phone	Convenience and snow-ball	'Feminist' interview technique, semi-structured	Thematic/ narrative

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Study	Authors and Date Organization	Aim	Participant Information	Type of Sampling	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
20	Pemberton Ford (2017)	To explore challenges and opportunities facing churches when supporting victims of human trafficking, domestic servitude and domestic violence, and the particular contribution which the Pentecostal Churches can play in relation to women at risk.	8 case studies are outlined based on the experience of people working with trafficking survivors or are written by trafficking survivors. It is not clear whether these are written aspects of stories from a few participants, as many have the same name. Case studies are 6 from Nigeria, 1 from Vietnam, 1 unspecified.	Snowball	Participant observation, in-depth interviews with trafficking survivors and workshop-based focus groups, alongside survey data and discussion forum (with 200 active participants)	Unclear
21	Sarson & MacDonald (2008)	To explore experiences of five women tortured in family groups including the use of rituals, labeled 'ritual abuse-torture.'	5 case studies (survivors of ritual abuse-torture). Interview with 1 friend of a deceased survivor of ritual abuse-torture.	Unclear	Open interview technique with clarification as necessary	Narrative
22	Savona et al. (2013)	To analyze the vulnerabilities associated with the crime-commission process in human trafficking into sexual exploitation in Italy, to gather information on the actions and decisions of both traffickers and victims linked to the stages of the crime of trafficking and draw research and policy recommendations	Document analysis of 2 arrest warrants (both consisting of approximately 500 pages each of wiretap transcriptions, witnesses' examination and other police activities). one case study involving 17 Eastern European victims; one case study involving 67 Nigerian victims.	Purposive	Document analysis	"In-depth script analysis"

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Study	Authors and Date Organization	Aim	Participant Information	Type of Sampling	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
23	Somerset (2001)	To measure the level of awareness of child trafficking amongst London social services, to find of whether they had come across any cases of trafficking and how they had dealt with them	50 professionals: 24 working with children who had been trafficked: officials (immigration and police), non-government organizations and observers (academics, journalists, lawyers). Further telephone calls and informal contacts (conferences and meetings) also included. Two case studies presented.	Not specified	Interviews using an 'open questionnaire'	Unclear
24	Van der Watt and Kruger (2017)	To contribute to a more in-depth understanding of juju and how it is used in human trafficking, by exploring the lived realities of those who experienced the phenomenon.	23 interviews with local and international 'actors' in the counter-trafficking field in South Africa. This included social workers, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, NGO representatives, survivors of trafficking, a journalist, a member of civil society, and a trafficker. 4 interviews with international experts.	Unclear amongst survivors, Purposive of experts.	Unstructured phenomenological interviews	Content/ thematic

Vulnerability Factors

Preexisting Cultural Beliefs in the Power of the Spiritual World. Trafficking victims, perpetrators, and others might believe from a young age in the power or “specialness” of rituals and experience fear and reverence of the spiritual world. This deference to the spiritual occurs in followers of various world religions. It is important to note that a person who identifies as being of a non-African traditional religion, such as Christianity, may still believe in or fear the power of a juju ritual. Van der Watt and Kruger (2017, p. 80) found that “cultural congruencies, superstition, ancestral worship and sensitivity to the spiritual realm were highlighted by participants as predisposing factors to an actual belief in the power and control of juju.”

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Table 2.

Group Theme	Sub-Themes	Studies Endorsing Theme (Out of 24)	Endorsed in juju Papers?	Endorsed in One of the Other Ritual Papers?
Vulnerability factors	Preexisting cultural beliefs in the power of the spiritual world	16	Yes	Yes
	Victim vulnerabilities related to reduced power make a ritual effective as a control mechanism	10	Yes	Yes
Trafficker aims and processes	Traffickers misuse culturally normal rituals in order to coerce and control	22	Yes	Yes
	The ritual is linked to transportation of trafficking victims	10	Yes	Yes
	The trafficking process involves professional and established networks	12	Yes	No
Issues of power and consent	A power differential makes the victim unable to refuse the ritual and contract	10	Yes	Yes
	Deception and confusion are involved in coercing the victim, negating informed consent	13	Yes	Yes
	Victim may initially have had positive hopes about what the ritual might bring	7	Yes	No
The ritual experience	The ritual is designed to humiliate, dehumanize and frighten the victim	15	Yes	Yes
	Ceremonial features, including invoking a spiritual power and entwining the victim within it	18	Yes	Yes
Control mechanisms	An oath is sworn to obey a contract resulting in a sense of debt bondage and obligation to secrecy	21	Yes	Yes
	Belief the oath cannot be undone	12	Yes	Yes
	Fear related to threats made during a ritual	20	Yes	Yes
	Belief in a spiritual power which can remotely control by causing fortune and misfortune	17	Yes	Yes
	The trafficking network reinforces the belief in the power of the oath	14	Yes	No
	Complex family involvement can reinforce control	13	Yes	No
Impact on victim	Feelings of powerlessness following the ritual	15	Yes	Yes
	Identity change	7	Yes	Yes
Intervention challenges	Health consequences	16	Yes	Yes
	The victim avoids seeking help	20	Yes	Yes
	The victim does not leave exploitation	14	Yes	Yes
	Practitioners may struggle to understand or to maintain an open mind.	13	Yes	No
	Interpreters can be fearful	2	Yes	No
Intervention suggestions and successes	The survivor may independently take steps to escape the trafficking	6	Yes	No
	Accept the complexities and focus on building a trusting relationship	11	Yes	Yes
	Alternative spiritual authorities may be used to counter the perceived power of the ritual	14	Yes	Yes
	Alternative explanations may be tested and used to decrease belief in the ritual's power	4	Yes	No

Victim Vulnerabilities Related to Reduced Power Make a Ritual Effective as a Control Mechanism.

Identified vulnerabilities include poverty, youth, female gender and a lack of education. A researcher noted that “Juju in Nigeria generally occurred in situations where the victim was already powerless (for example, in a pre-existing situation of exploitation)” (Cherti et al., 2013, p. 43).

Trafficker Aims and Processes

Traffickers Misuse Culturally Normal Rituals to Coerce and Control. The use of oaths or rituals to guarantee a contractual agreement is normal cultural practice in many communities. However, traffickers exploit the underlying belief systems and spiritual practices to intimidate, control and

coerce their victim into exploitation. The nature of the ritual is changed by their ill intent and the use of juju rituals in a trafficking context is not accepted in Edo State, Nigeria. This is demonstrated by the revocation in 2018 of all juju oaths by the Oba of Benin (Chatham House, 2018). Some interviewees suggested that the victim knowingly enters a contract. We note however that even if a victim agrees to the ritual, there are a range of barriers to obtaining properly informed consent (outlined below). A trafficking survivor stated “The Juju, the voodoo rite, it’s not a bad practice. It was used to bring justice, but they [she refers to the traffickers] ruined everything” (Lo Iacono, 2013, p. 73). A professional stated “The baba-loa, instead of performing rites for propitiating a good journey the girl’s success and health, twists them into evil rites, bending them to the will of the maman” (Carchedi et al., 2010, p. 84).

The Ritual Is Linked to Transit of Trafficking Victims. The ritual/oath is usually undertaken shortly prior to transit by the traffickers, sometimes with the journey arrangements disclosed at the shrine and the oath linked to the transit costs. Sometimes the ritual may occur *en route*, in the destination country for the first time, or as a subsequent reinforcing ritual. Okojie (2003, p. 66) records in a case study that some victims swore oaths before leaving their country of origin, and some on arrival in the destination country.

The Trafficking Process Involves Professional and Established Networks. There are professional/business-like structures and transactions linking the traffickers and those administering rituals, such as: a) Traffickers purposefully requesting collaboration with juju administrators due to awareness of their power and control; b) direct links between traffickers and juju administrators both in the home country of origin and the destination country, including payment of juju administrators, c) fraudulent religious figures involved in supporting trafficking, and d) involvement of other authority figures in the ritual and trafficking process. Juju rituals may be used as a form of quasi-legal contract. A professional noted that “there is a criminal diaspora, which may develop a system of exploitation and economical accumulation and, of course, native doctors or juju priests may be captured in this desire” (Millett-Barrett, 2019, p. 17).

Issues of Power and Consent

Power Differentials Make the Victim Unable to Refuse the Ritual and Contract. Some professionals commented on the difficulty in proving whether a trafficking victim had the option to refuse to participate in the ritual and the associated contract. Many survivors commented on their lack of choice about whether to participate. Reasons for lack of informed consent to engage in the ritual include: a) powerlessness against the traffickers, b) not understanding the purpose or nature of the ceremony before or during the ritual, c) not understanding the nature of the trafficking “contract” and d) being pressured by family. A trafficking survivor stated “I do not believe in the juju. I was told to swear the oath and I participated in the ceremony even though I didn’t believe in it. I didn’t have a choice. Even though I didn’t believe in it, I felt controlled by it” (Millett-Barrett, 2019, p. 23).

Deception and Confusion are Involved in Coercing the Victim, Negating Informed Consent. There is a lack of transparency during the trafficking process, including the oath swearing ritual ceremony. This includes deception and confusion regarding a) the nature of the ritual prior to attending, b) language during the ritual (incomprehensible things said), c) the nature of the work after transportation, d) the level of debt being agreed to, and e) the life awaiting them in the host country. Victims often see undertaking an oath as a positive step toward securing their transport to Europe. The debt amount is often stated in an incomprehensible foreign currency. The victim’s understanding of and relationship with the oath changes as the true circumstances become apparent. A trafficking survivor explained

I was happy. I was hopeful that my life was going to be better in Europe . . . that it would be like heaven. So to me the oath ceremony was something I just had to do to go to Europe. I believe in God, so I thought I would be okay. I didn’t know then what life was going to be like here. (Millett-Barrett, 2019, p. 21)

Victim May Have Had Positive Hopes about What the Ritual Might Bring. As outlined above, some victims are unclear what the ritual will involve and some do not feel able to dissent to engage in the ritual if they do grasp what it will involve. However, some victims are told (and believe) that the ritual is for positive outcomes such as safety, prosperity, strength and protection, and therefore initially have a positive view and experience of the ritual itself (Carling, 2006; Van Dijk, 2001). Some may keep objects for protection or good fortune. Over time, their positive belief erodes as reality sinks in. One survivor shared:

he asked me to give him some of my things (pubic hairs, hair, a pair of underpants and some photos) that he had to send to a man he knew in Nigeria for “sanctifying” them with voodoo rites. He said that he was going to give me these things back before I left. This we did. In truth, I must say that after I felt better, I felt that the migrants’ good spirits were protecting me. (Carchedi et al., 2010, p. 54)

The Ritual Experience

The Ritual Is Designed to Humiliate, Dehumanize and Frighten the Victim. While rituals as used in normal spiritual practices may be experienced positively, rituals as used by traffickers have been described as involving a) humiliation and degradation, b) emphasizing or demonstrating the vulnerability of the victim, c) violence and torture, d) threats, and e) sexual abuse. The ceremony often involves the expression of threats against the survivor of terrible consequences for not abiding by the oath. Threats may include symbolic violence of what the punishment will be for disobeying, which further increases the fear. A case study of a trafficking survivor stated:

she remembers the juju ritual and the contract. She remembers it as if it were yesterday because she is terrified of it. She says that it works, that it is real. ‘Juju will kill you if you don’t obey. It has many ways to kill, it enters your body, makes you sick and you die.’ She says white people can’t understand it, but she has seen the things that juju can do and she would never break the contract. (Fernandez Rodriguez de Lievana & Soria Montanez, 2015, p. 2)

Ceremonial Features, Including Invoking a Spiritual Power and Entwining the Victim within It.

Ceremonial actions appear to be undertaken to invoke a sense of power of the spiritual world and the entwined nature of its control (e.g., praying, chanting, using objects to connect to the spiritual world). In juju rituals, common examples include: a) substances being mixed and placed on the body or bathed in, b) incisions made on the body and substances placed in them, c) witnessing or participating in animal sacrifice, d) being forced to eat raw animal body parts, and e) collection of personal items from the woman including material (e.g., underwear, clothing) or bodily (e.g., blood, pubic hair, nails, eyelashes). Power and control may be emphasized by the ritual administrator retaining personal items of the victim, or the victim being told to retain items from the ceremony. Dunkerley (2018, p. 90) reported that professionals encountered victims who had not only witnessed animal sacrifice during the ritual, but were made to consume the body parts. Some were made to chew chicken livers, chicken hearts and drink blood. The removal of hair and nail clippings, rubbing soot into the cuts and mixing these items was commonly identified. AEW2 offered an explanation for this process by stating that, “[The items] are ingredients of juju. They then say that the victims are in there. Your body is now mixed up with magic and so you can never get away from it.”

Control Mechanisms

An Oath Is Sworn to Obey a Contract Resulting in a Sense of Debt Bondage and Obligation to Secrecy. The trafficking victim is often required to swear to obey, to not leave, and to maintain secrecy about the ritual and trafficking process. A trafficking victim shared

No, I can’t quit this job. My madam made me to take an oath in a shrine in Nigeria that I have to work with her and pay back her money for helping me to travel to Italy. If I quit this job I will die or run mad because of the oath. (Nankobe, 2018, p. 44)

Belief the Oath Cannot Be Undone. The victim has a sense that the only escape from potential spiritual punishment arising from the ritual is to repay the debt they have incurred. They believe that this cannot be undone, and are desperate to repay the debt to escape the power of the oath. The persistence of the oath's effects is associated with the concept that a victim's body is permanently entwined with the spiritual world, giving a continuing means to punish them. A survivor explains:

the priest told me that if I did not keep my promise I would go mad in Italy and would be returned to Nigeria. The oath was on my mind every day. I was one of the lucky ones because it took me less than one year to pay my debt. I thank God it was quick. I do not believe the oath can be cancelled, but I am at peace now because I gave them their money. (Millett-Barrett, 2019, p. 31)

Fear Related to Threats Made during a Ritual. threats are made during the ritual of consequences for disobeying the oath. Victims often fear that if they do not abide by the oath, they will be harmed as a result. They dread a) death, b) physical illness, c) psychiatric illness, d) personal misfortune, e) harm to their family, f) harm or being killed either by being haunted, by the power of the spiritual world, or by the juju administrator or trafficker. A survivor shared her fears:

She [took] my hair, there and cut my hair. And [drew] my blood, you understand? And said whenever I decide not to pay or [if I] involve her in everything, she's going to use this against me. Then with that, I end up like, being scared. (Cherti et al., 2013, p. 59)

Belief in a Spiritual Power Which Can Remotely Control by Causing Fortune and Misfortune. The ritual controls a trafficking victim remotely via several means: a) entwinement with the spiritual world via use of personal objects connecting the Juju priest and the trafficking survivor; b) being "haunted" or contaminated/poisoned; c) a sense that through the ritual the survivor is "cursed" and can be "punished" remotely for not obeying the contract; d) fear of the power of the ritual resulting in compliance with the oath's stipulations; and e) a resulting sense of loyalty to keep the oath. The trafficking survivor may interpret misfortune or fortune as the result of the power of the ritual. One professional stated "we have women who have been with us for years who have long escaped and the slightest thing happens, they stub their toe, they get a cold, their asylum decision is refused, whatever, it's the juju" (Cherti et al., 2013, p. 49).

The Trafficking Network Reinforces the Belief in the Power of the Oath. The traffickers continue to reinforce the ritual's power. This may be by a) reminding the victim of the oath and consequences; b) requesting the juju administrator contacts the victim to remind them to obey due to the power of the oath; c) telling the victim stories of misfortune of others who did not obey; d) repeating or threatening to repeat a ritual; and e) retaining objects used during the ritual. A trafficking survivor shared:

There was this lady that was at that place with us who refused to stay and do what she was asked her do. She escaped and came back home. We later heard that she died. Aunty did not hesitate to tell us that anyone who goes against the oath will face that same repercussion. (Oyebanji, 2017, p. 76)

Complex Family Involvement Can Reinforce Control. Family members can reinforce the control of the oath in a number of ways, including: a) the trafficking survivor obeys the oath as they fear their family will be harmed if they do not; b) if harm does come to a family member, the trafficking survivor interprets this as being due to the oath being broken; c) the family are non-complicit initially but become involved when traffickers directly threaten them including taking them to the shrine; and d)

the family are complicit in the ritual and trafficking, including being present at the ritual and continuing to reinforce it. Family members may also feel powerless in the face of the ritual. A survivor stated in Millett-Barrett (2019, p. 16):

During the ceremony, I was told that my family would be killed if I did not repay my debt. I believed this would be true and my family believed it too. I received pressure from my family in Nigeria to keep my promise and pay back the debt. 330

Impact on Victim

Feelings of Powerlessness following the Ritual. Subordination of victims using the ritual results in a sense of entrapment. Survivors described a sense of powerlessness in the face of the spiritual world, powerless in the face of the traffickers, and a sense of psychological helplessness. A survivor described: 335

between spasms of pain, she keeps saying how afraid she is. She is not free and she knows it. She doesn't want to talk about all the suffering she has faced along the way, let alone think of what is to come. Her life is not her own—it is in the hands of God and her madame, whose name she doesn't even know. (Fernandez Rodriguez de Lievana & Soria Montanez, 2015, p. 2)

Identity Change. Loss of individual identity and the development of a sense of group belonging might arise in those who have endured rituals. A fear of stigma and community disconnection resulting from the ritual can lead to secrecy around it. A survivor case study reported: 340

She was forced to take part in a number of rituals which involved drinking blood. The people who were in charge told her that she was now a member of their group, and that she must swear complete secrecy, if she told anyone she would die. (Somerset, 2001, p. 38) 345

Health Consequences. Survivors experience high levels of fear related to breaking the contract, and can develop symptoms potentially indicative of serious mental illness including psychosis and post-traumatic stress disorder. Aggression and violence may be normalized and rationalized as a result of the ritual. Physical health consequences are also noted, such as the risk of infection from cuts. One professional stated 350

when trafficking networks exploit juju, it instills fear of death or disease in their victims, but also the fear of going mad. Victims feel that everything that happens to them is their fault because they violated the rules of juju. Many victims suffer minor psychotic episodes, delirium and sometimes even hallucinations. (Fernandez Rodriguez de Lievana & Soria Montanez, 2015, p. 22)

Intervention Challenges

The Victim Avoids Seeking Help. The ritual can function as a means of maintaining secrecy about the trafficking process, leading to victims withholding information or giving a rehearsed story, not seeking help from professional bodies and not cooperating with authorities including police and the legal system. This may occur because the survivor fears spiritual consequences of speaking, or because they are overtly threatened with negative outcomes by the trafficker or juju administrator for disclosing. A trafficking survivor described: 355 360

After Mamma was arrested and we were to go for the court proceedings, all the other girls could not talk, they were afraid of the repercussion of the oath taken. I was bold enough to confront Mamma in court because I had already been taken somewhere to neutralize the effect of the charm. (Oyebanji, 2017, p. 76)

The Victim Does Not Leave Exploitation. Victims might not leave trafficking due to having sworn an oath not to do so, having ongoing indebtedness and perceiving risk to themselves. Professionals have repeatedly observed that trafficking survivors returned to exploitation after escaping. 365

You'll get decisions that say things like 'but the doors and windows weren't locked'. So there's no real appreciation [of] something like the power that taking an oath might have over someone in terms of their actual ability to extricate themselves from a situation . . . You know, they could have been standing in the middle of an open field and not run. (Cherti et al., 2013, p. 49)

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Practitioners May Struggle to Understand or to Maintain an Open Mind. Lack of professional understanding can impede anti-trafficking efforts. Barriers to clear and consistent communication and understanding about the rituals include: a) the wide variety of rituals; b) the variety of terminology, leading to confusion, c) the secrecy of the rituals precluding open discussion; d) survivors feel uncomfortable acknowledging a fear of the ritual if they hold incongruent spiritual beliefs; and e) the impact of the ritual on the survivors makes it difficult for them to clearly recall the ritual. There are often different cultural backgrounds between trafficking survivors and practitioners attempting to help, making it difficult for some survivors to trust and open up to those from another culture. Demonstrating curiosity and knowledge can aid the counter-trafficking work and facilitate health treatment. A professional shared "Also there is the whole question of 'magic.' It's considered ridiculous here in the West, but we have to try to understand the mentality" (Lo Iacono, 2013, p. 156).

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Interpreters Can Be Fearful. Due to a shared fear of the power of the spiritual world, an interpreter may be unwilling to interpret conversation about juju rituals. Dunkerley (2018, p. 93) recorded an example of this: "I had an interpreter get up to go to the bathroom. After a while I get a call from the language services saying they have had a call from the interpreter saying she is stuck on a bus and won't be able to get there."

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Intervention Suggestions and Successes

The Survivor May Independently Take Steps to Escape the Trafficking. Some survivors develop awareness that they have been controlled and take steps toward freedom independently. Somerset (2001, p. 38) documented an example: "She went to a local church and asked for their help. She says she told the preacher everything, despite the death threats."

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Accept the Complexities and Focus on Building a Trusting Relationship. Professionals commented on the complex nature of helping trafficking survivors who have experienced rituals. A cautious, open-minded approach centered on building trust is crucial. It can be helpful to maintain a focus on basic needs when the rest of the intervention feels challenging and uncertain. A professional shared:

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giving victims basic food and hygiene products should not be seen as a gratuity but a necessity, which also helps to differentiate the investigator from the trafficker . . . [...] . . . When they realise that you're not there to do anything like that then they start to trust you and they'll speak to you. (Dunkerley, 2018, p. 94)

Alternative Spiritual Authorities May Be Used to Counter the Perceived Power of the Ritual.

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Professionals may try various interventions to reduce the power of the ritual, all of which have potential benefits and disadvantages. Professionals might help to reduce the control of the ritual by drawing on a perceived alternative spiritual power to neutralize or counter the ritual, or to gain a perception of spiritual protection for the survivor. For some survivors, attempting to persuade them of explanations for misfortune that do not cast blame on the oath may not be successful. Millett-Barrett (2019, p. 30) shares results of a survey undertaken with Nigerian survivors of trafficking, along with a quotation from a survivor:

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The most common way that women seek to break the chains of the juju oath is to become fervent worshippers of God through Christianity or Islam. Survey results revealed that 50% of survivors who had taken the oath believed that through prayer and faith in God they could reverse the oath. One survivor turned activist said, "People ask me, 'The things you do, do you go with a bodyguard?' I say, 'Yes,' and they ask 'Who?' I say, 'Jesus Christ' (Okokon, P., January 31, 2018, personal interview).

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Alternative Explanations May Be Tested and Used to Decrease Belief in the Ritual's Power.

Alternatively, professionals may also reduce the survivors' sense of control of the ritual by trying to demonstrate that the traffickers lied, helping to find alternative explanations for misfortunes, and to test feared consequences in a gradual manner. One professional stated:

The thing for me is to figure out how it is possible to weaken this kind of control. One of my aims is to transform the powerful object to a simple object. The object that was created at the shrine that was made of the woman's hair, nails, and blood, this became a magical and powerful object. I help them to see that an object is just an object, a stick is just a stick. (Millett-Barrett, 2019, p. 29)

The Relationships between Juju Rituals and Human Trafficking

Themes arising from the thematic synthesis are summarized diagrammatically in Figure 2. Control of the trafficking victim arose as a theme at the heart of the issue of ritual use in human trafficking. A number of the themes are clearly linked and impact upon one another. For example, powerlessness is a vulnerability factor, an issue in informed consent, an experience during the ritual, and a deliberate consequence of the ritual when used with trafficking victims. An experience and feeling of powerlessness may then lead a victim not to seek help, and their sense of powerlessness may be reinforced by practitioners who do not understand and therefore cannot help effectively. Fear also links the themes arising in the synthesis. Fear is present in the victim's inability to decline to participate in the ritual or the trafficking contract, the experience of the ritual, the threats made during the ceremony, the lasting fear imbued in the victim that they or a loved one will be harmed or killed. Similar to powerlessness, fear is then linked to the difficulty in seeking help, resulting in a victim unable to speak up or leave their situation as they believe terrible consequences will occur.

Discussion

This study is the first meta-synthesis of qualitative literature on juju and similar ritual practices linked to human trafficking. Twenty-four qualitative studies were found that spanned research undertaken by professionals in disciplines including criminology, psychology and anthropology. Our thematic synthesis of these studies gave rise to eight over-arching themes and twenty-seven sub-themes as described above.

Issues pertaining to control in trafficking have been highlighted by hundreds of professionals and survivors. The data demonstrates that control is wielded over victims by inducing fear and a sense of being remotely controlled by a spiritual power, inducing feelings of hopelessness and helplessness in victims who feel unable to escape until they have repaid the debt they have been told they owe. This meta-synthesis provides strong evidence that rituals must be considered by policy-makers as a control mechanism comparable in power to more overt forms of violence. As noted by Aghatise (2004, p. 1131), the sense of enduring control may last well beyond the time in which a survivor feels they have repaid their supposed debt. This study supports the notion that informed consent should not be assumed when considering cases of individuals who are potential trafficking survivors.

It is clear in the voices of survivors and professionals that the rituals were perceived by many to be a normal part of the culture, and sometimes perceived positively. Juju rituals are often used as oath ceremonies to seal contracts negotiated in good faith. They are sometimes used to counter criminal activity (Ekhtator, 2019). There is a risk that rituals performed in the context of human trafficking are therefore misunderstood as being a normal part of a migrant's cultural experience, when in fact the ritual may have been exploited and abused by a trafficker. There is also clear evidence that the belief in the power of the rituals is widespread, even if the person did not report belief in the underlying spiritual power. It is important therefore to recognize that people from a range of backgrounds may be susceptible, including those who report a Christian faith (Apard et al., 2019).

The voices of survivors and professionals in this meta-synthesis clearly indicates that trafficking victims who have experienced rituals suffer long-term psychological damage and poor mental health outcomes. The themes of the fears, memories, and apparent delusions that survivors reported were tied often to the experience of the ritual and sense of being taken over by a punishing spiritual power. These psychological outcomes prolong the suffering of the survivor and require attention by those supporting trafficking survivors. Symptoms should be viewed within the survivor's cultural context; some complaints that might appear as "delusions" may not be delusional when considered in this way. Although anecdotally there are reports of juju survivors experiencing psychotic symptoms, this was not a consistent finding within papers that met inclusion criteria for this review and therefore further investigation is warranted.

There was a widespread view that helping trafficking survivors who have experienced juju rituals is challenging. This is unsurprising given the power, control and secrecy inherent in the ritual process in this context. As described by Spyropoulos (2018), it is important to navigate these challenges in an open-minded and ethical way. Understanding the importance of the ritual to the survivor, including its traumatic impact, is key. Drawing on a survivor's alternative beliefs to counteract the juju ritual can be effective, as can challenging the evidence behind the perceived level of control and providing an alternative explanation. It is important that professionals working with survivors of trafficking who have experienced juju rituals do not engage in religious intolerance regarding a spiritual belief system they do not understand (Boaz, 2021) but engage with the survivor within the survivor's spiritual belief framework.

Aside from juju, we found qualitative research on two other forms of rituals in relation to human trafficking. One study detailed ritual-abuse torture (a cult-like form of ritualistic abuse; Sarson & MacDonald, 2008), and the other was on "gri gri" pertaining to slavery in child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kelly et al., 2016). All eight over-arching themes described in our synthesis were endorsed in these two non-juju papers.

Counter-Trafficking Implications

The challenge of getting information from and helping trafficking survivors who have experienced rituals has been well-documented (Kaur, 2011; Kigbu & Hassan, 2015). In our clinical experience, juju rituals are often reported much later on than other aspects of a person's trafficking experience, because talking about this invokes more fear than recounting other traumatic events. The importance of an informed justice system, in which the lived experience of trafficking survivors is acknowledged and the fear of spiritual retribution is taken seriously, has been highlighted (Van der Watt & Kruger, 2020). Our results show that the belief of the power of the ritual and the fear of seeking help can extend well beyond the physical trafficking situation, as victims have often sworn oaths not to seek help or tell authorities of their experience. This may manifest as a perceived lack of cooperation with officials and as inconsistencies in their self-reported histories. Failure to understand or consider the impact that juju rituals can have on a victim's testimony can lead to potentially flawed asylum decisions or other forms of legal injustice (Dunkerley, 2018). Increased psychological trauma and further risk of exploitation are potential sequelae for the victim. We suggest that training on the psychological power of rituals for those involved in working with trafficking survivors is imperative.

A strength of this meta-synthesis is that it combined research from varied disciplines. However, we note that many of the papers were by European trafficking experts and suggest the importance of high-level research being undertaken across professionals cross-culturally in order to better understand and best develop policy and interventions for trafficking survivors.

Limitations

The wide scope and broad inclusion criteria for this meta-synthesis render some limitations. Firstly, the studies included in this meta-synthesis were of variable quality. However, such wealth of data would not have been available had we only included high quality qualitative studies, due to the potentially sensitive nature of this topic of this review. Data quality was reviewed, and it was found that exclusion of low quality data would not have altered the overall thematic structure, but the extent and wealth of resources would have been less rich as a result. Secondly, much of the primary data extracted was the voice of professionals rather than survivors. The decision was made to include all sources, to obtain as wide a range of information as possible about the experience of rituals/trafficking. We ensured that all themes identified were endorsed by survivors, with quotes from survivors included wherever possible. Thirdly, we excluded papers that were not written in English which resulted in loss of some data and a potential cultural bias. Fourthly, the review included non-juju rituals to help explore the initial hypothesis of whether this phenomenon was restricted to West Africa. Only two articles regarding non-juju rituals met inclusion criteria, limiting our ability to make conclusions as to whether the themes of control described exist outside of the juju setting. Further research is needed to address this. Finally, there is inherent potential bias of a research team when undertaking metasynthesis. The authors are all health professionals who have worked with trafficking survivors and used their clinical experience to consider the voice of the trafficking survivor. It is through this lens that we propose a framework of the relationship between juju rituals and trafficking. In an effort to reduce this potential bias a thematic synthesis methodology beginning with line-by-line coding was chosen.

Future Research

It is important to obtain more qualitative data from survivors themselves on this issue. As an area that is difficult for survivors to talk about, this will require sensitivity. However the more that survivors' voices can be heard on the matter, the more professionals will be able to understand their lived experiences and recognize the impact of juju on their trafficking case. Asking survivors to comment and offer their perspective on the proposed thematic structure generated by this meta-synthesis would be beneficial. As discussed above, more research is needed to explore the extent to which this phenomenon extends beyond West Africa.

A key issue raised is the enormous challenge of intervening effectively. The effectiveness of the proposed intervention and management strategies discovered in this meta-synthesis require formal research. Further qualitative and quantitative research with survivors will assist in understanding what might support survivors of rituals and trafficking to disclose their experiences and the impact on their distress and health.

Developing and evaluating training programs for clinicians and other professionals (such as our criminal justice and immigration colleagues) about the use of juju in human trafficking would be worthwhile. This should include guidance on how to delicately screen their patients/clients for a history of participation in such rituals. Greater awareness would potentially lead to better clinical and legal outcomes for many trafficking survivors.

Conclusion

This systematic review synthesizes the wide variety of qualitative research undertaken on rituals in human trafficking. The role of rituals as a means of instilling fear and controlling victims of trafficking is clear. Amongst other things, this leads to difficulty in seeking help and leaving exploitation. Our framework outlines these themes, designed to increase understanding and awareness amongst all

professionals who may be supporting people who have been subjugated with the help of coercive rituals. Recommendations are made for policies, research and training in this area.

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