

**A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN
WHOSE MOTHERS ENGAGED IN PROSTITUTION**

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**A dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the degree of Masters of Psychology in
Counselling Psychology**

Department of Psychology

Faculty for Social Wellbeing

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Abstract

This qualitative retrospective study employed an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to examine the experiences of children, whose mothers were involved in prostitution whilst participants were still minors. One-time in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants, who were contacted through entities. Participants' endurance of childhood traumatic experiences, exposure to mothers' prostitution, abandonment, bullying, pain, shame and stigma are some of the themes that emerged as the participants recounted their experiences. Findings were analysed and interpreted using attachment and resilience theoretical frameworks as well as a social-constructionist conceptual framework. Findings indicate the lack of shelter and protection participants endured throughout their childhood, the struggle they faced to come to terms with their mothers' involvement in prostitution and drug use, the impact such experiences left on the mother-child relationship, as well as the intergenerational cycle of prostitution and drug use. This study has also highlighted the self-protective factors and coping mechanisms that reinforced participants' resilience. Recommendations for future research as well as suggestions for future services are included.

Keywords: children of prostitutes; maternal prostitution; mother-child relationship; attachment; trauma; resilience



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Signature

Date 11.06.2019

*To my late Uncle Michael,
Not a day goes by that I don't think of you!*

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Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>vi</i>
Chapter 1	12
Introduction	12
Preamble	12
What is prostitution?	12
Research Rationale	13
My interest and Position in this study	14
Research Question	15
Conceptual Framework	16
Attachment Perspective.	16
Resilience perspective.	17
Social-Constructionist Perspective.....	18
The Maltese context.	19
Conclusion	20
Chapter 2	21
Literature Review	21
Introduction	21
Search Strategy	21
The experience of women involved in prostitution	22
Antecedents to prostitution entry.	22
Engagement in prostitution.....	23
The divided world of the women - Motherhood and Prostitution	26
Parenting Experience.....	27
Children’s experience of their mother’s involvement in prostitution	29
Mother’s involvement in prostitution and the children’s quality of life.	30

Abuse, neglect and abandonment.....	32
The intergenerational cycle of prostitution	34
Shame, Stigma and Discrimination	36
Resilience and Protective Factors.....	37
Conclusion	38
<i>Chapter 3.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Methodology.....</i>	<i>39</i>
Introduction.....	39
<i>Part 1- Methodology.....</i>	<i>39</i>
Research Rationale.....	39
Rationale for using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	40
Philosophical and Methodological Tenets of IPA	41
Phenomenology.....	41
Hermeneutics.	42
Idiography.....	43
<i>Part 2 – Methods</i>	<i>44</i>
Ethical considerations	44
Research Participants	46
Recruitment process.	46
The Participants	48
Data Collection.....	50
Pilot study.	50
Interview Schedule and Data Collection.	50
Data Analysis.....	52
Quality, Credibility, and Trustworthiness of the Study	54
Self-reflexivity.	54
Quality of the Research study.....	56
Respondent Validation.	57

Conclusion 57

Chapter 4..... 58

Research Findings 58

Introduction..... 58

Presentation of Superordinate and Subordinate themes 59

Enduring Traumatic Experiences 60

My childhood was painful and chaotic..... 60

I was neglected, physically and sexually abused and I often witnessed domestic
violence. 61

When I tried to speak up about the abuse, no one believed me. 62

I never felt I was a priority. I was constantly abandoned..... 63

I was ashamed, stigmatized and labelled..... 64

Exposure to deviant lifestyle 64

Reasons behind my mother's involvement in prostitution..... 64

I was exposed to my mother's prostitution. 65

My mother was a drug user..... 66

Participants' engagement in deviant lifestyle..... 66

Trying to make sense of what led to my engagement in this lifestyle. 66

I resorted to drug use. 67

I was a prostitute. 68

The high price I paid for engaging in prostitution. 69

My mother's reaction..... 69

I was incarcerated..... 70

Mother-child relationship – Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and neglect..... 70

I couldn't take it any more - I had to leave home..... 70

My mother wanted to take care of me, but she constrained. 70

My experience of living in residential care. 71

I am paying the consequences for my mother's choices..... 72

Despite all her inconsistencies, I craved my mother's love and attention. 72

How has all this affected my relationship with my mother..... 73

Moving forward..... 74

Protective Factors.....	74
I learnt to cope.....	75
I am resilient.	76
What would have helped.	76
I needed to talk.....	77
Conclusion	77
Chapter 5.....	78
Discussion	78
Introduction.....	78
Lack of shelter and protection - a total exposure in the children's everyday experience	78
Withstanding mothers' incessant engagement in prostitution and drug use.	78
Feeling othered, shamed and stigmatised.	81
Children's endurance of traumatic experiences.....	82
Victims of physical abuse and witnesses of persistent domestic violence.	83
Victims of sexual abuse.....	84
From longing to absent fathers to desiring distance.....	86
The implications on the mother-child relationship	87
Making sense of recent past - the children's involvement in deviancy.....	89
Engagement in drug use.	89
Involvement in prostitution.....	90
Finding the strength to move forward.....	92
Conclusion	94
Chapter 6.....	95
Conclusion	95
Introduction.....	95
Summary of Salient Findings.....	95
Limitations of this study	97
Recommendations for future services	99

Suggestions for Future Research	102
Conclusion	103
<i>References</i>	104
<i>Appendix A</i>	126
<i>Ethical Approval Letters</i>	126
<i>Appendix B</i>	130
CONSENT FORM FOR PROFESSIONALS	130
IL-FORMOLA TAL-KUNSENS GHALL-PROFESSJONISTI	134
<i>Appendix C</i>	138
INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS	138
TAGHRIF GHALL –PARTEĊIPANTI	141
<i>Appendix D</i>	144
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS	144
IL-FORMOLA TAL-KUNSENS GHALL-PARTEĊIPANTI	146
<i>Appendix E</i>	148
<i>The participants</i>	148
<i>Appendix F</i>	151
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	151
<i>Appendix G</i>	155
<i>An Excerpt from Jason's Analysis</i>	155
<i>Appendix H</i>	157
Research Findings in Maltese	157
Introduction	157
Presentation of Superordinate and Subordinate themes	157
Enduring Traumatic Experiences	159
My childhood was painful and chaotic.....	159

I was neglected, physically and sexually abused and I often witnessed domestic violence.	159
When I tried to speak up about the abuse, no one believed me.	161
I never felt I was a priority. I was constantly abandoned.	162
I was ashamed, stigmatized and labelled.	163
Exposure to deviant lifestyle.	163
My mother's involvement in prostitution.	164
I was exposed to my mother's prostitution.	164
My mother was a drug user.	165
Participants' engagement in deviant lifestyle.	166
Trying to make sense of what led to my engagement in this lifestyle.	166
I resorted to drug use.	167
I was a prostitute.	168
The high price I paid for engaging in prostitution.	168
My mother's reaction.	169
I was incarcerated.	170
Mother-child relationship – Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and neglect.	170
I couldn't take it any more - I had to leave home.	170
My mother wanted to take care of me, but she constrained.	170
My experience of living in residential care.	171
I am paying the consequences for my mother's choices.	172
Despite all her inconsistencies, I craved my mother's love and attention.	173
How has all this affected my relationship with my mother.	174
Moving forward.	175
Protective Factors.	175
I learnt to cope.	176
I am resilient.	177
What would have helped.	177
I needed to talk.	178
Conclusion.	179

Chapter 1

Introduction

Preamble

“It’s impossible to recruit participants” “Who would possibly admit that their mother is a prostitute and then, talk to a stranger about it?!”. These were the exact reactions I got when I first declared an interest in researching the area of children whose mothers were involved in prostitution. These off-putting remarks intensified my interest in giving a voice to these children, who seem to be voiceless, abandoned and unacknowledged. Through a retrospective approach, my study mainly focuses on representing the children's views of their experience of their mother's involvement in prostitution, during their childhood and adolescence.

What is prostitution?

Prostitution, defined as an exchange of sex or sexual activities in return for money, food, drugs or other commodities, (Dalla, 2001) is known to be one of the world's oldest practices, first recorded in the Maltese Islands during the rule of the Knights of Saint John, circa 1530s (Attard, 2015). Similar to other occupations, prostitution is hierarchically organized, varying from high-class women who often meet regular clients within a safe environment to women who loiter and solicit clients from the streets (Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2017; Dalla, 2001). Whilst prostitution is not considered to be an illegal act in Malta, soliciting and loitering are criminalized by Maltese legislation (Chapter 9, Laws of Malta).

Street-walking prostitution is considered to be the most dangerous and the least desirable to the persons involved, as it is a pathway negotiated through physical and emotional risks as well as the carrier of stigma of public judgment (Dodsworth, 2012).

Prostitutes are recurrently abused, raped and exploited by clients, pimps or partners (Benoit et

al., 2017). However, for the vast majority of street-walking prostitutes, prostitution is not a money-making activity but an economic necessity (Bletzer, 2005; Dalla, 2001; Dodsworth, 2012; Vella, Savona Ventura, & Wolff, 2016), as a resistance or response to poverty, in the absence of alternative work opportunities or as a means to support theirs or their partners' drug addiction (Bindel, 2017; Dalla, 2000, 2003, 2004).

Informed by the principle that primary relationships, upbringing and family environment impact children's experiences, in this study, I opt to research the experience of children whose mothers were involved in street-walking prostitution (prostitution) during their childhood and/or adolescence. In light of the above, given the probable difficulty in gaining ethical approval to interview minors, coupled with potential signs of distress and/or re-traumatization whilst recalling their experiences, I opt to interview adults about their retrospective experiences.

Research Rationale

Given the hidden nature of prostitution, numerous authors have stated that its prevalence can only be estimated, which makes it even harder to quantify the number of prostitutes who are mothers (Beard et al., 2010; Dalla, 2004; Dodsworth, 2014; Sloss & Harper, 2004). The latter are frequently overlooked as maternal figures and are rarely acknowledged as mothers, even though prostitution is an activity that by nature makes women vulnerable to pregnancy and maternity (Mandiuc, 2014).

Indeed, extant literature shows that researchers' interest in the mother-child relationship within this context is relatively recent, which explains the paucity of studies in this field (Mandiuc, 2014) vis-à-vis studies about the prostitutes' family of origin (Adhikari, 2012; Basu, & Dutta, 2011; Bindel, 2017; Bletzer, 2005; Baker, Dalla & Williamson, 2010; Mellor & Lovell, 2012). Similarly, Beard et al., (2010) and Servin et al., (2015) noted the dearth of literature on the vulnerabilities these children face because of their family situation,

and their thoughts, feelings and ideas. The same pattern could also be noted locally. Indeed, to my knowledge, this is the first study on this cohort. Additionally, in discussions in Parliament and on traditional and social media generated by a recent interest in reforming the laws regulating prostitution, the plight of children of prostitutes was barely broached, (Azzopardi, 2018; Carabott, 2017; Grech, 2018) although this could strongly impact these children's upbringing (Beard et al, 2010). Moreover, I noticed that the few relevant studies available did not present the children's perspective and experiences (Benoit et al., 2017; Ficht et al., 2018) but rather researchers relied on parents', caregivers', and/or professionals' perspectives. Indeed, adults' views are over-represented (Mandiuc, 2014; Sircar & Dutta, 2011; Willis, Hodgson, & Lovich, 2014). Hence, I aim to contribute to this gap by retrieving the lived experience directly from the children themselves via in-depth retrospective interviews. This research project inquires into the participants' experiences of their mothers' engagement in prostitution, the occurrences they endured, and the experiences, people or self-skills that supported them throughout their childhood.

Lastly, I think that this study can help promote awareness and training amongst healthcare professionals, in order to enhance their sensitivity to specific cultural groups (Beard et al., 2010) such as the Maltese population. Current courses addressing prostitution at the University of Malta include social work and youth and community studies. As recognising the needs of these children is key to creating relevant and evidence-based interventions, as a trainee counselling psychologist, I firmly believe that this topic should also form part of our professional training, so that we would be professionally competent to support these children and their families.

My interest and Position in this study

Working for four years within child protection services (CPS) was an inevitably life-changing experience. Although I had the opportunity to work, meet and care for different

children faced with various challenging situations, I can still distinctly remember feeling confounded and intrigued by Jane's¹ distinct timidity and navel-gazing the first time I asked her to talk about the things she enjoyed doing after school. Learning that Jane had to daily crawl under her mother's bed and search for monetary and valuable items, whilst her mother entertained men in her bedroom, left me feeling dismayed and bewildered. Although I was able to come to terms with the mother's choices underpinning her involvement in prostitution, I couldn't understand why she would expose her child to such happenings. Driven by the need to understand Jane's experience better, I started to research the area; however, I quickly realized the limited amount of studies related to children whose mother is involved in prostitution. Which dearth kindled my interest in exploring the reality.

In view of my work experiences and the emergent findings in literature, (Beard et al., 2010; Dalla, 2004; 2003; Mandiuc, 2014) reflecting on my position, I realized that being a former CPS worker, I am more likely to identify the negative consequences of living with a mother involved in prostitution. Acknowledging the likelihood of bias that could adversely impact my approach to this research study, I engaged in two reflexivity interviews so that I could become more mindful of my subjectivity, assumptions and vested interests in researching this topic. In this way, I was better prepared to analyse and interpret participants' lived experiences more objectively and in greater depth.

Research Question

This study seeks to answer the question: "What is the lived experience of children whose mothers are engaged in prostitution whilst they were still minors?"

- How has this lived experience affected participants' perception of their lifestyles?

¹ All names used are fictitious

- How has this experience affected participants' experience and understanding of past and present relationships?
- How has participants' understanding of their resilient factors supported them throughout their experience?

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework guiding my study entails an attachment and a resilience perspective, whilst a social-constructionist perspective informs my ontological and epistemological position.

Attachment Perspective.

Studies show that parental abandonment, exposure to traumatic occurrences, abuse and neglect are often the life experiences of children born to mothers involved in prostitution (Mandiuc, 2014; Shetty, Malve, Cunningham, & Tharakan, 2017). Indeed, an attachment framework enables me to shine a light on how such negative experiences and interruptions in affectional bonds between prostitutes and their children can generate psychological disturbances in the children. Although attachment is a system that is generally active over a person's entire life span (Dallos, 2006), Bowlby (2005) concluded that children's experience of early relationships shape their expectations of subsequent ones, especially when danger is perceived. Hence, when mothers or significant others are available in the child's life and are able to provide sensitive and attuned-responses to the latter's proximity-seeking behaviours, as indicated by children in Nadarajah and Fadzil's (2015) study, claiming that they feel protected and cared for irrespective of their mother's involvement in prostitution, children are apt to attain a secure sense of attachment (Bowlby, 1998). Eventually they extrapolate this sense of attachment to future relationships (Sroufe, 2005). Conversely, when caregivers are unavailable, erratic or indifferent to their children, the latter's needs are often unmet, leaving children unable to achieve attachment security (Bowlby, 2005).

These unconsciously acquired, non-verbal patterns and expectations with one's caregivers (Gerhardt, 2010) about their accessibility to relieve distress and representations of oneself as capable and esteemed (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003) are then translated into mental relationship representations - namely "*internal working models*" (Bowlby, 1969). Over time these representations affect the way one interacts with others, and depending on the kind of response obtained, one's beliefs are either strengthened or challenged (Gerhardt, 2010).

Hence, attachment theory is be a valuable theoretical perspective in helping me delve deep into the effect attachment experiences have on the development of a child growing up in a family where one's mother is involved in prostitution.

Resilience perspective.

Several scholars consider resilience to be a dynamic interplay between individuals' strengths and their sociocultural settings (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Masten, 2014). Although most of the available literature highlights the arduous reality these children live (Ficht et al., 2018; Sircar & Dutta, 2011), there are some studies that "don't paint a picture of helplessness, but one where in the face of stigma they are powerfully resilient, reworking through the odds and resisting discrimination" (Sicar & Dutta, 2011, p. 347).

Indeed, not all children born to mothers involved in prostitution go to develop behavioural difficulties or social and mental health problems (Meichenbaum, 2008). Attributes such as "social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future" (Clemente, 2001, p.32) generate resilience. Other resilience-building factors are good connectedness, open parent-child relationship (Brookmeyer, Henrich, & Schwab-Stone, 2005) and association with peer groups (Rutter, 1999). Adopting a life span perspective, I believe that a resilience perspective enables me to understand the children's

perception of the protective factors and the coping mechanisms that helped them address difficult situations.

Social-Constructionist Perspective.

Children's experience of having a mother involved in prostitution is constructed within a broader social context. Social constructionism is characterised by people's social process and contact, (Schwandt, 2001) occurs through a dialogue and factors in identity formation (McNamee & Gergen, 1992; Schwandt, 2001). Indeed, social constructionists believe that there is no singular objective truth, but rather several truths exist within different environments and relational systems (Levy, 2006). As our brain is socially constructed (Eisenberg, 1996), the comprehension of other people and factual information should not be taken out of context, but rather viewed as part of its whole social and cultural milieu (Whitty, 1997). By way of using such perspective, through this research I attempt to understand the meanings participants construct about their experience of having a mother involved in prostitution. I aim to evaluate these constructs in light of society's understanding of maternal prostitution and its deep-seated ramifications in Maltese culture.

Language is considered a tool used to create meaning and knowledge, (Puig, Koro-Ljungberg & Echevarria-Doan, 2008). Through an appreciation of language, I will consider the words participants use as a reflection of their character, their truth and their environment (Burr, 1995). I will attempt to explore and identify the constructed meaning of all they consider as obvious, and attempt to interpret it in relation to their social reality (Schutz, 1970). Moreover, the study's theoretical frameworks emphasising that one's attachment relations and resilience are necessarily personal, subjective and framed within one's construction of meanings and identities (Dallos, 2006), are in line with Burr's (1995, p.2) remark that "what exists is what we perceive to exist". Hence, I seek to acknowledge each participant unique construction, give it its due importance, and accept it as the truth.

Throughout this process, I will be expounding a concurrent reflection on how my experiences, my values, and my socially constructed worldview can affect the way in which I will be reacting to the emerging data.

The Maltese context.

Malta is a small Mediterranean island with a face-to-face community, has a strong Catholic Church influence (Abela, 2016) and highly values the preservation of the family unit (Abela, Frosh & Dowling, 2005). According to Borg Xuereb, Abela, & Spiteri, (2012) the Maltese families are still largely child-oriented, which may explain the unwritten code of secrecy surrounding any traumatic and negative child experiences.

Recent Maltese statistics show that 410 women were arraigned on charges of prostitution over the last 10 years, (personal communication, Cilia, 2018). Despite the fact that Malta is a small country and news travels fast, reaching a large amount of people, discourse around such practices is still often considered inadequate. Indeed, prostitution and sexual encounters outside the matrimonial family remain taboo subjects, and are largely perceived as gross transgressions against the Catholic faith. This culture in which the values embraced by the tight-knit Maltese society are deep-rooted (Abela, 2016; Naudi, 2005) has numerous implications for children born to mothers involved in prostitution. Being a Mediterranean country, where honour (Borg & Clark, 2007), and high social visibility are strong values (Sultana & Baldacchino, 1994) and where the most important roles in life for a woman seem to be that of a wife, housewife and a mother (Borg & Clark, 2007), engaging in prostitution could be considered as deviant and socially undesirable. Inevitably, these cultural factors could influence the way prostitute mothers are looked at and determine the manner in which others relate to their children.

Throughout this study, I aim to acquire a deeper understanding of participants' experiences vis-à-vis the local context.

Conclusion

I will be presenting a review of extant literature related to prostitutes and their children in the following chapter. In chapter 3 I will be outlining the methodology and the method procedures I followed in this research. This will be followed by chapter 4 where I will be presenting the findings that emerged from the data collection process. In Chapter 5, I will be discussing the themes, whilst in the final chapter, I will be incorporating a summary of the salient findings, the limitations of this study and suggestions for clinical practice and future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Throughout this chapter, I will review and evaluate existing literature in the context of children experiencing maternal prostitution during their childhood, in order to establish where research in this field stands today. I will problematize the different themes and identify any gaps in the literature in order to inform the methodology of my study, bridging these lacunae.

Search Strategy

I conducted a comprehensive search using the University of Malta's main research database - Hydi, Google Scholar and Research Gate, by the following keywords - "prostitution" "sex work" "sex industry" "prostitutes" "female sex worker" "commercial sex worker" "street walking prostitution" "parent" "child" "infant" "youth" "adolescence" "family" "motherhood" "child rearing" "childhood" "exploitation" "intergenerational" "attachment" "resilience" "vulnerability" "risk factors" - used in Boolean combinations. The search was reinforced with a review of the bibliographic-related articles. I also consulted earlier literature to reach key research and articles that consequent researchers built upon. Relevant books enabled me to gain better knowledge surrounding the subject, whilst the Maltese Government documents and newspapers helped me to become more familiar with the situation of prostitution in Malta.

This search yielded a wealth of information, which is why I have divided this chapter in different sections, namely the experience of prostitution, prostitution and motherhood, the manner in which children are affected by their mothers' involvement in prostitution, its intergenerational cycle and lastly, the experience of shame, stigma and resilience.

The experience of women involved in prostitution

Considering that patterns adopted in one's family of origin are commonly echoed and replicated in future generations (Dalla, 2004), I will follow this up by a brief review of the literature pertaining to the antecedents to prostitution entry, and the lifestyle associated with one's involvement. This will help the reader locate themselves within the review in understanding prostitutes' relationships with their children.

Antecedents to prostitution entry.

Different qualitative studies using phenomenological descriptive analysis conducted by Dalla (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004), and a quantitative study conducted by Potter, Martin, and Romans (1999) using the parental bonding instrument yielded similar results. Examining the lives of women involved in prostitution, both studies indicated that relationships within the latter's family of origin were marked by interpersonal struggles, chaos, reduced caring, highly controlling parents and diffused relationships lacking in affection. Additionally, using a mixed method approach of thematic analysis and standard statistical tests, Dalla, Xia and Kennedy (2003) concluded that a life-long complex pattern of cumulative trauma, ranging from severe physical abuse to childhood sexual abuse, from emotional abuse and rejection to exploitation and mortification featured prominently in the lives of most of the participants in their study.

From Dodsworth's (2012) thematic analysis, interviewed prostitutes indicated that in their childhood they were repeatedly abused by men. They also lamented the persistence of abuse by intimate partners and pimps, as they became involved in prostitution. As a result of these experiences, the theme of abandonment and lack of protection and security were often highlighted throughout literature. Prostitutes in Dalla's (2000, 2003, 2004) and in Dodsworth's (2012) studies found how although their caregivers knew about these occurrences, the latter failed to protect them or dismissed whatever the children were feeling.

The availability of a trustworthy adult simply did not exist in such families. From a young age, women involved in prostitution were repeatedly forced to cope with harmful, emotionally traumatic experiences, alone.

The latter studies also report findings highlighting contrasting individual experiences. Indeed, the availability of a secure base and the development of resilient qualities through cognitive appraisal of early childhood experiences permitted prostitutes to resolve painful memories. Which helped them to build effective coping mechanisms, preserve a clear sense of self and deal with future experiences (Dodsworth, 2012).

In a comparative study that researched the risk factors of family structure and personality traits among adolescent prostitutes, against a control group of high school girls, using statistical analysis, Lung, Lin, Lu and Shu (2004) found that demands to perform household chores, care for siblings, failure to complete necessary education, exposure to domestic violence, parents' mental health and addiction problems were common realities shared by most of the prostitutes. Similar results were obtained in Potter et al.'s (1999) and in Dalla's (2000; 2003) studies. Prostitutes participating in these studies indicated that such environmental circumstances often led to their removal or intentional leaving from their family of origin during the first decade of their lives. This often forced them to resort to self-care and self-reliance (Dalla, 2003) during critical moments in their development.

Engagement in prostitution.

Even though the phenomenon of prostitution has been heavily researched, involvement is represented in literature as a complex process, which makes it very difficult to reach a single explanation (Hester & Westmarland, 2004; Melrose, 2004; Pearce, 2009; Pheonix, 2002). Research (Dalla, 2003) indeed indicates that the start and continuation of prostitution are determined by multiple contextual factors, together with interdependent personal issues, none of which occur in the same degree or form for all women, despite

similar experiences. Acknowledging the intergenerational cycle of prostitution, I deemed it fit to delve deep into such explanations in order to better understand participants' realities, in case any of them followed in their mothers' footsteps.

As early as 1985, Potterat, Phillips, Rothenberg, and Darrow attempted to explain women's motives for entering prostitution via *susceptibility* and *exposure models*. Through the exposure model, Potterat et al. (1985) challenged the notion that encouragement and interpersonal contact with others involved in prostitution could lead to personal involvement. On the other hand, the *susceptibility model* posits that the aforementioned childhood traumatic experiences, particularly sexual abuse, combined with psychological characteristics, predispose some women to prostitution (Potterat et al., 1985). Indeed, the underlying paths that link early sexual abuse with prostitution have been a matter of contentious dispute for a long period of time. An omnibus longitudinal ethnographic study of four generations of women, conducted by Dunlap, Golub, Johnson and Wesley (2002) in New York concluded that continual sexual assault results in a process called "mortification of the self" (p.8); characterized by dissociation from one's emotions, acceptance of the situation and socialization to such behaviours. This process predisposes prostitutes to engage in sex work more readily. Bindel (2017), who conducted 250 interviews with different people involved in the sex trade, wrote that women involved in prostitution described how such dissociation is a necessary and crucial coping mechanism. Prostitutes noted that the constant removal of themselves from their own body left an effect upon every aspect of their life (Bindel, 2017). The concept of intimacy was lost and most claimed that "we had gone from being a pure and special creature to a human toilet" (Bindel, 2017, p. 326).

Emotional dissociation does not suffice as a coping mechanism for those who extend their involvement in prostitution. "Drugs and alcohol were needed to absorb the blows to our psyche and humanity, while money was exchanged to pound away at whatever orifices the

punter purchased” (Bindel, 2017, p. 326). The onset of substances as a coping mechanism on entering prostitution was highlighted in various studies (Bletzer, 2005; Dalla, 2000; Graham and Wish, 1994; Swendeman et al., 2015). Drugs are both an escape from a harsh reality and a cyclical driver in the women’s sustained engagement in prostitution (Dodsworth, 2012; Lung et al., 2004). Moreover, addiction drove them to offer cheaper sex services and to become less selective of their clientele (Dalla, 2000, 2004). Indeed, Vella et al.’s (2016) ten-year retrospective quantitative study about substance misusing mothers observed this same pattern of deterioration in Malta.

Once involved in prostitution, Valera, Sawyer, and Schiraldi (2001) concluded through statistical analysis that women struggled with daily stressors including incarceration, high rates of housing instability, involvement with pimps, abuse, rape, being beaten, being threatened and abandoned, and continued financial stringency. Indeed, a staggering PTSD prevalence rate of 68% was found amongst women involved in prostitution across nine different countries (Farley, 2004). These daily stressors are often exacerbated by society’s outlook on prostitutes; as being different, in need of help or having their existence denied (Adhikari, 2012; Dodsworth, 2012). Prostitutes are rarely looked upon beyond the stereotypes; they often lead marginalized lives, surviving on the outskirts of society (Dalla, 2000), resulting in consistent loss of social support and acceptance from their family and friends (Swendeman et al., 2015). As a result, many prostitutes in Dalla’s study (2004) hoped that they would be able to leave prostitution, get a stable job and be reunited with their family. However, stigma, addiction problems, drug dependent partners, inadequate accommodation and inappropriate services made it difficult for them to leave the streets.

There is a complicated interplay between different ‘*push*’ factors involving poverty, negligence and abuse and ‘*pull*’ factors involving drugs, alcohol and money, as well as

between *personal* and *environmental* factors that seem to influence and contribute to one's involvement in prostitution (Melrose, 2004; Pearce, 2009; Praimkumara & Goh, 2016).

Whereas none of the factors can be said to be directly causal, they can exacerbate the individual's vulnerability, thus providing useful warning signs of risk of involvement (Pearce, Williams & Galvin, 2002).

The divided world of the women - Motherhood and Prostitution

Given the hidden nature of sex work, the number of prostitutes who are mothers is even harder to quantify (Beard et al., 2010; Dalla, 2004; Dodsworth, 2014; Sloss & Harper, 2004). Sloss and Harper's (2004) thematic analysis study shines a light on the fact that prostitutes are frequently overlooked as maternal figures, although most have children before the age of eighteen (Dalla, 2000; 2004; Dalla et al., 2003; Ficht et al., 2018; Potter et al., 1999; Sloss & Harper, 2004).

Apart from the stressful situation of engaging in prostitution, bearing and raising children is often considered as an additional stressor that prostitutes face (Dalla, 2000). Mexican prostitutes, who were part of fourteen focus group sessions conducted by Castaneda, Ortiz, Allen, Garcia & Hernandez-Avila (1996), stated that they were implicated in a combination and a concurrent separation of family life and the world of the sex industry; juggling a daytime private life and a night time professional life. Their life as mothers was marked by the beliefs and biases resulting from a symbolic masculine domination, emphasizing women's passivity and subjugation. In their life as prostitutes they played out their alter-ego completely sexual and uninhibited, in sharp contrast with the pure and non-sexual, submissive woman at home. This same sense of disconnect, stemming from having two separate self-identities emerged powerfully in Abel's (2011) thematic analysis. Indeed, the interviewed prostitutes ruefully insisted that in coping with the stressors brought about by

their engagement in prostitution, they often perceived themselves as totally different persons, inhabiting as it were two separate domains.

Whilst bearing in mind the potential cultural biases in Castaneda et al.'s (1996) study, Borg & Clark (2007) found that the most Maltese hold strongly conservative views on the role of women in society. Indeed, they found that in Malta's society the most significant role in life for a woman is considered to be that of a wife, housewife and mother, whilst men are expected to go out to work and earn the family income. The fact that honour is highly valued in Malta, (Borg & Clark, 2007) is likely to influence the way prostitute mothers are perceived and the manner in which Maltese relate to these mothers' children.

In light of these cultural determinants and imperatives, the challenges of a mother involved in prostitution are more complex than a simplistic dichotomy between 'bad' prostitute and 'good' mother (Dodsworth, 2014).

Parenting Experience.

Findings from Dalla's studies (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004) indicate that pregnancy itself did not limit the interviewed prostitutes from working or from feeding further their alcohol or drug addictions, despite being fully aware of its adverse effects. However, mothers in Mandiuc's (2014) comparative qualitative study revealed that during this time they often felt emotionally strained, ashamed and anxious. Prostitutes often realized that their lifestyle regularly prevented them from getting adequate rest and antenatal care for their unborn children, fearing that they were putting the latter at risk (Willis et al., 2016; Sloss, Harper & Budd, 2004).

Bindel's research (2017) indicated that after child birth, the consensus view among mothers was that their children influenced their working behaviours; some increased their working hours due to economic necessities, whilst others reduced their time, due to child rearing practices (Sloss and Harper, 2004). Praimkumara and Goh's (2016) thematic analysis

study featuring mothers involved in prostitution found that “the incongruent images of ‘good mother’ and ‘street sex worker’ created many struggles and much inner turmoil” (p. 50).

These struggles intensified when children expressed that their mother’s job was ‘indecent’. Feeling guilty, mothers interviewed in Sloss et al.’s analytical study, (2004) indicated that to compensate for their behaviour, they often tried to spend more quality time with their children or bought them extravagant gifts (Sloss et al., 2004). Tensions increased with the additional worry of incarceration, stigmatization, (Sloss & Harper, 2004; Sanders, 2005; Rivers-Moore, 2010) violence and other types of abuse directed towards them and their children (Praimkumara & Goh, 2016). Others feared that their children would follow in their footsteps (Praimkumara & Goh, 2016). Determined to give their children the childhood that they were robbed of when they were children themselves, the majority of prostitutes interviewed in Sloss et al.’s study (2004) indicated that the aforementioned stressors served as a catalyst for reducing their engagement or giving up completely.

In sharp contrast, there were mothers who counterintuitively reported that prostitution gave them a means of proximity to their children, flexibility in their working hours (Praimkumara & Goh, 2016; Rivers-Moore, 2010) and vast experience of what life offers, preparing them to handle their children’s problems as they arise (Sloss et al., 2004). Such sense of self-efficacy and self-worth resonated in Dodsworth’s (2012) study, where interviewed mothers saw prostitution as something they did rather than who they were. Basu and Dutta’s (2011) ethnographic study in a prostitutes’ community in India concluded that being a ‘good mother’ meant providing for and meeting the needs of their children, irrespective of the job they did. Such an attitude enabled the prostitutes interviewed by Swendeman et al., (2015) to escape victimization and preserve a sense of choice about their life pathways. Similarly, Kohm’s (2006) meta-analysis found that they all wished to raise their children, despite being portrayed as incapable of taking care of their wellbeing,

emphasizing that one of their biggest fears and stressors was separation from their children. Indeed, when separation does occur, studies showed that feelings of sorrow, repentance, depression, and suicidal ideations were shared amongst all mothers, who then interpreted prostitution as an all-consuming, all-absorbing identity, excluding everything else, including their children (McClelland & Newell, 2008). Such feelings tend to intensify the mothers' engagement in prostitution, drug and alcohol use (McClelland & Newell, 2008; Sloss et al., 2004). However, over time, mothers who participated in Dalla's qualitative study (2004) admitted that the realization of their inability to give their children what they needed, to some extent, mitigated the emotional pain of their removal from home.

The aforementioned studies on the experience of the divided world of motherhood and prostitution clearly indicate that stigma, shame, dual identities and parenting responsibilities contribute to the stressful lifestyles such mothers lead, typically compounded with problematic substance use (McClelland & Newell, 2008). Involvement in prostitution impacts not only the women, but also their children as will be further explored below.

Children's experience of their mother's involvement in prostitution

Many researchers highlighted the global paucity of empirical research about this subject matter (Dalla, 2000; 2003; 2004; Dalla et al., 2003; McClelland & Newell, 2008; Willis et al., 2014; 2016). The dearth of studies in this respect also applies to the Maltese context. Beard et al. (2010) concluded that this lack of research could be accounted for by the hidden nature of prostitution itself as well as by the children's resistance to talk about their mother's involvement, fearing stigma and shame. Indeed, most researchers sought to inquire about this cohort through interviews with professionals or parents rather than children themselves (Beard et al., 2010; Mandiuc, 2014; Sircar & Dutta, 2011). Unsurprisingly, my literature search yielded four recent qualitative studies dealing with particular aspects of the

first-hand experience of children born to mothers who were involved in prostitution. Shohel & Mahruf's qualitative study (2013), using a grounded theory approach, tackled the children's access to education by interviewing children of prostitutes, prostitutes themselves and professionals in Bangladesh. Shetty et al. (2017) conducted ten different focus groups featuring Indian mothers involved in prostitution and their children, drawing conclusions on their daily experiences. Adhikari's (2012) study consisted of both observations and interviews in families where mothers were involved in prostitution. This study laid bare the stigma that children of prostitutes born in India had to face during different life stages. Nadarajah & Fadzil's (2015) qualitative study with ten children from Kuala Lumpur explored the latter's challenges and needs through thematic analysis. The next two sections present the main implications.

Mother's involvement in prostitution and the children's quality of life.

A common finding throughout the literature was the absence of a father figure in the life of children whose mother was involved in prostitution. Indeed, a plethora of studies (Dalla, 2000; 2002;2003; Shetty et al., 2017; Nadarajah & Fadzil, 2015) indicated that children lived in distressing conditions, expressed pain and were aggrieved at the fact that their father abused of them and their mothers, and deserted them for other women. Consequently, mothers often ended up caring for children alone. The mothers interviewed in a number of studies (Dalla, 2004; Shetty et al., 2017; Sloss & Harper, 2004; Sallman, 2010) that inquired into the effects family makeup had on their children noted that in the absence of the children's father, the children's quality of life was often influenced by their mothers' availability, their mental and physical health status, their education level, accessibility to resources, family and community support.

McClelland and Newell (2008) found that apart from the aforementioned factors, mothers confessed that their drug addiction, alcohol use and involvement in prostitution often acted as barriers to giving the optimum care for their children, as did unsafe living environments and homelessness. In their quantitative study involving 399 prostitutes, Duff et al. (2015) concluded that homelessness is a pervasive problem among these mothers. The vast majority (88%) claimed that they feared seeking shelter in homes for homeless people as this could put them at greater risk of being identified as prostitutes, thus, possibly bringing their children to the notice of child protection services. To obviate such a scenario, Mandiuc (2014) found that participating prostitutes often changed residence as frequently as every three to four years, consequently causing their children a lot of settling-in problems, loss of reassuring daily routine and friends.

As a result of such chaotic environment, children in Shohel & Mahruf's study (2013) complained that they felt that their education and health were often given low priority by their caregivers. They also expressed regret and anger that this neglect of their educational and medical needs eventually prevented them from attaining their set goals. These findings were echoed both in McClelland and Newell's (2008) as well as in Pardeshi and Bhattacharya's (2006) studies. Moreover, interviewed prostitutes in Sloss et al.'s (2004) study indicated that living in a low-income family, being bereft of basic needs, being exposed to violence, fights and abusive language, the constant hustle of customers and pimps, as well as exposure to soliciting and loitering, were factors that were not conducive to their children's development. As a result, mothers who participated in focus groups conducted by Ficht et al., (2018), perceived their children to be anxious, sad, angry and afraid because of their involvement in prostitution. Others in Bletzer's (2005) and Dalla's (2003) studies reported that their children were resentful of their choice of lifestyle.

Abuse, neglect and abandonment.

Findings from Shohel & Mahruf's (2013) and Setthy et al.'s (2017) studies indicated that these children were susceptible to traumatic experiences, such as exposure to drugs and alcohol, sex trade, sexual exploitation, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, regardless of their mothers' wish to shelter them. Shetty et al.'s (2017) and Nadarajah & Fadzil's (2015) studies revealed that compared to boys, girls were highly vulnerable to harassment. Conversely, mothers in McClelland and Newell's (2008) study disclosed that when clients saw their children, irrespective of their gender, they often suggested that their children join in their sexual activities. This finding was also confirmed by Servin et al.'s (2015) quantitative study. Using univariate and multivariate logistic regression, the latter found that 50% of the sample (628) of the participating prostitutes (who had their parents involved in prostitution as well), were more likely to report being subjected to sexual violence in childhood by a parent's partner, father or client. A number of studies indicate that such traumatic experiences put victims at a higher risk of developing substance abuse problems, (Fergusson, Boden & Horwood, 2008; Hadland et al., 2012) sexual victimization in adulthood (Messman-Moore & Long, 2003) and engagement in high risk sexual behaviour and prostitution (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). Apart from sexual violence, children were both witnesses and victims of severe abuse and domestic violence, that characterized their mothers' intimate relationships with male partners (Beard et al., 2010; Dalla, 2003; Dalla et al., 2003; Sloss & Harper, 2004; Sloss et al., 2004; Willis et al., 2016).

Trying to prevent this from happening, the aforementioned studies show that whilst engaging in prostitution, mothers often attempted to find alternative care for their children at the homes of extended members of their family. Whilst some children in Shetty et al.'s focus groups (2017) indicated that they had a special rapport with their grandparents and their extended family, as they protected them from the shame and stigma associated with their

mother's lifestyle, others felt that these same arrangements frequently exposed them to further emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Indeed, some mothers admitted that shorn of other alternatives, they had to entrust their children in the care of relatives, the same persons who had abused of them when they were youngsters themselves (Dalla, 2003; Duff et al., 2015; Willis et al., 2014). When none of these arrangements sufficed, other mothers had their children living in foster care (Bletzer, 2005; Dalla, 2000; Shetty et al., 2017). Of the 105 children that the 38 prostitutes talked about in Dalla's study (2004), only 6 lived with them. In spite of the fact that mothers tried to remain as much as possible involved in their children's life a plethora of studies indicated that such arrangements often caused children to feel abandoned by their mother, to long for her presence and nurture and to be more loved, cared and comforted by her (Adhikari, 2012; Bletzer, 2005; Nadarajah and Fadzil, 2015; Shetty et al., 2017).

Gomez-Perales (2015) as well as Dallos and Vetere (2009) pointed out that such parental inconsistency, unavailability and inability to provide constant caring, can be experienced by the children as a life-threatening trauma. Indeed, their parents' neglect undermines their holistic development, generates failure to attain attachment security and makes them unable to cope with one's emotions. Later, this could possibly be manifested as a negative effect on one's attention, memory, cognition and academic performance (Meichenbaum, 2008; Christoffersen & DePanfilis, 2009). Shetty's et al. (2017) noticed that such experiences greatly affect the children's overall sense of self-worth and self-reliance, possibly expressed as low self-esteem and internalized anger.

In conclusion, as indicated by the literature that was reviewed, the early familial lives of these children were often characterized by an endless stream of traumatic experiences (Shetty et al., 2017). Whilst this finding is in line with my position, I think that analysing

different studies and being aware of the protective factors that were highlighted has helped me keep an open mind and to prepare myself emotionally and psychologically for the different realities that my participants could bring forward during the interviews.

The intergenerational cycle of prostitution

An overview of the intergenerational transmission of prostitution shines a light on the impact prostitutes have on their adult children. Indeed, research shows that prostitutes' childhood traumatic experiences can negatively impact their developing attachment patterns, which patterns are often transmitted to the next generation (Morrel et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2010; Siegel, 2013; Van IJzendoorn, 1995; Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1997). Congruent with the outcomes of the latter studies, comparing mothers who were victims of abuse vis-à-vis those who weren't, Alexander, Teti & Anderson (2000) concluded that their impaired attachment patterns left mothers unable to control their emotions and feeling stressed out, they often failed to attend sensitively to their children. Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by DiLillo and Damashek, (2003) Rumstein-McKean and Hunsley, (2001) and Teicher, Tomoda and Anderson's (2006) study corroborated the aforementioned results. In addition, these studies found that adult survivors of childhood abuse experienced difficulties in establishing clear generational boundaries with their children, and in using different forms of discipline other than corporal punishment. Such compromised maternal behaviour, according to a longitudinal study conducted by Kwako, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett (2010), repeatedly prevents the children from developing the necessarily self-protective self-help factors, leading to development of extreme strategies of attachment, self-care, and self-comfort.

Therefore, in view of the above studies and the *Family Systems Theory* (Klein & White, 1996), children whose mother is involved in prostitution cannot be understood in

isolation. The familial context which the child is brought up in exerts significant influence on the latter's development. Indeed, in line with the *exposure model* (Potterat et al., 1985) Dunlap et al.'s (2002) longitudinal study showed that the relationship patterns implemented in a family of origin are often found to be repeated in families of procreation, especially in norms surrounding sexual deviance, drug addiction and violence. Similarly, Dalla (2003) added that individuals tend to repeat what is familiar to them, irrespective of whether the patterns, behaviours and ways of connecting generates positive or detrimental relational effects. Indeed, Dunlap et al. (2002) concluded that having negative role models and in the throes of abusive experiences, children eventually learn to accept aggressive physical and sexual assault, substance use and unstable home environments as the effective conduct norms in their homes. Over time they internalized these norms and passed them on to their children through the way they treated them.

On the other hand, realizing that they were repeating their childhood experiences with their children and understanding their negative impacts, some mothers in Dalla's studies (2003; 2004) sought professional support in trying to change their behaviour, exit prostitution and break the intergenerational cycle. Research shows that a transitional character has to foster new familial patterns and ways of relating. Although it is not easily achieved, by dint of personal insight, self-efficacy and support, prostitutes in Dalla's study (2003) aimed to free themselves from addictions, find alternative jobs and above all, become better mothers for their children. Congruent with the latter study, Shohel & Mahruf's research (2013) indicated that children of mothers involved in prostitution could also be catalysts for change. He noted that education was the protective factor that enabled children to create a better future for themselves and cease engagement in the vicious intergenerational cycle of prostitution. Those who benefitted from good education were able to be employed in or choose different jobs vis-à-vis those of their caregivers.

In highlighting the importance of understanding participants within their familial context, the reviewed studies in this chapter allowed me to become more aware of the constant deleterious effect abuse has on subsequent generations and to realize the different ways sexuality could be constructed within different family environments. It also permitted me to appreciate the effort and perseverance needed to break out of such intergenerational cycle.

Shame, Stigma and Discrimination

Since one's acceptability in society is often influenced by one's adherence to societal norms, deviance often leads to shame and stigma (Goffman, 1990). This is often experienced by prostitutes and their families, as one's involvement in prostitution is often perceived as diverging (Abel, 2011; Swendeman et al., 2015). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, Sallaman (2010) found that negative perceptions, stigmatisation and social rejection directed towards prostitutes have persisted throughout the past decades. Indeed, in their meta-analysis, Benoit et al. (2017) concluded that prostitutes and their children were often targeted by members of the public, harassed, humiliated, exploited and at times, treated as inferior. The same "profoundly negative impact" (p.126) was reported by mothers participating in Willis et al.'s (2014) focus groups, as well as by children interviewed in Shetty et al.'s study (2017). The children in the latter study disclosed that at school they were often bullied, abused, terrorised and neglected, as a result of which they often felt isolated and marginalized. Shohel et al. (2012) and Mandiuc (2014) indicated that these experiences led to high school dropout rate among these children. Such findings were also corroborated by McKeganey's study (2006) and Fitch et al.'s study (2018).

Acknowledging such adversities, in trying to shelter their children from stigmatization, Willis et al. (2014) found that most mothers strove to conceal their involvement in prostitution as much as possible. The decision on when and how to inform

their children was mostly influenced by the child's age and the mother's perception of the least damaging option (McCallend & Newell, 2008). Still others changed residences before anyone became aware of their involvement (Mandiuc, 2014), sent their children away hoping they would have a brighter future (Swendeman et al., 2015) or stopped visiting them altogether (Bletzer, 2005). In our Maltese context characterised by small geographical size, face-to-face society and high social visibility, (Borg & Clark, 2007) where one's family of origin is key to constructing one's personal and public identity (Abela et al., 2005), I think it would be very difficult to hide one's involvement. Inevitably, in our society where everyone knows everybody else, the mothers' involvement in prostitution is very likely to impact their children.

Resilience and Protective Factors

Contrary to the above experiences, a few studies discuss resilience in the face of adversity. Pardeshi and Bhattacharya's cross-sectional quantitative study (2006) featuring 60 different mothers involved in prostitution indicated that different protective factors helped their children to be resilient in the face of stigma and discrimination. These factors included strong family support, prioritization of education, limited exposure to their mother's lifestyle and close contact with her. This finding resonated with Sicar and Dutta's (2011) documentation of a group of children of prostitutes from Kolkata and Chege, Kabiru, Mbithi & Bwayo (2002) cross-sectional survey with children in Kenya. Children interviewed in Nadarajah & Fadzil's (2015) and Shohel & Mahruf's (2013) studies found that equipped with the appropriate support, they were able to aspire for a better future and realize their dreams.

Conclusion

Through the studies that were appraised in this literature review, I attempted to elicit the most salient findings related to maternal involvement in prostitution and its effects on children which, as will be noted in the next chapter, impacted the manner in which I designed my research study. Heightening the sensitive nature of this cohort, I planned to interview adult children on their lived experience of their mothers' involvement in prostitution. Apart from the unique nature of this study, I think that choosing adult children ensures that my study will be more ethically sound when compared to others, as this criterion completely eliminated the vulnerability brought about by age. In addition, noticing that the aforementioned first-hand studies with children have sought to focus only on one particular aspect of their experience, I designed my study in a way that allowed me to gain a holistic understanding of their lived experience, as I believe a context is needed for a full understanding of separate, disparate occurrences.

The next chapter explains the methodology I adopted in this research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I will be providing a detailed description of the methodology and the methods used in this research study. In the methodology section, I will provide the rationale behind this research, the reasoning after my decision to adopt an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), followed by a discussion about the fundamental philosophical and methodological tenets guiding this study. In the subsequent section, concerning the methods, I will outline the ethical considerations, the recruitment process, the data collection and analysis, as well the trustworthiness and credibility principles.

Part 1- Methodology

Research Rationale

As has been identified in previous chapters, there is paucity of research on children's first-hand experience of maternal involvement in prostitution (Beard et al., 2010; Servin et al., 2015; Willis, et al., 2014). Indeed, most of the studies that I reviewed sought to obtain this information from mothers and/or professionals, rather than from children themselves (Mandiuc, 2014). These studies can give rise to flaws as responses might be biased, as they do not reflect the children's accurate experiences of this phenomenon (Dalla, 2003). Whilst the few researchers who obtained first-hand information conducted research with children under the age of eighteen, focusing on a particular aspect of their experiences, I decided to conduct a retrospective study with adults, making the nature of my study original in its choice of sample. I believe that it would make the participants in better position of making sense of their story, verbalize their thoughts, emotions and coping strategies.

To this end I sought to acquire qualitative information, apprehend, explore and transform the crux of the participants' childhood lived experiences (Smith, 2004; Willis, 2001) into a reflective, written format, through the eyes of the children themselves (Merleau-Ponty, 2003; Valle & Halling, 1989).

Rationale for using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

In view of the lack of representation in literature, my interest in laying bare the complexity and the sensitivity surrounding the children's lived experience of having a mother involved in prostitution, led me to adapt a qualitative method of inquiry. This enabled me to focus on the meaning individuals assign to certain "phenomena within their social worlds" (Snape & Spencer, 2013, p.3). Lived experiences are idiosyncratic to each individual, so qualitative methodologies lend themselves more readily than their quantitative counterparts to explore the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Langdrige, 2004).

In order to further apprehend the essence and gain a deeper understanding of the structure and the meaning children attributed to their experiences, (Patton, 2009) considering its philosophical and methodological underpinnings, I deemed that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the most appropriate methodology for this study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). As a researcher drawing from a social constructionist perspective, believing that each experience is a co-construction amongst different individuals, and occurring through social interactions via the thoughts and language employed, makes my belief system in parallel with this methodology. IPA draws from symbolic interactionism and explores the way meanings are formed by individuals in their personal and social world (Biggerstaff & Thompson; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Additionally, I adopted this methodology as it is congruent with the research question seeking to explore *what* the children's lived experiences were and *how* they gave meaning to them (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Willis, 2001). This approach is founded on the idea

that “human beings are sense-making creatures, and therefore, the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). The fact that participants were recounting their experience retrospectively meant that that they were constantly engaging in recollection and reflection on the significance of such occurrences in their life. Since IPA provides a set of flexible guidelines that could be adopted accordingly, using this methodology I was able to explore in detail participants’ individual experiences (Lyons & Coyle, 2007; Willig, 2013).

Philosophical and Methodological Tenets of IPA

Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Ideography are the three fundamental principles that inform IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology.

Phenomenology, the first philosophical underpinning of IPA, has two main tenets: *transcendental phenomenology* developed by Husserl and *hermeneutic phenomenology*, later established by Heidegger (2010). The focus in hermeneutic phenomenology lies in the discovery of the “significance of perceptions that individuals themselves have shaped by ‘*dasein*’ or by *being-in-the-world*” (Heidegger, 1962 as cited in Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2009). This suggests that an IPA study is a dynamic process, in which the researcher has an active role, influencing the extent to which access is gained into the participant’s experience and how, through an interpretative activity, sense is made of the participant’s personal world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Whilst acknowledging the limitations, I strove to stand in the participants’ shoes, and convey the meaning through the process of transcript interpretation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Although I tried to suspend my judgement and adopt Husserl’s concept of *epochè*

(Moustaka, 1994), as Heidegger points out, total impartiality is an illusion (Ponterotto, 2005; Smith et al., 2009). My values and lived experiences inevitably, influenced the extent to which I accessed the participants' occurrences and made sense of their world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012), which has influenced my engagement in two reflexivity interviews. This analytical process is defined as double hermeneutics as initially, the participants engaged in meaning construction of their own world and then, as a researcher, I tried to decode the meaning behind the participants' meaning, influenced by the way I view the world (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics, the theory and practice of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009), is the second theoretical tenet of IPA. The significance of the information collected during the research, how it is constructed and in turn comprehended is given prominence (Rapport, 2005). Researchers hold that such understanding can only be gained through one's engagement and interpretation of the participants' accounts (Willig, 2013).

As a researcher, I had to go beyond describing the participants' experiences and bring into play the element of interpretation, following Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic cycle. It is described as a spiral phenomenon, accentuating the continual process of change, or the "hermeneutical ripple effect," which is "dynamic, impinges on others interpretations, and, over time, changes the understandings of all" (Conroy, 2003, p.14). I entered this study with personal meaning, , beliefs, thoughts and theoretical experience about what it means to be a child of a mother who engages in prostitution, and this formed my understanding prior to starting analyzing participants' responses (Shaw, 2017). When analyzing the transcripts, I realized that I could not and should not strive to detach myself from presuppositions completely, as interpretation always takes place within one's personal background

(Schwandt, 2007). My explicit beliefs are inevitably intertwined with my perception of how I understood the phenomena under investigation (Hammersley, 2003). To this end, I presented my reflections alongside the experiences shared by the participants, attempting to differentiate between my interpretations and participants' accounts. This enabled me to be more aware of my beliefs and acquire a novel perception of participants' experiences.

Idiography.

Idiography (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1995) is the study of individuals one at a time, without undermining any of them in the occurrence of a shared kind (Harre, 2016). It focuses on the subjective meaning attached to the experiences and uses individual experiential accounts as data (Shaw, 2017). This idiographic facet of IPA is considered to address the totality and uniqueness of an individual, seeking to give a comprehensive and in-depth understanding (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011).

For the data collection phase, I prepared an interview guide that was consistent throughout all the semi-structured interviews, but rather than focusing on following it rigidly, I emphasized the individual experiences, aiming to obtain rich, complex and detailed data in participants' accounts. This approach persisted during the data analysis stage, conserving and sustaining the precise individual details of participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009). As Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest, I considered not only the participants' verbal expressions, but also their cognitions and emotions, which provided me with an in-depth understanding of their experience.

Part 2 – Methods

This section discusses the recruitment process, the data collection and analysis methods, as well the trustworthiness and credibility principles I abided by.

Ethical considerations

To comply with the ethical requirement to do no harm to the participants (British Psychological Society, 2018) I took the necessary measures to ensure that the research course did not affect participants' wellbeing (Coolican, 2004). I first sought ethical approval from the University Research Ethics Committee and then separately from the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS), Dar Hosea, and Corradino Correctional Facility (CCF) to gain access to participants (Appendix A).

As I was given approval by the aforementioned entities, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, potential participants were contacted by designated gatekeepers whom I provided with a consent form (Appendix B). Each participant was informed about the purpose of the study and the interview process (Smith et al., 2009). Those who agreed to take part were given a choice of either being contacted by me or else to approach me themselves. When communication was established, we agreed to meet in a place where participants felt most comfortable in, increasing transparency and a welcoming atmosphere (Bailey, 1996). I also handed them with a written information sheet (Appendix C) and explained further the aims of the study.

Afterwards, ensuring a safe environment and encouraging an honest, in-depth exploration of their lived experiences (Bailey, 1996), I explained the issue of confidentiality (Smith et al., 2009). I assured them that they had the right to opt not to answer particular questions, and also to withdraw their participation until one month before the study's submission date (Dowd & Wilson, 1995). To get an approval for audio recording, written

consent (Appendix D) was obtained individually. I explained that access to these recordings and transcriptions was limited to me, my supervisor, and advisor. I also gave them assurances that these records would be stored in a password-protected laptop and destroyed after the dissertation is corrected. Lastly, I explained that their identities would be safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms and that any information which could lead to the revelation of their identity would be systematically masked (Smith et al., 2009).

Although participants had the option of being referred to psychological services through Dar Hosea if the need arises, keeping in mind the principle of doing no harm, I was very cautious in my interactions with them. Avoiding detachment and/or fragmentation, I let each participant decide whether they felt comfortable enough to talk in more depth. I also felt the need to augment my questions with continuous variation of basic emphatic responses, so as to make the interviewing process more ethically sensitive to participants' raw feelings (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, as will be discussed in the next chapter, one of the participants disclosed a sexual abuse experience whilst residing in residential care. As I reflected about this with my supervisor, I felt responsible for safeguarding her and other children that were still residing in care. I contacted her, offered her my support in finding closure to her experience, and expressed my deep concern. She refused, explaining that she wasn't ready to delve into the experience again, whilst assuring me that the perpetrator was now deceased. Upon concluding, I debriefed the participants by helping them discuss their experience of the interview and return to a normal state of arousal (Sammut Scerri, Abela & Vetere, 2012). We also discussed what they could do in case they felt upset after the session, identified key persons they could refer to and discussed the possibility of contacting 'Dar Hosea', for free psychological services (Appendix A).

Research Participants

Recruitment process.

I opted to employ two sampling criteria in recruiting participants. As gaining ethical approval to interview minors was fraught with difficulties, I chose to interview adult children about their childhood experience of having a mother involved in prostitution. Moreover, I believed that adults can make better sense of their story, their thoughts and emotions.

Secondly, participants had to have a professional supportive network, including the gatekeepers that referred them. This decision was corroborated by Sammut Scerri et al.'s research (2012), which highlighted the significance of social support in stress reduction and improved wellbeing.

The search proved to be a challenging process that required substantial diligence. I encountered resistance from several key professionals who were reluctant to act as gatekeepers, possibly due to the stigma associated with acknowledging one's mother as a prostitute and the gatekeepers' worry that participants would be unable to cope with issues that might resurface when exploring their past. Reflecting about this resistance, I realised that the impediment I experienced during this phase might be reflecting the sensitive nature of the subject matter, as well as an indication of the children's lived experiences. By time, I found professionals who believed in my study and did their best in to recruit participants. I provided them with the interview guide, so as to assure them that I would be sensitive to the needs and feelings of prospective participants and readily accepted their feedback. Based on the abovementioned criteria of purposive sampling, (Creswell, 2007; Kuzel, 1999) eight participants were recruited through different gate keepers working within FSWS, CCF and Dar Hosea.

The sample size was largely determined by “the richness of individual cases and the strength of commitment to a case-by-case approach” (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2008,

p.186). The sample consisted of two men, four women and two transwomen between the ages of 21 and 52. I deemed this sample size adequate in fulfilling the purpose of obtaining a phenomenological understanding of issues pertinent to maternal involvement in prostitution (Kelly, 2006; Kuzel, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Such a homogenous sample is characteristic of an IPA study (Smith & Eatough, 2008) and helps to highlighting the similarities and differences between each participant's experience (Smith et al., 2010). Below I am presenting two tables briefly introducing each participant. For a more detailed description please refer to Appendix E.

The Participants*Table 1 - Basic information about participants (continues on next page)*

Name²	Age	Gender	Meeting Place	Lived with mother	Lived in Residential care
Nathalie	25	Female	Drug Rehabilitation Centre	Yes, until mother passed away	Yes, just for brief periods
Simon	21	Male	Rented Therapy Room	Just for brief periods	Never
Amber	28	Female	Dar Hosea	Yes, till present	Yes, just for brief periods
Jason	32	Male	Rented Therapy Room	From 13-15 years old	From birth - 13 years old
Diane	21	Female	Rented Therapy Room	From 16 - till present	From birth - 16 years old
Maria	50	Transwoman	Corradino Correctional Facility	Always, until mother passed away	Never
Lisa	24	Female	Corradino Correctional Facility	Just for brief periods	From 13-14 years old
Roberta	48	Transwoman	Rented Therapy Room	Just for brief periods	From birth to 14-years old

² All names are fictitious

Name	Disclosure of childhood abuse	Was involved in prostitution	Made use of drugs	Incarcerated
Nathalie	Sexual and Physical abuse	Yes	Yes - abstinent	Yes
Simon	/	No	Yes - abstinent	No
Amber	Sexual and Physical abuse, exposure to DV	No	Yes - abstinent	No
Jason	Sexual and Physical abuse, exposure to DV	No	Yes - abstinent	Yes
Diane	/	No	No	No
Maria	Sexual and Physical abuse, exposure to DV	Yes	Yes - abstinent	Yes
Lisa	Sexual and Physical abuse, exposure to DV	Yes	Yes - abstinent	Yes
Roberta	Sexual and Physical abuse	Yes	Yes - abstinent	Yes

Data Collection

In order to understand the research participants' lived experience comprehensively, I gathered the data using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as indicated by Smith et al. (2009). The face-to-face layout of the interviews allowed me to build a rapport with the participants, heightening openness and trust, with a view to observe non-verbal behaviors, thus adding to the richness of verbal cues (Smith et al., 2009).

Pilot study.

I formulated the initial draft of the interview schedule based on literature reviewed. Several iterations followed a number of discussions, a pilot study and a self-reflexivity interview.

I conducted a pilot study (Hassan, Schattner, & Mazza, 2009) with Dr Vella, a specialist medical doctor in the area of prostitution, to assess first-hand the nature and language of the questions and how these can be perceived by the participants. We restructured, replaced or eliminated altogether certain questions. I also added a number of prompts to assist the participants expand further upon their experiences. A self-reflexivity interview with my advisor followed, prior to the final draft of questions and interviews with participants (Rolls & Relf, 2006). As I became more mindful of my subjectivity, assumptions and vested interests in researching this topic, a final interview schedule was agreed upon (Smith et al., 2009).

Interview Schedule and Data Collection.

I prepared the final interview schedule both in English, and in Maltase (Appendix F). The questions were broad, open-ended and non-directional (Boyce & Neale, 2006). I used the schedule only as a guide for participants to reflect further, and elaborate on their experiences (Smith, Jarman & Osborne, 1999). To ensure maximum concentration on active listening, I

memorised the interview guide questions and prompts to minimise distractions (Smith and Eatough, 2007; Smith et al. 2009).

All the interviews were conducted between December 2018 and February 2019, and each lasted between 1 hour and 2 hours and 30 minutes. To capture all the nuances, I audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim all the interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Since using recording equipment within the CCF is prohibited, the two interviews I conducted there were transcribed verbatim and reviewed exactly after the interview was over.

During the interview, as suggested by Smith and Eatough (2007), I adopted a funnel approach, starting off with the overarching question that guided this research; '*What was it like growing up as a child?*'. This generic question served to avoid leading participants to talk about one particular experience but to elicit a broader picture of what their childhood was like, growing up with a mother involved in prostitution. All interviews flowed smoothly and the participants readily immersed themselves in their narratives. As the participants began to delve deeper into their experiences, I used a variety of open-ended probes in order to elicit from them more detailed information about specific aspects of their accounts (Smith et al., 2009). As a researcher, I adopted a non-judgmental, reflective attitude and conducted all interviews prudently, avoiding unjustifiable interruptions and disturbances (Creswell, 2007).

Towards the end of the interview, I asked the participants to make helpful suggestions that could be passed on to children encountering similar experiences. I concluded the sessions by debriefing participants. Together we discussed the interview process, how they felt, how it might have impacted them and what plans they had after the interview, helping them return to a normal state of arousal (Sammut Scerri et al., 2012). None of the interviewees reported feelings of distress. As indicated in Sammut et al.'s (2012) study, all participants admitted that the interview was a difficult process, but they felt that it helped them make sense of their past,

whilst hoping that their participation would serve as cautionary tales to be used to safeguard other children.

Data Analysis

Following each interview, I kept processing notes which enabled me to reflect on the feelings and thoughts that remained with me. I transcribed each interview verbatim to familiarize myself with the issues being addressed, increase my sensitivity to the phenomenon, get immersed in the data and engage more with the transcripts, (Smith et al., 2009). I re-read and listened to the participants' interviews numerous times (Willis, 2001). This enabled me to obtain a sense of the whole (Giorgi, 2006; 2010) and a closer understating of the way the participants perceived and communicated specific experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Whilst gaining insight into the idiographic, subjective experiences of each narration was important, following IPA's foundation in hermeneutics enabled me to transcend the individual meaning making and consider the interpretation of wider conceptualizations (Smith et al., 2009). Many interpretations of perceptions and meanings associated with the experience of having a mother engaging in prostitution were made possible as I followed the conscious expressions made by each participant. Recognizing this highlights the existence of several truths at the same time, including those outside my own knowledge and preconceptions as a researcher, congruent with the social constructionist framework (Creswell, 2007). I was conscious of my preconceptions and their harmful effects, whilst realizing that I could not detach myself completely from them, (Schwandt, 2007). To this end, I aimed to adopt a non-judgmental role as a researcher. I followed a bottom-up approach and generated emergent themes from the data rather than allowing the data to be interpreted from my own experiences

or from literature (Fade, 2004). Each line was analyzed in light of the participants' individual contexts.

I drew a wide margin on either side of the first transcript. I used the left-hand margin to record my initial thoughts, meaningful aspects, recollections from the interview, the language register, connecting the issues to specific contexts and identifying aspects that can be used in understanding participants' accounts (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). I then listed the emergent themes in the right-hand margin (Smith & Osborn, 2003) (Appendix G). During this procedure, my goal was to condense the amount of annotated detail from the transcript, but not at the expense of losing the essence of the participants' words (Willis, 2001). All the emergent themes were then listed in chronological order and I attempted to find connections and converging patterns. Those which didn't fit anywhere were placed separately (Smith et al., 2009). Ensuring stability of the phenomena being studied, trustworthiness and credibility, I rigorously followed this process for all the remaining seven interviews (Langdrige, 2004), treating each case idiographically. Ultimately, this procedure allowed new themes to emerge (Smith et al., 2009).

With 8 distinctive tables of emergent themes and illustrative quotes from each interview, I identified patterns and connections across cases. This led to a process of themes clustering across interviews. To form the superordinate themes, each cluster was named to incorporate the wider concepts and shared meanings of the separate subordinate themes (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I compiled a summary table as presented in the following chapter, incorporating the superordinate and subordinate themes, and direct quotations from different transcripts, so as to be as authentic as possible in communicating the lived experience of the participants (Nutt Williams & Morrow, 2009). As theorized by the social constructionist perspective, such authenticity is key to comprehending the way participants understood their

experience (Burr, 1995). Through IPA, I was able to voice the participants' experiences, and concurrently interpret them from my own psychological perspective (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Accordingly, it is assumed that these superordinate and subordinate themes are a composite of both participants' contributions as well as my own interpretations, which is noted to be an essential process rather than a confounding factor of research (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Quality, Credibility, and Trustworthiness of the Study

Self-reflexivity.

Dallos and Vetere (2005) point out that engagement in self-reflexivity throughout the research process is a way of increasing credibility, coherence and trustworthiness. To this end, throughout the whole research journey, I kept a journal that helped me become more aware of my theoretical assumptions, motivations, training and biases that impacted the data collection and analysis. As briefly aforementioned, I undertook two self-reflexivity interviews one prior to collecting the data and the other one before I started analyzing. These exercises allowed me to acknowledge my biases, perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Hammersley, 2000). I was able to immerse myself more deeply into participants' narratives, conscious of my presuppositions, but still able to receive the phenomenon sensitively (DeParaz, Varela & Vermersch, 2003). At times, I found this process of exposing myself arduous and stressful. However, the latter, together with the supervision sessions, were instrumental in aiding me to articulate my position (Sammut Scerri et al., 2012).

As I reflected about the participants' difficult at times traumatic narratives of their childhood experiences I soon realized that they resonated with me and took me back to the work I used to do as a CPS worker. Having had clinical experience in dealing every day with difficult disclosures of abuse, I was surprised by the aftermath of the interviews. The detailed

narratives of abuse, abandonment, injustice and fragmented nature of some experiences often left me feeling emotionally exhausted and distressed. After one particular interviewee had described in detail her physical argument with her mother, I ended up constantly thinking about her, reliving the interview in my head and on more than one occasions I dreamt about the incident, perceiving this whole experience to be a very stressful one. Such feelings were discussed by Sammut Scerri et al.'s (2012), noting the ethical dilemmas of interviewing women about their experience of childhood domestic violence.

On other occasions, I felt responsible for the participants' emotional wellbeing, as I felt that they were reliving their memories for the benefit of my study. Even though I was completely aware that this was not a therapy session, I repeatedly felt the need to make my thoughts explicit, especially when I found their disclosures emotionally difficult. My experience of '*being with*' every participant, assisted me in achieving an in-depth appreciation of their life experiences, allowing me to transport myself in their narratives, as can be revealed through the resultant extended and rich interviews. The cautious stance I adopted with my participants allowed me to walk slowly with them throughout the interview and provide them with a holding environment. This led the participants to feel emotionally comfortable and understood, with one interviewee highlighting that such affirmations would have been of great help when she was a child enduring difficult moments.

I was intrigued by the in-depth narratives of trauma, resilience and growth as the participants processed their experience of having a mother involved in prostitution. However, whilst I anticipated the disclosure of the endured traumatic experiences, I was stunned by the participants' disclosures of the love they bore for her, even though the latter's lifestyle was to blame for their difficult occurrences. During these moments, I had to consciously make a greater effort to bracket my preconceived ideas. As I reflected further about this with my

advisor, I realized that I was perceiving the two experiences as contradictory. I think that this was also experienced to some extent by the participants as they were trying to make sense of their relationship with their mother. Discussing such feelings and thoughts in the reflexivity interview helped me manage its emotional impact (Pennebaker and Graybeal, 2001).

Additionally, as I took a step back, I began to appreciate more Heidegger's (2010) concept of *dasein*, that sees my understanding of being, as inevitably rooted in a wider context, developing through "interrelated systems of meaningfulness" (Sembera as cited in Taylor & de Vocht, 2011). Finally, through the reflexivity interview, I realized that as a researcher I had to shift my perception of perceiving the participants not solely as "victims" of their mothers' choice of lifestyle, but also as people with a sense of agency, who are resilient and strong, despite their difficult experiences

Discussion about these thoughts and feelings gave me the necessary support to manage my emotional distress and ethical dilemmas that developed whilst doing this research.

Quality of the Research study.

In order to enhance the quality of this research from the early stages I demonstrated *sensitivity to the context* (Yardley, 2008). Indeed, through the IPA methodology, I was allowed to sensitively adhere to the context by engaging closely with the idiographic nature of each participant's experience and by immersing myself fully to the unfolding account of each participant. Additionally, in order to convey the experience as lived and defined by participants themselves, in the next chapter I will be presenting a considerable number of verbatim extracts from participants' interviews. This will permit the reader to evaluate the accuracy of the interpretations I made (Smith et al., 2009).

Ensuring quality, I preserved confidentiality and refrained from reporting particular details of the participant's account for confidentiality's sake. By choosing the appropriate

homogeneous sample, and focusing in depth on each individual account, I ensured that my research study was compliant with the principles of *commitment and rigour* (Yardley, 2008). In line with the *transparency criteria*, I presented the research process in a detailed and coherent manner, by defining openly the various stages I undertook (Smith et al., 2009).

Respondent Validation.

Although I was aware of the hermeneutical circle, to make sure that I was sufficiently faithful to participants' experiences, I opted to conduct member checking as the last measure of validity (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). After the analysis, I took the final results to two participants who at the end of the interviews showed an interest in participating in this exercise (Creswell, 2007). I sought their views and comments of my interpretations of data, and asked whether they were valid representations of their lived experiences. They endorsed these representations.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the detailed description of the philosophy and procedures relating to the methodology and methods of this research. In the subsequent chapter, I will be presenting the findings which emerged from the described data collection process.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

Introduction

In this chapter I shall be presenting the participants' experiences by exploring the most pertinent findings that emerged from the interviews. Prior to delving into each theme, I will be providing a general overview of the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the analysis, in order to provide a broad summary of the whole picture ³

³ The results with the Maltese quotations, along with other participants' illustrative examples are presented in Appendix H. Maltese readers are invited to read the Maltese version, to avoid going into another level of re-construction.

Presentation of Superordinate and Subordinate themes

Master List	
Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Enduring Traumatic Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My childhood was painful and chaotic 2. I was neglected, physically and sexually abused and I often witnessed domestic violence 3. When I tried to speak up about the abuse, no one believed me 4. I never felt I was a priority. I was constantly abandoned 5. I was ashamed, stigmatized and labelled
Exposure to deviant lifestyle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reasons behind my mother's involvement in prostitution 2. I was exposed to my mother's prostitution 3. My mother was a drug user
Child's engagement in deviant lifestyle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sense of recollection - trying to make sense of what led to my engagement in this lifestyle 2. I resorted to drug use 3. I was a prostitute 4. The high price I paid for engaging in prostitution 5. My mother's reaction 6. I was incarcerated
Mother-child relationship – Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and neglect	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I couldn't take it any more - I had to leave home

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. My mother wanted to take care of me, but she was constrained 3. My experience of living in residential care 4. I was the one paying the consequences for my mother's choices 5. Despite all her inconsistencies, I craved my mother's love and attention 6. How has all this affected my relationship with my mother
Moving forward	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protective Factors 2. I learnt to cope 3. I am resilient 4. What would have helped 5. I needed to talk

Enduring Traumatic Experiences

All the participants in this study disclosed that due to their mother's involvement in prostitution, throughout their childhood they had to withstand various traumatic experiences ranging from abandonment, abuse, stigmatization and labelling, amongst others. Additionally, most ruefully explained that although a substantial period of time had passed since the traumatic occurrences, they were still haunted and tormented by the consequences.

My childhood was painful and chaotic.

Throughout the participants' accounts, it became very evident that they experienced their childhood as arduous, characterised by numerous difficult and painful memories: "It's totally unfair, on everyone. You wouldn't want this life..." (Diane). Simon and Nathalie

admitted that at that age, the painful experiences left them feeling initially overwhelmed and confused, and then angry and prone to constant self-questioning: “More than anything else, I was confused. The main feeling that I’d had since I was young was confusion. Eventually, it turned into anger.” (Simon). Some remarked that because this interview had provided them with the opportunity to look at their childhood in retrospect, they felt shocked at the realization that they had lived through such experiences: “Whenever I remember, I feel shocked, and I realise how severe and drastic these things are.” (Jason)

I was neglected, physically and sexually abused and I often witnessed domestic violence.

As I analyzed the results, I realized that of all the eight participants that I interviewed, six were abused and/or neglected during their childhood. Indeed, when the latter used to be in their mothers' presence and care, they described how they were often severely neglected and emotionally abused.

“The fact that she did not accept me, for instance, the fact that she’d always preferred my siblings more than me, that she’d always loved me for the things I could offer, not for what I actually am ... I used to watch my mother cook pasta, and then everyone would be eating, there’d be nothing left, and she’d simply collect the leftovers from everyone’s plate for me. These instances saddened me. They hurt, a great deal.”

(Roberta)

On the other hand, Amber, Jason, Roberta and Lisa felt resentment at the fact that their mother, her partners and/ or other individuals habitually abused them physically: “She grabbed a figurine...she smashed it on the floor ... and she stuck it here, in my head. And...I collapsed. Then I woke up and she was on top of me, hitting me with a broomstick again” (Nathalie). Indeed, they confessed that although over time they got used to the constant beatings, this same abuse often left them feeling wretched and worthless. They expressed

shock and bewilderment at the fact that someone who was supposed to take care of them was also abusive in their regard.

Nathalie, Amber, Lisa, Maria and Roberta also talked frankly about their sexual abuse experiences.

“And my mum’s partner... he paid for the DVD and we were watching it and suddenly a coarse and obscene part comes on screen. Then I ended up being abused... He used to tell me to take off my clothes and I used to say, “What?” and he used to reply, “You take off your clothes, and do not say a word to your mother, you’ll benefit from this.” And I used to comply because I was afraid he would hit me...I was around fifteen years old, or sixteen...Whenever he found the time, he’d start” (Amber).

Apart from withstanding personal abuse, participants explained how they often witnessed domestic violence towards their mother: “When I was 11, and I used to watch my mother’s partner hit her, I used to fight with her... I used to tell her, but she would say ‘No,’ because she loved him” (Maria). Additionally, Lisa emphasised that this abuse constantly wreaked extreme havoc at home “I know he treated her miserably; she worked as a prostitute for his sake... As soon as she’d arrive home he’d order, ‘give me the money,’ ridiculing her in front of others, regarding her as an object.”

When I tried to speak up about the abuse, no one believed me.

From the participants’ accounts it was painfully clear that the availability of a trustworthy adult simply did not exist in their family. As a result, some interviewees decided to refrain from talking about the abuse that they were enduring, fearing shame and lack of comprehension. Similarly, even those who dared to report the abuse, stated that they felt completely ignored, resulting in further victimization: “whenever I shared something with my mother, for instance that I had been abused, I ended up being beaten. Because they don’t believe you.” (Roberta). As a result of this lack of protection, Roberta lamented the fact that

time will never heal the sexual abuse she experienced, as till this present day she still suffers the consequences: “The thing that hurts the most about abuse, is not the abuse in itself ... what bothers me is that...whenever I have sexual intercourse, I need to fantasize about them, with a priest till this very day... even though I loathe them... Afterwards, I feel dirty, and I can't stand that. I'm a mature 48-year-old, but this can still defeat me” (Roberta)

I never felt I was a priority. I was constantly abandoned.

Predominant feelings across the participants' accounts evinced constant abandonment and lack of protection. This sense of helplessness and desertion was extensively and graphically captured in Lisa's story incredulously remarking that her parents never prioritised her even though she was their own flesh and blood. Emphasising her relationship with her father, Lisa reiterated that despite serving his prison sentence, he constantly abandons her whereas she persistently yearns for him.

“If we meet outside he'd probably disregard me; he won't look for me if I don't.

He preferred another woman over his own flesh and blood. In reality he was never present, and it never affected me intensely, but it still hurts” (Lisa).

Jason communicated the same longing. However, unlike Diane, Maria, Roberta and Amber, who grew up to know who their father is but chose themselves not to pursue a relationship, he disclosed that he would never know who his biological father is. However, “I still wanted to learn more about him, to find out who he was, especially because if I ask my mother...she'd effectively avert the subject and avoid mentioning that we were the outcome of the job.”

Conversly, Roberta explained that it was her mother who abandoned her, leaving her with no other choice but to be self-sufficient “Who can I rely on if I ever need anything? The only person I can turn to, is myself.”

I was ashamed, stigmatized and labelled.

In addition to the aforementioned traumatic experiences, taking into consideration that Malta is characterised by a face-to-face society, interviewed children experienced intense shame and embarrassment every time their identity was overshadowed by their mother's engagement in prostitution: "I know there are many people who use the situation as a way to identify me, it's like, 'Nathalie, Nathalie who?' 'That Nathalie...' It's the truth, but it hurts" (Nathalie). Indeed, some recounted how this association often compelled them to deny their relationship with their parents.

These realities are in sharp contrast with Roberta and Diane's experiences. The latter believed that living in residential care eliminated the distinctiveness of their individual parental situation, as a result of which they never felt judged or stigmatized by any of them: "Way back in the late 70s, early 80s, those who resided in a boarding school, were either single mothers, prostitutes or children from residential care. It was our norm, no one could've said anything about it" (Roberta).

Exposure to deviant lifestyle

All participants lived, at least for a few years at the same place where their mother or other members of their family engaged in prostitution, drugs and other deviant activities, so for them these activities were considered the norm. Through the following subordinate themes, I will be presenting the participants' perspectives of how growing up in such a culture impacted their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Some explained how their parents' lifestyle had its roots set in years prior to their birth.

Reasons behind my mother's involvement in prostitution.

All of the participants recognized that their mothers' reasons for their involvement in prostitution were either out of economic necessity or as a means to support theirs or their partner's drug addiction. However, Diane added that her mother's initiation into prostitution

was manipulated and driven by her father's agency: "if he hadn't coerced her into drug abuse...none of this would have happened to any of us... after she met him her life turned into havoc. Once you wade into drugs, it lays into other circumstances." (Diane)

On the other hand, Maria lamented that her mother was a victim of intergenerational cycle of prostitution in her family. Therefore, when her mother was struggling financially, it seemed that she didn't perceive that she had any other choice, except that of involving herself in prostitution:

"She used to benefit from social security payments however that wasn't enough either. It was tough... I think that once she had been exposed to prostitution and couldn't identify another way out, she simply treaded in grandma's footsteps." (Maria)

I was exposed to my mother's prostitution.

Participants shared the evolution of their awareness of their mother's involvement in prostitution and how they experienced it. Simon and Jason both explained that only when they grew older and began to ask around did they form a clear picture of what was happening.

"I had already suspected about my mother, even before I had confirmed it as the truth. She used to leave, saying she worked in a bar. But which bar allows its employees to just work whenever they feel like it? No one calls before going in a bar, and people don't go into bartenders' homes, nest for a while and then leave again" (Simon).

Diversely, others were well aware of their mother's involvement in prostitution as they were recurrently exposed to it: "I used to go home once a week and all I used to see was prostitution, pickpocketing, strangers coming in, drinking... that was the typical, common environment, 'the norm' for me" (Roberta). Although she eventually became involved in prostitution herself, Lisa seemed to struggle with her mother's involvement and begged her to cease her involvement: "It was dreadful ... Mum was a prostitute, a drug addict...When I used

to watch my mother leaving for work I used to sob and beg her to stay, 'Don't go, please... stay with me.'

My mother was a drug user.

Diane and Lisa highlighted how difficult it was for them to come to terms with their mother's addiction, even more when they realized that it was one of the reasons why they had to reside in residential care. Lisa explained, that despite feeling devastated by her mother's addiction, during the few years that she lived with her, she used to witness her mother's engagement. Little did her mother know that this exposure eventually led her daughter to make use of drugs as well: "I used to witness what she was doing, and she'd say, 'it's so you can see what I'm going through, so you don't end up doing the same.'...although that intrigued me even more" (Lisa). Lastly, Nathalie remarked how from a young age she felt burdened when she was entrusted with the preparation of her mother's drugs, which exposed her to the latter's constant use.

Participants' engagement in deviant lifestyle

All interviewed participants except for Diane, at some point in their life engaged in prostitution, drug use and/or drug dealing. Finding themselves caught in the maelstrom of their chaotic lifestyle, during their separate interviews, the participants reflected on what had possibly led them to such choices, recounted their experiences as prostitutes and drug users, and lastly, elaborated on the feelings that were stirred up by their incarceration.

Trying to make sense of what led to my engagement in this lifestyle.

Participants postulate that given the circumstances that they were brought up in, they felt they did not have much choice regarding their life decisions. Indeed, Roberta asserted that "You'd ask how did you become a prostitute?... Well, that was the norm, that's what I'd learnt... personally, neither prostitution nor stealing were considered a crime." (Roberta). Similarly, Lisa blamed her grandmother, and she constantly questioned why the latter did not

protect her from the deviant lifestyle her mother and father were leading, despite being fully aware of it.

Although the latter acknowledged her upbringing and her exposure to her parents' lifestyle as the two main determinants of her deviancy, her narrative was overshadowed by disbelief. Indeed, she struggled to make sense of how much she despised her mother's behaviour and yet felt disbelief that she had still ended up going down the same path.

“It used to be dreadful for me to deal with the idea of watching her use drugs and so on when I used to live with her; so I was even more bewildered with myself when I started.” (Lisa)

Jason and Maria attributed their behaviour to the lack of their mothers' parenting skills. Yet Maria, unlike Jason whose reactions were steeped in anger, justified her mother's behaviour, for she admitted that her mother did not know any better: “She couldn't have given me a better life, because that's what she had always known, that's how she was brought up ” (Maria)

I resorted to drug use.

Living in a house with a drug-using mother and a drug-dealing partner meant daily exposure to drug-related paraphernalia. As Lisa affirmed, this constant domestic exposure tempted her and laid the groundwork for her later experimentation with drugs by somehow desensitizing her to the risk posed by drugs: “Our place had turned into a bar; you'd observe people nodding, bending their head and you'd wonder, ‘but what are they feeling?’ Everything was more appealing to me; I was obviously tempted to try” (Lisa)

Notwithstanding the fact that the participants had abstained from drugs for more than a year and a half at the time of the interview, all vividly recalled their first engagement, which seem to have followed a similar trajectory: “I had already smoked my first joint at fourteen or thirteen years of age. Then I started to inject heroin at fourteen or fifteen” (Jason). Drug

addiction served various purposes. For Nathalie it served to soften the pain of her mother's abandonment: "until I actually got hooked on cocaine, I used to feel bad that other people are getting the little attention I could get off my mum...but that stopped when I started taking cocaine, I stopped feeling that way...I stopped feeling anything" (Nathalie)

Conversely, for Maria and Roberta, drug taking was a way to fit in and a means of holding on the relational attachments that were developing.

"I used to relate with certain type of people...my partner...made use of drugs, but he used to make me feel safe; when I went to work he used to be there for guarding and protection. That's how I started to experiment on drugs." (Maria)

Additionally, Roberta insisted that drugs served as coping mechanism for sustaining her involvement in prostitution and for dealing with her self-loathing: "The guilt and the constant thought of how filthy and coarse you are, would force anyone to turn to dope. To survive doing it, drugs have to do, you have to numb yourself 100%." (Roberta)

I was a prostitute.

For some others, drugs served to escape the harsh reality of prostitution. Indeed, for Maria, Lisa and Roberta, drugs were the exclusive drivers after their involvement in prostitution. They remarked that they needed constant supply of money to support their addiction: "Prostitution was an inconvenience, but I enjoyed the drugs. And in order to get money for drugs, I had to work as a prostitute" (Lisa). Conversely, Nathalie added that prostitution substituted for the lack of attention and parental affection she missed growing up as "because of the experience I've been through, it feels good when you have the attention, even when it's the at wrong time" (Nathalie).

The high price I paid for engaging in prostitution.

Participants explained that others' reactions and attitudes towards their engagement in prostitution left them feeling stigmatised, labelled and abandoned by the closest members of their families.

“Whenever I went to see them [younger half-siblings] I would hear their mother shrieking...because she wouldn't want me to be with them. He told me [father] ‘Can you blame her? What if you've just come back from work, touched someone's cock, and now you touch our son's face?’” (Lisa)

These experiences still reverberated in some of the participants' present life, adversely affecting their current life situations and well-being. Indeed, Roberta dolefully admitted that the concept of intimacy was lost as soon as she allowed others to use her body in exchange for money.

“At first prostitution doesn't seem so awful but then when you start experiencing the repercussions, you turn into someone's object. The way men look at you and treat you... Used and disposed of. That's something you can never shake off (Roberta).

My mother's reaction.

Although involvement in drugs and prostitution were considered to be the norm in most of the participants' households, all mentioned that their mothers objected to their own engagement, in either one of the abovementioned behaviours: “When she first found out that I'd started working as a prostitute she'd beaten me to debility. She used to call the police on me, she couldn't allow it” (Maria). Although at that time, Maria struggled to understand the motive behind her mother's actions, she remarked that having lived as a prostitute, she could now understand better what her mother wanted to prevent her from.

When it came to drug use, Lisa and Jason disclosed that although their mother did not approve of their addiction, she did nothing to stop them or help them fight the addiction:

“Once I got home highly intoxicated... she was grilling me and yelling, ‘what have you done?’ ... but then it died out rather swiftly” (Lisa).

I was incarcerated.

Five of the participants interviewed had been incarcerated at some point in their life due to criminal behaviour, with two of the interviewees serving a sentence at the time of the interview. Lisa explained that drugs and prostitution led her and her mother to be sentenced to prison. Although all were incarcerated at a young age, the consensus view among them was that despite the arduous experience being in prison was “has truly and profoundly taught me so so much; it’s the best treatment I’ve done” (Roberta).

Mother-child relationship – Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and neglect

In the previous sections, I aimed at eliciting the most pertinent experiences participants shared with regards to their mothers' involvement in prostitution. Through this superordinate theme, I seek to provide the reader with a snapshot of the manner in which these experiences affected the dynamics between the mother-child relationship.

I couldn't take it any more - I had to leave home.

A common thread running across participants' accounts of their experience of living in the same household as their mother was of the feeling of repugnance. Most remarked that as they grew older, their tolerance of their mother's behaviour gradually decreased, until they felt that they couldn't endure it any longer: “When I was young I used to breakout from home to go to the sisters’, in residential care. I couldn’t live that life anymore” (Amber). This was also echoed in Jason's, Roberta and Maria's accounts. Indeed, these three participants stated that they left home at the ages of fourteen, thirteen and twelve respectively.

My mother wanted to take care of me, but she constrained.

During multiple interviews, I noticed that the participants were caught in loyalty binds. On one hand, they wanted to express resentment towards their mother's behaviour,

whilst on the other hand, they wanted to make it clear that their mother acted in such manner not out of spite, but because she herself was also a victim of the circumstances. Indeed, Lisa emphasised that because her mother wanted to safeguard her from her partner's abusive behaviour, the latter often exposed her to prostitution, firmly believing that such a decision was in her best interest: "He used to threaten her, 'take your daughter with you, or I'll kill her one of these days,' and because of him she wouldn't leave me at home... That's what she thought was best at the time" (Lisa)

Participants felt disheartened by the fact that that when they required a parent figure in their life, they could not get what they needed from them even when they were present. Inevitably, someone had to step in, and as Simon explained: "When daddy realised that she wasn't reliable enough to be in a child's presence, he told her, 'I'm going to take my son, you can see him again when you're stable'" However, he insisted that despite the fact that his mother admitted her parenting limitations, she still wanted to take care of him, and as a child, he still yearned for her nurturing.

My experience of living in residential care.

All participants, except for Simon, spent most of their upbringing in different residential care homes. As indicated by Jason, the reason underpinning their placement was his mother's life as a prostitute: "due to the life that my mother led, my brother and I had to be taken away". Indeed, Roberta explained that spending time in her mother's presence was traumatic.

"I would be anxious and tense from Saturday night, knowing that the following day I'd have to go home. I was constantly tormented by the thought....I was happy to stay in care. My mum was...constantly stressed and then she'd vent it all out on me."

However, the other participants' awareness that their life was different from that experienced by their peers meant that Jason, Nathalie and Diane experienced residential care

negatively. Indeed, Diane claimed that when she returned home she felt she had to start afresh:

“Being at home would have been better... Sleeping with ten other children, going to school, hearing everyone shouting, ‘Mum’ and you’re the one who has to call out ‘sister’, it’s distressing. You wouldn’t want this, believe me, it’s like you’re confined from the outside world” (Diane).

I am paying the consequences for my mother's choices.

As participants recalled their childhood, all made the link between their mothers' respective choices and the adverse experiences they had to endure. Diane explained blamed her mother's bad choices for all her negative life experiences

“I knew that we were suffering the consequences to her actions, I used to tell her, and everyone else...It’s like you were punished, imprisoned [referring to residential care]; but whereas she had actually done something wrong, we hadn’t.... Why would anyone even be surprised of how my life turned out? It’s only logical”

Nathalie remarked that because her mother never showed her unconditional love she:

“thought I knew what love was, but I didn’t. Because here [rehabilitation programme], I felt it and it was so genuine that it felt weird deep down. You’re so regularly and invariably dejected all the time that eventually it becomes the decent standard.”

Jason, Amber and Roberta also blamed their chaotic upbringing for their difficulty in trusting people “It took me a very long time to be able to start trusting people again, and I still won’t trust completely” (Roberta).

Despite all her inconsistencies, I craved my mother's love and attention.

A prevailing experience throughout most of the interviews was the manner in which children experienced their mothers' inconsistencies. Indeed, Jason, Lisa and Nathalie shared how they often racked their brains trying to make sense of their mother's attitude towards

them. Most of the time they considered their mothers' mood swings inexplicable and highly stressful: "She would snap every few minutes. One minute, 'you're my favourite, I love you,' ... five minutes later, she'd be after me with the broomstick. I was like, 'what the fuck is going on?'" (Nathalie). Undeterred by the difficulty to justify such behaviour, as already hinted in the aforementioned remark, Simon too experienced similar mixed feelings towards his mother. He explained that although he harboured anger towards her inconsistent behaviour, the need he had to be cared for and the love he had for his mother seemed to tip the balance: "I've always wanted to see her; you mother will always remain your mother."

Desperately craving their mothers' love and attention, Roberta and Nathalie admitted that they were ready to go to great lengths to get their love:

"I wanted it so much that there was a point that the only attention I was getting was through a beating. And I used to know I'm gonna get a beating, but I still did it just to get that beating because it was the only way of attention I was getting" (Nathalie).

How has all this affected my relationship with my mother.

Participants regretted that their relationships with their mothers were frequently fraught with various stressors, which made it difficult for them to develop a loving bond. Lisa explained that although later on her mother was trying to make up for the lost time in the past, she was so angry at the ignominious way she treated her that she was unable to reciprocate her mother's efforts.

"I bear a great deal of anger towards my mother for the fact that she abandoned me, that she preferred him [boyfriend]... over me... Why now though?... She had to accept me when I needed her the most, not now, when I've learned to manage on my own."

Additionally, Simon stated that his relationship with his mother did not change even though he went to live with her. He emphasised that "Going back with her hadn't affected me considerably... The relationship had been and remained, non-existent". However, he remarked

that now he had come to terms with this fact and learnt to “keep her at arm’s length. Sometimes I avoid her... especially when she’s not stable, but...it’s better than nought.” The same unwillingness to enter into relationships and the desire to keep people at a distance was repeatedly evinced by Roberta in her interview. Indeed, she blamed her mother's treatment for her tendency to refrain from nurturing intimate relationships. Contrastingly, Diane focused on the good memories she had of her mother, regardless of the fact that she continually reiterated the traumatic experiences she had endured because of her; "for me, she represents both my mother and my father. She’s always been there for me...There isn’t one instance wherein I can renounce that.”

Moving forward

As has been amply indicated, the participants' childhood was characterised by various traumatic experiences. However, through this last superordinate theme, I seek to present the different protective factors, coping skills and resilience that the participants thought were helpful in weathering arduous moments in their life.

Protective Factors.

Participants insisted that during their upbringing, at one point or another there were different people who took care of them, protected them and gave them a taste of what unconditional love meant. As they reminisced about these experiences, I noticed that they still held fond memories of them.

Lisa was glad to expound on her experience of being accepted, cared for, loved and given shelter by an old man, who did not expect anything in return, in contrast to members of her family.

“This person accepted me in his home and fed me, he was like the grandpa I never had. I’m deeply grateful that he accepted me, without abusing of me. Today...it’s

normal that someone expects something in return...This person instead...just gave me his genuine love”.

In the same vein, Jason talked lovingly about the friendly relationship he had with an old man whilst he was still in residential care, recollecting his experience in graphic detail.

Alternatively, Nathalie spoke highly of the support she received from professionals, which she viewed as a very solid protective factor in her life, whilst Simon declared that his relationship with his father "was a constant", serving as a buffer against the traumatic experiences he endured because of his mother's involvement in prostitution. Additionally, he highlighted the value of sports in offering him a safe environment where he could release his pent-up energy and tension: "I've always longed for my personal space. It was a favourable thing that I had football and basketball everyday”.

I learnt to cope.

Apart from the aforementioned protective factors, participants also referred to the various coping strategies that they learnt to activate during difficult moments.

Roberta described how faced with tough experiences, she kept reminding herself that she had managed to overcome similar occurrences in the past. Indeed, her coping strategy consisted in urging herself to believe that “that it's only a matter of time. It will pass...and I get by, gradually”. On the other hand, Nathalie confessed that her past emotional baggage at times became too heavy for her to carry. Therefore, in order to survive, she learnt to shut down such emotions: "I'm in this stage... where you learn how to do a shutter... You can talk about your past without getting emotional"

Lastly, both Jason and Simon expressed gratitude for their respective partners for offering a solid base for them to rely on in difficult times: “The only person who shields me is my girlfriend” (Jason).

I am resilient.

As the participants recalled childhood memories in relation to where they stand now, what I noticed was their strong sense of resilience. The excerpts below testify to participants' ability to bounce back from adversity, fend for themselves and identify what is positive despite the dire circumstances they often found themselves in.

"I've had a severely obstinate life, and to this day, I still struggle. I don't regret going through any of this hardship...If it had to go this way for me to grow into the Roberta I am today, let it be...I've been through a lot, and although I might appear poor, deep down, I'm the most affluent person" (Roberta).

Diane asserted that having witnessed her mother's deviant behavior and its aftermath served as a cautionary tale that motivated her to distance herself from such lifestyle.

"I have this colossal mirror that exemplifies what I can never emulate. I've pitied my mother enough after all she's been through; how could I go through them myself? I'd end up pitying myself"

What would have helped.

All participants identified values that would have helped them as they were growing up. Jason's and Diane's response revolved around parental love and presence that they lacked, insisting that professionals should always strive to include the biological family in the child's life. Roberta, Simon and Maria unanimously recommended the importance of disseminating knowledge and raising more awareness around the topics of prostitution, drugs and abuse.

"I believe that the most crucial thing is raising awareness; being more open-minded, breaking the taboo and all these inhibitions, which I find so detrimental. It is what it is, let's all do something about it, without trying to suppress the issue" (Roberta).

Simon insisted that as a child it would have been more beneficial if someone had explained to him why he was not allowed to be in her presence, rather than being fed lies about his mother's behaviour or not being told anything at all:

“They didn't have to wait till I was eleven to inform me about what my mother was doing. They could have explained that I just couldn't be with my mother because she was not acting responsibly...It would have been more reasonable and justifiable”

I needed to talk.

Even if talking about one's experiences needed considerable effort, in the end participants shared a sense of relief after the interview. The consensus view was that disclosing everything had been liberating, particularly because they felt that they could talk in great depth and at great length without any fear of judgment. They all hoped that their story would help others in similar situations and prevent them from enduring all that they had to withstand.

“Actually, I think I needed this because I'm not very cordial. It's very difficult...to a point where you find it difficult to breathe... I hope it helps you, help other people”
(Nathalie).

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the most salient superordinate and subordinate themes pertaining to the children's accounts of their experience of having their mother involved in prostitution. In the next chapter, I will be discussing these main findings in relation to existing literature.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

In light of the extant literature and the conceptual frameworks guiding this research, in this chapter I will be discussing the participants' accounts chronologically as I believe that this helps the reader reflect the manner in which participants experienced them. To this end, I will start by delving into participants' exposure to their mothers' deviant behaviour and move on to the traumatic and abusive experiences endured. Exploring these experiences has yielded insights into the effects such occurrences left on the mother-child relationship and the children's own engagement in prostitution and drug use. In the last part of this chapter I will be presenting the different protective factors and coping mechanisms that enabled the participants to move forward.

Lack of shelter and protection - a total exposure in the children's everyday experience

Irrespective of their living arrangements, the consensus view was that participants' lives were overshadowed by their mothers' engagement in prostitution, drugs and other deviant activities. Such substantial exposure left them feeling unprotected and unsheltered, both by their main caregivers, the country's safeguarding system, and society at large. Hence, in the next section I will be delving deeper into participants' endurance of their mother's involvement in this deviant lifestyle and the repercussions on their upbringing (Shetty et al., 2017; Sloss & Harper, 2004; Sallman, 2010).

Withstanding mothers' incessant engagement in prostitution and drug use.

Whilst participants identified different reasons for their mothers' initiation in prostitution, congruent with both foreign (Bindel, 2017; Dalla, 2002; Dodsworth, 2012) as well as local literature (Vella et al., 2016), all participants highlighted the arduous ordeals

they suffered, exposed as they were to their mothers' deviant lifestyle. Indeed, in contrast to Sloss and Harper's study (2004), the participants' consensus view was that motherhood didn't limit their mothers' involvement in deviant lifestyle, so much so that the latter's behaviour led participants to eventually flee from their family home.

Growing up, Lisa and Nathalie lamented that they were not only aware of, but had to bear their mother's involvement in prostitution. Although she eventually became involved in prostitution herself, Lisa confessed that as a child, her mother's involvement used to distress her. Indeed, this finding is echoed in Bletzer's (2005) and Dalla's (2003) studies, in which interviewed prostitutes admitted that their children resented their choice of lifestyle. Seeing her mother soliciting clients, Lisa explained that whilst waiting for her mother in the car, she often wept and begged her to stay with her instead of engaging in prostitution. Similarly, Amber used to end up under her mother's bed, counting and making up stories in her head to distract herself from what was happening. Roberta and Maria explained that although they were distraught by what they were exposed to, during the 1970's, such scenes were considered the norm, which meant that nobody protected them from such harrowing occurrences.

Whereas literature supports the idea that the mother's substance abuse could be a means of self-medication and a coping mechanism against the stockpile of pain generated by the harsh reality of their involvement in prostitution (Swendeman et al., 2015; Graham & Wish, 1994), the four participants, whose mothers were also drug users, remarked that it was very difficult for them to accept their mothers' drug use. Indeed, Diane and Simon were deeply disturbed at the realisation that this was one of the reasons why they had ended up living in residential care. Pain, rage and hatred were some of the feelings the participants experienced, in congruence with findings from Barnard & Barlow's (2003) study. On the other hand, feeling devastated at being directly exposed to their mothers' addiction, Nathalie and Lisa reported that their respective mothers failed to shelter them from their deviant

behaviour. In fact, Lisa, highlighted how her mother often granted her permission at her requests to witness her drug taking, believing that this was going to teach Lisa a lesson.

In light of these experiences, I could not believe that no one stepped in to protect these children, that none of the professionals approached tried to safeguard them or do something to help them. My reactions of utter shock and disgust resonated throughout Lisa's interview. She expressed strong incredulity at the fact that her grandmother exposed her to her mother's deviant lifestyle, irrespective of the fact that she was fully aware of the negative effects on Lisa. Realising the lack of protection around them, Jason, Amber, Roberta and Maria attempted to protect themselves by running away from home at a young age, stating that they could not endure their mother's behaviour any longer. Although such findings are not reflected in the extant literature vis-à-vis the children's experiences, Dalla (2000, 20003) found similar runaway behaviour in prostitutes themselves, as a reaction to their childhood traumatic occurrences. Amber disclosed that she used to find refuge in residential care, away from the miserable life she led at home. Indeed, she remarked that even though she craved to be reunited with her family, in hindsight she believes that it would have been much more beneficial for her if she had remained in care. Similarly, Roberta and Jason admitted experiencing consternation at visiting their mother's home and sheer terror every time they used to leave residential care.

Additionally, Roberta's insistence at remaining in care despite the sexual abuse she was suffering, was quite shocking for me. The issue of institutional abuse was researched by previous scholars (Baldock, Manning & Vickerstaff, 2007) who emphasized its incidence in residential care. It is simultaneously sad and ironical how Roberta was placed in care for protection purposes but was subjected to another form of abuse. And it was painful for me to witness how disconcerting it was for Roberta to have to accept the fact that growing up, she had no safe space. As I took time to reflect on Roberta's experience and the ramifications of

this lack of support in these young persons' childhood, I gradually came to terms and understood even more deeply the harsh and traumatic reality they had to endure when in their mothers' presence, as well as the lack of protection and security they had to cope with on a daily basis.

Feeling othered, shamed and stigmatised.

Congruent with Abel (2011) and Swendeman et al.'s (2015) findings, all participants in this research asserted that they experienced intense shame, harassment and bullying every time their identity was overshadowed by their mother's engagement in deviancy. Looking at this phenomenon from a social constructionist framework, one's understanding of oneself, one's reality and one's life circumstances are based upon social interaction (Burr, 2006). Naturally, such shaming and spiteful experiences weighed down heavily and relentlessly on each participant.

In striving to defend themselves, Jason, Lisa and Maria reacted to such hurtful behaviour by withdrawing from friends, whilst Nathalie recounted how her mother's conduct often drove her to deny their relationship. There were other participants who described how Malta's small population, where private narratives soon become public knowledge, frequently made them feel divided between a private and a public self, and compelled to lie about their mothers' deviant behaviour. On one hand, they were ashamed of being associated with their mother, whilst on the other hand, they also felt obliged to protect the latter's deviancy from becoming public knowledge. Jason remarked that both when he was young as well as presently, his mother's engagement in prostitution was never talked about. On the same lines, Simon, disclosed that his aunt never explained why he couldn't reside with his mother and often urged him to lie when asked about her whereabouts. Indeed, in line with Borg and Clark's (2007) study, emphasizing the role of shame and honour, and the strong Roman

Catholic roots in Maltese society (Abela, 2016) such concealment could be attributed to the children's and their relatives' effort to shelter them from stigmatization.

Lastly, Diane indicated that although she endlessly tried to protect herself from being associated with her mother's deviant behaviour, the socially constructed nature of identity (Schwandt, 2001) meant that she could not escape the negative impact of her mother's deviant lifestyle. As she compared her life with that of her peers, she became aware of the discrepancy and subsequently felt othered. Diane, who was in residential care until she was 16 years old, expressed anger and shame that in her mother's absence, she used to be accompanied by a nun at most of her social and educational activities. She spoke about the shameful experience of feeling different from everyone else and the unbearably emotionally painful situation of seeing every other child call out, "Mum, mum, mum" whereas she was the one who had to call out "sister". Indeed, she disclosed that "it would have been better if I stayed with my mum and not eating for a week, rather than living there".

Children's endurance of traumatic experiences

All participants in this research declared that growing up they not only lacked protection and shelter, but their childhood was dominated by traumatic experiences that ranged from physical abuse, exposure to domestic violence and ongoing sexual abuse. Indeed, such occurrences are well documented in previous literature, with studies concluding that being born to mothers involved in prostitution makes their children more susceptible to countless disruptions in their upbringing (Nadarajah and Fadzil's, 2015; Setthy et al., 2017; Shohel & Mahruf, 2013). The next sub-section explores how such traumatic experiences might have jeopardized the children's ability to attain secure attachments (Dallos & Vetere, 2009; Gomez-Perales, 2015). Lastly, I will be referring to the children's traumatic experiences with regards to their fathers.

Victims of physical abuse and witnesses of persistent domestic violence.

As indicated in extant literature, related to the experiences of children of prostitutes, Amber, Jason, Roberta and Lisa explained how their mothers, their partners and/ or other individuals who were responsible for their wellbeing, habitually abused them physically (Nadarajah & Fadzil, 2015; Shetty et al., 2017; Shohel & Mahruf, 2013). As per Crittenden and Ainsworth's (1989) findings, such behaviour tends to lead children to develop an ambivalent/avoidant attachment style and adopt either one of two distinct patterns (compliance or acting out), which patterns featured prominently in the behaviours of some of the participants in this study.

Being constantly beaten and fearing further abuse, Nathalie became excessively compliant with her mother's requests. At age thirteen she had agreed to take care of her mother's drug preparation, in spite of the fact that she detested her drugged behaviour. In sharp contrast to Nathalie, Jason, exhibiting the 'acting out' response to physical abuse, explained that he turned into an angry and ambivalent adolescent, whose aggressive behaviour intensified as he grew older (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). In processing his behaviour, Jason disclosed that the incessant physical abuse from his mother often led him to refuse all attempts of affection from her. However, he confessed that till this present day he still finds it very difficult to understand his behaviour, explaining that all he ever wanted was his mother's love and acceptance. Such ambivalent behaviour is testimony to Jason's difficulty of developing secure attachment patterns with his caregivers.

Additionally, literature has repeatedly indicated that the same insecure attachment representations could be observed in children who witness domestic violence (Gustafsson, Brown, Mills-Koonce, Cox, & The Family Life Project Key Investigators, 2017). During physically violent exchanges, participants explained that their mothers were often unavailable to comfort them. Their mothers' absence when participants needed them most might have

compromised their ability to create representations of their mother as someone who responds to their distress or as someone whom they can turn to when they need comfort. These insecure attachments might also stem from the child's fear of the perpetrator (Gustafsson et al., 2017). Indeed, as Amber insisted, she frequently witnessed and overheard physically violent interactions between her mother and her partner, during which she often felt terrified, signifying that such violent episodes might have been perceived by Amber as posing a threat to her own physical safety. Moreover, Maria and Lisa explained that they were not just passive witnesses of the constant beatings and emotional abuse, but often felt responsible for warning their mother against her partner. In line with Duff's et al.'s study (2015) participants explained that such abusive relationships used to leave their mothers in distress and emotionally unavailable, thus, in such situations, the participants often stepped in to console their mother, indicating that from a young age, they had to adopt a parentified role in the absence of a secure care giver.

Victims of sexual abuse.

Congruent with Severin et al.'s (2015) quantitative study, six of the eight participants in my study revealed that during their childhood, they were repeatedly sexually abused by different men, be they their mother's partner, father or uncle. All participants lamented that the abuse often left them feeling wretched and worthless, highlighting how difficult it was to understand that someone who was supposed to take care of them in fact abused them (Finkelhor, 1990). According to Kwako et al., such maltreatment possibly left a massive impact on the participants' self and world view, resulting in high levels of insecure attachment-related anxiety and a painful understanding that others are not readily available to offer shelter and support. Fearing shame and lack of comprehension, most participants decided to refrain from reporting the abuse they were suffering, whilst those who dared to speak stated that they felt completely ignored, resulting in further victimization.

In line with Finkelhor's study (1990) these negative reactions from one's family exacerbated feelings of betrayal and consolidated insecure attachment representations, especially when mothers were unwilling to protect their children from further abuse. Indeed, Nathalie and Maria felt aggrieved at their mothers' unwillingness to protect them. Indeed, despite the fact that they constantly disclosed their traumatic experiences to their respective mothers, they remarked that "no actions were taken". The frustration Nathalie felt made her engage in various physical, violent arguments with her mother. This lack of protection was echoed in Amber's and Roberta's lived experiences. Indeed, both expressed bewilderment and a sense of fatalism at the fact that the aftermath of the sexual abuse occurrences seemed to have persisted in adulthood. Amber indicated pronounced dependency, clinginess and constant preoccupation with her intimate partner's loyalty. These feelings are, according to Finkelhor, (1990) characteristic features of preoccupied attachment organizations. Additionally, Roberta explained that the impact of her childhood sexual abuse undermined the quality of her sexual relationships in adulthood. In line with Wilson and Wilson's (2008) study, she disclosed that she experienced unwanted sexual fantasies, followed by guilt and shame.

On a concluding note, I noticed that whilst Nathalie, Roberta, Lisa, Amber and Maria talked explicitly and openly about their sexual abuse experiences, Jason referred to his abusive occurrences through the use of euphemisms, for example, commenting that "[mother's partner] used to do things that bother children". According to Smith et al. (2010), such euphemistic use of language shines a light on the participant's experiences and his social construction (Burr, 1995). In this respect, I deduced that Jason's use of euphemism bears witness to the traumatic effects of these experiences and the difficulty in coming to terms with them. Indeed, as I came in touch with his pain in relating such experience, I took an ethical

decision and refrained from posing further questions about the subject matter, given that further discussion would elicit raw emotions and painful memories.

From longing to absent fathers to desiring distance.

A common thematic thread running through the literature and the findings of my study was the dysfunctional and traumatic relationship the participants had with their fathers' and their mothers' partners respectively (Dalla, 2000; 2002;2003; Shetty et al., 2017). Maria, Amber and Lisa reported that they found it difficult to strike a cordial relationship with their father. As aforementioned, most of these participants were victims or witnesses of persistent violent abuse. They expressed contempt for the way their fathers treated them and their mothers, and the havoc they used to wreak at home, causing further instability.

Similarly, Lisa lamented the lack of contribution her father had in her development. She talked about him as if he were a stranger, insisting that for the first thirteen years of her life he was not present. Heartbroken and yearning for his attention, Lisa explained that despite serving his prison sentence, he never tried to make up for lost time and constantly abandoned her for his new-found family. This longing for an absent father was also evident in Jason's narrative, who admitted that he did not know his biological father, and found it odd to realise that he would never call someone "dad". On the other hand, Diane, Maria, Roberta and Amber claimed that although they grew up to know who their father was, they never bothered to establish a relationship with him, as the latter was never present in their life. Although most of the literature has elucidated the origins and significance of the mother-child attachment, Bowlby (1969) notes that children who are securely attached to their fathers are more likely to display behaviour that reflects a sense of trust, well-being and emotional availability. In view of the above experiences, it is legitimate to postulate that these participants were not able to attain such security from their fathers.

The implications on the mother-child relationship

In view of the participants' persistent exposure to their mother's deviant lifestyle, the resulting traumatic occurrences they withstood, and the lack of protection they experienced, throughout their accounts they highlighted the effects these traumatic experiences have had on their relationship with their mothers. As this finding is barely highlighted in extant literature, I will be discussing the implications of these experiences on the mother-child-relationship, as narrated and perceived by participants.

In making sense of their respective relationships, participants constantly referred to their mother's difficult upbringing, which in turn helped them understand better the dynamics between them. Indeed, congruent with various studies (Dalla, 2004; Dodsworth, 2012) that examined the lives of prostitutes and their antecedents to prostitution, all participants indicated that their mother's childhood was marked by chaos, abuse, diffused relationships and lack of parental affection. As attachment is most critical during the early phases of life (Bowlby, 1969, 1988), such exposure possibly undermined the participants' mothers' ability to develop secure attachments themselves (Morrel et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2010; Siegel, 2013). This inability to develop secure attachments, as hypothesized by Mikulincer et al., (2005), undermines the caregiver's compassionate attunement to their children's needs.

Indeed, Simon, Jason, Lisa, Roberta, and Nathalie reiterated how when they were growing up, their relationship with their mother was marked by unremitting inconsistencies that they were unable to trust in her comfort, warmth and reassurance. They lamented that they often encountered a "cold front" whenever they tried to build a relationship. The constant rejections, eventually led them to be self-sufficient, and in turn reject her help even in the face of challenging situations (Ainsworth, 1982). Maria resented the fact that when she required a parent figure in her life, even though her mother was present, she could not get what she needed from her. Her mental health difficulties, prostitution and drug use often prevented her

from getting the optimum care (Sallman, 2010). Which findings were highlighted by Sloss et al.'s (2004) study. They concluded that prostitution and/or drug use could disrupt further the mother's parenting ability. Similarly, Simon explained that although he enjoyed the toys and material gifts that his mother provided him with to make up for their lost time, he still preferred her love, presence and attention. Indeed, in line with findings in extant literature, the participants insisted that these difficult dynamics coexisted with their desperate yearning for their mothers' love, acknowledgment and nurturance. They expressed regret that when they were young, they could not spend more time in her presence (Adhikari, 2012; Nadarajah & Fadzil, 2015). This longing for their mothers' loving presence drove Nathalie to do everything she could to gain her mother's attention, even to the extent of doing some mischief that in her mother's view merited corporal punishment. Indeed, she disclosed that she used to get in trouble on purpose, knowing that she would incur her mother's anger and consequent punishment.

As participants discussed the implications such occurrences had on their present relationship, I noticed that the same ambivalent rapport emerged. After all the failed attempts at building a solid relationship with their mother, participants expressed profound regret that their rapport did not improve. Lisa explained that although her mother was presently trying to make up for lost time, her persistent feelings of anger at her mother have prevented her from building a trusting relationship with her. Similarly, Simon, admitted that even though he went to live with his mother, their "relationship was and still is inexistent".

However, overtime, the participants asserted that they learnt to protect themselves from their mother's way of being. Showing resilience and will power, they expressed confidence and a sense of resignation that keeping their distance, creating boundaries and taking the initiative themselves to organize a meeting with their mother, has helped them to come to terms with the fact that, unfortunately, their mother will not change.

Contrastingly, having been lately reunited with her mother, now as an adult, Diane declared that she has a good relationship with her mother and that in her she found what she always needed. Trying to understanding what circumstances permitted such a drastic change led to further discussion that revealed that unlike the other participants' mothers, Diane's mother was the only one who ceased engagement in prostitution and in drugs as soon as she was reunited with her children. In light of the other participants' experiences, it can be deduced that ending her deviant behaviour enabled Diane and her mother to work serenely on developing their relationship.

On a concluding note, although I believe that the findings highlighted in this study have managed to touch upon major points vis-à-vis the mother-child relationship that have insofar been undocumented in previous research, further investigation is needed in order to compare and contrast such findings to other participants' experiences.

Making sense of recent past - the children's involvement in deviancy

Chiming with the conclusions drawn from Dunlap et al.'s (2002) longitudinal study, the findings in my study indicate that patterns surrounding sexual deviancy and drug addiction in the participants' families of origin were eventually replicated by the participants themselves. In light of the aforementioned childhood experiences, the way participants made sense of their involvement in deviancy is explored.

Engagement in drug use.

All participants interviewed, except for Diane, whose supportive factors are delved into in another section of this chapter, made use of drugs at some point in their lives.

In narrating their addiction experience, they tried to make sense of their engagement, and reflected on the purposes the addictive substances served. Having had a childhood overshadowed by traumatic experiences of abuse and maternal abandonment, as previous studies indicated, put the participants at a higher risk of developing a substance abuse problem

(Fergusson, et al., 2008; Hadland et al., 2012). Indeed, in line with extant research, Nathalie revealed that drugs served as a way of nursing long-standing wounds, a survival strategy in producing reliable, short-term change of effective and psychological state, (Massey, Compton, & Kaslow, 2014; Schindler, Thomasius, Petersen, & Sack, 2009) as well as a substitute for a loving relationship with her mother (Walant, 1997). Such an explanation was echoed in Maria's account, who emphasised that the motivation underpinning her initiation into drugs was to feel accepted by those around her and not to lose any developing relational attachments. In this respect, I hypothesise that this choice of lifestyle stemmed from participants' yearning to satisfy their core needs, such as belongingness, a sense of self purpose, and a way to restore their lost capacity for attachment (Walant, 1997).

Lastly, Jason and Lisa attributed their behaviour to the lack of appropriate parenting skills their mother had as they were growing up. Lisa claimed that since she lived in a household with a drug-using mother and a drug-dealing partner, exposure to drug-related paraphernalia was a daily occurrence. In line with the findings in the study conducted by Cleaver, Unell and Aldgate (2011), Lisa asserted that this daily exposure to drugs laid the foundation for her drug use and desensitization to drugs' associated harm, that eventually triggered her curiosity to experiment with drugs herself. Although not at home, the latter explained that when opportunity presented itself, she readily gave in and experimented with drugs. Undeterred by her mother's reaction, Lisa continued to make use of drugs, and the latter did nothing to stop or help her. Lisa's mother's indifference to her drug addiction was also echoed in Jason's account.

Involvement in prostitution.

Nathalie, Maria, Roberta and Lisa were the four participants in this study who followed their mothers' footsteps and involved themselves in prostitution, all before the age of sixteen. Although prostitution was considered the norm in their households, the participants

insisted that their mothers did not approve of their involvement, with Maria even remarking that her mother often reported her to the police.

Indeed, in line with the *exposure model* (Potterat et al., 1985) which explains that one's involvement in prostitution is heightened by interpersonal contact with prostitutes, Roberta and Maria suggested that their engagement started merely as a replication of what was familiar to them. They both discussed that whilst in their initial stages of involvement they were very keen on the high-end life that prostitution enabled them to lead, Roberta admitted that over time her incessant engagement would not have been possible without the use of drugs. Indeed, as Bindel (2017) argued, drugs served the participants as a coping mechanism to mitigate the effects on their sense of self. Such a coping mechanism in turn generated another difficulty. The constant supply of money they needed to maintain their drug addiction perpetuated the downward cycle of their involvement in prostitution and drug use. As echoed in different studies, (Dodsworth, 2012; Lung et al., 2004) this cycle was also noted in some of the participants' mothers, with Lisa emphasising the incredulity she found herself in at the realisation that she was repeating the exact same behaviour she had spent years despising. Unconsciously, Lisa might have come to accept her mother's behaviour as an effective conduct, which led her to internalise and practice it during her adolescence and adulthood (Dunlap et al., 2002).

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that whilst I was comparing and contrasting the participants' experiences, apart from the incessant exposure to their mother's involvement in prostitution, a common reality between them was that they were all victims of sexual abuse. Although the underlying paths that link early sexual abuse with prostitution offer endless and controversial food for thought, my findings seem to confirm Potterat et al.'s (1985) hypothesis with regards to the *susceptibly model* (Potterat et al., 1985) and Dunlap et al.'s (2002) conclusions. As these authors concluded, the occurrence of sexual abuse combined with other

traumatic childhood experiences and psychological characteristics might have predisposed the participants to prostitution. All these factors could have led the participants to experience a process called “mortification of the self” (Dunlap et al., 2002, p.8). Which according to Dunlap et al., (2002), is a psychological process characterised by one's dissociation from emotions, acceptance of the situation and socialization to sexual victimisation. Indeed Bindel (2017) found that this process is essential for one's engagement in sex work as it is an indispensable form of defence mechanism against the traumatic experiences endured during prostitution.

Finding the strength to move forward

Notwithstanding the arduous experiences participants endured, throughout their respective interviews all managed to identify different self-protective and coping mechanisms that helped them be resilient in facing such occurrences.

In line with other studies (Bletzer, 2005; Maniducic, 2014), Simon's secure relationship with his late father served as a buffer against the traumatic effects of his mother's involvement in deviancy, as were Lisa's provisional attachment relationships with individuals outside her immediate family. Indeed, Lisa insisted that for a short period of time, these used to make her feel safe, loved and protected. Werner and Smith argued (2001) that although these persons were not the participants' primary carers, their warm, sensitive and supportive stance helped them develop good quality relationships. In light of these findings, I postulate that over time, these periods of provisional attachments imbued Lisa and Simon with hope, which in turn seemed to have reinforced their present strength and courage. Indeed, whilst they were talking about their adverse childhood experiences, both managed to identify positives in their bleak accounts, and took pride in the fact that more often than not, they were able to bounce back. Lisa put this quality in a nutshell when she referred to herself as "survivor...who learnt to pull

herself together". This precise term was used by Radke-Yarrow & Sherman (1990), when they described adolescents who survived and thrived when faced with dauntingly adverse circumstances.

Another coping mechanism that Simon identified was practising sports. He explained that it offered him a safe environment where he could release his accumulation of energy and tension. In line with existent resilience literature, he seems to have developed a sense of achievement and joy, which enabled him to gain confidence in himself and boost his self-esteem (Rutter, 1999). Diversely, for Jason his relationship with his intimate partners was identified as a source of strength during tough times. As Vetere (2013) indicates, his safe relationship contexts could have sustained his development of affect regulation, enabled a more reflective communication pattern and given him the possibility of viewing others as caring and trustworthy, unlike other individuals in his immediate family circle. This finding indicates that safe relationships can mitigate the detrimental effects of traumatic experiences and offer contexts of "earned or continuous relationship security" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 334).

Additionally, Maria, Nathalie and Roberta remarked that they were able to generate new and constructive responses to the traumatic experiences endured instead of succumbing to their ill effects. Indeed, adding an additional layer of meaning to previous studies (Clark, 2006) about the experiences of incarcerated men in Malta, participants in my study remarked that despite the precarious and arduous experience they went through, prison was an important life lesson for them and an opportunity for growth. Such positive mind set in the face of adverse conditions is typical of resilient individuals (Kendziora & Osher, 2004)

Lastly, as indicted by the aforementioned findings, Diane was the only participant who did not engage in a deviant lifestyle. Similar to some of the participants in Dalla's study

(2003), she managed to understand the risks posed by generational transmission of deviancy, and took countermeasures to protect herself, which motivated her in distancing herself and becoming a transitional character in her family. Although this distancing stance is not easily accomplished, I hypothesize that this transformation was possible because Diane lived the majority of her life in residential care, which offered her a safe place, equipped her with the essential support, self-efficacy and personal insight needed for such will power and resilience (Dalla, 2003).

Conclusion

As I outlined throughout this chapter, this research highlighted the lack of shelter and protection these participants withstood. Their life circumstances were influenced both directly through exposure to their mother's prostitution, drug use and drug dealing, and indirectly through the consequences of these practices. Indeed, their childhood was burdened with problems including physical and sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence and lack of protection and shelter amongst others. The findings obtained bring into focus the complexity of this issue, and highlight the need of supportive services both for prostitutes as well as their children. By offering a secure environment, the negative ramifications of these adverse conditions can possibly be mitigated.

In the following chapter I will be outlining the limitations of this study, proposing recommendations for clinical practice and future research.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Introduction

In this concluding chapter I will be presenting a summary of the main findings of this study, followed by its limitations. Subsequently, I will be discussing the clinical implications for future services and making suggestions for future research.

Summary of Salient Findings

Findings from my retrospective research, with eight individuals born to mothers involved in prostitution laid bare the lack of shelter and protection these participants endured throughout their childhood. All indicated that irrespective of their living arrangements, their life was overshadowed by their mothers' involvement in prostitution, drugs and other deviant activities. Some emphasised that they were incessantly exposed to her loitering, soliciting and entertainment of clients. I found that that motherhood did not limit the participants' mothers' involvement in deviant lifestyles.

As research informs us (Abel, 2011; Swendeman et al., 2015) participants experienced intense shame, harassment, bullying, stigmatisation and discrimination every time their identity was overshadowed by their mother's engagement in deviancy. All described different ways of defending themselves, and highlighted the loyalty conflicts they used to find themselves in; on one hand they felt obliged to prevent their mother's deviancy from becoming public knowledge, whilst on the other they felt ashamed to be associated with her. Such finding needs to be understood in the context of the central role that shame, honour and Roman Catholicism play in Maltese society.

In view of the lack of protection and safety, my study indicated that children of prostitutes had to find a way to defend themselves, and from a young age they looked for shelter away from their familial household. Six of the participants found refuge in residential care. Although they wished to live with their family, in hindsight, the consensus view was that it would have been much more beneficial for them if they had remained in care, remarking that perhaps they would not have ended up following their mothers' lifestyle. In sharp contrast, in line with Nadarajah's and Fadzil's, (2015) and Shetty et al.,'s (2017) studies, living in residential care for Diane proved to be a traumatic experience. She craved her mother's presence, love and attention, highlighting the importance of sustained contact with one's biological family.

My study also revealed that during their childhood participants were victims of severe physical and sexual abuse, as well as witnesses of domestic violence. Such occurrences are well documented in literature, (Nadarajah & Fadzil's, 2015; Setthy et al., 2017; Shohel & Mahruf, 2013) with researches finding that mothers' involvement in prostitution make their children more susceptible to countless disruptions in their upbringing. Indeed, these experiences impacted the participants' ability to develop secure attachment patterns; this difficulty seemed to have persisted in adulthood.

Another prominent finding that is hardly represented in previous literature was the effect the aforementioned experiences had on the mother-child relationship. My interpretation was that growing up all participants shared patterns indicative of insecure attachment with their mothers, impacting their intra and interpersonal development. All stressed that for a long time they yearned for her love and acknowledgment irrespective of the way she treated them. Over time, all participants, except Diane, realized that unfortunately their mother would not change, and they deduced that in protecting themselves, it was important to keep their distance and create boundaries. Diane's contrasting experience revealed that her mother's

decision to cease engagement in prostitution and drugs, gave her an opportunity to make up for their lost time and work serenely on developing their relationship.

Congruent with Dunlap et al.'s (2002) longitudinal study, findings from my study indicated that patterns surrounding sexual deviancy and drug addiction in the participants' families of origin were eventually repeated by the participants themselves. Seven participants confessed to engaging in drug use, highlighting that exposure laid the foundation for their drug taking and desensitization to associated harm. Drugs served as a coping mechanism, a substitute for relationships and a way of belonging to a group. There were also four participants who involved themselves in prostitution. Except for the incessant exposure to their mother's involvement, a common thread running through the participants' accounts was that they were all victims of childhood sexual abuse. This finding seems to be in line with the hypothesis drawn from Dunlap et al.'s (2002) and Potterat et al.'s (1985) studies, that sexual abuse victims are more susceptible to prostitution than others.

Lastly, my study highlighted the self-protective factors and coping mechanisms that helped participants be resilient in the face of arduous experiences. Several participants highlighted the importance of past and present secure attachment relationships as a buffer against traumatic experiences, whilst others disclosed that sports offered them a safe space where they could release their pent-up energy and tension. Additionally, incarcerated participants identified prison as an important life lesson and an opportunity for growth, where they learnt to generate constructive responses to their experiences.

Limitations of this study

The participants' lived experiences were provided using a retrospective approach. Indeed, whilst this mode of research has enabled me to provide a snapshot of experiences and related feelings over a span of years, this same method has been criticised for being limited to

memory recall and challenged by potential distortions of experiences (Thornberry, Knight & Lovegrove, 2012). Indeed, one needs to keep in mind that participants' accounts reflect what was readily accessible in their memory and what they felt comfortable enough sharing during this one-time interview. However, in this qualitative study, prominence was given to participants' remembered experiences and how it impacted them. Nevertheless, one way to enhance the credibility and trust-worthiness of the reported lived experiences would be to increase the number of interviews with the same participants rather than relying on one-off interviews.

Participants were recruited according to whoever explicitly identified themselves as children of prostitutes, who made use of support services and who accepted the invitation to participate in my study. Consequently, such factors might have limited the number of possible participants. With regards to the first criterion, recruitment was limited to children who were aware of their mothers' involvement in prostitution and to those who interpreted their mothers' numerous sexual encounters as prostitution. The second criterion restricted recruitment to the participants in contact with professionals. This condition possibly targeted individuals who are more/less troubled, and more/less resilient than other individuals who were not receiving support. Therefore, this inclusion criterion might have underrepresented the complexity of this cohort in its totality. Another limitation was the gender imbalance of participants – six females to two males. These limitations could have excluded other needs and experiences by participants in this study.

Another limitation within this study is that the CCF did not grant me permission to audio record the two interviews I conducted with two of the inmates. Consequently, I had to take verbatim notes of the participants' comments and add more detail as soon as the interviews were over. This could have possibly undermined the accuracy of the way I

recorded their responses verbatim and the flow of the interview, although this seemed to have permitted the participants to be more effusive and reflective about their experiences.

Lastly, since this is a qualitative study, although the reflexivity interviews helped me become more mindful of my subjectivity and assumptions, my biases as a researcher were likely to have impacted the way I interpreted the data and identified the themes that I deemed to be the most prominent (Ponterotto, 2005). Indeed, knowing that human interactions unfold uniquely with each individual, other researchers might encounter the same participants in a different manner, thus interpreting and presenting the data diversely. Therefore, in order to explicitly highlight my biases and experiences as much as possible, I tried to indicate my views and reactions that emerged with each participant's account, especially when the discussion broached complex and sensitive issues. Additionally, in mitigating my biases and enhancing the validity of this study, I constantly discussed my results and emergent themes with my supervisor and advisor (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, ensuring respondent validation (Cresswell, 2007), following completion of the analysis, I took the final results to two participants, which interpretations the latter endorsed.

Recommendations for future services

The children's lived experiences presented in this study, overshadowed by lack of shelter, protection and security, continued to validate and justify the Malta Association of Social Workers' urgent demand to the Maltese Government to enact the new Child Protection Legislation without any delay, and to set up appropriate services ensuring the protection of the most vulnerable members in our society (MASW as cited in Carabott, 2019). In line with this need and in view of extant literature, (eg. Beard et al., 2010; Maniduc, 2014; Severin et al., 2015) my research brought to light the fact that children of prostitutes are marginalized constituents in need of attention from authorities and professionals. Indeed, in spite of the fact

that prostitution is an activity that by nature renders women vulnerable to maternity (Maniduc, 2014) and that the local demand for prostitutes is extremely high (Costa, 2018), to date there are no local programmes that target the specific needs of mothers involved in prostitution and their children. The dearth of such programmes has been noted internationally (Shetty et al., 2017). Consequently, the recommendations of this study that I will be presenting hereunder can serve as a guide for practitioners in understanding, helping and supporting these children and their families better, as well as an advocating tool in meeting the needs of families.

My study has shone a light on the familial dynamics that needs to be taken into consideration when targeting the needs of children in this cohort. Indeed, whilst acknowledging the detrimental effects exposure to maternal prostitution has on children, one also needs to take into account that irrespective of these arduous experiences, findings from my study highlighted that children constantly yearned for their mother's love, acknowledgment and nurturance. Therefore, the primary intervention should be that of working systemically with families. In line with research (Dalla, 2003), I recommend that specifically designed services should address both the mothers' needs in their role as caregivers, as well as their children's protection needs. Creating a safe space where children could express themselves freely without fearing consequences that their mother would be criminalized for her engagement in prostitution, and where they feel that their concerns are taken seriously, could prevent children from enduring their difficulties alone without support. Additionally, further help should consist of promoting healthier parenting patterns by strengthening the mother-child attachment relationships and communication patterns, and by establishing stability within one's families. Services must also address the psychological needs of mothers, by targeting their own traumas and eventually helping them stop engaging in prostitution and other deviant behaviour.

In view of the shame and stigma associated with prostitution, one might wonder how these mothers and children are going to be reached. I recommend that as has been done successfully in other European countries (Bindel, 2017), the first step towards reaching this cohort is that as a country, Malta adopts the Nordic model approach. Researchers found that this approach reduces the shame and stigma associated with prostitution drastically as prostitutes are decriminalized whereas people who purchase the services are the ones criminalized (Schulze, Canto, Mason, & Skalin, 2014), thus making it somewhat easier for both mothers and children to reach out for help. Additionally, since in Malta, ten women on average are arraigned on charges of prostitution every year (personal communication, Cilia, 2018), action needs to be taken by the judiciary when sentencing these women to check whether they are mothers. I recommend that if these convicted women are mothers, court experts should assess and address their children's needs in the best way possible through a child's advocate and refer them as quickly as possible to the appropriate services. As has been highlighted by my research, most of the time these children's needs remain invisible, impacting strongly their development. Therefore, I strongly suggest that in order to improve these children's well-being, professionals need to advocate for their existence, views and needs to be rendered visible in different public contexts, such as courts and social services, amongst others.

When none of the above efforts in keeping the children with their mothers are sufficient, findings from my research suggest that in safeguarding the children's wellbeing it would be best if the latter are placed in alternative care. Shetty et al., (2017) argued that providing children with care continuity is a protective factor and thus should be confirmed as a priority. I suggest that professionals evaluate the possibility of kin care, or alternatively a foster care placement, leaving residential care for emergency cases only. As has been highlighted by Abela et al.,'s (2012) study, foster homes seem to be more conducive towards

the well-being of children when compared to residential care. Additionally, as has been emphasized by participants themselves, I suggest that in such cases, children be provided with regular contact visits with their family of origin accompanied by professionals so as to facilitate communication, such as expression of emotions and thoughts. I also suggest that in case of young children, therapists could help mothers and support caregivers in constructively explaining the reasons behind their out-of-home placement. Indeed, one of the participants stressed that if such information had been shared with him when he was younger, rather than left hidden, he would have been able to process things better while growing up. Lastly, therapists and social workers should conduct regular follow-ups so as to monitor the child's adjustment process and help them in processing traumatic experiences. Hopefully such therapeutic work would help children gain appropriate coping mechanisms and lower the chances of them following their mother's footsteps and resorting to drug use.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since this topic is an under-researched area, more information is required in order to better understand the needs and challenges experienced by children whose mothers are involved in prostitution. Since the implications on the mother-child relationship are barely mentioned in extant literature, other research projects could investigate my findings in more depth. This could be done by examining the kind of interactions and attachment patterns between mothers and their children, both when the latter are minors as well as during adulthood. Additionally, one could also examine the dynamics and effects of this same relationship after mother's cessation in prostitution. It would prove a more rigorous research exercise if participants were followed longitudinally so that one could appraise how their experiences and cognitions change over time.

Other research examining the experiences of siblings within the same family could highlight if there are differences in the siblings' perceptions and experiences of their mother's involvement in prostitution. Such research could bring to light the factors that contribute to such dissimilarities, possibly examining their familial relationships and the differences in coping mechanisms and protective factors. Their contribution to the differences in the resilience of each sibling could also be assessed

It would also be interesting to investigate the different perceptions of this phenomenon by triangulating data. Future researchers could interview mothers on their perception of their children's experience of their involvement in prostitution and subsequently compare them to the children's own perceptions and if possible also to those of kin or other caregivers. Perhaps, such a study would shed light on what contributes to differences in perceptions, if there are any, and how different parties can come to understand the others' point of view.

Conclusion

I will remain forever grateful to the participants who accepted to be part of this study, who gladly shared their stories and granted me a glimpse into their worlds. Through their trust I was allowed to understand better the process and dynamics that occurred in their families and in their societal systems as they were growing up, and the effect the latter had on their adult selves.

As this journey ends, I will hold close to my heart the participants' fervour, the resilience and the insights they provided me with, as a reminder of strength and as a tool for continuing to advocate for the need of developing the adequate services and interventions. I hope that these services would mitigate adverse effects of experiences on children in similar circumstances, providing them with sufficient opportunities for better life trajectories.

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Appendix A

Ethical Approval Letters



Friends of Thouret

VO No: 1365

Dar Hosegha

Dar Hosegha

PO Box 17

Date: 28th May 2018

Dear Monique

This is to confirm that I have accepted to your proposed work with young adults whose mother was caught in prostitution. I will be gate-keeping your access to these clients and only after giving their consent freely and without any undue pressure will you be able to contact these clients.

I also confirm that if during your interviews, any of the clients feel distressed, they can be referred to a counsellor from Dar Hosegha

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Maria Vella', written over a light-colored background.

Dr Anna Maria Vella



Foundation for Social Welfare Services
212, Cannon Road,
Santa Venera SVR 9034

31st May 2018

Witamy
Damascus Street
Munxar, Gozo

Ref no: 526/1

To whom it may concern

Monique Debrincat's request to conduct research within the services of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services has been reviewed. The research aims to conduct 'A retrospective study of the lived experience of children whose mother engages in prostitution.'

After reviewing this request, the Research Office has given approval for the researcher to conduct interviews.

Although the Research Office has approved the research, the service providers and participants still retain the right to refuse any research request.

Regards,

Ronald Balzan

Ronald Balzan

Research Executive

INCORPORATING:

Agenzija APPOGG

Agenzija SEDQA


Agenzija LEAP

Tel: 2295 9000 Fax: 21 225354 URL: www.appogg.gov.mt

Tel: 23885110 Fax: 21 441029 URL: www.sedqa.gov.mt

URL: <https://fsws.gov.mt/en/leap/Pages/default.aspx>



<u>Section to be completed by FSWS Research Review Panel ONLY</u>	
We have examined the above proposal and advise	
Approval	Conditional Acceptance
Refusal	
For the following reason/s if any:	
Approval is being given for the study to be conducted within Aġenzija Appoġġ. An interview can be conducted with 6 – 8 individuals:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whose mothers engaged in prostitution when participants were under the age of 16; • who are now 18 years or older. 	
The student is to prepare a recruitment letter and send it to the undersigned. It will then be distributed amongst Adult Services within Aġenzija Appoġġ so that any Service which might be aware of participants who satisfy the above criteria, might invite them to participate.	
Important Disclaimer: Even though the request is being approved, Aġenzija Appoġġ and FSWS cannot guarantee that potential participants will be found or that they would want to take part in the research study	
 Signature	
Date: 31st May 2018	
<u>Note: If conditionally accepted, the recommended changes must be confirmed with the Research Office before the research can proceed.</u>	
<u>Section to be completed by the Research Office for Conditionally Accepted Research ONLY.</u>	
The recommended changes stipulated by the Conditional Acceptance have not been implemented and these changes have not been confirmed by the Research Office. As a result of these changes the research is now Refused . . <input type="checkbox"/>	
The recommended changes stipulated by the Conditional Acceptance have been implemented and these changes have been confirmed by the Research Office. As a result of these changes the research is now Approved . . <input type="checkbox"/>	
Signature _____ Date _____	
<i>If Accepted/Conditionally Accepted to whom the study will be directed:</i>	
The Unit/s:	
The person/s referred Ronald Balzan – Research Executive	Contact details ronald.balzan@gov.mt

Foundation for Social Welfare Services

212, Cannon Road, Santa Venera SVR 9034

Tel: 22588000; Fax: 22588939

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Correspondence with Corradiono Correctional Facility

To the director - dissertation participants 



Monique Debrincat <monique.debrincat.11@um.edu.mt>
to admin.ccf ▾

Fri, 16 Nov, 10:32



Dear Director,

I hope this email finds you well. I am Monique DeBrincat and I am currently reading for the Masters in Counselling Psychology at the university of Malta.

I am interested in carrying out my dissertation on the lived experience of children whose mothers have engaged in prostitution. Dr Daniel Mercieca and Ms Nayda Abdilla will be supervising this research which will take a retrospective stance, inviting participants to narrate some of the experiences they recall of living with their mother. The aim of this research is to get a better understanding of the daily difficulties, needs and coping mechanisms of these youngsters.

In view of the above, I would like to kindly request your permission with recruiting participants for my research, perhaps with the help of the CCF social workers. Participants would be aged 18 years and over and would be children of mothers who have engaged or is still engaging in prostitution. Participation would involve an interview, lasting approximately one hour.

Whilst thanking you in advance, I look forward to your reply, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions.

Yours sincerely,
Monique DeBrincat

99021593

 Reply

 Forward



Lia Saviour A at MHAS <saviour.a.lia@gov.mt>
to me, Zammit ▾

Tue, 27 Nov, 14:37



Dear Ms. Debrincat,

Thanks for your email. We are willing to collaborate on your research. I would suggest that we hold a meeting to discuss further. Would you be available to meet next Monday sometime in the afternoon please?

Kind Regards,

Saviour Lia
Correctional Manager
Care and re-integration unit
Correctional Services Division



MINISTRY FOR HOME AFFAIRS
AND NATIONAL SECURITY

t +356 21691428 e saviour.a.lia@gov.mt
www.homeaffairs.gov.mt | www.publicservice.gov.mt
Valletta 2018 - European Capital of Culture www.valletta2018.org
Kindly consider your environmental responsibility before printing this e-mail

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES DIVISION,
CORRADINO CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES,
TRIQ IL-BELT VALLETTA, PAOLA, MALTA

From: Monique Debrincat [<mailto:monique.debrincat.11@um.edu.mt>]

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM FOR PROFESSIONALS

Supervisors Email: dmerc04@um.edu.mt, nadya.abdilla@gmail.com

Mr Daniel Mercieca; Visiting lecturer, Faculty of Social Wellbeing, Department of Psychology, University of Malta

Ms Nadya Abdilla, Visiting Assistant lecturer, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, University of Malta

Student Email – monique.debrincat.11@um.edu.mt

Monique Debrincat

Mobile Number: *****

Research Title: *A retrospective study of the lived experience of children whose mother engages in prostitution.*

Rationale

During my four-year experience as a Child Protection worker, I have met and worked with children facing various challenges. From time to time, I used to work with mothers involved in prostitution as well as their children. I became very interested in the children's experience of living and being cared for by a mother who is prostituting herself. Although, I have terminated my job there, I had another opportunity to work with children born out of prostitution as I was volunteering in India. As I returned back to Malta, these experiences left me thinking and rekindled my interest in investigating this topic further.

Recently the Maltese government has begun to contemplate a reform to the laws surrounding prostitution and has indicated an interest in developing a policy framework to this industry (Grech, 2018). Most often as can be observed from various articles in local newspapers such as Azzopardi (2018) and Carabott (2017), the discussions around this topic generally focus on the persons involved in prostitution. This is also echoed in the literature (Baker, Dalla & Williamson, 2010; Dalla 2000,2002; Mellor & Lovell, 2012). Beard et al., (2010) and Servin et al., (2015) maintain that little emphasis, if any is given to the thoughts, feelings and ideas of their children. Influenced by my previous experiences, I frequently questioned and reflected on the effects that a mother's engagement in prostitution could have on the children themselves.

Aims

This study will attempt to answer the question: "What is the lived experience of children whose mothers engaged in prostitution whilst they were still minors?"

- How has the experience of living with a mother who engages in prostitution effected the participants perception of their lifestyle?
- How has this experience effected the participants' past and present relationships?
- How has the participants' understanding of their resilient factors supported them through their experience?

Guarantees

- a. All participants will be protected by confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used and any identifying information provided will be excluded from the written accounts of this study.

- b. Participants will be informed of their right that they can withdraw or change their data till 10th March, 2018 without providing reasons for choosing to do so.
- c. Interviews will be audio taped for the sole purpose of this study; they will be stored in a safe place and upon completion of this research, all recorded material will be disposed of safely.
- d. The supervisors of this study, Mr Daniel Mercieca and Ms Nadya Abdilla, may request to view some of the data collected.

Risks and Benefits

Participants might benefit from participating in this study as their stories and experiences will be validated and affirmed through the whole research process, hence they might feel that their experience is being valued and seen as unique and meaningful.

Their participation will also hopefully contribute to local and international knowledge, and they would be contributing in giving a voice to others living in the same situation, since this cohort is significantly underrepresented in research. Moreover, the participants' perceived experiences and how they made sense of various events in their life, might educate the wider population in understanding further their reality.

Given the possibility that participants may show signs of distress during the interviews, I will opt to interview adults who have a supportive network, including you as a professional who is referring them. This decision was informed by literature which showed that social support offers a secure base in helping to reduce anxiety and foster the development of self-efficacy, which aids in building resilience (Dodsworth, 2012; Howe, 2005). Moreover, as I discussed this possibility with Dr Vella from Dar Hosegha, with the management's agreement she offered therapeutic and social support if needed by any of the participants you might refer.

I, the undersigned, agree with the guarantees of this research and agree to refer participants for this study with the full knowledge of the purpose and the procedures of the research.

Signature of Professional _____

Signature of Researcher

M. DeBaincat
MANIQUE DEBAINCAT

Signature of Supervisor



Date: _____

IL-FORMOLA TAL-KUNSENS GĦALL-PROFESSJONISTI

Indirizz Elettroniku tas-*Supervisors*– dmerc04@um.edu.mt, nadya.abdilla@gmail.com

Mr Daniel Mercieca; Visiting lecturer, Faculty of Social Wellbeing, Department of Psychology, University of Malta

Ms Nadya Abdilla, Assistant Visiting lecturer, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, University of Malta

Indirizz Elettroniku tal- istudenta – monique.debrincat.11@um.edu.mt

Monique Debrincat

Numru tal-mowbajl: *****

Titlu tar-Ricerka: *L-esperjenza retrospettiva tat-tfal li ommhom kienet involuta fil-prostituzzjoni.*

Prinċipji

Matul l-esperjenza tiegħi ta' erba' snin bħala haddiem għall-Ħarsien tat-Tfal, iltqajt u hdimt mat-tfal li qed jaffaċċjaw diversi sfidi. Minn żmien għal żmien, kont nahdem ma' ommijiet involuti fil-prostituzzjoni kif ukoll mat-tfal tagħhom. Interessajt ruhi hafna fl-esperjenza tat-tfal u tal-għajxien u l-kura tagħhom minn omm involuta fil-prostituzzjoni. Ghalkemm, temmejt ix-xogħol tiegħi hemm, kelli opportunità oħra biex nahdem ma' tfal imwielda fl-istess sitwazzjoni meta kont qed nagħmel volontarjat gewwa l-Indja. Hekk kif ġejt lura Malta, indunajt kemm dawn l-esperjenzi hallew impatt fuqi u reggħu qajmu l-interess tiegħi li ninvestiga aktar dan is-sugġett.

Ricentement, il-gvern Malti beda jaħseb dwar riforma għal-liġijiet marbuta mal-prostituzzjoni (Grech, 2018). Hafna drabi, kif jista' jiġi osservat minn diversi artikli f'gazzetti lokali bħal Azzopardi (2018) u Carabott (2017), id-diskussjonijiet dwar dan is-suġġett generalment jiffokaw fuq il-persuni involuti fil-prostituzzjoni direttament. Dan huwa wkoll imtenni fil-letteratura (Baker, Dalla & Williamson, 2010; Dalla 2000,2002; Mellor & Lovell, 2012). Beard et al., (2010) u Servin et al., (2015) li jsostnu li f'it enfasi tingħata lill-ħsibijiet, sentimenti u ideat ta' wliedhom. Influwenzata mill-esperjenzi preċedenti tiegħi, spiss staqsajt u rrifletejt fuq l-effetti li l-involviment ta' omm fil-prostituzzjoni jista' jkollu fuq uliedha.

Ghanijiet

Dan l-istudju mmirat li jwieġeb il-mistoqsija: "X'inhom l-esperjenza tat-tfal li ommhom kienet involuta fil-prostituzzjoni meta huma kienu għadhom minuri?"

- L-esperjenza li tgħix ma' omm involuta fil-prostituzzjoni kif affettwat il-mod kif għexu l-partecipanti?
- Din l-esperjenza kif affettwat ir-relazzjonijiet prezenti u passati tal-partecipanti?
- B'liema mod il-partecipanti rnexxielhom jaffaċċjaw u jaffrontaw l-esperjenzi li għaddew minnhom?

Garanziji

a. Il-partecipanti ser ikunu protetti mill-kunfidenzjalità. L-identità tagħhom mhux ser tkun assoċjata mas-sejbiet ta' din ir-riċerka. L-ismijiet ser jinbidlu, u kull tagħrif marbut mal-identità tal-persuna mhux ser jitnizzel bil-miktub f'dan l-istudju.

b. Il-partecipanti ser jiġu infurmati dwar id-dritt tagħhom li sal-10 ta' Marzu 2018, huma jistgħu jirtiraw jew ibiddu xi informazzjoni mill-istudju għal kwalunkwe raġuni, mingħajr ma jkollhom għalfejn jipprovdu raġuni għal dan.

c. L-intervisti ser jiġu rrekordjati għall-iskop uniku ta' dan l-istudju u ser jiġu merfugħa f' post sigur. Malli titlesta din ir-riċerka, il-materjal registrat ser jiġi meqrud b'mod sikur.

d. Is-*supervisors* ta' dan l-istudju, is-Sur Daniel Mercieca u s-Sinjura Nayda Abdilla, jistgħu jistaqsu sabiex jaraw xi materjal miġbur matul l-intervisti.

Riskji u Benefiċċji

Il-parteċipanti jistgħu jibbenefikaw milli jipparteċipaw f'dan l-istudju peress li l-istejjer u l-esperjenzi tagħhom se jiġu vvalidati u affermati permezz tal-proċess tar-riċerka kollha. Huma jistgħu jhossu li l-esperjenza tagħhom qed tiġi vvalutata u meqjusa bħala unika u sinifikanti.

Permezz tal-parteċipazzjoni tagħhom nittama li tikkontribwixxi għall-għarfien lokali u internazzjonali. Huma ser ikunu qed jikkontribwixxu biex jagħtu vuċi lill-oħrajn li jgħixu fl-istess sitwazzjoni. Barra minn hekk, l-esperjenzi tal-parteċipanti u kif dawn għamlu sens minn diversi avvenimenti fil-ħajja tagħhom, jistgħu jedukaw lill-popolazzjoni ġenerali biex tifhem aħjar ir-realtà tagħhom.

Minħabba l-possibbiltà li l-parteċipanti jistgħu juru sinjali ta' stress matul l-intervisti, ser nintervista lill-adulti li għandhom sapport u appoġġ, inkluż lilek bħala professjonist li qed tirreferihom. Wasalna għal din id-deċiżjoni mil-letteratura li wriet li l-appoġġ soċjali joffri bażi sigura biex tgħin tnaqqas l-ansjetà u tgħin fil-bini tar-reżistenza (Dodsworth, 2012; Howe, 2005). Barra minn hekk, din il-possibbiltà kienet diskussa ma' Dr Vella minn Dar Hosegha, li bi ftehim tal-manigment hija offriet appoġġ terapewtiku u soċjali jekk meħtieġ minn kwalunkwe parteċipant li jiġi referut.

Jien hawn taht niffirma li naqbel mal-garanziji ta' din ir-ricerka. Naqbel ukoll li nirreferi parteċipanti sabiex jieħdu sehem f' din ir-ricerka b'għarfien sħiħ tal-għan u l-proċeduri ta' dan l-istudju.

Firma tal-Professjonist/a _____

Firma tar-Ricerkatriċi

M. DeBeincat
MANIQUE DEBEINCAT

Firma tas-Supervisor



Data: _____

Appendix C

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Research

After having worked with several youngsters over the years, some of whom had mothers who were involved in prostitution, I became increasingly interested in what children think about such experience. I have realised that most of the information about this topic is focused on the persons involved in prostitution and little emphasis, if any is given to the thoughts, feelings and ideas of their children.

I appreciate that this issue is rather sensitive and delicate, thus I would like to invite you to take part in a one hour interview, were we would be discussing your experience, needs and resilient factors . I will also be doing this with seven other adults who had gone through such experience in their childhood or teenage years.

The Interview

The interview will last about one hour where I will be asking you some questions about your experience. The interview will take place at a location that is convenient to you. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to give as much information as you wish and you also have the right to choose not to answer to questions that you feel uncomfortable doing so. You may quit at any time without having to give me a reason. Moreover, until the 10th of March 2018, you may choose to ask me to change or remove the information that you have given me during the interview without any consequences.

All the information you share during this interview will remain confidential. Your name will be replaced with a fictitious name throughout the written account of the interview.

This interview will be audio recorded, so that when I write about your experience I will be as faithful to your verbal account as possible. Nobody, apart from the researcher (me) and the supervisors, will have access to the recordings of the interview. All data will be gathered according to the Data Protection Act Principles and will be stored in a safe place until the dissertation is evaluated and a mark is given, after which the interview recordings will be deleted and destroyed.

By taking part in this interview and sharing your story, you may benefit from feeling affirmed and validated, as you might feel that your experience is being valued as unique and meaningful. Through your participation, you will be helping me in giving a voice to others who are living or lived in the same situation. Moreover, you would be helping me in educating the wider population and further their understanding about your reality.

Given the possibility that you may show any signs of distress during the interviews, I can offer you the possibility of therapeutic and social support from therapists and social workers at Dar Hosegha for free. Moreover, I can help you contact any professionals that you feel comfortable with and you feel that they can offer you the support that you need.

If you wish to ask any further questions, and if you wish to participate in this study, please feel free to contact me on *****. You can also email me on monique.debrincat.11@um.edu.mt; or my supervisor on dmerc04@um.edu.mt.

Thank you!

M. DeBaincat
MONIQUE DEBRINCAT

Ms Monique DeBrincat

M.Psy Student, University of Malta



Mr Daniel Mercieca

Supervisor, University of Malta

TAGHRIF GHALL –PARTEĊIPANTI

Ir-Riċerka

Matul dawn l-aħħar snin, ħdimt ma' diversi tfal u zgħażaġh li wħud minnhom kellhom ommijiet li, jaħdmu fil-prostituzzjoni. Bdejt ninterssa ruħi aktar biex ninforma ruħi dwar kif dawn it-tfal u z-zgħażaġh setgħu għexu u għamlu sens minn din l-esperjenza. Indunajt li d-diskussjonijiet u r-riċerka dwar dan is-sugġett generalment jiffokaw fuq il-persuni involuti fil-prostituzzjoni u ftit li xejn hemm tagħrif fuq il-ħsibijiet, l-emozzjonijiet u l-ideat tat-tfal tagħhom.

Napprezza l-fatt li din hija kwistjoni pjuttost sensitiva u delikata. Għaldaqstant, għażilt li nisma' l-esperjenza ta' seba' adulti li għexu din l-esperjenza fit-tfulija/fl-adolessenza tagħhom, u nixtieq nistiednek biex tkun wieħed/waħda minnhom. Dan se jsir permezz ta' intervista, ta' madwar siegħa. Dawn l-intervisti ser ikunu dwar l-esperjenza tiegħek, il-ħtiġijiet u r-reżiljenzi ta' tfal bħalek, f'ċirkustanzi bħal dawn

L-Intervista

L-intervista tieħu madwar siegħa; fiha ser nistaqsik xi mistoqsijiet dwar l-esperjenza tiegħek. Din l-intervista se ssir f'post li hu konvenjenti għalik. Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju hija għalkollox volontarja. Inti libera/u li tagħti l-informazzjoni li tixtieq u kemm tixtieq; inti għandek ukoll id-dritt li tagħzel li ma twegibx għal xi mistoqsijiet li jsirulek. Sa l-10 ta' Marzu 2018, inti tista' tagħzel li tbiddel l-informazzjoni li tajt jew ittemm is-sehem tiegħek f'din ir-riċerka mingħajr ma jkun meħtieġ li tagħti ebda spjegazzjoni u mingħajr ebda konsegwenzi għalik.

Kull informazzjoni mogħtija waqt din l-intervista tibqa' kunfidenzjali. Ismek ser jiġi mibdul f'isem fittizju li se jintuza fil-gabra ta' tagħrif bil-miktub ta' din l-intervista.

Din l-intervista ser tiġi rrekordjata permezz ta' 'audio-tape', sabiex it-tagħrif miġbur bil-miktub ikun kemm jista' jkun leali lejn it-tagħrif mogħti verbalment. Hadd aktar, minbarra r-riċerkatur (jiena) u s-*supervisor*, ma jista' jkollu aċċess għar-'recordings' ta' din l-intervista. Dawn ir- 'recordings' ser ikunu miġbura f' post sigur sakemm din ir-riċerka tiġi evalwata u mogħtija marka. Wara li jsir dan, ir-'recordings' ser jiġu distrutti.

Permezz ta' din ir-riċerka, inti tista' tibbenifika billi tħossok utli. Permezz tal-partecipazzjoni tiegħek, inti tkun qed tgħinni nagħti vuċi lil oħrajn li qed jgħixu jew għexu fl-istess sitwazzjoni tiegħek. Barra minn hekk, inti tkun qed tgħinni nzid l-għarfien u l-edukazzjoni tal-poplu fuq din ir-realtà'.

Minħabba l-possibbiltà li tista' turi xi sinjali ta' stress matul l-intervisti, jiena nista' noffrilek il-possibbiltà ta' appoġġ terapewtiku u soċjali minn terapisti u haddiema soċjali f'Dar Hosegha b'xejn. Barra minn hekk, nista' ngħinek tikkuntattja lil kwalunkwe professjonist li tħossok komdu miegħu/magħha u tħoss li jistgħu joffrulek l-appoġġ li għandek bżonn.

Jekk tixtieq tagħmel xi mistoqsijiet, u jekk tixtieq tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju, jekk jogħġbok, ħossok libera/u li tikkuntattjani fuq in-numru *****. Tista' wkoll tibgħat imejl fuq monique.debrincat.11@um.edu.mt; jew lis-*supervisor* tiegħi fuq dmerc04@um.edu.mt.

Grazzi ħafna!

M. DeBrincat
MONIQUE DEBRINCAT



Ms Monique DeBrincat

Mr Daniel Mercieca

Studenta tal-M.Psy, Università' ta' Malta

Supervisor, Università' ta' Malta

Appendix D

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

The information below refers to your participation in this study, confirming that you are aware of your rights and that you have been given enough information to make an informed decision about your participation.

Mark \surd as applicable.

1. I have received information about the study.
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
3. I have been given enough information and opportunity to decide whether I would like to participate in this study.
4. I understand that the interviews will be recorded and this information will be used for the sole purpose of this study.
5. I am aware that all personal information will remain confidential to the researcher
6. I understand that my name will be changed in the written account.
7. I understand that quotations may be used in the written account of the study and that these will be anonymous.
8. I understand that the data can be used for publication, however under no circumstances my identity will be revealed.
9. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary.
10. I understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time, without judgement and without having to give an explanation for my withdrawal from this study.

11. I understand that my information will be stored in a safe place and will be kept until the study is evaluated and marked. Afterwards all data will be destroyed.

12. I am happy to proceed with my participation in this study.

Name _____

Signature _____

Contact Number _____

Date _____

M. DeBeincatt
MONIQUE DEBEINCAT



Signature of Researcher

Signature of Supervisor

IL-FORMOLA TAL-KUNSENS GĦALL-PARTEĊIPANTI

L-informazzjoni t'hawn taht qed tirreferi għall-parteci-pazzjoni tieghek f'din ir-ricerka, biex tikkonferma li inti taf x'inhuma d-drittijiet tieghek; u li taf ukoll li inti ngħatajt tagħrif bizzejjed biex tiddeċiedi għandekx tipparteċipa f'dan it-tahrig jew le.

Immarka b'✓ fejn japplika.

1. Irċevejt bizzejjed tagħrif dwar dan l-istudju.
2. Kelli ċ-ċans bizzejjed biex nistaqsi dwar din ir-ricerka.
3. Inghatajt bizzejjed tagħrif u opportunita biex niddeċiedi jekk irridx niehu sehem f'dan l-istudju jew le.
4. Nifhem li l-intervisti se jigu rrekordjati, u li l-informazzjoni migbura se tintuza biss għall-iskop ta' dan l-istudju.
5. Naf li kull informazzjoni personali se tibqa' kunfidenzjali mar-ricerkatrici biss.
6. Ismi se jigi mibdul waqt li qed tingabar din l-informazzjoni.
7. Nifhem li xi siltiet minn dak li ngħid jistghu jigu miktuba, imma dawn iridu jibqghu anonimi.
8. Nifhem li l-informazzjoni tista' tintuza għall-pubblikazzjoni, izda taht l-ebda ċirkostanza l-identita tieghi ma tigi zvelata.
9. Nifhem li l-parteci-pazzjoni tieghi f'dan l-istudju hija volontarja.
10. Naf ukoll li nista' nieqaf niehu sehem fl-intervista meta jidhirli jien, minghajr pregudizzju, u minghajr ma jkun hemm għalfejn naghti ebda spjegazzjoni biex ma nkomplix niehu sehem f'din ir-ricerka.

11. Nifhem li l-informazzjoni tiegħi ser tingabar f'post sigur u tinzamm sakemm l-istudju jiġi evalwat u mmarkat. Wara, l-informazzjoni kollha se tinqered.

12. Ninsab kuntent/a li nagħti sehmi f'dan l-istudju.

Isem _____

Firma _____

Numru tat-telefown / mowbajl _____

Data _____

Firma tar-Ricerkatriċi

M. DeBencat
MONIQUE DEBENCAT

Firma tas-Supervisor



Appendix E

The participants

Nathalie⁴ is a 25-year-old woman whom I met at a drug rehabilitation programme. Her mother had been involved in prostitution since before Nathalie was born and unlike her two siblings, the latter had always lived in the same household with her mother, with some brief periods in different residential care homes. Nathalie continually highlighted the tense relationship she had with her mother, claiming that at times she even engaged in physical arguments with her. Although Nathalie has abused of drugs in the past, has been involved in prostitution herself as well as incarcerated, she is currently in the last phases of a drug rehabilitation programme and has been abstinent of drugs for the past year and a half.

Simon is a 21-year-old man who has been living with his paternal aunt since he was one years old. When he was born, his mother was 18 years of age, involved in prostitution and with a drug addiction problem. His late father was also a drug and an alcohol abuser, however when Simon was born, the latter changed his lifestyle. Simon explained that although his mother's visits were always inconsistent and still are, he has now got used to them and tries his best to keep up a relationship with his mother. For a brief period of time Simon resorted to drugs and resided at his mother's house, however he is now in a stable intimate relationship has a good payed job and aims to rent a place so as to start living more independently.

Amber is a 28-year-old woman. She is the second child amongst 3 other half-brothers. Amber explained that she has always lived with her mother, except for a few instances of living in residential homes. As she was growing up, due to her mother's lifestyle Amber was severely

⁴ All names are fictitious

abused by her mother's partner. She has resorted to both drugs and prostitution; however, she is currently involved in Dar Hosea, making use of the different support services they offer.

Jason is a 32-year-old man, has lived in different residential homes for the first 13 years of their life. He said that due to his mother's lifestyle he was severely abused by her multiple partners, was estranged from his immediate family and will never know who his father is. Jason believes that these experiences led him to his drug addiction, describing the latter as a means of lashing out his anger. Engaging in various criminal activities that enabled him to buy drugs, he ended up serving a 10-year prison sentence. Presently, Jason has minimal contact with anyone in his family, is abstinent of drugs and has been in a stable relationship for the past four years.

Diane is a 21-year-old woman who has spent most of her years residing in different residential homes. She is the second daughter amongst six siblings. Despite her mother's shortcomings in her upbringing, Diane believes that since she has been living with her, they managed to work on their relationship, and are trying to make up for the lost years. She said that she does not have a good relationship with her father, never had and does not plan on having one in the future. Diane has a full-time job and helps her mother with the care taking of her younger siblings.

Maria is a 50-year transwoman whom I met in prison and has been identifying with the female gender for the past 36 years. Maria described that prostitution has been an intergenerational factor in her family. Her great grandmother, her grandparents, her parents, as well as herself have always been involved in prostitution. She explained that her father died when she was 2 years old, and to make ends meet her mother involved herself in prostitution. Maria has always lived with her mother when she was a child, and the latter has always provided her with what she needed. She was 15 years old when she became involved in

prostitution and soon after she began to make use of drugs. She will be out of prison in the coming months and is determined to make a change in her life; she is taking private lessons, looking for a job and a new place to live in.

Lisa is 24-year-old woman whom I also met in prison. She explained that she had been incarcerated three times and at the time of the interview she was serving an 11-month sentence. Lisa's mother has always been involved in prostitution, even before she was born, and as a result, the latter resided with her maternal grandmother for the first 13 years of her life. Later, Lisa went to live her mother who exposed her to the lifestyle she was involved in, until she was incarcerated. Few months after, Lisa followed her mother's footsteps and began to make use of drugs and involved herself in prostitution. Lisa does not have a good relationship with her father, neither with her half-siblings.

Roberta is a 48-year-old transwoman and has been identifying with the female gender for the past 35 years. Roberta described that prostitution has been an intergenerational factor in her family. Her mother was involved in prostitution, as were all her female siblings. She explained that as from birth she resided in various residential homes and used to find it traumatising to return to her mother's house during the weekends. The latter, abused her both emotionally and physically for a long period of time. At the age of 14 Roberta left her home, became involved in prostitution and resorted to drug abuse. She has been incarcerated numerous times, however, presently Roberta lives independently, is not involved in prostitution anymore, has a stable job and has been abstinent from drugs for the past 4 years.

Appendix F

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Demographic information

Prior to discussing your experience, I would like to ask you some general questions about yourself

Age _____

Gender _____

In-Depth Interview Questions

Overarching Question: What was it like growing up as a child?

1. You can start by mentioning the most vivid memory or feeling you have.
2. Can you talk about any positive/negative childhood memories that you might have?
3. How do you describe your upbringing?
4. How did you experience your mother's way of life?
5. Where there any changes that took place in your life as a result of this?
6. Can you describe your relationship with your mother and father?
7. Can you tell me about your relationship with your family members (i.e. father, brothers, sisters, aunties & uncles, grandparents) or other people who played a role in your upbringing?
8. Do you think your childhood experiences influences your life today? If yes, in what way? If no, how come?
9. How has this experience effected your past and present relationships?
10. After talking about your childhood experiences, what do you think would have been helpful?

Prompts

1. Were there persons in your life that have helped you throughout this experience?
2. What was your experience of other people's reaction to your mother's way of life?
3. What was your experience of being interviewed ?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add before ending?

GWIDA GHALL-INTERVISTA

Informazzjoni Demografika

Qabel ma ngħaddu għall-esperjenza tiegħek, nixtieq nistaqsik xi mistoqsijiet dwar ek
innifsek:

Eta' _____

Sess/Ġeneru _____

Mistoqsijiet għall-Intervista

Mistoqsija Predominanti: Kif kienet l-esperjenza tat-trobbija tiegħek?

1. Tista' tibda billi ssemmi l-iktar memorji friski jew emozzjonijiet li għandek.
2. Tista' tiddekrivi xi memorji pożittivi/negattivi tat-tfulija li kellek?
3. Kif tiddekrivi t-trobbija tiegħek?
4. Kif esperjenzajt l-istil tal-ħajja ta' ommok?
5. Kien hemm xi bidliet f'ħajtek li sehhew minhabba dan?
6. Tista' tiddekrivi r-relazzjoni tiegħek ma' ommok u missierek matul iż-żmien?
7. Tista' tiddekrivi r-relazzjoni tiegħek ma' membri oħra tal-familja (ħutek, zijiet, nanniet) jew persuni oħra li kienu ta' importanza fit-trobbija tiegħek?
8. Tahseb li l-esperjenzi ta' tfulitek affettwaw il-ħajja tiegħek, anke dik preżenti? Jekk iva kif?
9. Kif tahseb li din l-istess esperjenza affettwat ir-relazzjonijiet preżenti u passati tiegħek?
10. Wara li tkellimt dwar l-esperjenzi tat-tfulija tiegħek, x'tahseb li kieku kien ikun ta' għajjnuna f'dak iż-żmien ?

Mistoqsijiet addizzjonali

1. Kien hemm xi persuni li għenuk matul din l-esperjenza?
2. Kif kienet l-esperjenza tiegħek għar-reazzjoni ta' nies oħrajn minhabba l-stil ta' ħajja li kienet tgħix ommok?
3. Kif esperjenzajt din l-intervista?
4. Hemm xi haġa oħra li tixtieq iżżid qabel ma nagħlqu?

Appendix G

An Excerpt from Jason's Analysis

Annotations (Initial Thoughts)	Transcript	Emergent Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They used to be physically abused all the time by their mother • Why was she constantly abusive to them? • Always feeling on edge and frightened • They constantly had to suffer the consequences of her actions – she has put the packet somewhere else, yet they had to suffer the consequences because they did not find it • Contradiction – she says they are in one place and they would be in another place • Justifying his mother's behaviour – he wants to protect her • Neither him, nor his brother they do not want 	<p>J: Heq mela, il-hin kollu. Ezempju tibagħtek għas-sigaretti, tghidlek, "Mur gibli s-sigaretti minn fuq il-komodina." Tmur hemm u ma ssibhomx hemm inti. Ikunu ġol-kexxun. Jekk int mintix tarahom fuq il-komodina, x'għandi x'naqsam fejn għamilthom int? Tghidlek, "Ha nitla u ha nsawwtek," u inti taqbad tihhasilja biex issibu dal-pakkett. Imma mhux qed tara xejn hemmhekk, qed tifhem? Ara kif tispicċa tbellaħlek mohħok, qed tifhem? U nsomma titla' u taqla' xeba. Ghax hi tiftaħ il-kexxun u ssibhom hemm, heq, dawn l-affarijiet.</p> <p>Jiena nemmen li bl-stress li qalghet ġol-hajja tagħha ta iġifieri, pero' b'dak l-atteġjament tilfet żewġt itfal, fhimtha ommi? Ghax illum il-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant physical abuse • Feeling on edge all the time • Suffering consequences of mother's actions • Living with contradiction • Family protection • No relationship with mother

<p>to have a relationship with her</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of recollection, trying to make sense of why his mother treated him the way she did • He does not want to keep up a relationship with his mother – way too hurt? • He could not understand the reason why his mother acted the way she did. Because she had suffered why did they have to suffer as well? Sense of injustice • No relationship with his mother – he chose what it best for him, perhaps being without her is what serves him best. She might have hurt him way too much. A way of coping? A way of protecting one self? 	<p>ġurnata kemm jien u kemm hija kemm jista' jkun inwarrbuha 'l hemm.</p> <p>M: M'għandkomx relazzjoni magħha.</p> <p>J: Lanqas xejn. U meta, ha nkun onest miegħek, ġieli ċċempel u tagħmel dak ix-xahar inċemplu lil xulxin imbagħad naqbad u nerga naqtaha. Ghax orajt, jekk hi bagħtiet, ejja naghmluha jekk jien bagħtejt, għalfejn għandhom jehlu n-nies miegħi? Fhimtha l-biċċa? Iġifieri...u hi hekk bdiet tagħmel qed tifhem? Ghax bagħtiet hi rridu nbagħtu magħha ahna.</p> <p>M: Bdejt看 teħlu ma rasha intom.</p> <p>J: Allura, illum il-ġurnata għażilna li nzommu d-distanza minnha...lil omni.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of recollection-trying to make sense of why his mother treated him the way she did • Sense of injustice and unfairness • He does not want a relationship with his mother • In order to cope – no relationship with mother • Choosing what is best for oneself
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Appendix H

Research Findings in Maltese

Introduction

In this chapter I shall be presenting the participants' experiences by exploring the most pertinent findings that emerged from the interviews. Prior to delving into each theme, I will be providing a general overview of the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the analysis, in order to provide a broad summary of the whole picture.

Presentation of Superordinate and Subordinate themes

Master List	
Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Enduring Traumatic Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My childhood was painful and chaotic 2. I was neglected, physically and sexually abused and I often witnessed domestic violence 3. When I tried to speak up about the abuse, no one believed me 4. I never felt I was a priority. I was constantly abandoned 5. I was ashamed, stigmatized and labelled
Exposure to deviant lifestyle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My mother's involvement in prostitution 2. I was exposed to my mother's prostitution 3. My mother was a drug user

Child's engagement in deviant lifestyle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sense of recollection - trying to make sense of what led to my engagement in this lifestyle 2. I resorted to drug use 3. I was a prostitute 4. The high price I paid for engaging in prostitution 5. My mother's reaction 6. I was incarcerated
Mother-child relationship – Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and neglect	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I couldn't take it any more - I had to leave home 2. My mother wanted to take care of me, but she was constrained 3. My experience of living in residential care 4. I was the one paying the consequences for my mother's choices 5. Despite all her inconsistencies, I craved my mother's love and attention 6. How has all this affected my relationship with my mother
Moving forward	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protective Factors 2. I learnt to cope 3. I am resilient 4. What would have helped 5. I needed to talk

Enduring Traumatic Experiences

All the participants in this study disclosed that due to their mother's involvement in prostitution, throughout their childhood they had to withstand various traumatic experiences ranging from abandonment, abuse, stigmatization and labelling, amongst others. Additionally, most ruefully explained that although a substantial period of time had passed since the traumatic occurrences, they were still haunted and tormented by the consequences.

My childhood was painful and chaotic.

Throughout the participants' accounts, it became very evident that they experienced their childhood as arduous, characterised by numerous difficult and painful memories: “Fuq kulhadd unfair. Ma tridx li jkollok dik il-ħajja ta” (Diane). Simon and Nathalie admitted that at that age, the painful experiences left them feeling initially overwhelmed and confused, and then angry and prone to constant self-questioning: “Kont confused, iktar milli xejn. Il-main feeling ta’ meta kont zghir jien kienet confused. Imbagħad marret għal angry” (Simon). Some remarked that because this interview had provided them with the opportunity to look at their childhood in retrospect, they felt shocked at the realization that they had lived through such experiences: “Għax xhin niftakar qed nixxokkja ruħi u ninduna kemm huma affarijiet li gravi” (Jason)

I was neglected, physically and sexually abused and I often witnessed domestic violence.

As I analyzed the results, I realized that of all the eight participants that I interviewed, six were abused and/or neglected during their childhood. Indeed, when the latter used to be in their mothers' presence and care, they described how they were often severely neglected and emotionally abused.

“Li m’ accettatnix, eżempju, li kienet dejjem iġġib lil huti iktar minni, li dejjem habbitni għal dak li nista’ noffri u mhux għal dak li jiena ... ġieli kont naraha ssajjar lil ommi, tagħmel dixx għagin lil kulhadd eżempju fhimt, u mbaġhad nara lil kulhadd jiekol, ma jkunx għad baqa’, u lili tiġborli mit-tlaqqit tal-platti. Dawk kienu affarijiet li jwegġġu. Imma, iwegġġuk wisq” (Roberta)

On the other hand, Amber, Jason, Roberta and Lisa felt resentment at the fact that their mother, her partners and/ or other individuals habitually abused them physically:

“U qabdet figurin, kien f’nofs il-kuritur, niftakru kien anglu kbir, u kissritu mal-art... u dahhlituli hawn, f’rasi.. U I fell, I collapsed. Imbaġhad I wake up and she’s on top of me, hitting me with a broomstick again, ma nafx x’kellha għall-broomstick imma vera kienet tieġu pjaċir tfaqqagħhom fuq dahri.” (Nathalie).

“U xhin inżilt naqla’ daqqa ta’ pala ġo rasi minn wara... Dawn li tiġbor il-hmieġ taż-żwiemel bihom...U tlift id-dawl t’għajnejja ma bdejt nara hlief... Iswed u abajd, bħal meta johdulek X-ray, hekk bdejt nara, dak il-kulur tiegħu tal-X-ray” (Amber)

“Mela dażgur, ommi kienet issawwatna jiġifieri biċ-ċintorin u hekk. Għax tant konna drajnathom id-daqqiet li ttina bil-ponn lanqas inhossuha.” (Jason)

Indeed, they confessed that although over time they got used to the constant beatings, this same abuse often left them feeling wretched and worthless. They expressed shock and bewilderment at the fact that someone who was supposed to take care of them was also abusive in their regard.

Nathalie, Amber, Lisa, Maria and Roberta also talked frankly about their sexual abuse experiences.

"U dan il-partner t’ommi...Ħallas id-DVD u konna qed narawh u tiġi biċċa oxxena u hamalla. Imbaġhad spiċċajt kont ġejt abbużata u hekk u kien jgħidli biex ninza’ l-hwejjeġ. U jiena kont ngħidli “X’ nagħmel?” U kien jgħidli “Int inza’ l-hwejjeġ u

titkellem xejn mal-mummy u tgawdi.” U jien kont nisma’ għax jien kont nibza’ minnu li ha jsawwatni. Kont ninza’ l-hwejjeg u hekk u kien jagħmel li kellu jagħmel...

Kelli xi hmistax-il sena zgur jew sittax... Meta jsib iċ-ċans kien jibda” (Amber)

“what an uncle... erm so he walks in and he tells him “I’m here”... So he takes me with him, we go to this bar, he gets a drink, I get sweets... then he takes me to Luxol to drive. So he sits me on his lap, I had no idea what an erection was. And he gave me the steering wheel.., but you know, first he starts with just an erection, then he starts touching you and then he takes you to his house... and he does other things to you.

Anyways so basically, it started at 6 and I made an end to it at 12.... Every week, on a Sunday...” (Nathalie)

Apart from withstanding personal abuse, participants explained how they often witnessed domestic violence towards their mother: "Meta kelli 11, kont niġġieled m'ommi għax kont nara l-partner t'ommi jsawwatha... kont nghidilha, u kienet tghidli, “Le,” għax tant kienet thobbu” (Maria). Additionally, Lisa emphasised that this abuse constantly wreaked extreme havoc at home " naf li trattaha hażin, kienet toħqob għalih. Dak it-tip, kif tasal id-dar “tini l-flus”, quddiem in-nies, għax għedtlek kien ibiġh, “tini l-flus” quddiem in nies, iwaqqagħha għan-nejk... hekk qisha oġġett, għax iffissata fuqu"

When I tried to speak up about the abuse, no one believed me.

From the participants’ accounts it was painfully clear that the availability of a trustworthy adult simply did not exist in their family. As a result, some interviewees decided to refrain from talking about the abuse that they were enduring, fearing shame and lack of comprehension. Similarly, even those who dared to report the abuse, stated that they felt completely ignored, resulting in further victimization: “Le lil hadd. Għax meta xi darba qsamt xi haġa ma’ ommi li eżempju kont abbuzata jew haġa jew oħra, spiċċajt qlajt iktar swat. Għax jispiċċaw ma jemmnukx.” (Roberta). As a result of this lack of protection, Roberta lamented

the fact that time will never heal the sexual abuse she experienced, as till this present day she still suffers the consequences:

"L-iktar haġa li twegġagħni fl-abbuż, qisu mhux l-abbuż innifsu...l-iktar li jdejjaqni għax... għaddew 30 something years...u meta jkolli x' naqsam sexually... irrid niffantasizza, għalkemm nobgħodhom...b'qassis sal-lum il-ġurnata eżempju... imbagħad wara I feel dirty.... u dik ma niflaħhiex... dik l-ħaġa li illum għandi 48, u matura biżżejjed, u xorta tiblagħni u tegħlibni fhimt... Ngħid, "illistra madoffi, naf li jiena b'sahhti, naf li qbiżt hafna affarijiet u fuckin din ma nistax fuckin naqbiżha?". Dak il-ħin I don't care, I like it...imma wara vera I feel vera, iff...jaqq ta' barra minn hawn" (Roberta)

I never felt I was a priority. I was constantly abandoned.

Predominant feelings across the participants' accounts evinced constant abandonment and lack of protection. This sense of helplessness and desertion was extensively and graphically captured in Lisa's story incredulously remarking that her parents never prioritised her even though she was their own flesh and blood. Emphasising her relationship with her father, Lisa reiterated that despite serving his prison sentence, he constantly abandons her whereas she persistently yearns for him.

"le barra le ma tantx jagħti kasi, jekk ma mmurx infittxu jien mhux ser ifittixni hu...nidejjaq hux,... ma' mara biddilni, bidel lil demmu, vera qatt ma kien hemm għalija u ma tantx kienet taffettwani imma xorta hu, xorta tħossha..." (Lisa).

Jason communicated the same longing. However, unlike Diane, Maria, Roberta and Amber, who grew up to know who their father is but chose themselves not to pursue a relationship, he disclosed that he would never know who his biological father is. However, he "ridt niskopri bejn wiehed u iehor min hu missieri eżempju, għax jien unknown father, sewwa.... U jekk

insaqsì lil ommi lanqas tgħidli min hu... dejjem taħrabha dil-bicċa tax-xogħol... ma tgħidilniex għax aħna frott ta' dak it-tip ta' xogħol. Conversely, Roberta explained that it was her mother who abandoned her, leaving her with no other choice but to be self-sufficient "Fuq min ha indur meta jkolli bzonn xi haga? L-unika persuna li nista ndur lejha hija jiena innfsi"

I was ashamed, stigmatized and labelled.

In addition to the aforementioned traumatic experiences, taking into consideration that Malta is characterised by a face-to-face society, interviewed children experienced intense shame and embarrassment every time their identity was overshadowed by their mother's engagement in prostitution: "U naf li hawn hafna nies li meta jitkellmu fuqi that's the first thing, qisu, "Nathalie, Nathalie min?" "U dik..." It hurts hux but it's the truth, fhimt? It hurts hux, mhux ovvja it hurts" (Nathalie). Indeed, some recounted how this association often compelled them to deny their relationship with their parents.

These realities are in sharp contrast with Roberta and Diane's experiences. The latter believed that living in residential care eliminated the distinctiveness of their individual parental situation, as a result of which they never felt judged or stigmatized by any of them: "fil late 70s early 80s kien n-norm tagħna ...hafna single mothers u prostituti u it-tfal li kien fl-istitut qisu in-norm, kulhadd kien hekk...hadd ma seta jgħid xejn" (Roberta).

Exposure to deviant lifestyle

All participants lived, at least for a few years at the same place where their mother or other members of their family engaged in prostitution, drugs and other deviant activities, so for them these activities were considered the norm. Through the following subordinate themes, I will be presenting the participants' perspectives of how growing up in such a culture impacted their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Some explained how their parents' lifestyle had its roots set in years prior to their birth.

“in-nanna filghaxijiet kienet tmur ghax-xoghol ukoll.. In-nanna kellha l-post il-Marsa, kien tal-bużnanna, haditu n-nanna mbaghad haditu ommi....” (Maria)

"Missieri... meta kien zghir, kien jghix Londra... u kellu l-hwienet tal-prostituzzjoni" (Maria).

Reasons behind my mother's involvement in prostitution.

All of the participants recognized that their mothers' reasons for their involvement in prostitution were either out of economic necessity or as a means to support theirs or their partner's drug addiction. However, Diane added that her mother's initiation into prostitution was manipulated and driven by her father's agency: “Kieku l-mummy ma ltaqghetx mieghu, u ma waqqagħhiex fd-droga u affarijiet minn dawn, hadd ma kien jispiċċa hekk... Ghax dik meta kienet zghira kienet tghix mal-mummy tagħha u kienet mudella, imbaghad meta qisha ltaqghet ma' missieri, qalibilha l-hajja ta'taht fuq...Ma nafx. Imma meta tmiss id-droga imbaghad tispicċa tagħmel hafna affarijiet “ (Diane)

On the other hand, Maria lamented that her mother was a victim of intergenerational cycle of prostitution in her family. Therefore, when her mother was struggling financially, it seemed that she didn't perceive that she had any other choice, except that of involving herself in prostitution: “Kienet tieħu xi haġa tal-benefiċċji soċjali imma ma kinux biżżejjed lanqas... Kienet diffiċli... naħseb ommi meta imbaghad rat dik il-hajja, u qisha ma kinitx taf x'se taqbad tagħmel, u għamlet bħan-nanna (Maria)

I was exposed to my mother's prostitution.

Participants shared the evolution of their awareness of their mother's involvement in prostitution and how they experienced it. Simon and Jason both explained that only when they grew older and began to ask around did they form a clear picture of what was happening.

"Xi haġa moħbija... Lili u lil Ronald ma jghidulna xejn fuqha dil-biċċa tax-xoghol.” (Jason).

“F’ommi digà kelli suspett kbir sakemm kont naf mija fil-mija. ...Kienet toħroġ, kienet tghid li taħdem ġo bar. Imma bniedem ma jaħdimx ġo bar meta jkollu aptit. Dan ma jċempilx qabel tidhol ġo bar u ma jġigux n-nies miegħek minn hemm, ihawdu u mbagħad imorru lura...jġu d-dar u jieħdu u jitolqu.” (Simon).

Diversely, others were well aware of their mother's involvement in prostitution as they were recurrently exposed to it: “Bdejt immur id-dar darba fil-gimgħa u kulma kont nara kien prostitution, pickpocketing, strangieri nies deħlin u herġin jixorbu u għalija dak kien “in norm...ghax dik il-habta, kellha hwienet strada stretta (Roberta). Although she eventually became involved in prostitution herself, Lisa seemed to struggle with her mother's involvement and begged her to cease her involvement: “Heq, ħazin ux... il-mummy drugjata, il-mummy tipprostitwixxi ruħha, ħazin...vera kont neħodha ħazin meta kont ngħix magħha... kif kont nara lil ommi sejra vera nibki “u tmurx u please”...“oqghod miegħi tmurx” (Lisa)

My mother was a drug user.

Diane and Lisa highlighted how difficult it was for them to come to terms with their mother's addiction, even more when they realized that it was one of the reasons why they had to reside in residential care. Lisa explained, that despite feeling devastated by her mother's addiction, during the few years that she lived with her, she used to witness her mother's engagement. Little did her mother know that this exposure eventually led her daughter to make use of drugs as well. “Imma kienet ikollha ddaħħalni hdejha ħazin u tajjeb, kienet iddaħħalni hdejha biex nara x’inhi tagħmel u tghidli “biex tara minn xiex qed ngħaddi biex ma tagħmilx hekk”... aktar kont nithajjar hux (Lisa). Lastly, Nathalie remarked how from a young age she felt burdened when she was entrusted with the preparation of her mother's drugs, which exposed her to the latter's constant use.

Participants' engagement in deviant lifestyle

All interviewed participants except for Diane, at some point in their life engaged in prostitution, drug use and/or drug dealing. Finding themselves caught in the maelstrom of their chaotic lifestyle, during their separate interviews, the participants reflected on what had possibly led them to such choices, recounted their experiences as prostitutes and drug users, and lastly, elaborated on the feelings that were stirred up by their incarceration.

Trying to make sense of what led to my engagement in this lifestyle.

Participants postulate that given the circumstances that they were brought up in, they felt they did not have much choice regarding their life decisions. Indeed, Roberta asserted that “Tghidli qisu għax sirt prostitute? u kont pickpocket? dak, għalija n-norm, jiena dak tghallimt... kont narahom jisirqu waqt li kont il-ħanut.... għalija ma kinitx crime...la ħaga u lanqas ohra” (Roberta). Similarly, Lisa blamed her grandmother, and she constantly questioned why the latter did not protect her from the deviant lifestyle her mother and father were leading, despite being fully aware of it.

Although the latter acknowledged her upbringing and her exposure to her parents' lifestyle as the two main determinants of her deviancy, her narrative was overshadowed by disbelief. Indeed, she struggled to make sense of how much she despised her mother's behaviour and yet felt disbelief that she had still ended up going down the same path.

““U vera skantajt bija innifsi hu imma kif dħalt fiha jiena, għax vera kont neħodha ħazin meta kont ngħix magħha, meta kont naraha ħa tmur tieħu u hekk” (Lisa)

“Kif jista' jkun li kont niskanta tant li ommi fiha, imbagħad ġejt jiena fiha?!” (Lisa)

Jason and Maria attributed their behaviour to the lack of their mothers' parenting skills. Yet Maria, unlike Jason whose reactions were steeped in anger, justified her mother's behaviour, for she admitted that her mother did not know any better:

"Hi trabbiet f' dik il-ħajja allura, ma setgħetx ittini ħajja aħjar milli tatni... jiena hux xtaqt li l-mamà kienet taf naqra skola, biex kienet tgħinni naqra fl-iskola, u li ma kinitx tagħmel dak ix-xogħol. Għax il-bqija kieku kien ikolli ħafna ħajja aħjar... naħseb kien ikolli ċans kbir ma naqbadx id-droga... u l-ħajja tal-prostituzzjoni"

(Maria)

I resorted to drug use.

Living in a house with a drug-using mother and a drug-dealing partner meant daily exposure to drug-related paraphernalia. As Lisa affirmed, this constant domestic exposure tempted her and laid the groundwork for her later experimentation with drugs by somehow desensitizing her to the risk posed by drugs: "Gejna qisna każin, allura speċi, tibda tara lil dan jinnoda, jongħos b' rasu u tibda tgħid "imma xi jħossu, xi nħossu?". Tibda tinteressa ruhek hux....aktar kont niħajjar hux" (Lisa)

Notwithstanding the fact that the participants had abstained from drugs for more than a year and a half at the time of the interview, all vividly recalled their first engagement, which seem to have followed a similar trajectory: "Jiena ta' xi erbatax-il sena jew tlettax ħa, kont diġà pejjipt l-ewwel joint. U qbadt naħraq l-ewwel pakkett ta' xi ħmistax jew erbatax u nofs." (Jason). Drug addiction served various purposes. For Nathalie it served to soften the pain of her mother's abandonment: "until I actually got hooked on cocaine, I used to feel bad that other people are getting the little attention I could get off my mum...but that stopped when I started taking cocaine, I stopped feeling that way...I stopped feeling anything" (Nathalie)

Conversely, for Maria and Roberta, drug taking was a way to fit in and a means of holding on to the relational attachments that were developing.

"Ifhimni bdejt nagħmilha ma' nies, kif kelli 13, kelli l-partner kelli 18, kien iħawwad fid-droga... u jien kont inħossni safe miegħu, għax jien immur għax-xogħol, jiġi joqgħod għassa... U bdejt nesperimenta d-droga miegħu." (Maria)

Additionally, Roberta insisted that drugs served as coping mechanism for sustaining her involvement in prostitution and for dealing with her self-loathing: “Jiġifieri to do it, ma tistax tagħmilha f’ sensik... jiena hsibt li din id-darba nista’ nagħmilha mingħajr dope, imma l-guilt feeling li thoss u daqskemm thossok maħmuġa, bilfors għad-dope trid tmur. To survive doing it, drugs have to do, you have to numb yourself 100%” (Roberta)

I was a prostitute.

For some others, drugs served to escape the harsh reality of prostitution. Indeed, for Maria, Lisa and Roberta, drugs were the exclusive drivers after their involvement in prostitution. They remarked that they needed constant supply of money to support their addiction: “le li ninzel għall-prostituzzjoni niddejjaq, heq imma li nieħu d-droga nieħu gost... imma biex ikollok il-flus għad-droga trid tipprostitwixxi ruħek hu (Lisa). “Habba l-problema tad-droga jien ma stajtx noqghod bil-flus li kien itini hu biss. Kien itini jew 60 ewro, Maltin fil-gimġha... dawk kont nonfoqhom f’lejl.” (Maria). Conversely, Nathalie added that prostitution substituted for the lack of attention and parental affection she missed growing up as “because of the experience I’ve been through, it feels good when you have the attention, even when it’s the at wrong time” (Nathalie).

The high price I paid for engaging in prostitution.

Participants explained that others' reactions and attitudes towards their engagement in prostitution left them feeling stigmatised, labelled and abandoned by the closest members of their families.

“kif immur hdejjhom [younger half-siblings] nisma’ lil ommhom tgħajjat u twerzaq?... “Ejjew ’l hawn , ejjew ’l hawn” għax ma tridnix magħhom. Qalli [father] “tagħtiha xi tort? tgħidlek tkun għadha kemm messet xi żobb, issa tigi tmiss wiċċ it-tifel” ... u meta tarani ft-triq...hekk iharsu lejki qisek għandek il-pesta” (Lisa)

These experiences still reverberated in some of the participants' present life, adversely affecting their current life situations and well-being. Indeed, Roberta dolefully admitted that the concept of intimacy was lost as soon as she allowed others to use her body in exchange for money.

" Għall-ewwel ma tarahix kerha l-prostituzzjoni, imma kif jibdedew ġejjin ir-repercussions u kif jibdedew iħarsu lejki l-irġiel u jittrattawk maż-żmien... inti tiġi ogġett għan-nies. Uza u armi, jew uza u armi! U dik hija xi haġa li ma tista' tneħhiha qatt. Tneħhi hafna affarijiet, però meta tkun prostituta li tasal tbigh ġismek, hija l-agħar haġa li tista' tagħmel. L-agħar ! Dan ma tgħidx għandek mowbajl qbadt u bigħtu. Dan begħt lilek innifsek, jġifieri... u thalli lilek innifsek tiġi uzata (Roberta).

My mother's reaction.

Although involvement in drugs and prostitution were considered to be the norm in most of the participants' households, all mentioned that their mothers objected to their own engagement, in either one of the abovementioned behaviours: "'fil-bidu li saret taf li qed ninżel għax-xogħol kienet tatni xeba' bażwritni, kienet tibgħatli l-pulizija... xorta ma riditnix. Għalkemm hi kienet f' dax-xogħol, u lili aċċettatni li jiena trans però mhux li nagħmel dak ix-xogħol xorta"' (Maria). Although at that time, Maria struggled to understand the motive behind her mother's actions, she remarked that having lived as a prostitute, she could now understand better what her mother wanted to prevent her from: "Illum napprezza aktar minn qabel... sirt nifhem iktar ir-raġuni għaliex ommi ma riditnix f'dik il-ħajja...Hi kienet taf li mhijiex ħajja sabiħa. Ippruvat lili, mill-ftit li setgħet tibdilli ħajti, imma mbagħad... Jien rasi iebsa".

When it came to drug use, Lisa and Jason disclosed that although their mother did not approve of their addiction, she did nothing to stop them or help them fight the addiction:

"Imma darba mortilha żibel id-dar, u tkun f' dik il-ħajja tinduna...u bdiet tgħidli "x' għamilt? u tgħajjat u hekk" u nsomma u għaddiet malajr" (Lisa).

I was incarcerated.

Five of the participants interviewed had been incarcerated at some point in their life due to criminal behaviour, with two of the interviewees serving a sentence at the time of the interview. Lisa explained that drugs and prostitution led her and her mother to be sentenced to prison. Although all were incarcerated at a young age, the consensus view among them was that despite the arduous experience being in prison was "esperjenza tal-habs għallmitni hafna, hafna, hafna; l-aqwa programm li għamilt" (Roberta).

Mother-child relationship – Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and neglect

In the previous sections, I aimed at eliciting the most pertinent experiences participants shared with regards to their mothers' involvement in prostitution. Through this superordinate theme, I seek to provide the reader with a snapshot of the manner in which these experiences affected the dynamics between the mother-child relationship.

I couldn't take it any more - I had to leave home.

A common thread running across participants' accounts of their experience of living in the same household as their mother was of the feeling of repugnance. Most remarked that as they grew older, their tolerance of their mother's behaviour gradually decreased, until they felt that they couldn't endure it any longer: "kont nahrab meta kont żgħira... ma flaħtx ngħix aktar go dil-ħajja. Kont immur għand is-sorijiet, l-Istitut" (Amber). This was also echoed in Jason's, Roberta and Maria's accounts. Indeed, these three participants stated that they left home at the ages of fourteen, thirteen and twelve respectively.

My mother wanted to take care of me, but she constrained.

During multiple interviews, I noticed that the participants were caught in loyalty binds. On one hand, they wanted to express resentment towards their mother's behaviour,

whilst on the other hand, they wanted to make it clear that their mother acted in such manner not out of spite, but because she herself was also a victim of the circumstances. Indeed, Lisa emphasised that because her mother wanted to safeguard her from her partner's abusive behaviour, the latter often exposed her to prostitution, firmly believing that such a decision was in her best interest: “Kien jgħidilha “ħudha miegħek għax noqtolhielek għad lil din it-tifla” u minħabba fih ma kinetx tafđani d-dar, kienet tgħid “aħjar neħodha miegħi milli jagħmlilha xi ħaġa u nsibha mejta jew hekk” Hekk ħasbet li kien l-aħajr li tagħmel dak iż-żmien (Lisa)

Participants felt disheartened by the fact that that when they required a parent figure in their life, they could not get what they needed from them even when they were present. Inevitably, someone had to step in, and as Simon explained: "Meta mbaġhad id-daddy induna li qisu mhux tajba għal mat-tfal speċi, qalilha “Jien se nieħu t-tifel, jekk terġa’ tiġi kwieta tista’ tarah lit-tifel. Imma kif inti ma tistax tarah”. However, he insisted that despite the fact that his mother admitted her parenting limitations, she still wanted to take care of him, and as a child, he still yearned for her nurturing.

My experience of living in residential care.

All participants, except for Simon, spent most of their upbringing in different residential care homes. As indicated by Jason, the reason underpinning their placement was his mother’s life as a prostitute: “due to the life that my mother led, my brother and I had to be taken away”. Indeed, Roberta explained that spending time in her mother's presence was traumatic.

“Le jiena kont nieħu qatgħa meta kien jasal il-Ħadd u kien ikolli mmur ġurnata d-dar... Mis-sibt flgħaxija kont niwworja; “Madonna ħa jisbaħ, ħa jkolli mmur id-dar”. Kont nitrawmatizza ruħi. Kont kuntenta noqgħod l-istitut u ma mmurx id-dar. Għax ommi dejjem l-istess. Omni kienet tilgħabhom, dejjem ma’ rġiel differenti,

dejjem johdulha l-flus, dejjem stressjata u dejjem tneħhi l-istress u tiventja kollox fuqi u ... kienet twerwirni u kienet titrawmatizzani u kienet tbeżżagħni"

However, the other participants' awareness that their life was different from that experienced by their peers meant that Jason, Nathalie and Diane experienced residential care negatively. Indeed, Diane claimed that when she returned home she felt she had to start afresh:

““Kemmm aħjar qieghda d-dar milli qieghda hawn... Ghax eżempju, li torqod ha, ma' ghaxart itfal... u, qisek eżempju tmur l-iskola , kulhadd jghajjat 'Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma' u int qisek se tghajjat 'sister'... tad-dwejjaq! Qed ngħidlek emminni, ma tridx tghaddi minnha, xi haġa li, qisek maqtugħa mid-dinja” (Diane).

I am paying the consequences for my mother's choices.

As participants recalled their childhood, all made the link between their mothers' respective choices and the adverse experiences they had to endure. Diane explained blamed her mother's bad choices for all her negative life experiences

““Mela kont ngħidilha...ghax qisek....qed tagħmel il-ħażin int u qed neħluh aħna. Lil kulhadd kont ngħidha, li aħna qed inbatu l-konsegwenzi tagħhom...[referring to residential care] Qisek dhalt il-ħabs. Imma tal-ħabs, id-differenza hija li għamlet xi haġa hi u aħna [Diane and her siblings] ma għamilna xejn. Imbagħad jistagħgbu kif titla'? Mhux ovvja titla' mgerfxa "

Nathalie remarked that because her mother never showed her unconditional love she:

“I thought I knew what love was, but I didn't. Because here I felt it, and it was so genuine li it felt weird inside. Tant tkun ħażin, ħażin, ħażin, li l-ħażin imbagħad jiġi tajjeb. Allora dak li hu tajjeb fil-verità mbagħad, it gets weird"

Jason, Amber and Roberta also blamed their chaotic upbringing for their difficulty in trusting people “Jaffetwa, taf x'jaffetwa man-nies l-oħra! Nigi qisni stramb. Nigi mumentni qisni

niddejjaq minn dak li jkun, mumentu li niġi antipatku...mumentu fejn naħrab lin-nies... fejn inkun irrid noqgħod waħdi... U nkun irrid haġna jġifieri, noqgħod waħdi " (Jason)

“biex bdejt nafda tikka żgħira vera għadda żmien u xorta mhux se nafda kemm għandi nafda fhimt” (Roberta).

Despite all her inconsistencies, I craved my mother's love and attention.

A prevailing experience throughout most of the interviews was the manner in which children experienced their mothers' inconsistencies. Indeed, Jason, Lisa and Nathalie shared how they often racked their brains trying to make sense of their mother's attitude towards them. Most of the time they considered their mothers' mood swings inexplicable and highly stressful: "she would snap, she was bipolar, she would snap qisu hames minuti tghidli, “Inti l-favorita tiegħi u nħobbok,”... Five minutes later, Ġejja għalik bil-lastu tal-ixkupa! I'm like, “What the fuck is going on?” (Nathalie). Undeterred by the difficulty to justify such behaviour, as already hinted in the aforementioned remark, Simon too experienced similar mixed feelings towards his mother. He explained that although he harboured anger towards her inconsistent behaviour, the need he had to be cared for and the love he had for his mother seemed to tip the balance: “Eżatt jien dejjem ridtha tiġi, ommok dejjem tibqa' ommok.”

Desperately craving their mothers' love and attention, Roberta and Nathalie admitted that they were ready to go to great lengths to get their love:

“I used to lie... ġieli tkun għadha kif tatni xebgħa tboos il-mummy, imbagħad ikollna meeting mas-social worker, I'm like, “No, she's not drinking alcohol, no she's not being aggressive, no, no, .” Anzi if I don't make up a story about what we did this weekend... U I used to picture her different hux...It felt so wrong and it hurts so much to have a mother like that. But I didn't want to lose it, it? Ma naffordjax ngħid x' inhu vera jġri and they take me away from her... It's just for that mother's love.”

(Nathalie)

"And I'm gonna tell you, I wanted it so much li there was a point that the only attention I was getting was through a beating. And I used to know I'm gonna get a beating, but I still did it just to get that beating because it was the only way of attention I was getting"(Nathalie).

How has all this affected my relationship with my mother.

Participants regretted that their relationships with their mothers were frequently fraught with various stressors, which made it difficult for them to develop a loving bond. Lisa explained that although later on her mother was trying to make up for the lost time in the past, she was so angry at the ignominious way she treated her that she was unable to reciprocate her mother's efforts.

"Għandi ħafna rabja għal ommi, li abbandunatni, speċi gābet lilu (referring to her mum's boyfriend). U issa l-ħabs, allāħares immur go kamra u allāħares nagħmel kwarta 'l bogħod minnha, għax taraha ssejjahli...Issa imma? Għal għajn in-nies? Lili aċċetani meta kelli bżonnok mhux issa, issa kapaci nfendi għalija nnifsi" (LI

Additionally, Simon stated that his relationship with his mother did not change even though he went to live with her. He emphasised that "meta mort m'ommi mhux li affettwatni. Sirt nafha ftit iżjed b'mod ta' kumbinazzjoni, għax kont hemmhekk. Imma l-kumplament kollox baqa' normali. Kif kien qabel mort magħha baqa', u meta tlaqt mingħandha bqajt l-istess... Dik ir-relazzjoni kienet u baqgħet non-existent.... meta kont hemm bilkemm kont inkellema, hi barra filgħaxija... qisna aquantinces... r-relazzjoni mal-mummy dejjem kienet qisha ta' ħbieb. M'hemmx relazzjoni ta' mum and son taf kif... M'għandniex relazzjoni normali.." However, he remarked that now he had come to terms with this fact and learnt to "keep her at an arm's length. Ġieli naqtagħha għal xahar, xahrejn, tlieta għax tibda tħawwad ħafna... imma... Bizżejjed...aħjar mix-xejn." The same unwillingness to enter into

relationships and the desire to keep people at a distance was repeatedly evinced by Roberta in

her interview. Indeed, she blamed her mother's treatment for her tendency to refrain from nurturing intimate relationships. Contrastingly, Diane focused on the good memories she had of her mother, regardless of the fact that she continually reiterated the traumatic experiences she had endured because of her; "Mal-mummy dejjem qbilt ta. Jien ngħidilha, inti għalija, ommi u missieri f'daqqa... Dejjem kienet hemm għalija. F'kollox. M'hemmx qatra li ngħidilha , ma kontx hemm għalija inti."

Moving forward

As has been amply indicated, the participants' childhood was characterised by various traumatic experiences. However, through this last superordinate theme, I seek to present the different protective factors, coping skills and resilience that the participants thought were helpful in weathering arduous moments in their life.

Protective Factors.

Participants insisted that during their upbringing, at one point or another there were different people who took care of them, protected them and gave them a taste of what unconditional love meant. As they reminisced about these experiences, I noticed that they still held fond memories of them.

Lisa was glad to expound on her experience of being accepted, cared for, loved and given shelter by an old man, who did not expect anything in return, in contrast to members of her family.

“Ara dan il-persuna, aċċetani go daru, kien jitmagħni... kien qisu n-nannu li qatt ma kelli... u hafna napprezza li zammni dejjem hemm u qatt ma abbuza minni. Għax illum jekk tmur għand xi hadd... kważi saret normali li jrid xi haġa lura, la xi hadd ha jzommok. Ara dan qatt ma ried xejn minni, just imħabba tani, imma mietli wkoll”... Hu biss kien iħobbni fil-verità, minn dawn il-persuni kollha li semmejt”.

In the same vein, Jason talked lovingly about the friendly relationship he had with an old man whilst he was still in residential care, recollecting his experience in graphic detail.

" Dak kien hemm xiħ, u kien jiġi johroġni mill-istitut, u tant kien bniedem...too good, anke kien ikellimni.... Ikellimni b'ċertu ħlewwa... meta jkellimni biss eżempju kont iħossni ħafna tajjeb jiena. Għadni niftakar, avolja kont zġħir, kemm kien iħossni tajjeb ma' dax-xiħ (Jason)

Alternatively, Nathalie spoke highly of the support she received from professionals, which she viewed as a very solid protective factor in her life, whilst Simon declared that his relationship with his father "was a constant", serving as a buffer against the traumatic experiences he endured because of his mother's involvement in prostitution. Additionally, he highlighted the value of sports in offering him a safe environment where he could release his pent-up energy and tension: "dejjem ridt naqra spazju...Allura kienet ħaġa sabiħa, kelli l-futbol, kelli l-basketbol kuljum mit-Tnejn sal-Ġimgħa".

I learnt to cope.

Apart from the aforementioned protective factors, participants also referred to the various coping strategies that they learnt to activate during difficult moments.

Roberta described how faced with tough experiences, she kept reminding herself that she had managed to overcome similar occurrences in the past. Indeed, her coping strategy consisted in urging herself to believe that "Meta nkun f'sitwazzjoni ngħid it is a matter of time...ħa tgħaddi, ħa tgħaddi, ħa tgħaddi u naqbizha ftit ftit". On the other hand, Nathalie confessed that her past emotional baggage at times became too heavy for her to carry. Therefore, in order to survive, she learnt to shut down such emotions: "I'm in this stage... where you learn how to do a shutter... You can talk about your past without getting emotional"

Lastly, both Jason and Simon expressed gratitude for their respective partners for offering a solid base for them to rely on in difficult times: “l-unika wahda li qabditni minn xaghri s’issa hija t-tfajla, Claire... speçi li qed tghinni” (Jason). ““Ifhimni trid issib bniedem wiehed imqar jghinek through xi haġa... Hi ghenitni hafna” (Simon)

I am resilient.

As the participants recalled childhood memories in relation to where they stand now, what I noticed was their strong sense of resilience. The excerpts below testify to participants’ ability to bounce back from adversity, fend for themselves and identify what is positive despite the dire circumstances they often found themselves in.

“Jien kelli haġja iebsa ta’ barra minn hawn u ghadni nistrugilja sal-lum il-ġurnata... Li ghaddejt minn dik it-tbatija kollha, ma jiddispjaçinix. Jekk kellhom ikunu huma biex inkun Roberta li jien illum, ehe so let them be.... u everything happens for a reason.

Jigifieri jien batejt u minn barra nidher fqira imma minn ġewwa miljunarja” (Roberta).

Diane asserted that having witnessed her mother's deviant behavior and its aftermath served as a cautionary tale that motivated her to distance herself from such lifestyle.

“Ghandi din il-mera daqs il-madoffi, x’ngħaddi minna! U jiena qed ngħidlek li nithassar lil ommi ghax ghaddiet minn dawk l affarijiet kollha , ha ngħaddihom jiena? Nispiçça nithassar lili nnifs”

What would have helped.

All participants identified values that would have helped them as they were growing up. Jason's and Diane's response revolved around parental love and presence that they lacked, insisting that professionals should always strive to include the biological family in the child's life. Roberta, Simon and Maria unanimously recommended the importance of disseminating knowledge and raising more awareness around the topics of prostitution, drugs and abuse:

"Jien naħseb l-iktar importanti hija l-awareness u li nkunu iktar open u nkissru naqa’ iktar t-

taboo...dat-taboo u dal-ħabi jweggagħni ħafna. It is what it is, ... ejja nagħmlu xi ħaġa dwarha mhux nibbrushjawha taħt it-tapit "(Roberta).

Simon insisted that as a child it would have been more beneficial if someone had explained to him why he was not allowed to be in her presence, rather than being fed lies about his mother's behaviour or not being told anything at all:

“Allura meta kienu qed jgħiduli li l-mummy qed tagħmel xi ħaġa ma kellhomx għax jistennew sa 11. Setgħu jgħiduli isma' l-mummy ma tistax tmur għandha għax qiegħda f' sitwazzjoni fejn qed tagħmel bħat-tfal. U t-tfal ma jistgħux jiehdu ħsieb it-tfal. U kienet tkun ħafna iktar raġonevoli milli “Il-mummy ma tistax taraha kuljum”...Għaliex ma tgħidilhomx lit-tfal? Dan ovvjament ma tridx tgħabbihom imma fl-istess hin trid tħallihom aware ”

I needed to talk.

Even if talking about one's experiences needed considerable effort, in the end participants shared a sense of relief after the interview. The consensus view was that disclosing everything had been liberating, particularly because they felt that they could talk in great depth and at great length without any fear of judgment. They all hoped that their story would help others in similar situations and prevent them from enduring all that they had to withstand.

“Actually, I think I needed this għax ma tantx nitkellem jiena.... but it's very difficult, it's very difficult. Uhm, to a point where you find it difficult to breathe... I hope it helps you, help other people” (Nathalie).

“Suppost fuq il-prostituzzjoni u bidditlek fuq il-ħajja kollha tiegħi, imma vera kelli bżonn nitkellem” (Lisa).

“Qabel ma kontx lest li nitkellem fuqha l-bicċa imma kuntent li ġejt li nista' ngħin lin-nies” (Simon).

“Jiena, ma niddejjaqx ngħidha l-istorja...jiena ngħidha biex kif qed ngħidlek li għaddejti jiena ma jgħaddi hadd minnu u biex ikun hemm min minnha jista’ jitgħallem xi hadd (Maria).

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the most salient superordinate and subordinate themes pertaining to the children's accounts of their experience of having their mother involved in prostitution. In the next chapter, I will be discussing these main findings in relation to existing literature.