



## “Petites Bonnes” minors sex trafficked in Morocco and Spain

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### ABSTRACT

The information currently available about girls and women who are trafficked worldwide for the purpose of sexual exploitation only shows us one part of the picture. In the Puigvert (2012–2014) TRATA: Life trajectories that move away or bring closer to the trafficking processes of sexual exploitation, through 25 qualitative techniques conducted with social service providers with a communicative orientation, we have identified a group of Moroccan adolescent girls between 12 and 18 years old who are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking: the *petites bonnes* or young housemaids. Sexual exploitation, as well as sexual abuse that sometimes leads to pregnancy, can result in the flight or expulsion of these girls from their homes. These results unveil two recruitment elements that are used by trafficking networks: the irregular situation in which girls have arrived in a city and the circumstances of inequality in which they find themselves, including having low education levels and poor work experience. Furthermore, these elements make these girls invisible to the authorities and other professionals who could assist them. Based on these results, we conclude that tackling these challenges requires primary prevention measures that will increase the financial viability of the social groups at risk, establish programs that ensure successful educational trajectories for girls in their places of origin, and raise the awareness of people about this reality in their environments.

### 1. Introduction

The International Labour Organization estimated in 2016 that approximately 4.5 million children worldwide were victims of forced labor, which includes human trafficking (International Labour Organization, 2017). In Europe, calculations estimate the existence of 140,000 victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, with approximately 70,000 victims annually (United Nations, 2010). According to the data provided by the European Commission, in the period from 2015 to 2016, 20,532 victims of trafficking were reported in the 28 EU member states. Of these, 56% were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and 95% of those individuals were women. Furthermore, among the victims trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, 23% were girls (European Commission, 2018).

A 2017 report by the Ministry of Domestic Affairs in Spain assessed 155 victims of sexual trafficking who came from Nigeria, Romania and China, 6 of whom were minors. The general profile of these victims corresponds to a woman between 18 and 22 years of Nigerian origin living in an irregular situation. Although Moroccan women and girls do

not appear in the Spanish reports as victims of sex trafficking, among the 475 victims of labor exploitation—3 of them minors—the Moroccan nationality was one of the three identified. Obviously, these numbers are estimations based on the known cases, generally because an intervention has been conducted. Nevertheless, all the reports highlight the difficulty of achieving comprehensive knowledge regarding the magnitude of the problem (EUROPOL, 2008).

The investigation, the results of which are presented in this article, has its precedent in the *TRANSMIGRA: Análisis de los procesos de transnacionalidad económica y política marroquí, ecuatoriana y rumana. La migración como factor de desarrollo en los países de origen y acogida* [Analysis of the process of Moroccan, Ecuadorian and Romanian financial and political transnationality. Migration as a development factor in the countries of origin and reception] investigation, which was directed by Ramon Flecha (2005–2008). In the development of this research, particularly through the performance of fieldwork in Morocco, significant evidence was found of young Moroccan women coming from rural areas who disappeared in the migration process. The Puigvert (2012–2014) TRATA: Life trajectories that move away or bring closer to

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the trafficking processes of sexual exploitation research started with the aim of breaking the silence about the trafficking of young Moroccan women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Because the existing literature has provided evidence about the recruitment of victims of trafficking among women with similar characteristics and circumstances to those in which the *petites bonnes* find themselves, this paper started from the hypothesis that the *petites bonnes* in Morocco and Spain could be victims of sex trafficking networks.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1. Social and personal characteristics that place girls and women at risk for trafficking networks

Previous studies have provided information on the social characteristics of victims who are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Certain factors increase the victim's risk of being recruited by trafficking networks, such as the need to migrate, low academic training or a context that promotes forced prostitution.

Trafficking networks recruit most of their victims among social groups that, for different reasons, find themselves obliged to undertake a migratory process. Armed conflicts, natural disasters and, in short, a lack of opportunities and the resulting poverty generate greater possibilities for trafficking networks to obtain victims (Acharya, 2010; McLeigh, 2013). Belonging to a family with poor resources and living in a context with few opportunities, such as poor rural areas, prompts girls and women in these areas to migrate. The recruiters usually approach families or tutors who live in poverty and try to buy the girls or young women. The recruiters usually argue that they are buying the girls with the promise of better conditions for the girl in a rich country and the hope of the funds transfers that the girl will make once she starts to work in the city (Hodge & Lietz, 2007).

In the case of Mexico, Acharya (2010) shows that of the 60 women interviewed who had been victims, 48 were from rural areas, whereas only 12 were from urban areas. In Greece, prostituted women who were slaves had migrated from other countries due to poverty and a lack of employment (Lazaridis, 2001). In Nepal, the economic conditions, poverty and social inequality in which many women live increase their risk of becoming a sex trafficking victim (Simkhada, 2008). This link becomes particularly worrying when we confirm that in recent decades, we have witnessed a feminization of migration, both domestic and international (Acharya, 2010).

The politics of prostitution in destination countries is another demonstrated risk factor. When these policies increase the market as a consequence, the trafficking of girls and young girls for their sexual exploitation increases (Cho, Dreher, & Neumayer, 2013; Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2013). Although these policies from destination countries may either reduce or increase the operating costs for smugglers (including the ease of establishing a business and the risk of being held), they also create the conditions for human trafficking (Jac-Kucharski, 2012).

Women's educational, labor and health situations and characteristics place them at risk of being victims. Concerning their educational level, the educational inequality that many women suffer in different parts of the world is a factor that increases their risk of falling into sex trafficking networks (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; Miller, Decker, Silverman, & Raj, 2007). For instance, girls who are smuggled from Nepal are usually illiterate (Simkhada, 2008), and in the Ukraine, the majority of women who have been smuggled have low educational levels (Vijayarasa, 2012). However, we should not neglect existing research showing that there are women with high-school or college-level educations who are also victims of sex trafficking networks (Adoratrices, 2012; Di Tommaso, Shima, Strøm, & Bettio, 2009).

We find two significant characteristics of the employment situation. The first is poor previous employment experience. For instance, in the research of Acharya (2010) conducted in Mexico, 62% of the women had

never worked before they were trafficked, while others had served in domestic work or worked in their own agricultural fields. Second, women who were prostitutes in their places of origin are also of interest to traffickers, particularly if they are in good health and do not take drugs (Hodge & Lietz, 2007).

Finally, the age of women who are trafficked is highlighted, since they are often significantly younger (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; Hwang & Bedford, 2004). Almost 72% of the women who had been trafficked with whom Acharya (2010) worked were younger than 24. In this case, the vulnerability that their age implies—and that can also facilitate their recruitment—goes hand in hand with clients' preference for younger women. Thus, traffickers tend to buy the youngest women possible to extend their years of exploitation.

### 2.2. Personal interaction as a means of recruitment

Contrary to expectations, scientific research highlights the influence of social relationships in the recruitment process. Traffickers rely on personal relationships to make contacts that may lead to the recruitment of potential victims (Di Tommaso et al., 2009), particularly in contexts of poverty, by grooming victims or deceiving families with false promises of a better future for their daughters (Hodge, 2008). The involvement of a family member in the process of the sex trafficking of youth has also been found in studies conducted in different countries, such as the US, Vietnam and Nigeria (Sprang & Colle, 2018; Molland, 2010, Okonofua, Obgomwan, Alutu, Kufre & Eghosa, 2004). In a study conducted in Nepal, 35.7% of recruiters were family members, such as uncles, cousins or stepfathers (Simkhada, 2008). In the research of Di Tommaso et al. (2009), 29% of traffickers were connected to the victims through friendship.

The networks of friends and relatives are very important in this illicit market (Molland, 2010; Acharya & Salas, 2008), partially because women easily trust friends and family who encourage them to migrate, and this trust leads to many women being recruited who do not even ask themselves whether their living conditions will improve with migration (Molland, 2010). In addition to the importance of family and friendship networks in the sex trafficking recruitment process, research has noted the influence of intimate relationships in sex trafficking. Abusive intimate partners can be part of trafficking networks and involve their partners in sexual exploitation, keeping them controlled in situations in which sex trafficking and intimate partner violence are permanent and which victims find difficult to escape (Roe-Sepowitz, Hickle, Dahlstedt, & Gallagher, 2014; Liu, 2012). Additionally, studies have identified cases of traffickers who prey on vulnerable adolescent and young women and coerce them through fraudulent intimate relationships (Verhoeven, Gestel, Jong, Kleemans, 2015; Raphael, Reichert, & Powers, 2010). In Nepal, Simkhada (2008) has identified how traffickers target vulnerable victims and recruit them through false promises of a life with luxuries, traveling or working abroad; in some cases, the trafficker presents himself as the girl's boyfriend, grooming her and gradually gaining her trust to get her to move to another city where she will be exploited. Forced marriage and fraudulent marriage offers have also been reported in cases of international sex trafficking (Huang, 2017; Simkhada, 2008).

### 2.3. Existing research on *petites bonnes*

In Morocco, in 2013, a girl, aged between fifteen and seventeen years, who was living in domestic labor servitude died after being tortured by her employers (AFP, 2013). Years earlier, the girl had left her rural hometown located in the Sahara Desert, close to the Algerian border, to be employed as a housemaid in a large coastal city hundreds of miles away. There, she was confined in a house and forced to perform housework until the day she died, which was due to serious burns to her face and arms caused by the family of the employers who exploited her. This and other similar cases deeply shocked Moroccan society,

prompting a social movement protesting the almost invisible abusive conditions and exploitation that the so-called *petites bonnes* endure.

The *petites bonnes* (which in French means “young housemaids”) are generally girls from 8 to 15 years old from rural and poor areas of Morocco who are sold, forced, coerced or deceived into domestic work by richer families at private houses, which are usually located in larger cities. These girls are held under the control and care of families other than their own, who employ them for house chores. In these situations, they are exposed to significant discrimination; isolation; malnutrition; contempt; verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse; sexual harassment and other violations of children’s rights with devastating health consequences (Save the Children, 2006). *Petites bonnes* are exploited and forced to perform domestic work in extended, 12- to 16-hour days without days off or holidays (Amenzou, 2002).

Although studies on this issue are still limited, and measurement of the issue remains difficult, the domestic work of children employed as servants in the households of richer families has been identified worldwide, especially in poor countries (Black, 2002). There are no official statistics on the prevalence of *petites bonnes*, although in 2008, the Moroccan Health Ministry stated that almost 36% of domestic workers were children (CEAR, 2013).

A study conducted by the Collectif pour l’Éradication du Travail des “Petites Bonnes” concluded that up to 62% of the girls in domestic service were aged between 13 and 15 years old and that 38% were between 8 and 12 years old. Additionally, 30% of the girls had never attended school, 49% had dropped out, and 21% attended school but worked on days off. The girls from the study belonged to poor families and came from rural areas (CEAR, 2013). Previous data support this scope. In 2001, the UNICEF-Morocco and United Nations Population Fund estimated that 22,940 girls were in domestic servitude in Casablanca. Of these girls, more than half were younger than 15, more than 80% were illiterate, came from rural areas and belonged to large families, and a considerable number were orphans (Llorent-Bedmar, 2013).

### 3. Methods

This article collects part of the results of the Puigvert (2012–2014). The first goal of this research was to analyze the factors that protect against or increase the risk of the sexual trafficking of young Moroccan migrants in Spain. To this end, a qualitative study using the communicative methodology was implemented in the research (Gómez, 2019). The communicative methodology has been recommended by the EU for its potential impact on research with vulnerable groups (The European Union Spanish Presidency, 2010).

For this article, we include a selection of the fieldwork conducted in the project in Spain and Morocco from 2014 to 2015.

The research led to methodological challenges, particularly with regard to the difficulty of accessing information on who had been victims or potential victims of sexual exploitation and of contacting the professionals who intervened in this area, primarily in Morocco. The nature of the situations in which survivors find themselves is complex due to illegality, fear of possible reprisals, social stigmatization, lack of protection and insecurity, among other things. Given these difficulties, we want to value the courage of all the people who agreed to collaborate in our research to denounce this reality and build a different future.

#### 3.1. Participant selection

The broader project involved 25 qualitative techniques, including semistructured interviews and communicative focus groups with law enforcement, social service providers and public institutions in Morocco and Spain. In addition, communicative daily life stories were collected from young Moroccan women who had migrated to Spain and, despite being in circumstances that made them more vulnerable to sex trafficking, had experienced protective factors that prevented them from being trafficked. To carry out the fieldwork in Spain and Morocco, we

first mapped and selected NGOs and public institutions according to plurality, complementarity and geographic distribution criteria.

To develop this paper, we have focused on 13 interviews conducted with key social service providers according to their knowledge and direct experience about the reality and the situations of the *petites bonnes*. Of these interviews, seven were conducted in different cities located in southern, northern and central Spain. Two interviews were held with service providers who worked at two different charities dedicated to serving migrants. Four interviews were conducted with professionals from different NGOs specializing in providing shelter, therapeutic, legal and educational services for sex-trafficking victims. One interview was conducted with a law enforcement official who investigates human trafficking cases. The other five interviews were conducted in the northern and central regions of Morocco with different social service providers. One of the interviewees coordinated a program for the training and sociolabor insertion of vulnerable youth, and another two service providers worked at charitable organizations devoted to assisting women in vulnerable circumstances, such as single mothers or domestic violence victims. The final two interviewees were professionals from two different NGOs in the field of minor migrants and refugees.

Importantly, when this study was conducted in Morocco, there were no charities specifically oriented toward helping and supporting victims of sexual exploitation because addressing this issue can have legal consequences. This lack of organizational framework was an important challenge in finding suitable social service providers. To address this difficulty, we considered that sex trafficking victims would probably be attended by charitable organizations devoted to answering different social needs. Therefore, we carefully looked for professionals who were closely involved with NGOs from different intervention areas that would potentially address the needs of and provide services for sex trafficking victims, even if they were not aware that they were doing so. This difficulty was not found in Spain because there are NGOs in the region that specialize in serving sex-trafficking victims. We mapped organizations from different regions, contacted them and engaged them with the research project. Information was also obtained from government reports, NGOs, and the available gray literature.

#### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

The qualitative nature of the study and the communicative methodology approach were crucial for facilitating the emergence of this reality. Different investigations have confirmed the utility of this methodology in work with vulnerable groups (Gómez, Padrós, Ríos, Mara, & Pukepuke, 2019). Specifically, the communicative methodology in research on sex trafficking is useful in analyzing the emergence of aspects linked to emotions and socialization processes that are difficult to approach using other research methods (Merodio, Duque, & Peña, 2020). The analysis of reality through the communicative methodology assumes that knowledge is the result of the dialogue between science and society. In its application, the people participating in the fieldwork are recognized as social agents in their lives and transformers of their contexts. They contribute their experiences and interpretations, which are complemented by scientific theories and investigations. Great importance is attached not only to listening to and collecting the experiences of the participants but also to collaborating with them in interpreting their own contexts and social world. The agreements and the understanding that result are derived from such dialogue, not imposed by the investigator.

For the interviews, the researchers used a semistructured guide divided into four main sections. Before starting each interview, the researchers explained the purpose of the research and provided brochures with information on the project that the research team had translated into Spanish or French. The first section of the interview guide aimed to obtain information about the work performed by the participants and the organization as well as the characteristics of the population they

helped. The second section collected information about cases of young Moroccan girls being victims of sex trafficking as identified by the participants across their professional careers. The third section included questions on the factors and circumstances that push and pull victims into sex trafficking. The last section focused on the influences of relationships and social networks and the roles of education and other social disadvantages in the pathways of the cases of the young Moroccan girls identified by the participants. Each section included several questions and items to collect information. This semistructured guide was a flexible instrument and served as a general orientation.

During the interviews, the research team provided scientific evidence on the topic, explained the data that had already been gathered, and engaged in an egalitarian dialogue with the participants that helped start the conversation on a very sensitive topic, encouraging the participants to contrast their experiences and enhance their reflection. Consequently, this procedure favored an in-depth analysis. When some Spanish professionals were interviewed, they were at first unaware of the existence of young Moroccan women victims of sex trafficking, but when the hypothesis of the study regarding how and where they might be being sexually exploited was explained, the professionals began to remember crucial information that supported the hypothesis, realizing that on occasion, they have helped young Moroccan women whom they did not realize could actually be victims of sex trafficking since the women did not fit the typical profile. Similarly, in Morocco, in practically all the interviews conducted, the participants claimed at the beginning not to know of any cases of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, when the research team provided scientific information and explained the definition of sex trafficking stated in the Palermo Protocol (UN, 2000), including the means of recruitment and exploitation, professionals realized that many of the girls and women whom they had helped might not just be in prostitution; they might be sex trafficking victims. In fact, after the interview, one of the charities that participated in the study decided to modify their intake protocol to add key questions for the detection of potential sex trafficking victims among the population that they helped.

The interviews were held in French and Spanish and lasted approximately 40 to 90 min. To analyze the data, the research team used the qualitative software ATLAS.ti. The information extracted from the development of these interviews included the profiles presented by the women, the forms of training to which they have been exposed, the possible ways out of the situation, and other information related to the contexts and circumstances that were relevant to the investigation.

Given the information collected in the literature review, three categories were established for the data analysis: system, subject (lifeworld) and other. In the system category, the subcategories “context of origin and interactions” and “institutions, entities and persons” were created. The first subcategory refers to aspects related to economic difficulties, conflicts, catastrophes, inequalities, etc., as elements of the system that bring women closer to or away from trafficking networks with the aim of sexual exploitation. The second subcategory includes aspects such as the relations of abuse and power, corruption, public policies, and the administrative situation, as well as international cooperation, public policies, security forces, NGOs, access to educational programs and services; other aspects include the traffickers, intermediaries, the vulnerability of women, violent coercion, indebtedness or isolation, among others. The subject (lifeworld) category was composed of three subcategories: the first is “family interactions, friendships, boyfriend, environment,” which includes aspects such as love, the sale of the woman, coercion, gender violence, and sexual-affective relations. The “personal project” and the “professional project” subcategory comprises aspects such as aspirations and other forms of life, dreams, and elements related to the world and labor development. Finally, the “other” subcategory collected the elements of analysis that do not belong to any of the former categories.

Following the communicative methodology, each category was analyzed through two main dimensions—exclusionary and

transformative—which included the exclusionary and transformative elements of the information gathered. For instance, the exclusionary dimension of the analysis included those risk factors, vulnerable circumstances, and negative interactions that push young Moroccan women into sex trafficking. By contrast, the transformative dimension of the analysis comprised the protective factors and social interactions that protected women and moved them away from sexual exploitation. The contrast of the information gathered in both dimensions of analysis helped to identify risk and protective factors and generated scientific knowledge aiming to inform public policies to prevent the sex trafficking of young Moroccan girls.

### 3.3. Human subject protection

In keeping with professional ethics criteria, the data have been protected to the strictest standards, and confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent have been guaranteed.

To ensure the ethical nature of the research process, approval by the ethical committee of the Community of Research on Excellence for All (CREA) was obtained before the implementation of the diverse research techniques. Additionally, an informed consent document that informed all participants of the goals of the project, the voluntary character of their participation in it and the anonymity and confidentiality of the personal data facilitated by the protagonists was given in their respective languages.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. *Petites bonnes* in Morocco and Spain: Invisible girls

The fieldwork conducted with professionals highlights the existence of minors who correspond to the profile of *petites bonnes* and who have eventually become victims of sex trafficking.

Although the sexual exploitation of young Moroccan women in Spain has developed in a very hidden way, the State’s security forces point to the existence of cases of Moroccan women who are sexually exploited through unipersonal relations without having evidence that these are part of the organized crime networks.

*Some young Moroccan boys recognize that [it] is very easy to maintain sexual relations with young Moroccan girls, and besides, it is done in a very cautious way and very hidden; they are not even road clubs, they go with their djellabas and scarves, but they know who they are, and it is done in a discreet way in a house (EM\_04).*

The movement of these girls from rural zones to cities in Morocco or into Spain is generally accomplished through a companion or extended family networks using a false identity. This identity can be that of a distant female relative to whom the girl might bear a certain physical resemblance.

These minors are difficult to identify not only due to their irregular entry into the country but also because the majority of them are isolated from the neighborhoods and community environments in which they live and do not attend school.

These girls are only detected in Spain by Moroccan professionals in the field of social intervention, who warn that they do not know how to act to eradicate this trafficking.

*Usually, this is a topic not being dealt with because there was a lack of knowledge about how to deal with it. They were invisible, these were unknown cases, and we would get a case of a case... (EM\_12).*

As in Morocco, according to the professionals’ descriptions, *petites bonnes* in Spain are usually girls who come from underprivileged and underdeveloped rural areas whose families find themselves in a situation of extreme poverty and who lack educational and economic opportunities. Preying upon these inequalities, intermediaries from large cities travel around rural areas in search of these minors, profiting from the privative context in which the girls find themselves. The intermediaries frequently offer the girls’ families money in exchange for taking their

daughters to work as domestic workers for wealthy families living in the cities. In addition, the intermediaries also cater to the hopes and dreams that many of these families have for their daughters to be able to study and enjoy greater prosperity in cities with their new employers.

The minors become domestic workers in semislavery conditions and suffer frequent humiliation, abuse, violence and sexual harassment.

*For them, the project of migration is their dream, and she discovers that once that she gets here, she is home doing domestic work, and it is not what she had dreamed, and of course, she discovers that she is a "petite bonne". She dreamed that she would come, she would study, work and all that. She did not imagine that she was going to be a "petite bonne" within the family that took care [of her] and without a salary. And after, when she left the family in Morocco that is waiting for her to send money there, then they ran away and find these networks (EM\_12).*

When they arrive in these cities, such girls are usually poor, lacking in resources, in unknown environments and without social networks to support their new future. Often, their lack of qualifications together with the labor conditions of their country mean that they obtain employment in companies or factories in which there is substantial labor precariousness, with strenuous workdays and low salaries.

#### 4.2. Recruitment of petites bonnes by trafficking networks for the purpose of sexual exploitation

Given the reality of their experiences that have been described, many girls decide to escape or are expelled from their homes when they grow older. Outside the homes where they came for work, they find themselves in an unknown context without social networks or resources, and they are underage. In the case of having emigrated to Spain, these young women find themselves surrounded by a foreign language and culture, which exacerbates their circumstances.

*They come from other villages to work in the large cities, a large city means many dangers and a weak person in an unknown world, the culture is not the same as the one as in the village, more due to the risk of abuse within the factory or the environment (EM\_11).*

Furthermore, the insecurity and abandonment of this situation are increased by the fact that neither the institutions nor the state or the security forces have knowledge of these girls' existence since their relatives do not usually report their disappearances when they leave home to avoid being exposed to prosecution for the crime of trafficking and illegally holding minors, as pointed out by a Moroccan professional:

*She has escaped, and you will not find her anymore, and who reports? And the families could not report because they have entered irregularly and what have they done with her? (EM\_12).*

The girls see that their circumstances are far from their dreamed-of migration project of coming to Spain to obtain a better future. It is in this moment, in which these Moroccan minors lack protection and are invisible to the system, that they are recruited by trafficking networks for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Morocco, Spain or even other countries.

*Specially to the Gulf. And these ones, I tell you, from the 90 s, we already suspected, and there was some case, two of three cases, that were suspected to have left Spain and gone to the Gulf. (EM\_12).*

In the circumstances described above, the recruiters approach these women and introduce them to these networks through promises of fraudulent job offers or false promises of better jobs and salaries. They even induce them into prostitution with the pretext of obtaining extra financial income. Then, the recruiters profit from the temporary situation of economic need and, ultimately, introduce these girls to sex trafficking networks.

Previous scientific literature has shown that most of these girls are uneducated and isolated from their neighborhoods and the community environments in which they live. The professionals taking part in our fieldwork highlighted that this invisibility can also occur in front of the social services professionals or social agents of the community.

The general profile of these women includes circumstances of

vulnerability and social risk. However, as with other social groups, there are also Moroccan women victims with high educational attainment.

As an example of the latter, research has identified cases of young Moroccan women students who move from rural areas to large cities to start their university studies. They are young women with successful academic careers who have overcome manifold barriers and difficulties. Nevertheless, in this new urban context, they find themselves without social networks, in a culture that is often different from their own, at a lower socioeconomic level and in a situation of great inequality in regard to their fellow university students.

People who come from rural areas, they, the fact of reaching university is something enormous, their family has made a tremendous effort.

*Then, if people are not going to have money, she will have to work one way or the other. (...) Then, you have a very big responsibility and a load, that you are studying or you have to work, or if you do not have a job, you are going to work in whatever (EM\_11).*

Moroccan professionals highlight that these young women are under substantial pressure and feel the responsibility not to impose a financial burden on families, who often live in impoverished and underdeveloped rural regions in northern, eastern and southern Morocco. In these circumstances, there are identified cases of men recruiters who approach potential victims in their environments and initiate social relations that are false friendships. Then, the men give the girls presents or help them economically, apparently in a disinterested way, with the purpose of slowly generating a relationship of dependency and coercion that will ultimately draw these young students closer to the sex trafficking networks.

Another route of entrance to these networks experienced by these *petites bonnes* occurs when, as a result of the violence and sexual abuses committed in their captivity, they become pregnant and, later, single mothers, which results in vulnerability and discrimination that form an important risk factor. The Moroccan organizations point to the existence of a correlation between the state in which these domestic slaves find themselves and the possibility of becoming single mothers.

Some professionals who work in areas that focus on single mothers in Morocco report that this social group of women are highly vulnerable, of which sex trafficking networks take advantage. These girls suffer rejection from their families and the communities in which they reside, can be abandoned by their partners, may not have professional opportunities and may lack economic resources. In short, they can find themselves in a situation of desolation and abandonment.

*When the girls grow up, if they have not got another job, they are thrown out of the house and the families again buy younger women. These girls who have been thrown out, depending on how psychologically affected they have been, can end up being prostitutes, leaving for another country or with much older men, 60-year-olds. Many of these girls are expelled from the families because they have become pregnant by some member of the family, and as this is a dishonor, they are thrown out. The majority of girls who arrive pregnant to the associations have been sexually abused in these houses (EM\_08).*

Young Moroccan women who are single mothers are sometimes introduced to sex trafficking networks through violence, coercion, or, more frequently, through a person taking advantage of the vulnerability produced by this very system and the state by offering to cover these women's most pressing basic needs in exchange for being sexually exploited in conditions of submission and a complete lack of freedom.

*We have found sometimes, and especially with young, very young mothers, with issues that we would almost link to networks of prostitution because they are girls that in a certain moment have set themselves apart from the association very radically, in a space that we could call "maison close", brothels, where they are given everything, reception, shelter, they take care of the child and in exchange your prostitute yourself (EM\_08).*

Although there have been advances in recent years, the Moroccan Family Code (Mudawana) still places single mothers and their children within a context of illegality. Children born out of wedlock are

considered to be illegitimate, can only obtain a surname with consent from the father or brother, and do not have the right to claim food or child support from the biological father. In addition, article 490 of the penal code punishes sexual relations out of wedlock with penalties ranging from a month up to a year.

Professionals who work in areas that focus on single women in Morocco report that this social group of women finds itself in a highly vulnerable situation, of which the trafficking networks with the purpose of sexual exploitation take advantage.

*There are girls who have really fallen in love with a guy, they have become pregnant after that, and then they leave the village or the city because the family does not accept this relationship, and eventually they find that the boyfriend leaves them or abandons them and they find themselves on the streets and there the networks capture them, there they go in (EM\_12).*

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The phenomenon of the *petites bonnes* is directly related to the will and need for migration. In this paper, we have shown the main drivers of migration for a great number of girls and women who end up as victims of trafficking networks: poverty, a lack of employment or unequal access to the labor market (Hwang & Bedford, 2004). These circumstances lead these women to view migration as an alternative for them and their families. Through this pathway, they expect to obtain a job that improves their economic situation, offers them access to housing and may, in the future, allow them to save enough money to establish a business in their country of origin (Miller et al., 2007; Vijayarasa, 2012). Thus, on many occasions, migration relates to expectations of improvement for these young women and their families. The desire to help themselves in the face of poor economic situations or illnesses is clearly considered a driving force that fosters their decision to migrate (Oso, 2010; Miller et al., 2007).

Illiteracy, the lack of economic resources, little or nonexistent work experience, urban life, disability and many other issues place girls and women in vulnerable situations (Hughes, 2000). These issues are exploited by sex trafficking networks to facilitate not only initial recruitment but also subsequent control (Aghatise, 2004; Flamm, 2003; Hodge & Lietz, 2007; Hughes, 2000).

There is no doubt that migrant girls face greater risks and find themselves in greater vulnerability (Warria, 2017), but little research has shown the connection between minors performing domestic work and the eventual sex trafficking of these girls. In the case of the *petites bonnes*, although their labor exploitation situation has been identified in Morocco, their presence in Spain has not been addressed by public institutions or previous scientific work. The recruitment of these girls by sex trafficking networks has also not been analyzed in general terms, and thus little is known about their paths in Morocco and Spain.

According to the results obtained in our research, in the case of the *petites bonnes*, child domestic work overlaps with labor and sexual abuse, increasing the eventual risk of exposure to sex trafficking. A few authors have suggested that as they grow up, the *petites bonnes* are introduced to night parties, alcohol, new outfits, and makeup, among other factors, all of which lead them into prostitution (Berri, 2011). Llorent-Bedmar (2013) also affirmed that many Moroccan girls in domestic servitude end up working as prostitutes, although the study did not include fieldwork evidence.

We have found limited previous research that conducted analyses similar to our research. These studies showed evidence of this connection in the paths of therestàveks in Haiti (Gilbert et al., 2018; Pierre, Smucker, & Tardieu, 2009) and in girls who migrate due to a forced marriage (Warria, 2017).

In all these cases, answers appear once the girls have already become victims, but very little is done in terms of primary prevention (Gilbert et al., 2018; McCalla, 2002; Sommerfelt, 2015). In our research, following the communicative methodology, the data collection and later analysis of the transformative dimension led us to identify the protective

factors and social interactions that protect these young women in their contexts from moving toward sexual exploitation. These results show that having had educational opportunities and, especially, a nonsegregated education that has promoted their social inclusion and equal opportunity, can have a protective effect against trafficking for the aim of sexual exploitation.

In these successful paths, experiencing a social and community environment that supports and acknowledges these young women is also a remarkable protective factor, as is having solid friendships. Their families and environment have had high expectations about them and have promoted them in facilitating their attainment of their goals. Finally, in these girls' paths, life projects are also of utmost importance. It is crucial that these girls have high expectations and dreams that, although difficult to attain, they have not abandoned, even though they started from similar conditions and contexts as other girls who have ended up in the trafficking networks with the aim of sexual exploitation.

Consequently, considering the previous scientific literature and our results, in the case of the *petites bonnes*, we suggest three lines of preventive work: increasing the economic viability of the girls' places of origin, promoting girls' academic education and enhancing their social interactions with people in their environments. The first line of work responds to the need to improve the economic circumstances that make migration the most viable option for a family to ensure the basic needs of their children or offer a future for the girls who migrate. Programs for the development of sustainable agriculture or microcredits for starting personal businesses are some examples. One such example that is achieving successful results is the savings and credit program operated by the Foundation Limyè Lavi in Haiti. Through this program, the foundation funds commercial activities, such as the acquisition of agricultural material or animals to be raised. The benefits of such programs are used to pay part of the education of the vulnerable children of that community. Through this approach, those families who would otherwise opt to send their children to work in domestic service receive support that allows them to keep their children at home (Sommerfelt, 2015).

The second line of work is tightly linked to the first and is, in fact, part of the general strategies based on human rights to reduce poverty. Schools are key spaces for the transformation of the lives of girls and boys, their families and society in general. Therefore, early school leaving needs to be addressed, and all girls of school age who are not attending school should be considered (Rothman et al., 2020). These actions should not be limited to facilitating access to education, since work must also be done to ensure that the education provided is inclusive and nonsegregated (Antunes & Lúcio, 2019; López de Aguilera, 2019). Previous studies indicate the relevance of school access for children from underprivileged sectors to become integrated and able to work on an egalitarian basis with the rest of society. Furthermore, it is important to form a space that welcomes them, reinforces them and guarantees their best academic knowledge (Gairal, García, Novo, & Salvadó, 2019; García-Carrión, Molina-Luque, & Roldán, 2018; Soler, Morlà-Folch, García-Carrión, & Valls, 2020).

Third, both in our investigation and in other research conducted with trafficked women, social interactions beyond structural factors are highlighted due to their impact on these young women in the process of beginning the migration process and/or being recruited by sex trafficking networks (Warria, 2017). Therefore, in addition to working on the structural elements that generate the need to emigrate, increasing awareness of the families and the community in general can be very useful (Quinless & Adu-Febiri, 2019). This awareness should bring to light the reality of the trajectories of abuse and violence suffered by these girls and their eventual recruitment by trafficking networks. Such awareness can be fostered, for example, by concrete school programs that address gender violence in general. The dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution, among its different actions, contemplates taking scientific evidence about gender violence to the whole community to facilitate the identification of cases among all (Rodríguez-Oramas, Zubiri, Arostegui, Serradell, & Sanvicén-Torné, 2020; Serradell,

Ramis, de Botton, & Solé, 2019).

During our research, we confirmed that providing the practitioners of the organizations with scientific knowledge about the trafficking paths helped them obtain a new perspective and identify a reality that had hitherto gone unnoticed.

To enhance these interactions in a more concrete way, it is important that future research delve into the knowledge of the recruitment processes of these girls.

Finally, we would like to highlight the relevance for future research of accurately identifying the places of origin of these *petites bonnes*. The extant knowledge indicates that impoverished regions, particularly rural areas, are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon. Locating these contexts more precisely will allow us to determine the priority zones for the implementation of these actions.

The lack of data about the trajectories that draw these Moroccan girls closer to trafficking networks emphasizes the value of this article. Nevertheless, this study has two major limitations that can also be addressed in future research. The first is the lack of previous empirical research studies on the *petites bonnes* issue, and the second is the limited access to data. *Petites bonnes* victims were not interviewed due to the difficulty of accessing this vulnerable population and because of ethical concerns. Therefore, the findings rely on the professional experiences and knowledge of social service providers. However, we are aware that the population served by our informants might not be representative of Moroccan trafficking victims at large. To approach a topic on which there is a lack of previous study, we followed the strategy of selecting social service providers according to plurality, complementarity and geographic distribution criteria. Thus, we were able to obtain at least a first groundwork of findings on the topic studied on which other researchers can build and contribute further evidence. Future development of this topic should apply new methodologies and approaches to include the direct experiences and voices of the *petites bonnes* survivors. This approach would potentially contribute to a deeper understanding of the specific risk factors according to victims' perceptions and to the design and development of accurate strategies for detecting and preventing such victimization.

The information provided herein contributes to increasing the visibility of the reality of these *petites bonnes* victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation so that they are not forgotten. Furthermore, it provides knowledge that can guide the actions of policy makers and practitioners working to protect childhood, among others. This knowledge should lead to the creation of new primary prevention programs in the places of origin of the *petites bonnes* and can also be useful in promoting and strengthening the work that some organizations in Morocco are currently already doing to address child labor exploitation.

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#### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105719>.

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