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I would like to extend a warm welcome to our readers and authors. It is my pleasure to introduce this Issue of the JoRIE, *Journal of Research for International Educators.* JoRIE provides a journal platform for authors from universities and educational entities to strategic research.  We have added a new track on AI and updated our International Education Studies track:

- **AI Ethics and Academic Integration** - to examine the *ethical implementation and impact of artificial intelligence in higher education*, focusing on responsible AI development, algorithmic fairness in academic assessment, student privacy protection, and the enhancement of teaching-learning experiences while maintaining human-centered educational values.

- **International Education Studies -**to engage research that seeks information and data from leaders and teachers that encourages *best practices for building expertise, content and literacy that impacts K-12 to university students with skills and values of school and mission.*

Appreciation is expressed to those on the peer review team who provide their expertise and reviewing skills that combine evaluation, theory, context, mechanism, and methodology. Our editorial team expanded to include 3 more universities, from our member schools:

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The expertise and cross-cultural understanding from the authors of papers and presentations places JoRIE at the center of important, evolving research that has a far-reaching impact internationally. Enjoy this previous year's entries and join us with your comments and participation for entries in 2025!

With gratitude,
Dr. Bishop

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the unlikely convergence of patriarchal beliefs, ideologies, and narratives between traditional Cambodian culture, Christian ideologies, and international political pressures on the Cambodian government. This convergence creates the opportunity for an authoritarian disciplinary approach to social justice and community development interventions to address sex trafficking in Cambodia that denies women the agency to make choices about their bodies and engage in sexual commerce for economic survival or financial gain. It also legitimizes strict control of women during their recovery from sex trafficking, preventing them from contacting their families, denying them freedom of movement, and coercing them to work in social enterprises or state-owned operations as part of their rehabilitation. Government actors and anti-trafficking NGOs use cultural, religious, and political narratives to equate sex work and sex trafficking, resulting in physical violence against women, infringements on their human rights, invasions of their privacy, and their subjection to disciplinary environments in both government and NGO shelters. Narratives identifying women engaging in sexual commerce as trafficking victims without regard for their circumstances and choices is an act of rhetorical violence and social injustice that diminishes their perceived value in society, reduces their access to opportunities and social support systems, and results in increased risks of other forms of violence. This article recommends clarifying anti-trafficking legislation, improving oversight on anti-

trafficking responses and interventions, and improving social and cultural narratives related to sex trafficking.

## INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is a form of violence that has increased in frequency over the last two and a half decades. In 2001, estimates indicated that 700,000 – 800,000 people were trafficked worldwide (Clawson, 2007). In 2023, the Global Slavery Index reported that an estimated 50 million people are currently trafficked or exploited in some form of modern slavery (Walk Free, 2023), a 7000% increase in the number of people enslaved over a mere 22 years. Additionally, these numbers do not include the estimated 160 million exploited through child labor practices as of 2021 (International Labor Organization, 2024). Estimates of the prevalence of human trafficking vary across international organizations, NGOs, and governments, but these estimates agree that women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to sex trafficking. Sex trafficking in Southeast Asia has been a specific area of concern for NGOs, with anti-trafficking efforts in the region focused on eliminating sex trafficking, especially in Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Christian NGOs working to eliminate the sexual exploitation of women, girls, and children have historically led social justice and community development efforts to address sex trafficking in Cambodia (Miles et al., 2020). While sex trafficking is an ongoing concern in Cambodia, scholars dispute government and NGO portrayals of the scale of the problem and their proposed solutions (Keo et al., 2014; Overs, 2013; Steinfatt, 2011).

Cambodia is officially a constitutional monarchy that operates as a parliamentary representative democracy (United States Department of State, 2011). Prime Minister Hun Manet, son of long-time prime minister and authoritarian ruler Hun Sen (The Associated Press, 2024), operates as an authoritarian leader despite Cambodia being a representative democracy (Lawrence, 2020; Luo & Un, 2022). Hun Sen and his ruling party have maintained control through violence and oppression of political and social opposition (United States Department of State, 2011). Cambodia's social framework is built on Theravada Buddhist foundations (Harris, 2012). Anti-human trafficking NGOs in Cambodia working to secure social justice outcomes operate at the mercy of, and in cooperation with, the authoritarian Cambodian government. In this authoritarian environment, these collaborative efforts between NGOs and the government have successfully identified human trafficking cases. While the identification of trafficking cases has improved over the last two decades, the number of women identified as trafficking victims who assert that they are not victims of trafficking but instead working in Cambodia's entertainment scene of their own free will is increasing (Keo et al., 2014; Overs, 2013; Steinfatt, 2011). While there are clear legal definitions of sex trafficking and human trafficking, interpretations of these definitions vary widely across anti-trafficking actors. Cultural, social, and political ideologies influence interpretations of these definitions. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts in Cambodia, it is essential to understand the origins and effects of beliefs, ideologies, and norms that drive government and NGO responses to human trafficking in Cambodia and the consequences of these on women engaging in the commercial sex industry or suspected of engaging in commercial sexual activity.

**Significance**

      This study will contribute to filling the knowledge gap related to the origins and legitimization of anti-trafficking ideologies and practices in Cambodia and their effects on the agency and autonomy of women working in the commercial sex industry in Cambodia.

**Research Questions**

      This study focuses on three research questions.

1) What are the cultural and ideological synergies between traditional Cambodian culture and Christianity related to female agency, morality, and sexuality?

2) How do these cultural and religious ideas shape responses to sex trafficking in Cambodia?

3) How do women working in the entertainment and commercial sex industries experience these anti-trafficking responses?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

      This research finds a foundation in Foucault's theory of power and discipline and its application to the lived experiences of women engaging in commercial sex in Cambodia.

**Foucault's Theory of Power and Discipline**

      This study analyzes human trafficking interventions in Cambodia through the lens of Michel Foucault's theories of discipline and power. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (1995)*,* Foucault explores the emergence of societal discipline as a method of punishment

for disobedience. He argues, "Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of 'contagions,' of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder" (Foucault, 1995, p. 198). Foucault's idea of "contagions" gives language and depth to human fear of the unknown, and the potential of 'the other' to disrupt social order. He also likens discipline to the antithesis of a political plague of disorder. Discipline facilitates "regulation of the smallest details … and the capillary functioning of power (Foucault, 1995, pp. 197-8). The functions of discipline are primarily applied to "abnormal individuals" whom Foucault typifies through the illustration of the leper and the plague (Foucault, 1995, p. 198)." Lepers are excluded from society, and the plague is eradicated through discipline. Excluding 'lepers' is a means of attaining the end goal of a "pure society," while eradication of the plague through rigorous controls is a means of creating a "disciplined society" (Foucault, 1995, p. 198).

According to Foucault, power is enacted on the body, and the purpose of discipline is to make it "docile," increase its utility, and bind its control to greater societal forces of governance (Foucault, 1995, pp. 136–137). "A body that is docile may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (Foucault, 1995, p. 135-6). Foucault (1995) underscores the role of societal institutions in democratizing the social construction of disciplinary practices through education, healthcare, and other institutional mechanisms, resulting in self-surveillance and adherence to societal norms.

Foucault's explanations of the emotional experiences and social mechanisms that drive and facilitate stigmatization and othering, while relevant to the stigmatization and othering that occur as a result of human trafficking, have not yet been applied to these cases.

**Gap in the Literature**

This lack of direct application of Foucault's theory to current social issues related to stigma, othering, and the implementation of authoritarian discipline creates a gap in practical understanding of the cultural motivations and drivers of inequitable treatment of women engaged in sex work in Cambodia.

**Definitions**

**Sex trafficking.** "Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age" (US Dept. of Justice, 2015).

**Prostitution.** Prostitution involves engaging, agreeing, or offering to engage in sexual conduct with another person in return for a fee (Cornell Law School, 2023).

This study will utilize the terminology of 'commercial sex' or 'sexual commerce' as a substitute for prostitution, as the author understands that 'prostitution' and 'prostitute' are highly stigmatized terms that have negative connotations regarding the legal status, dignity, and agency of women perceived to be engaging in commercial sexual activity.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is a meta-analysis of NGO reports and scholarly articles on cultural and religious beliefs regarding women's agency and sexuality and sex trafficking in Cambodia. This study's scope is limited in that it only focuses on perceptions of women's agency, morality, and sexuality. It also analyzes sex trafficking responses in Cambodia. It analyzes scholarly literature focused on

cultural and religious constructions of social norms for women, sex trafficking responses in Cambodia, and the experiences of survivors of sex trafficking in Cambodia. A broader review of the literature on narratives surrounding prostitution and sex trafficking provides additional necessary context.

This study utilizes Foucault's (1995) theoretical framework to conduct a meta-analysis of scholarly literature documenting normative narratives on women's agency and sexuality in Cambodia, anti-sex trafficking responses in Cambodia, and the experiences of women working in the commercial sex industry in Cambodia related to the use of these tactics. Many scholarly articles explore human trafficking in Cambodia. However, much of this literature describes selected phenomena and histories of intervention in the country. The prevalence of phenomena-related studies creates an opportunity for a meta-analysis to identify themes that describe the social and political frameworks motivating social justice actors and constructing community development responses to human trafficking, as well as the effects of those responses on women working in the commercial sex industry in Cambodia.

## FINDINGS

The author's review and analysis of existing literature on attitudes and beliefs about female sexuality in traditional Cambodian and Christian cultures and belief structures reveals important similarities between the two belief systems. The following sections examine the findings related to the research questions stated above. The first section explores the synergies between the two cultures regarding their beliefs about female agency, morality, and sexuality. The second section examines the effects of these beliefs on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government responses to sex trafficking in Cambodia. The third section details how women in

Cambodia experience anti-trafficking interventions. The paper concludes with a discussion of the application of Foucault's theory to the lived experiences of women engaging in commercial sex and anti-trafficking responses in Cambodia.

**Cultural and Ideological Synergies Between Cambodian Culture and Christianity Related to Female Sexuality**

      **The Value and Role of Women's Sexuality in Cambodia.** The Chab Srey code, or "The Rules of the Lady" (Morrison, Lim, et al., 2021), is an institutionalized set of behavioral norms and expectations derived from an ancient 14th-century Cambodian poem presented as a mother's advice to her daughter. Over centuries, it has dictated women's value, roles, and sexuality in Cambodia (Anderson & Grace, 2018). The poem prescribes the behavior expected from "*Srei Kruap* Leakkh (a woman full of virtue)" and how she should interact with three primary groups: her family, her husband, and others outside the home (Flude, 2013, p. 4). Schools in Cambodia taught the Chab Srey to girls enrolled in eighth and ninth grades until 2007, with an abbreviated, less formal version still taught in many schools (Anderson & Grace, 2018).

      According to the Chab Srey, a virtuous woman never ventures far from her home, is always respectful and subservient to her husband, and honors her parents, caring and providing for them (Anderson & Grace, 2018; Flude, 2013; Morrison, Vanntheary, et al., 2021). A crucial aspect of the Chab Srey is the sexual propriety of a virtuous woman. A virtuous woman remains a virgin until married and, when married, maintains a monogamous sexual relationship in marriage no matter how promiscuous her husband is (Flude, 2013; Morrison et al., 2021). "Men are gold, women are cloth" is a common Cambodian saying that alludes to the belief that a woman who

violates social expectations and norms related to sexuality tarnishes her family's reputation forever. In contrast, a man's reputation is never questioned, no matter how promiscuous he is (Derks, 2008).

A woman who violates the rules of Chab Srey, especially the codes related to sexual morality and propriety, is labeled "*Srei Kouc* (the 'broken woman,')" a euphemism for a sex worker (Flude, 2013; Morrison, Vanntheary, et al., 2021). During Cambodia's colonial period, the French constructed a new identity for Cambodian women. The French perceived Cambodian women to be open to casual sexual relationships and interested in monetary rewards in exchange for sex (Jacobsen, 2008). As Cambodia sought to reestablish itself on the world stage in the wake of the Vietnam War, the coup and genocidal rule of the nationalist Khmer Rouge pursued a reclaiming of the sexuality of Cambodian women (Flude, 2013) to restore and maintain the purity of the nation. The end of the Khmer Rouge's reign over the country brought UN troops, foreign investment, and an increased demand for commercial sex (Derks, 2008). The identity of a prostitute or sex worker is culturally associated with "*Srei Kouc,*" a woman broken and corrupted beyond repair or redemption who brings shame and dishonor to her family, community, and nation (Jacobsen, 2008). Jacobsen (2008) shows that staunch advocates for Cambodian culture viewed this new reality where commercial sex became more common as a "contamination" of Cambodian culture and a subversion of the culture's core values, causing women to fail in their role of "preserving" the values of the culture.

**The Value and Role of Women's Sexuality in Christianity.** The norms associated with the role and value of women's sexuality in Christianity originate in the Bible. In Genesis's narrative of the origins of human existence, a woman (Eve) is created to fulfill the relational needs of the man (Adam). Eve disobeys her creator, who then curses her. "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (*YouVersion*, 2023). In Genesis, male sexuality is prioritized,

and women are created for men's pleasure. The male controls women's sexuality, and the female "womb" is a tool for furthering male genetic lines (Mbuwayesango, 2016). In Biblical discourse on sex, "men are the active partners" and "it is men who 'know' women and women who are 'known'" (Mbuwayesango, 2016). Men are the only ones with "freedom, purpose, and activity," a woman who acts in "freedom" is sinful (Wu, n.d.)

The statements "purity before marriage" and "fidelity within marriage" (Hollinger, 2009, p. 30) summarize Modern Christian beliefs regarding sex. Sex must be "within marriage, exclusive, intimate, fruitful (reproductive), selfless, complex, and complementary" (Hollinger, 2009, p. 31). These requirements mean no sex outside of marriage. Sex is only appropriate between one man and one woman, and commercial selling of sex or other forms of sexual sin are forbidden. Therefore, a virtuous Christian woman abstains from any sexual activity until married and then only engages in sex with her husband. A woman who has sex outside of marriage has sinned (Hollinger, 2009).

The Bible frames sex workers as being "sinful and disloyal," unworthy of dignity or respect (Fones, 2022). Leviticus 19:29 states, "Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, that the land not become prostituted and full of depravity" (*YouVersion*, 2023), implying that a woman's virtue has implications for the purity and character of the nation, not just herself and her family. Additionally, the act of prostitution is used as a metaphor to describe the circumstances in which the nation of Israel disobeyed God (Fones, 2022). The Bible regularly uses a narrative of prostitutes and sex workers that frames them as the source of social problems to which the use of violence (stoning) to purify society is justified. In the biblical context, prostitutes are subject to shame, ridicule, and direct and structural violence. They only become valuable when they have been 'saved' and returned to righteousness and conformity to social, cultural, and religious norms

(Fones, 2022). Jesus' interaction with a woman caught in adultery, whom he saved from being stoned for her sins and commanded to "Go, and sin no more" (Bible Gateway, 2024), exemplifies the limitations of Christian kindness where acc conditional on repentance.

Jesus had multiple interactions with women who are commonly understood to be sexual sinners. In each interaction, he was kind and respectful to the women, but his message was clear: they needed to repent of their sins and stop engaging in sexual immorality. His relationship with Mary of Magdalene, a woman often characterized as a former prostitute in Christian lore, is often used to exemplify the redemptive power of Christianity. However, her status as a former prostitute is a result of inferred identity based on surrounding passages rather than decisive labeling in the text (Carrol, 2006). So, despite Jesus' kindness toward women identified as sexual sinners, his interactions with them uphold the moral responsibility of women to remain sexually pure and maintain the patriarchal disparity regarding responsibility and accountability for sexual promiscuity within the Christian tradition.

**Effects of Cultural Norms on Anti-Trafficking Responses and Tactics**

  **Representations and Understandings of Sex Trafficking**. There are profound differences in ideology related to what constitutes sex trafficking. Conservative and fundamentalist ideologies of social justice adhere to a belief that it is impossible for a person not under duress or coercion to choose to engage in commercial sex and consequently view all forms of commercial sex work and related activities as sex trafficking. Liberal ideologies and perspectives on social justice hold space for individual agency and choice and accordingly understand that there is a need for distinction between willing engagement in commercial sex work and forced sexual exploitation, sex

trafficking, and sexual slavery (Baker, 2013; Bernstein, 2010; Bettio et al., 2017; Brysk, 2009; Cojocaru, 2015; Swartz, 2019; Weitzer, 2007a).

The conservative ideology outlined above has largely shaped global legal frameworks, intervention design, and social discourse related to sex trafficking. In the United States, narratives of white slavery were codified into the Mann Act of 1910, which forbids the transportation of women across state lines for "immoral purposes." This narrative and legislation facilitated the criminalization of 'deviant' sexual practices like interracial sex and other socially unacceptable sexual relationships (Baker, 2013). Doezema (1999) demonstrates there were two primary narratives associated with white slavery, "regulation" and "abolition." Those in favor of regulation understood prostitution to be a "necessary evil" that was provided first by "fallen women" and later by "sexual deviants." Abolitionists embraced a feminist approach that framed unrestricted male desire for sex as the primary problem and advocated for the "rescue and rehabilitation" of prostitutes rather than regulation or criminal prosecution. The abolitionist movement against prostitution eventually intensified into a campaign for social purity (Doezema, 1999). The framing of prostitution as white slavery was intentional as it removed female agency from the equation, highlighted stolen innocence, and removed the element of choice. This framing of prostitution and the agency or lack thereof for people involved in sexual commerce remains deeply embedded in current discussions of sex trafficking (Bettio et al., 2017). The prohibitions against prostitution remain in most national and international laws, and the ideology permeates anti-trafficking work. A notable example of the continued prevalence of this ideological approach is the US government's requirement that anti-trafficking organizations receiving US Government funds must not advocate for the legalization of prostitution (Chuang, 2023).

When all commercial sex work is narrated as sex trafficking, the greater public demands a compelling solution (Twis & Praetorius, 2021; Weitzer, 2007b). Since 2000, the propagation of this ideology has resulted in an ever-growing number of social justice NGOs taking up the fight against sex trafficking around the world, with the rescue of 'helpless' victims of sex trafficking from exploitative situations being the most common and publicly salient model for addressing the problem (Jones et al., 2018; Swartz, 2019).

**Prostitution and Sex Trafficking in Cambodia.** Cheryl Overs (2013), in her report *From Sex Work to Entertainment and Trafficking: Implications of a Paradigm Shift for Sexuality, Law and Activism in Cambodia* introduces Cambodia's 2008 adoption of a new anti-trafficking law with background on the impetus for its construction and implementation. She argues that pressure from the United States Government triggered Cambodia's 2008 update to its anti-trafficking legal framework that made all commercial sex activities illegal as a method of addressing human and sex trafficking in the country. The language of the resulting law was ambiguous regarding the distinction between commercial sex work and sex trafficking, forcing women caught in or suspected of engaging in commercial sex into one of two sides of a legal dichotomy. The ambiguity of the law allows law enforcement the option of categorizing women suspected of sex work as trafficking victims or criminals, where those identified as trafficking victims are still often denied agency during their recovery process (Maher et al., 2015, p. 3). Concurrently, women engaging in the commercial sex economy are forced to contend with social and economic dichotomies as well. Economically, they can engage in the commercial sex economy and provide for themselves and their family, or they can suffer through poverty. Poverty leaves them unable to meet their needs or forces them to work in other physically demanding jobs, which also carry a risk of exploitation. Socially, they must choose between supporting their parents as dutiful daughters (Smith-Brake et

al., 2021) or maintaining their status as virtuous women. The choice to engage in commercial sex

to fulfill their obligation as a dutiful daughter results in their stigmatization as a "broken woman"

(Ditmore, 2014; Smith-Brake et al., 2021).

**Figure 1**
*Summarizing Competing Ideologies on Sex Trafficking*

| Practical Approach | Morality Approach |
|---|---|
| Regulation | Abolition |
| Liberal | Christian and Conservative Feminist |
| Prostitution and sex trafficking are related but separate issues. | Prostitution is always sex trafficking. |
| Women can choose to engage in commercial sex. | No woman would ever choose to engage in commercial sex. |
| Women engaging in sexual commerce need regulations and legislation to protect them. | Women engaging in sexual commerce need to be rescued and rehabilitated. |
| Sex work is a valid economic choice. | Sex work is a crime and a violation of society's moral standards. |
| Women engaging in commercial sex are dutiful daughters caring for their families. | Women engaging in commercial sex are broken women in need of rehabilitation and redemption. |

**Women's Experiences with Anti-Trafficking Interventions**

Beyond the consequences of political dichotomies that forced women to choose between

the identities of victim or criminal, the implementation of the law had considerable tangible

consequences for women engaging in commercial sex and for public health campaigns in Cambodia (Overs, 2013). The construction of the 2008 anti-trafficking law reflects the influence of the underlying cultural belief that women who engage in sex outside of marriage, especially commercial sex, are defiled and broken women who tarnish the reputation of their families, communities, and culture (Jacobsen, 2008). One of the most prominent and tangible effects of this belief, in conjunction with the 2008 law, is the shift in Cambodian methods of policing women engaging in commercial sex and women suspected of engaging in commercial sex. After the 2008 law went into effect, brothels were closed, and street prostitution was highly policed, forcing the market for sex into other entertainment venues like bars, beer gardens, and KTV (karaoke) establishments where women negotiate privately with patrons wanting sexual services (Ditmore, 2014; Overs, 2013). As a result of brothel closures, commercial sex negotiations and transactions were pushed into these public venues, opening them up to increased scrutiny from law enforcement. Police in Phnom Penh regularly search women in entertainment districts and venues for condoms. If condoms are found on the woman or any man who is accompanying them, the woman is taken into custody (Overs, 2013). For women engaging in commercial sex, the stigma of their "*srei kouc* (broken woman)" identity has resulted in a disregard for their human rights and an escalation of police violence against sex workers (Ditmore, 2014; Maher et al., 2015; Overs, 2013). Ditmore (2014, p. 29) provides the following quote from a woman in Phnom Penh.

> Chanta: "Violence has increased, especially from the police. The police look down on sex workers in the Garden and treat us like animals (Ditmore, 2014, p. 29)." Many women felt targeted as part of a larger plot to eliminate sex workers from society, as depicted in the quote below from Maher et al., (2015).

Chakriya, 22: "They want to abolish sex workers, so they catch us in order to send us for education and stop working like this. There are many jobs we can do. They don't want us to do like this because it affects Khmer culture and tradition." (Maher et al., 2015, p. 106)

Women who are arrested or rescued can face physical and sexual violence in police custody before being placed in government shelters or NGO shelters. Additionally, Overs (2013, p. 13) cites multiple sources detailing law enforcement's use of the 2008 anti-trafficking law to police "indecent acts that affect morality, tradition, and public order," with those detained forced to sign a pledge to rehabilitate and become good citizens. The current legal framework allows women who are taken into custody for commercial sexual activity to be classified as trafficked, which aligns with the philosophy and worldview of the predominately Christian NGOs fighting sex trafficking in Cambodia (Miles et al., 2021). Law enforcement officers often coordinate raids with NGOs, with NGOs functioning as informants, identifying potential victims, and providing shelter care for rescued women (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018). Many women dispute that they are trafficking victims and in need of rescue (Derks, 2008; Sandy, 2006). The following quote from a woman who was arrested and taken to a shelter against her will is an excellent example of the conflict between women perceived to be sex workers or sex trafficking victims and law enforcement and NGOs working to address sex trafficking.

Da, female, 2016: "They asked me, was I forced or treated badly. I did not know what they had to force me to do. I did not know. I applied to work there by myself. Then they said I told them a lie. I told them I did not tell them a lie. What was the problem? I did not know... They said that was ok although I did not know. They asked how old was I? I said I was older. I was 19 years old at that time. They said I was 15 or 16 years old and

then I was sent to an organization. I told them that I was 19 years old, but they did not

believe me. They said I was 15 or 16 years old, so I did not know how I should say. After

that, they sent me to the organization (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018)."

Women entering shelter care environments can find the process of entering and adjusting

to life in shelters for survivors traumatizing. Once admitted to government or NGO shelters,

survivors often encounter rigid, disciplinary environments that place considerable restrictions on

their rights and freedoms and force participation in rehabilitation programs focused on breaking

their dependence on commercial sex work and preparing them to engage in respectable

employment after their release (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018). In the shelter environments, women

experienced restrictions on their freedom of movement, use of the phone or internet, and ability to

contact their families.

Sokchea, female, 2015: "They block us. Even the small window was blocked, too. In

short, they tried to prevent us. I know they are trying to keep us safe, but it is too much...

They have a lot of rules. I cannot even see the outsiders when I go out. In the previous

time, when I went to get a training course offered by the shelter, I saw a man and he

looked at me too, so I have to meet them in the office because of it. It wasn't serious – I

just looked at his face…. [We are monitored] 24 hours, except for the time I go to the

restroom only. I am telling you the truth (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018, p. 20)."

In one government shelter, women were forced to grow vegetables, while in NGO shelters,

women were often required to work in the NGOs' social enterprises as a form of vocational training

or rehabilitation. (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018; Overs, 2013).

Veatha, female, 2016: "I think the skill of sewing the wallet is not usable in Cambodia, as all the products were sent to abroad. I think it is impossible for me to do it in Cambodia (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018, p. 151)."

Additionally, many women reported that some of the staff in the shelters held stigmatized views of the shelter residents and verbally abused them. While women's experiences in shelter care and training were mixed, many found the experience helpful despite their frustrations with how they came to reside in the shelter and its disciplinary structures (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018). In contrast to the negative experiences of women captured above, many women had positive experiences in recovery shelters and rehabilitation programs.

Bormey, female, 2016: "It [support from the shelter] changes me a lot. I think if I do not receive support from the shelter, I might not have everything I have today. They treated me and supported me for studying too… I could study until grade 12" (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018, p. 75)

Monyrath, female, 2016: "They [the staff] were kind. They never blamed us… They treated me in a good way. When I lived in that room, my housemother told me to be patient. I could change my attitude because my attitude was not good, as I did not listen to other-people's speech… When she taught me like that, I changed my attitude. She told me and encouraged me. I listened to her when she spoke. I changed." (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018, p. 78)

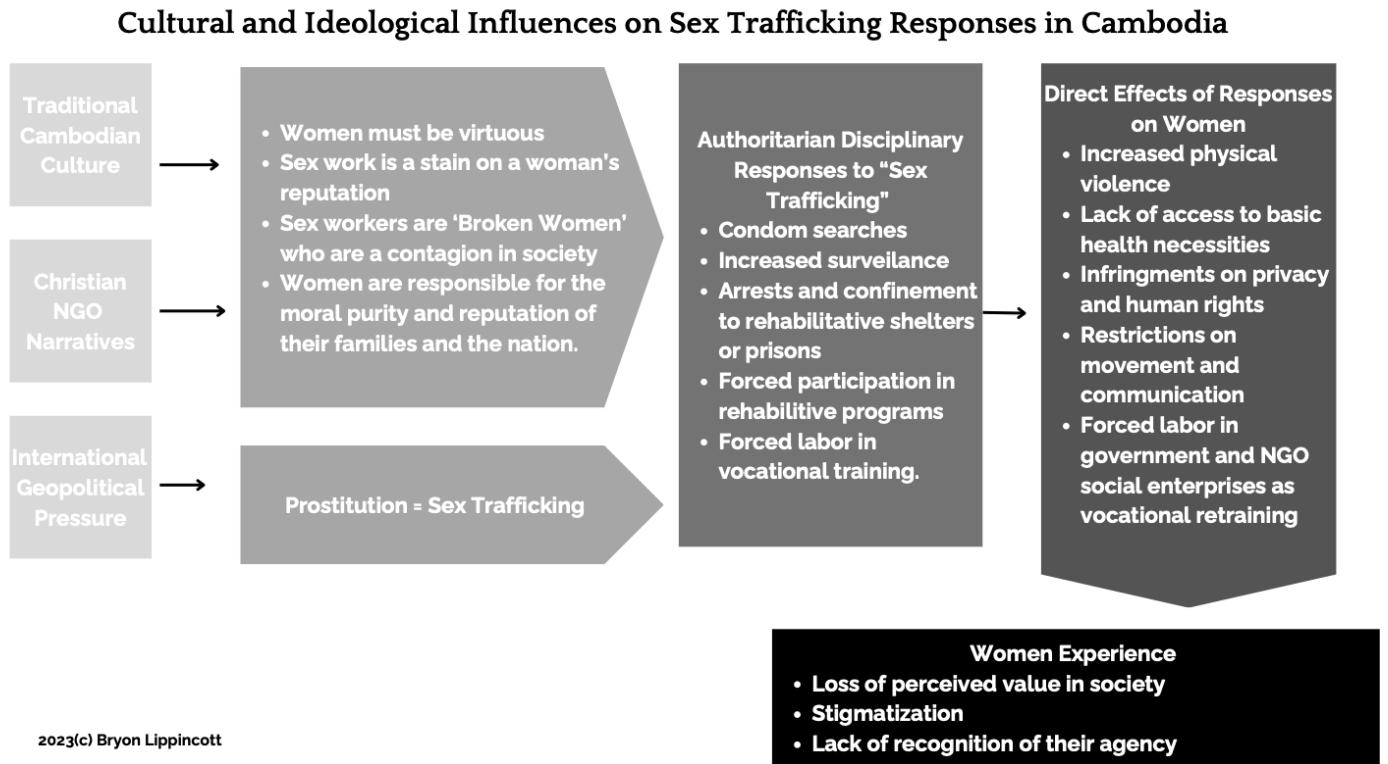Researchers have also documented survivors' positive experiences with shelter staff.

Rachana, 2016: "The teachers who worked in the shelter, as well as the counselor, encouraged me a lot. Those mums there encouraged me and I felt warmer than staying at

home. I did not feel warm when I lived with my family, but I felt warm when I stayed in the shelter. They took care of me all the time. . . I do not mean they took care of my body, but they taught me and used soft words" (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2020, p. 183).

The experiences of survivors shared above are just a small sampling of many experiences documented through the Butterfly Longitudinal Research project on survivor experiences in Cambodia conducted by Chab Dai, an international Anti-trafficking organization working in Cambodia, and a growing series of papers resulting from the data collected and research from other scholars like Maher et al., (2015). As a collective whole, the reports from the butterfly project and the scholarly research resulting from the study show that survivor experiences range from positive and impactful to negative and traumatizing. This diversity of experiences in shelter environments and the public stigma that come with being identified as a broken woman make being identified as a trafficking victim and forced into the rehabilitation system an experience fraught with risk.

**Figure 3**

*Influences on Sex Trafficking Responses in Cambodia*

## Cultural and Ideological Influences on Sex Trafficking Responses in Cambodia

**Traditional Cambodian Culture**

**Christian NGO Narratives**

**International Geopolitical Pressure**

- Women must be virtuous
- Sex work is a stain on a woman's reputation
- Sex workers are 'Broken Women' who are a contagion in society
- Women are responsible for the moral purity and reputation of their families and the nation.

**Prostitution = Sex Trafficking**

**Authoritarian Disciplinary Responses to "Sex Trafficking"**
- Condom searches
- Increased surveilance
- Arrests and confinement to rehabilitative shelters or prisons
- Forced participation in rehabilitive programs
- Forced labor in vocational training.

**Direct Effects of Responses on Women**
- Increased physical violence
- Lack of access to basic health necessities
- Infringments on privacy and human rights
- Restrictions on movement and communication
- Forced labor in government and NGO social enterprises as vocational retraining

**Women Experience**
- Loss of perceived value in society
- Stigmatization
- Lack of recognition of their agency

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## DISCUSSION

The alignment of Cambodian social norms, Christian anti-prostitution and anti-sex trafficking ideologies, and international political pressure from the US government to address sex trafficking in Cambodia created the opportunity for a disciplinary approach to addressing sex trafficking in Cambodia. Government and NGO responses to sex trafficking in Cambodia align with Foucault's (1995) theory of discipline as outlined in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault's primary theory that "power is enacted on the body" (Foucault, 1995, pp. 136–137) is powerfully relevant in relationship to women perceived to be engaged in commercial sex work in Cambodia and the desire of social, religious, and political forces to control their use of their bodies as a commodity for sexual commerce.

International pressure from the US Government to address sex trafficking in the country under threat of the discontinuation of aid funding to the country (Keo et al., 2014; Overs, 2013) created political space to address the social contagion of commercial sex work in Cambodia. This political cover to address sex trafficking resulted in the adoption of authoritarian disciplinary approaches based on the equivocation of prostitution with sex trafficking in NGO and government narratives. While there are definite international legal distinctions between prostitution and sex trafficking, narratives equating prostitution and sex trafficking in Cambodia are used to legitimize law enforcement's harassment and privacy invasion of women suspected of being involved in commercial sexual activity (prostitution). The harassment and search of women's persons and belongings on the street looking for condoms or other indications that a woman has engaged in or intends to engage in commercial sex, as documented (Overs. 2013), serves to regulate the "smallest details" of their lives and exemplifies the "capillary functioning of power" over their daily lives (Foucault, 1995, p.198). Ultimately, law enforcement's targeting of women carrying condoms has resulted in Cambodian women working in the entertainment industry engaging in self-surveillance and self-regulation to the point where they no longer feel comfortable carrying condoms to protect themselves (Maher et al., 2015; Overs, 2013). Cambodian authority's adoption of prostitution equals sex trafficking philosophy, and their invasion of women's privacy and infringement on their right to possess simple human necessities like condoms results in a denial of women's agency. It also limits access to essential health care for women participating in or perceived to be participating in sexual commerce. This policy and its implementation increase the risk of a recurrence of the HIV epidemic in Cambodia (Maher et al., 2015; Overs, 2013).

Cambodian women who work in the entertainment sector are socially understood to be engaging in sexual commerce (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018; Derks, 2008; Ditmore, 2014; Flude,

2013; Morrison et al., 2021; Sandy, 2006) and therefore construed as "abnormal individuals" (Foucault, 1995, p. 198) who must be reformed or rehabilitated to eliminate the spread of "the contagion" into social disorder. In the case of Cambodian women engaged in sexual commerce or trafficked for sex, the contagion responses of exclusion and discipline are applied in succession and in tandem. 'Trafficked' women, who are identified through "observation" and "examination" (Foucault, 1995, pp. 170–194), are placed in a state of exclusion and subjected to regimented disciplinary environments to purify society by excluding the abnormality and subsequently reforming the 'abnormal' individual into a new "docile body" that is ready to be utilized and governed by a "disciplined society" (Foucault, 1995, pp. 136–137).

While exclusion and discipline play vital roles in maintaining a healthy society, it is crucial to interrogate when they are used and what narratives and socio-cultural belief structures are used to legitimize their implementation, especially when their usage adversely affects the human rights of a particular group, increasing their marginalization. In the case of Cambodia, perceptions of the capacity for agency in women identified as victims of sex trafficking under the current legal framework vary widely between ideologies, resulting in disagreements regarding the actual number of sex trafficking victims in Cambodia. Keo et al. (2014) and Steinfatt (2011) found that estimates of human trafficking and sex trafficking in Cambodia were unreliable, inaccurate, and often heavily inflated. Definitions are pivotal to prevalence debates related to sex trafficking, with the debate over whether voluntary prostitution should be considered sex trafficking taking center stage. Steinfatt's research (2011) documented NGO claims alleging the number of women trafficked for sex in Cambodia to be somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000 and presented evidence to debunk these estimates. Steinfatt's empirical survey (2011, p. 458) and calculations of women working in sexual commerce in Cambodia in 2008 estimated that 27,925 women were

engaged in commercial sexual activity. Of those, only 1,058 were victims of sex trafficking. (Figure 2) The differences between NGO and academic estimates detailed above highlight the importance of definitions; if commercial sex work is always only sex trafficking, the scale of the problem of sex trafficking in Cambodia is considerable and shocking. However, if sex trafficking is a distinct, separate, and considerably more serious crime, the scope and scale of the sex trafficking problem in Cambodia is dramatically smaller.

**Figure 2**
*Disparity in Sex Trafficking Prevalence Estimates in Cambodia*

| NGO Estimates | Empirical Academic Research |
|---|---|
| | 27,975 women engaged in commercial sexual activity (Steinfatt, 2011) |
| 40,000 - 80,000 Sex trafficking victims (Steinfatt, 2011) | 1,058 Victims of sex trafficking (Steinfatt, 2011) |

This ideological debate is where Cambodian women's right to agency and self-determination collides with social justice agendas, cultural norms, religious ideologies, and international politics. In defiance of overwhelming rhetoric and social norms that delegitimize sex work as a choice and deny their capacity for agency, many Cambodian women engaging in commercial sex in Cambodia are doing so with full agency and intent (Cordisco Tsai et al., 2018; Derks, 2008; Flude, 2013; Sandy, 2006). Sandy's research (2006) with Cambodian women selling sex demonstrated that women often move in and out of sex work as required to maintain their desired lifestyles, provide for their families, or avoid other less preferable forms of labor like working in brick kilns or garment factories. While their stories do not demonstrate access to

unrestricted economic choices, they do reflect intentional actions that allow women to create a life of their choosing and provide for their loved ones (Sandy, 2006).

Christianity and normative Cambodian culture relegate Cambodian women who engage in sexual commerce to a space that denies them agency and autonomy over their bodies. These cultures, which self-identify as vastly different in values and belief structures, find considerable common ground concerning their views on women's values, virtue, and sexuality. Narratives from Christian NGOs and activists demonize the Cambodian culture for its devaluing of women, adherence to filial piety, and perceived willingness to sell their daughters for sex. However, comparisons of cultural values related to women's value, sexuality, and agency find that Christianity and traditional Cambodian culture are built on the same patriarchal foundations that relegate women to submissive, domestic roles where they are expected to provide for their families, submit to the husband's authority, and maintain their virtue and fidelity at all times.

The synergy of these alignments with social justice anti-prostitution and sex trafficking narratives has resulted in severe violations of women's rights. Women who violate these norms face stigmatizing rhetoric from both local Cambodian culture and Christian NGO culture, with both depicting women who have been 'trafficked' as broken women who are victims in need of recovery care, rehabilitation, and reforming to meet social and cultural expectations and norms. While NGOs critique the authoritarian nature of the Cambodian regime, its authoritarian disciplinary practices used to address 'sex trafficking' are applauded for their effectiveness in reducing prostitution and sex trafficking in the country. Many social justice and community development NGOs use the cover of Cambodia's disciplinary practices and international anti-prostitution rhetoric to legitimize their own disciplinary programming that ignores women's agency.

Both Cambodian and Christian patriarchal cultural norms legitimize authoritarian responses to commercial sex work in Cambodia under the guise of anti-sex trafficking efforts, leading to significant violations of women's rights and freedoms and the rights and freedoms of their spouses and partners.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the cultural beliefs and practices related to women's sexuality in Cambodian and Christian cultures. It then examined the effects of these beliefs on the nature of anti-sex trafficking interventions in Cambodia, the experiences of women engaged in commercial sexual activity, and women's experiences with anti-sex trafficking interventions in Cambodia. It then applies Foucault's theory of power and discipline to the context of anti-sex trafficking interventions in Cambodia and women's experiences with these interventions.

### RQ1: Cultural and ideological synergies between Cambodian culture and Christianity related to female agency and sexuality

The anti-trafficking environment in Cambodia is co-constructed by a complex web of social, cultural, religious, and political actors with varying motivations for influencing and controlling women's agency over their choices, bodies, and economic activities. Both traditional Cambodian culture and the Christian beliefs of many NGOs in the country narrate an ideal social reality that is patriarchal. Where women's agency, morality, and sexuality are subject to the moral judgments of men, and women's active use of sexual agency tarnishes their reputation, the honor of their families, and the integrity and honor of the nation.

**RQ2: Cultural and religious shaping of sex trafficking responses in Cambodia**

The legitimization of authoritarian discipline for social and moral cleansing in Cambodia as anti-sex trafficking interventions through cultural, religious, and political rhetoric equating prostitution and sex trafficking has resulted in the government and NGOs denying women agency.

**RQ3: Women's experiences with anti-trafficking responses in Cambodia**

This denial of women's agency has resulted in infringements on their human rights, invasions of their privacy, and their subjection to disciplinary environments in government and NGO shelters that align with Foucault's explanation of social disciplinary systems, their purposes, and their tactics. Forcing women to work on government farms and NGO 'social enterprises' as part of their rehabilitation demonstrates the "subjection" and "use" of women's bodies for the gain of others under the guise of discipline meant to improve their moral purity and capacity for social good (Foucault, 1995).

While these tactics are reducing the prevalence of visible commercial sex transactions in Cambodia and helping women find alternatives to provide for themselves and their families, they also exercise significant control over women's lives. Existing research and socio-cultural narratives on Cambodian culture and anti-trafficking NGOs suggest a desire to control women's expressions of sexuality and deny their ability to engage in commercial sex willfully. The desire of cultural purists and moral abolitionists to maintain moral purity, a disciplined society, and the public honor of the nation are also significant factors driving this conflict between women working in the commercial sex industry and anti-trafficking actors. Ethnographic research with women engaging in commercial sex work in Cambodia reveals that women engage in commercial sex as a result of a complex matrix of economic, social, and personal preference factors and that many

women exercise considerable agency as they move in and out of commercial sex work over many years (Derks, 2008; Sandy, 2006). See Figure 1 below.

Social, cultural, and religious norms and narratives denying the agency of all women engaged in commercial sex work, in combination with the disciplinary approach to sex trafficking interventions and the rehabilitation of women, has resulted in an increased risk of violence towards women in the commercial sex industry, a significant reduction of safe sex practices increasing their chances of contracting STDs and AIDS, and reduced these women's ability to provide for themselves and their families while failing to help many women exit "trafficking" situations permanently (Miles et al., 2021). Furthermore, the continued use of narratives identifying women engaging in sexual commerce as trafficking victims without regard for individual circumstances and choices is an act of rhetorical violence that diminishes their perceived value in society, reduces their access to opportunities and social support systems, and results in increased risks of other forms of violence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to improve government and NGO responses to sex trafficking in Cambodia. These needs can be grouped into three categories: clarifying anti-trafficking legislation, improving oversight on anti-trafficking responses and interventions, and improving social and cultural narratives related to sex trafficking. Overall, there are five recommendations related to legislation, policy, and implementation, as well as two recommendations for improving social and cultural narratives.

### Clarifying Anti-trafficking Legislation

1.  Update anti-trafficking legislation to clearly differentiate between voluntary commercial sexual activity and sex trafficking.

2. Ensure women's right to privacy and freedom from arbitrary search and detention and involuntary assignment to anti-trafficking shelters.

**Improving Oversight on Anti-Trafficking Responses**

1. Ensure law enforcement and anti-trafficking NGOs understand the difference between voluntary commercial sexual activity and sex trafficking.

2. Ensure that women who are confirmed to be trafficked can maintain their agency throughout the recovery process.

3. Initiate required training for Law enforcement, judiciary, and NGO actors on trauma-informed care, survivor's right to freedom and agency, and ethical representation of women survivors and women engaged in commercial sexual activity.

**Improving Social and Cultural Narratives**

1. Implement social awareness and advocacy campaigns affirming women's rights and healthy understandings of women's agency and sexuality.

2. Implement public awareness campaigns that place the stigma of trafficking on perpetrators rather than female survivors of trafficking.

**Closing Remarks**

While human trafficking and sex trafficking are considerable problems in Cambodia and the trafficking of even one woman, man, or child is one too many, it is essential to constantly review and evaluate social norms and attitudes, government and NGO responses, and the impacts of these

social justice initiatives on those they intend to help. The literature depicting anti-sex trafficking responses in Cambodia is overwhelmingly clear that anti-trafficking responses are having adverse unintended consequences on many women. Amid efforts to eradicate sex trafficking in Cambodia, women are suffering due to misaligned authoritarian approaches that have lost their connection to the purpose of their existence: to improve the lives of women, their access to human rights, agency, and a hopeful future. This lost connection and its unintended consequences are the result of social and cultural rhetoric and discourse that values patriarchal power over women more than empowering women.

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## ABSTRACT

This research explored the complex cultural dynamics of matriarchy within Northern Thailand, focusing on Lanna traditions, amidst the prevailing patriarchy in broader societal and religious contexts. Employing a comprehensive method involving field visits, literature reviews, and engagements in Lawa, Lua, Karen, and Lahu villages, the study explored three primary questions: the perceptions shaping women's roles, their contributions to Northern Thai society, and the influence of implicit matriarchy stemming from ancient beliefs. Despite conventional expectations, the findings reveal women's significant impacts on the economy, spiritual practices, maternal duties, conflict management skills, and their distinct connections to land ownership. Historical narratives depicted women assuming roles in political and military leadership, underscoring the interplay between ancient matriarchal systems and dominant patriarchal norms. The study synthesized the coexistence of these influences, providing insights into roles of women in Northern Thai society. Furthermore, it offered recommendations for educators and community leaders to empower and promote the advancement of women in the region, thus fostering a more inclusive, gender-equitable, and culturally sensitive educational framework that contributes to broader societal progress and a peaceful community.

## INTRODUCTION

The historical context of Thailand, particularly during the era of its ruling kingdoms, reflects a strong patriarchal influence that shaped various facets of society. This patriarchal framework was evident in governmental leadership, family structures, and other societal institutions. The role of the monarchy, primarily led by male rulers, epitomized this hierarchical and gender-based structure. The King was seen not just as a political leader but also as a semi-divine figure, a tradition that reinforced male dominance and leadership.

Contrasting with this patriarchal dominance is the cultural environment of Northern Thailand, particularly the traditions inherited from the Lanna Kingdom. The Lanna Kingdom, which existed from the 13th to the 18th centuries, is now part of modern-day Northern Thailand (Williams, 2020). In certain Northern Thai communities, especially among ethnic groups such as the Karen, Lahu, Lawa, and Lua communities, matriarchal traditions are prominent (Comaposada, 2022). Property rights in these matriarchal societies are often transferred through the female line. Women have significant control over land and property, which is a stark contrast to the male-dominated inheritance practices in traditional Thai society (Tantiwiramanond & Pandey, 1987).

In many Northern Thai communities, women manage family finances and agricultural activities, playing a crucial role in the local economy. Their economic empowerment reinforces their influential position within these societies. Lineage and inheritance follow matrilineal lines, passing family names, property, and social status through the mother (Tantiwiramanond & Pandey, 1987). Cultural and religious practices also reflect matriarchal traditions, with women leading rituals and ceremonies, and female deities worshipped.

This research aimed to fill a significant gap in the literature on the roles of women, gender dynamics, and cultural practices within Northern Thai societies. By exploring the distinctive cultural context of the Lanna societies, the study sought to reveal the complex roles women play in both familial and communal spheres. The study focused on women's roles within Lanna societies, highlighting their influence in areas such as leadership, decision-making, property rights, and lineage.

The research has significant implications for education in Northern Thailand, highlighting the roles of women in these societies. Educators can use these insights to create inclusive practices that empower young women and girls, fostering their participation and leadership. By integrating Lanna's cultural strengths and gender dynamics into the curriculum, students gain role models and celebrate female empowerment, helping to dismantle gender biases. These insights guide the development of educational materials that reflect Northern Thai culture, showcasing female leadership from Lanna traditions. Understanding the cultural dynamics also aids in designing culturally sensitive educational programs, involving local women leaders to connect with students' cultural context.

This research was guided by three important questions. (1) What perceptions shaped the roles of women within family and community structures? (2) How did women contribute to the socio-cultural and religious framework of Northern Thai society? (3) In what ways did matriarchy shape the cultural and religious landscape of Northern Thailand?

The study focused on Northern Thailand, particularly Lanna traditions and matriarchal customs among groups like the Karen, Lahu, Lawa, and Lua. It examined women's roles in family, community, and religion but acknowledged limitations in representing the region's full cultural diversity. Future research could include more ethnic groups and adopt longitudinal approaches to

capture changes in societal norms over time. Language barriers posed challenges, suggesting the need for collaboration with local researchers fluent in regional languages. The study also noted the interconnected roles of men and recognized that factors like economic structures, education, religion, globalization, and modernization influence women's roles. For example, economic changes impact women's agricultural roles, and educational advancements can shift gender role perceptions and increase women's public participation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review explores various themes related to gender dynamics and indigenous societies. It explores into the matriarchal structure of the Ancient Lanna Kingdom, the evolving concepts of matriarchy and indigenous feminism, and the limitations and challenges within these frameworks. By integrating insights from both matriarchal theory and indigenous feminism, the review aims to foster a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of gender roles.

### *Matriarchy in the Ancient Lanna Kingdom*

The Ancient Lanna Kingdom, established in 1296, represents a notable period in Northern Thailand when the Lan Na Kingdom, or Lanna, emerged as a significant Tai kingdom (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). This period was notable for its matrilineal societal structure despite being a monarchy. Women played crucial roles in governance, family dynamics, and cultural traditions, contrasting the male dominance in many contemporary societies (Williams, 2020). Women in the Lanna Kingdom were involved in decision-making processes, both in public and private spheres (Panitchaphan, 2005). In this matrilineal system, lineage and inheritance were traced through women, giving them significant influence and power. Women participated in political, economic, and religious activities, shaping the kingdom's governance and culture. This

system promoted gender balance and made women's voices essential to the community's well-being and progress.

The Karen and Lahu ethnic groups, demonstrated strong matriarchal traits, with women holding central roles in community life (Comaposada, 2022). The Karen tribe, also known by various names such as Kayin, Kariang, or Kawthoolese, emphasized maternal lineage and ritualistic practices that emphasized the importance of women in maintaining cultural and social continuity (Neiman, 2008). The Lahu tribe embraced an egalitarian social structure, with equal roles and responsibilities for both genders. This matrilineal society promoted mutual respect and cooperation, challenging the traditional dichotomy of matriarchy versus patriarchy and showcasing the diverse social structures in the region (Waddington, 2022; 2023).

The Lawa and Lua, indigenous to the northern region, settled in valleys, unlike the highland-dwelling Karen and Lahu ethnic groups. Lawa societies were matrilineal, with mothers holding more authority than their sons, highlighting a nuanced matriarchal structure (Satyawadhna, 1991). However, the influence of dominant cultures led to their integration into the patriarchal framework, merging them into contemporary "Lanna" society as part of the Tai Yuan group. (Satyawadhna, 1991). In contemporary society, those called Khon Muang ('people of the cultivated land'), are the Tai Yuan group into which the Lawa and Lua have integrated" (Penth & Forbes, 2004).

These societies highlight the importance of women's role in governance to cultural preservation showcasing the complexity and richness of indigenous communities. By studying these practices, we not only deepen our understanding of historical gender dynamics but also recognize the diverse ways societies have valued and integrated women's roles, contributing to societal development and resilience.

### *Matriarchal Theory and Indigenous Feminism*

#### *Redefining Matriarchy*

Matriarchy and Indigenous feminism have been the subject of historical analysis, revealing the governance structures of indigenous civilizations. According to Kearl (2006), these societies were often led by matriarchs, elder women who held authority in familial and communal matters. Matriarchal systems in Indigenous cultures emphasized women's roles in decision-making, clan leadership, and family structures, challenging the Eurocentric view that women were inferior (Kearl, 2006). These societies featured matrilineal governance systems, where authority and inheritance passed through the female line, contrasting with the patrilineal systems of many Western societies (Kearl, 2006).

However, Sanday (2008) proposes a redefinition of matriarchy, emphasizing a balanced social system where both men and women play vital roles rooted in maternal social principles. This redefinition shifts the focus from the coercive power of authority to the persuasive force of tradition and cultural practices. In matriarchal societies like the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, tradition is upheld through the influence of both genders particularly senior women responsible for nurturing and maintaining social order (Sanday, 2003). Therefore, matriarchy characterizes a diffusion of power, where leadership and influence emanate from the preservation of social ties and traditions, continuity, and harmony through a balanced partnership between genders.

#### *Limitations of Matriarchal Theory*

While matriarchal theory offers valuable insights into the Indigenous governance it has limitations. It may reinforce gender binaries and exclude individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles. By focusing on women's empowerment within a binary framework, this

theory may marginalize individuals who identify outside the traditional male-female dichotomy, such as non-binary and genderqueer.

The matriarchal theory also runs the risk of idealizing indigenous cultures, presenting them as perfect societies where women held significant power and lived without oppression. This idealization can obscure the realities and nuances of these societies, including internal conflicts, variations in gender roles across different tribes and regions, and the impact of external pressures such as colonization. Acknowledging these complexities is crucial to understanding the true nature of gender dynamics in indigenous societies.

*Indigenous Feminism*

Indigenous feminism integrates gender equity with cultural and spiritual traditions, asserting that women's empowerment is vital for community health (Gearon, 2021). Modern Indigenous feminists advocate for restoring traditional roles disrupted by colonialism and patriarchal systems (Gearon, 2021). Examining matriarchal societies in indigenous cultures challenges the Eurocentric view of women as subordinate. Scholars like Kearl (2006) show that gender dynamics in these societies were more equitable and fluid than previously acknowledged.

Indigenous feminism aimed to reclaim and celebrate these traditional roles, advocating for the autonomy, agency, and power of Indigenous women within their communities (Gearon, 2021). It operates as an intersectional framework, intertwining feminism with decolonization efforts, Indigenous sovereignty, and human rights for Indigenous women and their families. This perspective aims to acknowledge, identify, and discard imposed worldviews, particularly patriarchal systems that grant men power and privilege at the expense of women, as well as marginalizing gay, queer, and transgender individuals. Within Indigenous communities, patriarchy distorted and suppressed Indigenous teachings on gender and sexuality, undermining

their diversity and significance (Gearon, 2021). Indigenous feminism focuses on collaborative empowerment, respecting the inherent worth of all community members.

*The Challenges Within Indigenous Feminism*

Indigenous feminism faces the challenge of avoiding the imposition of Western feminist ideals onto indigenous cultures, which often prioritize communal and relational values over individualism and gender equality. It's crucial to develop feminist frameworks that respect indigenous worldviews and cultural contexts. Additionally, Indigenous feminism must recognize the diverse identities and experiences among Indigenous women, considering intersecting forms of oppression based on race, class, sexuality, disability, and other factors, to address their needs.

***Integrating Matriarchal Theory and Indigenous Feminism***

Both matriarchal theory and Indigenous feminism offer valuable perspectives on the role of women within indigenous societies. While matriarchal theory highlights the historical agency and empowerment of women, Indigenous feminism provides a critical framework for challenging patriarchal systems and advancing the rights of Indigenous women. By engaging in dialogue and collaboration between these perspectives, we can address limitations, avoid reinforcing gender binaries, and honor traditional roles while embracing gender diversity. This inclusive approach promotes a fairer understanding of gender roles that recognizes the contributions of all community members, regardless of gender.

Respecting the cultural contexts of indigenous communities is crucial when applying feminist theories. This means valuing indigenous knowledge systems, traditions, and ways of life while working to dismantle oppressive structures. By grounding feminist efforts in the cultural realities of Indigenous peoples, we can ensure that these movements are transformative and supportive of indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. It is important to acknowledge the

insights of matriarchal theory and Indigenous feminism while addressing their limitations and avoiding the reinforcement of gender binaries or imposition of Western ideals. Through dialogue, respect for cultural contexts, and inclusive frameworks, we can leverage the strengths of both perspectives to advance the rights and well-being of all members of Indigenous communities.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study employed a comprehensive and immersive approach to explore the roles of women and the dynamics of matriarchal traditions within Northern Thai societies, focusing on the Karen, Lahu, Lawa, and Lua ethnic groups, as well as the Tai Yuan, also called now *Khon Muang*.

The primary data collection was conducted through extensive field visits, participant observations, and community immersions in local villages of the Karen, Lahu, Lawa, Lua, and Tai Yuan people. The main researcher spent considerable time within these communities, engaging in direct observations to capture everyday practices, social interactions, and cultural rituals. This hands-on approach allowed researchers to observe daily life, participate in cultural events, and witness decision-making processes.

Participant observation was a key part of the methodology, allowing the researchers to immerse themselves in the daily life of the communities. By joining cultural events, religious ceremonies, and daily activities, the researcher experienced firsthand of social and cultural dynamics. Informal conversations with community members, including elders and women of different ages further enriched the understanding of local perspectives and historical roles of women.

The study used an integrated approach, combining fieldwork with extensive literature review and archival research. This involved reviewing scholarly articles, books, and historical records to provide a comprehensive understanding of Lanna traditions and matriarchal practices in Northern Thailand. By triangulating data from multiple sources, the research aimed to capture the dynamics of matriarchy, culture, and religious expressions within these communities. This dual approach ensured that the findings were grounded in both contemporary observations and historical contexts.

The data analysis involved thematic coding and narrative analysis. Thematic coding was used to identify recurring patterns and themes related to women's roles, matriarchal traditions, and cultural practices. Narrative analysis helped in understanding the stories and experiences shared by community members, providing a deeper insight into the cultural significance and personal meanings of these roles and traditions.

This methodological approach offers valuable contributions to the fields of gender studies, cultural anthropology, and regional analysis by focusing on the lived experiences and cultural contexts of women in Northern Thai societies. The comprehensive methodology ensures that the research findings are rooted in the cultural realities of the Karen, Lahu, Lawa, and Lua communities, providing a holistic perspective on the roles and contributions of women in Northern Thai society.

## FINDINGS

Through an exploration of perceptions surrounding the role of women in family and community structures, the contribution of women in Northern Thai society, and the intricate line of matriarchy with cultural and religious frameworks, significant insights have been gathered.

These findings shed light on the dynamic relationship between gender dynamics, cultural norms, and societal structures in the context of Northern Thai communities. A deeper understanding emerges of the roles and influences of women within their respective societies.

### *Perceptions of the Role of Women in Family and Community Structures*

Perceptions of the role of women in family and community structures in Northern Thailand reveal a unique societal framework where women are revered as central figures. Various aspects of daily life shaped these perceptions, including (a) women being perceived as heroes of the family, (b) women's roles in agriculture and trade, (c) and their spiritual significance as priestesses and healers. In contrast to other regions of Thailand, the Northern Thai communities emphasize the heroic and indispensable contributions of women, highlighting a cultural landscape where maternal strength and leadership are dominant.

*A - Women as Heroes in the Family*.

Perceptions within Northern Thai families and communal structures shape the experiences of women, with a notable absence of the father figure in family narratives. When individuals are asked to identify the most significant person in their family, they cite their mother, highlighting the essential role of women. Locals portrayed mothers as heroes, with narratives seldom mentioning fathers in this context.

In our informal conversations over the past few years with individuals in northern Thailand, a recurring theme has emerged: mothers are often highlighted as the most significant family members, sometimes alongside grandmothers or aunts who run businesses. Fathers, however, are seldom mentioned and are often portrayed as absent or disengaged from family affairs. This contrast underscores a cultural framework where mothers are central to family

stability and community cohesion, acting as primary caregivers, financial supporters, and moral guides, thereby emphasizing their indispensability within the family unit.

The importance of grandmothers and aunts who run businesses indicates a societal structure where women hold significant economic power, reinforcing their status as family heroes. This economic leadership challenges traditional gender roles and provides empowering role models for young women. The negative portrayal of men can perpetuate stereotypes that discourage male engagement in family life. These cultural narratives shape children's expectations and behaviors, with girls emulating their mothers' strength and boys lacking positive male role models. Promoting balanced representations of both parents could foster a more supportive family environment.

### B - Women's role in agriculture and trade.

The significance of mothers and women in the Lanna region becomes evident during the harvest period. The entire family participates in this vital activity, but women assume more than a labor position. Women in Lanna society are involved in agricultural processes, from planting to harvesting, and their efforts are pivotal for the community's survival. According to research conducted by Disch in 2012, harvesting is linked with female fertility rituals. Their involvement in agriculture is not practical but also holds cultural and spiritual significance. Fertility rituals tied to harvesting reflect a deep-seated respect for women's contributions to agriculture, symbolizing their vital role in nurturing life and sustaining the community (Disch, 2012).

These fertility rituals celebrate women's crucial role in ensuring the community's well-being and continuity, emphasizing their importance beyond mere labor. Furthermore, women often engage in trade, both within and beyond their communities. They play key roles in local markets, selling produce and handmade goods, and contributing to the economic stability of their

families and communities. This involvement in trade provides women with a degree of economic independence and influence, further highlighting their integral role in society.

     *C - Women as "priestesses of nature", mediums and healers.*

Despite Buddhism's male-dominated spiritual power, women retain significant roles as nature priestesses, esteemed as mediums and healers with superior prophetic abilities. They are revered for healing ailments, predicting the future, and ensuring good harvests, making them indispensable to the community's spiritual and practical welfare. Most fortune-tellers are women, believed to provide more accurate predictions than men.

As researchers, we witnessed a healing ceremony in Lamphun City held in a public square dedicated to Queen Jamadewi. A woman with apparent healing abilities, channeling ancient spirits, assisted many individuals seeking aid. This public event featured traditional women's dances and offerings made to Queen Jamathewi's statue, exemplifying the enduring influence of women in spiritual practices beyond Buddhism.

### *Contributions of Women in Northern Thai Society*

Women have contributed to the socio-cultural and religious framework of Northern Thai society through their roles and historical importance. Their contributions are cited as follows: (a) the autonomy of the local economy, business, and trade, (b) the influential roles of the queens, their exemptional leadership, and their military prowess, (c) women's contribution in the 20th century Lanna in the field of arts and crafts.

     *A - Autonomy of local economy, business, and trade.*

Women have played a crucial role in Northern Thai society, contributing to the local economy, business, and trade. They have achieved economic autonomy through their

involvement in agriculture, crafts, and retail. Dominating commerce and owning the majority of small businesses, women are key players in local markets, street vending, and small-scale manufacturing. Their management of these enterprises secures economic independence and contributes to the community's economic stability and growth. Despite men holding political power, women have maintained control over local economic activities, highlighting their essential role in community prosperity (Tantiwiramanond & Pandey, 1987).

Historically, women have been significant figures in business, even during periods of economic transition. In the 16th century, European and Chinese traders were surprised to find themselves negotiating with women in Thailand (Disch, 2012). This tradition continues, with women holding 40% of top executive positions in Thailand as of 2012, a rate second globally (Disch, 2012). Matrilineal inheritance and matrilocal residence patterns in many Northern Thai communities empower women by granting them control over land and resources, supporting their economic activities and community involvement (Disch, 2012).

*B - Influential role of the queens – their exceptional leadership & military prowess.* Historical figures like Queen Jamadewi and Queen Chamari exemplify the influential roles women have played in shaping Northern Thailand's history and religious landscape. Queen Jamadewi, the first sovereign of Hariphunchai, promoted Buddhism and defended her region's independence, challenging traditional gender roles. Her leadership and military prowess were instrumental in establishing and consolidating power in her kingdom (Disch, 2012).

Queen Chamari is another significant figure, known for leading her people to safety and founding the Kingdom of Li, a land characterized by arts and religious prosperity.[1] She prioritized

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[1] The main researcher visited and photographed the 91 images in this temple, thus the main reference for this section are the images found in the temple and the narrative text engraved in each of the images.

amicable relations and commercial ties, fostering a peaceful and thriving community. Her decision not to marry and her focus on leadership exemplify feminist ideals (Disch, 2012).

The legend of Queen Malika[2] (region of Fang, north of Chiang Mai province), further exemplifies the empowerment of women in Northern Thai society. Queen Malika, known for her martial arts mastery, symbolizes independence and strength. Ruling over the Kingdom of Mae Ai, she commanded an army of female warriors and is still venerated today, with annual ceremonies commemorating her contributions (Saratara, 2017).

In the realm of politics, women played significant roles during periods of turmoil and rebellion. Queens such as Phra Nang Chiraprapa and Wisutthithewi were called upon to ascend the throne in times of crisis, showcasing their ability to provide stability and leadership during challenging times (Wyatt & Wichienkeeo, 1998). Their ascension to power was not a mere filling of a vacancy but a strategic choice to leverage their unique leadership qualities during critical periods. These queens demonstrated exceptional political judgment and successfully found peaceful resolutions to direct military attacks through a visionary approach. Their reigns challenged traditional patriarchal norms and highlighted the importance of female leadership in governance and cultural influence.

The role of "Phu Yai Baan," or village elder, further highlights women's influence in Northern Thai society. Often elected for their deep knowledge of the community, women Phu Yai Baan oversee local administration and conflict resolution, maintaining social cohesion and community well-being (Panitchaphan, 2005). Elected for four-year terms by the villagers to oversee local administration, the Phu Yai Baan's duties include decision-making, conflict

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[2] Source: interpretive Panel of national Park in Fang. Blog: http://chamadewi.blogspot.com/2017/07/blog-post.html

resolution, and representing the village to authorities, ensuring social cohesion and community well-being. Women are often considered better choices for community leadership, according to Panitchaphan (2005), due to the matrilineal societal foundation of Northern Thailand, women, in general, do not move around much, allowing them to know their community and their own history very well.

<div align="center"><u>*C - Women in the 20th Century Lanna in the Fields of Arts and Crafts.*</u></div>

In contemporary times, figures like Dara Rasami, daughter of the final monarch of Chiang Mai, have left a lasting legacy. Married to King Rama V of Siam, Dara Rasami dedicated herself to preserving Lanna's traditions. She supported artisans, dancers, and monasteries, ensuring the continuation of cultural heritage (Castro -Woodhouse, 2021). Her influence is still evident in Lanna culture, with her efforts celebrated at the Daraphirom Palace Museum in Chiang Mai.

She provided support to artisans and tailors to uphold ancient weaving techniques, sponsored dancers to safeguard intangible heritage, and patronized monasteries to maintain Lanna architecture amid the spread of central Thai styles (Castro- Woodhouse, 2021).  Her story is known in today's society in northern Thailand. The house where she lived in northern Chiang Mai during the latter part of her life has been transformed into a museum, the Daraphirom Palace Museum (Mae Rim), where visitors can learn about her life surrounded by her personal belongings. The influence of Dara Rasami is woven into Lanna culture. You cannot witness a Lanna dance or observe the complex patterns of a "sarong" without recalling her contributions. Her legacy ensures that these cultural treasures remain vibrant and cherished. At the opening ceremony of the Annual International Conference on Religion, Culture, and Peace Education at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, we were privileged to witness two dancers whose

performance was not merely artistic but also carried profound symbolic significance. Without the efforts of Dara Rasami, these dances risked fading into obscurity in today's cultural landscape.

The Three Kings statue in Chiang Mai, commemorating the historic alliance between King Mengrai and his allies, located in the city's central square, is a monument of great symbolic importance. It is the work of Khun Kaimook Chuto, the first Thai female sculptor. Appointed as a royal sculptor by Queen Sirikit, her work broke traditional gender barriers in a field typically dominated by men. Her contributions to Thai sculpture are significant, and her legacy is celebrated, including recognition by Google in 2017 (Unsup, 2004).

Today, these women are revered for their courage, embodying ancient cultural values and offering spiritual guidance and assistance in various aspects of daily life. Temples, shrines, statues, and annual festivals commemorate their contributions, keeping their legacies alive in the collective memory of Northern Thai society. Their stories are integral to the culture and spirituality, providing role models for contemporary women and reinforcing the cultural belief in the potential and capability of female leaders.

### *The Impact of Matriarchy on the Cultural and Religious Landscape of Northern Thailand*

The matriarchal traditions of Northern Thailand, showed through matrilineal power structures, spiritual practices, and the valorization of the female authority, have influenced the region's cultural and religious landscape. This imprint manifests through: (a) legacy of ancient legends, (b) influence on Lanna communities, (c) structuring role within ethnic groups, (d) permeation of local spirituality, (e) repercussions on masculine identities, (f) interactions with Buddhism.

*A - Matriarchal legends and folklore about nature and spirits.*

Northern Thais revere female nature spirits, such as Doi Nang-Non, Mae Nangkeo, and Bua Tong, as guardians of the environment and fertility. These legends highlight powerful female figures, symbolizing resilience, sacrifice, and leadership in the region's folklore. Princesses in ancient legends play central roles, discovering water sources in caves or shaping mountain ranges, leaving enduring marks on narratives.

The 2018 incident of the trapped footballers in Chiang Rai cave sparked speculation about the presence of the mythical princess, Jao Mae Nang Non, haunting the cave. Some believed she was involved in the boys' disappearance. Villagers invoked her spirit during rescue efforts, reflecting the lasting impact of matriarchal legends on Northern Thai society, influencing cultural practices, and elevating the status of women.

Today, these women are revered for their strength, courage, and embodiment of ancient cultural values. Their worship reflects regional patriotism, with some considering it fashionable to appreciate Lanna's specificities. Additionally, as many of these female spirits are associated with love stories, young couples often make offerings to them in caves, seeking luck in their relationships.

### B - Matrilineal transmission of power and property in the Lanna communities.

Matriarchy influences Northern Thailand's culture and religion, contrasting with patriarchal norms in Buddhism. In the group now identify as "Khon Muang", the mother symbolizes female power, with women dominating the household domain. Men join their wives' families through marriage. Matrilineal systems prevail, shaping social organization and inheritance. Women hold central roles in decision-making, property ownership, and clan leadership, respected for their skills and leadership qualities. Matrilineal transmission of power and property highlights the elevated status of women, who are respected for their skills and

qualities as inventors, leaders, and decision-makers. Grandmothers and elder women are revered as matriarchs, preserving family culture and knowledge. Their authority extends to crucial rituals like marriage and inheritance (Satyawadhna, 1991; Forbes & Henley, 1997).

In northern Thai households, decisions are made near the loom, a symbol of women's authority (Panitchaphan, 2005). Traditional marriage among the Lanna people is not a complicated ceremony. The groom bows his head at the altar of the bride's female ancestors with offerings, then he can move into his wife's family home. The bride's parents tie bracelets of good fortune on the bride and groom, and the ceremony is complete. The young couple enjoys the privilege of the first room until they establish descendants for the clan. Afterward, the man's presence becomes optional, and he may construct a bamboo shelter in the garden (Panitchaphan, 2005).

### *The Matriarcal and Matrilinéal Traditions in Ethnic Villages*

North of Thailand, on the margins of lowland peoples such as the Tai, Lawa, and Lua, live the hill peoples or "hill tribes" - the Karens, Hmongs, Lahus, Lisus, Akhas, and Yaos. These six minority ethnic groups are distinguished by their ways of life, traditional costumes, languages, and rich unique histories. Although sharing some similarities, each of these mountain peoples has its own customs and age-old traditions (Lewis & Lewis, 1984).

Among them, the Karens and Lahus are recognized for their matriarchal societal structure, where women play a predominant role in family and community. These mountain ethnic groups in northern Thailand are known as "transnational communities" due to their presence spanning regions from Myanmar to Laos. Their history is marked by forced displacements, and many still lead semi-nomadic lifestyles, moving between countries to practice traditional agriculture. This

perpetual mobility reflects their deep connection to nature and seasonal cycles. (Lewis & Lewis, 1984)

*The Karen Tribe*

The Karen society, residing in provinces like Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, and Tak, Thailand as well as across the border in Myanmar's Karen State, identifies itself as matriarchal and matrilineal. In this social structure, women hold the position of spiritual clan leaders within the family. Upon marriage, husbands join their wives' families, integrating into their wives' clans. This multi-generational family setup often sees daughters and their husbands residing with the wife's parents to provide care. In cases of divorce, the children remain with the mother, reflecting the matrilineal emphasis of Karen society (Karen Organization of Minnesota, 2017).

In traditional Karen societies, some marriages are arranged by families. If a young Karen man is interested in a girl, he expresses his intentions through a letter. The entire village often weighs in on the suitability of a marriage, considering it unwise to upset the spirits. Thus, while the opinion of the young girl is considered, the community's perspective usually holds precedence (Karen Organization of Minnesota, 2017). Within Karen households, women hold significant authority, overseeing domestic tasks and agricultural work. Men primarily engage in fieldwork. Women serve as heads of the spiritual clan and the main lineage, playing a central role in organizing the household (EthnoMed, 2008).

Abigaël Pesses' thesis (2004) investigates into the socio-cultural and ecological aspects of the Karen ethnic group in Thailand. Through fieldwork in a Karen village in Chiang Mai province, she gathered crucial data on their contemporary lifestyle. Pesses (2004) emphasizes the matriarchal nature of Karen society, where women play a central role in managing the family and domestic affairs, despite appearing reserved to outsiders. While men hold formal positions,

decisions often originate from consultations led by women within households. A notable example is the selection of a Village Chief, where men's discussions reflect prior consultations conducted by their wives. This highlights the significant decision-making power held by Karen women, who prioritize the well-being of the family and community.

## *The Lahu Tribe*

The Lahu People did not arrive in northern Thailand until the 19th century. The Lahu originate from southwestern China. The Lahu are matrilineal but claim to be egalitarian in decision-making. (Lewis & Lewis, 1984). Du Shanshan's book (2002) "Chopsticks Only Work in Pairs: Gender Unity and Gender Equality Among the Lahu of Southwestern China," underscores the ingrained principles of gender unity and equality within Lahu culture in China. This concept of equality and mutual support between men and women appears to be embraced by the Lahu community residing in Thailand (Lahu individual, personal communication, May 31, 2024).

In Thai Lahu villages, responsibilities are equitably distributed between genders. Women manage domestic and agricultural tasks, while men engage in fieldwork. However, this division of labor does not suggest a hierarchical structure or the dominance of one gender over the other (Facts and Details, 2022). Important decisions within the household are made jointly by the spouses. The Lahu family structure is based on an egalitarian system where decision-making power is shared between men and women. This equality is also reflected in Lahu marriage traditions. Unlike many patriarchal societies, young Lahu have great freedom of choice in choosing their partner. Arranged marriages are rare, thus reinforcing women's autonomy. (Facts and Details, 2022)

In the remote valleys of Nan Province, Thailand, some villages maintain the ancient Lua traditions despite integration into the Khon Muang or Lanna group. Anthropologist Dr. Cholthira Satyawadhna's study of a remote Lua community in Nan Province reveals the significant role of women. Women wield authority in household and decision-making matters, with husbands consulting them on all major expenditures, reflecting economic power in female hands (Satyawadhna, 1991). During a post-conflict period in a mountainous region, Satyawadhna researched a Lua village's traditional lifestyle. Emerging from a period of Communist insurgency (1967-1982), she observed matriarchal leaders determining rice allocation for rebel troops and deciding on children joining guerrilla forces (Satyawadhna, 1991).

The Lua uphold ancestral matriarchal traditions where women lead the clan (cao kok) beyond the family unit. In their society, descent, property, and privileges pass exclusively through the maternal line. Matrilineal principles govern everything from rituals to power succession to marriages. Before marriage, the groom must perform the "tat phii" ritual, seeking approval from his and the bride's matrilineal spirits. Leadership within Lua clans, inherited by the eldest female descendant, underscores the matrilineal lineage's importance. The "matrilineal liquor pot" symbolizes this lineage's continuity, embodying the authority of each new chief. Even if a male chief marries another clan's cao kok, his wife assumes authority, reflecting the preeminence of female lineage in Lua society (Satyawadhna, 1991).

Since this study dates back to 1991, the matrilineal lifestyle and social organization of Lua may have evolved due to factors like education, rural exodus, and changing mindsets. An updated field study is needed to assess the persistence or erosion of these traditions over the past 30 years.

***Women perform trance dances, feminine energy, and ancestral spirits.***

Spiritual practices, such as trance dances serve as a means of communicating with the spirits. Traditional trance dance in the northern Thai population has long been an important activity as a gesture of homage and respect to the spirits of their ancestral roots. This form of animist practice appears to originate from pre-Buddhist culture, as suggested by the costumes, musical melodies, types of drums used, and musical instruments (Panitchaphan, 2005). These ceremonial trance dances, organized annually or based on financial circumstances, are led by the matriarch of each clan. They may also be held after illnesses or as a thanksgiving for good fortune. Mainly maternal kin participate, while paternal kin rarely do. The dances occur at the house of the oldest woman, "Gao Pi," who invites the ancestral spirits and enters the trance first, accompanied by ancient music. Men can observe from a distance but are instructed not to approach the ritual space instruments (Panitchaphan, 2005). During the clan's trance dances, members gradually enter trance, shaking, jerking, and shouting. Spirit-possessed women inquire about the younger generation's well-being, offer healing, give advice, predict futures, and address inappropriate behavior. They also reinforce taboos and traditions to ensure the clan's continuity. Accompanied by alcohol consumption, these dances are a unique way of communicating with spirits. Unlike the patriarchal traditions of China and India, these Lanna dances emphasize reverence for feminine energies (Panitchaphan, 2005).

***Societal ideals of strength and power are more associated with femininity than masculinity.***

The region's positive portrayal of women is reflected in the acceptance of transgender individuals, or "katoeys." These individuals are seen as resilient and assertive, indicating that strength and authority are linked with femininity rather than masculinity. This favorable view likely influences

many boys to transition. "Katoeys" embody determination and empowerment, highlighting society's perception that strength and authority are more associated with femininity (Panitchaphan, 2005).

Panitchaphan (2005) notes that over the past 40 years, more and more men, gay boys, and many transvestites have been involved in trance dance activities. These transgender individuals are increasingly taking the place of women in this ritual activity. Although the event itself takes place in traditional local communities, transgenders are widely accepted in this traditional role.

### Women in Buddhism: Transformation and Symbolism in Lanna Culture.

Buddhism, predominantly led by male clergy, historically views women as impure and restricts their entry into certain temple areas. Women are not to touch monks, as outlined in the Vinaya, the monastic discipline code (Sirisai et al., 2017). Despite this, women play crucial roles in supporting monks, cooking meals, and maintaining temple cleanliness, often dedicating more time to these tasks than men.

The Mae Chi, an equivalent of a nun, represents an ambivalent position between the ascetic and secular worlds. They observe the Eight Precepts and renounce worldly pleasures by shaving their hair, wearing white robes, and taking vows of abstinence. However, they are not considered part of the "merit field" like monks, who follow 227 monastic rules. Their white robe symbolizes their lower status. This role did not exist in Buddhism's original four orders (Tantiwiramanond & Pandey, 1987). The arrival of Buddhism shifted Lanna culture, emphasizing men, leaders, lords, and monks. Men now play a larger role in beliefs and rituals, while women's roles in spirit worship persist. Monks seek to diminish spirit worship, deeming it superstitious (Panitchaphan 2005).

The ancient view of women as nature goddesses was integrated into Lanna Buddhism. Wright (1990) states Buddhism preserved pre-Buddhist terrestrial religion in art, architecture, ritual, and history. When Buddha meditated under the Bodhi tree, he invoked Earth as a witness, and Phra Mae Thorani, the goddess of nature, helped him by washing away demons. This event is depicted in many Thai Buddhist temples, with statues of Phra Mae Thorani symbolizing Mother Nature present in most temples.

The creation myths of Northern Thais highlight the ancient importance of women as the first creators of life and spirit, as shown in the Lanna tradition's *Pathamamulamuli*. This myth describes a "Grandmother" who created the first humans and assigned them three genders: male, female, and transgender (Anatole-Roger Peltier, cited in Hongsuwan, 2024). This founding myth emphasizes a goddess woman as humanity's creator. Every human is believed to be born of this creator grandmother, reflecting the feminine image in body and spirit. Respecting women has ancient roots, linking women to divinity and fertility due to their ability to give birth and nurture children (Hongsuwan, 2024).

In the households of northern Thailand, decisions are made near the loom. When Panitchaphan wrote this, it means that working at the loom is as important as working in the fields or any other task. The loom is not a subordinate task, but rather the work of women who hold power. This implies that in the matriarchal societies of Northern Thailand, women do not abandon "women's work" to focus only on power. Tasks are distributed among individuals, and matriarchy is not a reversal of power compared to the patriarchal system. Instead, it is a peaceful balance where everyone engages in tasks recognized as being of equal value.

**DISCUSSION**

*Exploring Women's Influence in Peacebuilding in Northern Thai Society*

The exploration of women's roles in peacebuilding within Northern Thai society reveals the significant impact of women in family, community, and broader societal structures. Societal norms in this region celebrate women's strength and resilience, portraying them as the heroes who sustain family cohesion and welfare. Legendary accounts of queens who ruled during times of turmoil and chaos – when no qualified men could lead highlight their abilities to defend territories and promote cultural and religious advancements. Their legacies challenge traditional gender roles, showcasing women's capabilities in governance and military strategy.

The cultural and social dynamics of Northern Thai society, rooted in the reverence for women as life-givers and nurturers, translate into a social structure where women were central figures in maintaining community welfare. This reverence extends beyond biological roles to encompass broader community responsibilities, including agricultural management, conflict resolution, and education of the young. The respect for women's wisdom and experience, particularly that of elderly women, ensured that their voices are central to governance and social cohesion. Elderly women, often seen as repositories of cultural knowledge and experience, play crucial roles in mediating conflicts and guiding community decisions, reinforcing the importance of inclusive and participatory governance structures.

Women's influence in peacebuilding within Northern Thai society involves a complex interplay of gender dynamics, cultural norms, and societal structures. Women are celebrated as central figures in family and community life, vital contributors to the local economy, and influential spiritual leaders. The matriarchal elements within Northern Thai culture further elevate women's status, highlighting their integral role in maintaining social and cultural cohesion. These

insights emphasize the profound impact women have on the socio-cultural and religious life of Northern Thai communities, challenging traditional patriarchal norms and emphasizing their essential contributions to societal well-being.

The concept of gender balance and peace in matriarchal societies is intertwined with the principles of shared responsibilities and maternal values. These societies emphasize an ethic of balance and harmony, contrasting with patriarchal structures that often prioritize hierarchical dominance and competition. In matriarchal societies, men and women share responsibilities. This fair distribution and mutual respect in performing social, economic, and political roles differ from having distinct roles for both genders. For instance, while men may take on certain public leadership roles, women often manage community resources and maintain social networks that are crucial for conflict resolution and community resilience.

We argue that societies with maternal values foster an ethic of gender balance and peace. These values focus on cooperation, partnership, and nurturing, which contrast with the competitive and often violent ethos seen in patriarchal systems. We emphasize that matriarchy is not about female dominance but about foundational maternal values that promote balance and peace. In the face of modern challenges such as environmental degradation, the principles of matriarchal societies offer a blueprint for a more harmonious and sustainable world. These principles include peace, partnership, balance, and respect for differences. Integrating these values into global culture can help address the crises facing humanity today. For example, environmental stewardship often aligns with maternal values of nurturing and sustaining life, suggesting that matriarchal principles could guide more effective and compassionate environmental policies.

Matriarchal societies, by fostering an ethic of balance and peace through shared responsibilities and maternal principles, present a compelling alternative to patriarchal systems. They emphasize the importance of nurturing social ties, cooperative leadership, and sustaining harmonious relationships. In a world facing significant social and environmental challenges, the values of matriarchy offer a path toward a more balanced and peaceful global culture. Embracing these values could lead to a society where cooperation and mutual respect are paramount, and where the well-being of the community is prioritized over individual competition and dominance. By looking to the matriarchal traditions of Northern Thai society, we can learn valuable lessons about creating more inclusive, resilient, and peaceful communities worldwide.

## SUMMARY

This study investigates the interplay of patriarchy and matriarchy in Northern Thai society, particularly within Lanna traditions. Women's pivotal roles in decision-making, property ownership, and spiritual practices showcase their agency and influence in familial and communal contexts. They often manage household finances and inherit land, ensuring their centrality in economic and social spheres.

Women's autonomy is vital in Northern Thai society, particularly in local economies. They play crucial roles in agriculture and trade, managing production, distribution, and market activities. They negotiate prices, run businesses, and demonstrate leadership and entrepreneurial skills in various economic endeavors, from small-scale trading to large market operations. Additionally, women lead in community affairs, resolving conflicts and guiding communal decisions, further solidifying their influential role in Northern Thai society.

Northern Thai spirituality intertwines patriarchal Buddhism with reverence for female deities and animist traditions, creating a unique spiritual landscape. Female spiritual leaders, like priestesses and mediums, play essential roles, in connecting women with the spiritual realm. Matrifocal orientation is evident in the veneration of female spirits and the celebration of women in legends and folklore

Women's influence in preserving cultural heritage is evident through oral traditions, storytelling, and participation in festivals. Among ethnic groups like the Karen and Lahu, matrilineal inheritance practices reinforce women's roles as decision-makers and cultural custodians. Property and wealth passing through the female line empower women and ensure cultural continuity and social stability.

In Northern Thailand, a balanced approach to power-sharing between men and women fosters communal leadership and decision-making. Women's crucial roles in household and local economy management, alongside men, ensure diverse perspectives in decision-making. This inclusive model challenges patriarchal norms, offering a balance framework for governance and community organization, and advocating for egalitarian social structures.

## CONCLUSION

By appreciating the diverse contributions of women, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex societal frameworks that shape Northern Thai culture. Despite the coexistence of patriarchal norms, matriarchal traditions persist, offering alternative perspectives on leadership, spirituality, and community dynamics. These insights challenge conventional narratives of male dominance and highlight the potential for more egalitarian social structures. The recognition of women's pivotal roles in economic, cultural, and spiritual domains emphasizes their indispensable

contribution to the region's identity and development. These traditions provide a model of gender balance and respect that stands in contrast to more rigid patriarchal systems. By appreciating the diverse contributions of women, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex societal frameworks that shape Northern Thai culture and the vital roles women play within it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To advance women's empowerment in Northern Thailand, integrating research insights into education and community initiatives is crucial. Educators and leaders can create inclusive learning environments by incorporating diverse perspectives on gender roles and cultural traditions into the curriculum. This includes revising textbooks to feature more female historical figures and leaders from Northern Thailand. Cultural events and workshops celebrating matriarchal traditions can also promote gender equity. Encouraging student-led projects and discussions on gender roles and cultural heritage further empowers young women to embrace their heritage and potential.

Policymakers and stakeholders should prioritize initiatives supporting the preservation and celebration of matriarchal traditions in Northern Thailand. This includes funding cultural preservation projects and creating spaces for women to share their stories. Policymakers should also implement policies promoting gender equity in education, employment, and healthcare. This could involve providing scholarships and mentorship programs for young women and implementing gender-sensitive workplace policies.

Community initiatives should empower women at the grassroots level by supporting women's groups and cooperatives engaged in economic activities. Providing resources and

training enhances women's economic independence and leadership roles. Promoting women's participation in local governance ensures their voices are heard and contributions recognized.

Embracing gender dynamics and cultural heritage allows Northern Thailand to evolve as an inclusive society valuing all members' contributions. This involves acknowledging women's historical and cultural significance and creating environments for them to thrive and contribute. These efforts can make Northern Thailand a model for other regions, showcasing the benefits of inclusivity and equity.

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# Disability inclusion in for-profit organizations

Workplace case studies in the Netherlands, Denmark and the United States

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## ABSTRACT

For profit organizations recruiting and integrating workers with disabilities share a surprisingly common set of enablers. Across three different countries and five organizations, we find that they are characterized by (1) inclusive core values, (2) senior management commitment, (3) disability inclusive culture and (4) strong community partnerships. The study is based on a strategic selection of companies that employ a much larger proportion of employees with disabilities compared to similar companies in their country: Walgreens and Sephora in the USA, Philips and VodafoneZiggo in the Netherlands and Grundfos in Denmark. They are large, private, and successful companies in very different contexts. Our contribution to the disability literature is to focus on enablers rather than barriers to employment and to identify a specific set of common enablers that promote labor market inclusion of people with disabilities.

Keywords: Workplace inclusion, recruitment, for profit, disability employment, cross-national case study.

# INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities are an untapped labor reserve that could assist in filling labor shortages, harnessing a broader skill set, creating inclusive workplaces and reducing government expenditures. But persons with disabilities experience numerous barriers to the labor market and significantly lower employment and higher inactivity rates compared to people without disabilities (OECD, 2010; WHO, 2011). When people with disabilities manage to find employment, they are more likely to work in precarious and atypical jobs (e.g., part time jobs, subsidized or supported employment) and find it more difficult to advance to management positions (Eurofound, 2021; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008).

The literature on disability and employment emphasise multiple internal and external barriers that hinder the full participation of people with disabilities in the labor market. The very idea of barriers is also inherent to the most common definitions of disability. In the UN Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and the WHO International Classification Model (WHO, 2011) persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which in interaction with environmental *barriers* may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UNCRPD, 2006: article 1).

The contribution of the current study is to identify enablers of disability in inclusive organizations by conducting comparative case-study research across different institutional contexts and examining whether these enablers are applicable when legislation and cultural contexts vary.  To include more people with disabilities in the labor market, we need a better understanding of the enablers that make organizations inclusive for employees with disabilities (Collela & Bruyére, 2011; Seino et. al., 2017; Vornholt et. al., 2018). The research question is, therefore: Do organizations that employ a high percentage of disabled employees share a common set of characteristics across different institutional contexts?

In the following, we scope the relevant literature in different research fields to identify potential enablers of disability inclusive organizations. Second, we present the case design and methods of the study. Third, we present the cases and identify the common enablers across the cases. Finally, we discuss the findings, and how these enablers may transfer to other contexts to inspire other less disability inclusive work organizations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on disability and employment mainly focusses on barriers to the labor market inclusion of people with disabilities. This approach is in line with the social and relational models of disability and the idea that people with disabilities experience external barriers that hinder labor market inclusion (Oliver & Barnes, 2012; Shakespeare, 2014; Roulstone, 2014). The literature identifies several external barriers among employers, employment services and rehabilitation services, e.g., lack of information, bias, statistical discrimination, accessibility, stereotyping and inadequate resources (Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017). Barriers may even interact and accumulate (Frøyland et al., 2018).

In a literature review on (mental) disability and employment, Vornholt et al. (2018) identify both barriers and facilitators to employment, noting that there is far less empirical evidence of factors facilitating integration of people with disabilities, as research often focus on the identification of problems rather than on solutions. The main barriers identified in the review are co-workers and supervisors' attitudes and stereotypes, inadequate knowledge and experiences with disability, concerns about costs, training, and performance, increasing work demands and work intensity as well as low confidence and self-efficacy among people with (mental) disabilities.

We focus on the facilitators of labor market inclusion of people with disabilities and the enablers of disability inclusive company practices. Facilitators are enablers, i.e., mechanisms that promote labor market inclusion of persons with disabilities. Enablers are

like causal mechanisms, i.e., the conditions that are necessary and sufficient to explain a causal outcome (Goertz, 2006). Enablers are also like generative mechanisms, i.e., the active ingredients which are necessary to produce specific outcomes (Pawson, 2013). There are enablers on the supply, demand and support-side of the labor market, but in this article, we limit ourselves to explore the enablers on the demand-side, i.e., the mechanisms of disability inclusive work organizations.

Initially, we searched the scientific literature on disability and employment to identify previous research on enablers of disability inclusive work organizations. We searched in relevant disability journals, Web of Science and Google scholar for recent publications (2000 to 2024). We limited the search to company practices, work inclusion and disability. We included both quantitative and qualitative empirical studies. We found around 60 relevant publications that identified potential enablers of disability inclusive work organizations.

In the following, we summarize the main findings from this literature on the enablers of disability inclusive work organizations. Workplace studies of factors facilitating recruitment and inclusion of people with disabilities have been conducted within vocational rehabilitation and disability management (Bezyak et al., 2020; Bruyére, 2006; Harder & Scott, 2005). In general, the literature on the average effects of disability management interventions is contradictory. Gensby et al. (2014) found insufficient evidence to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of disability management programs, while Lefever et al. (2017) found sufficient evidence to conclude that disability management programs were effective and efficient.

When examining disability management, Chan et al. (2010) and Phillips et al. (2016) discovered that the organization's Disability Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies and procedures were strongly associated with the employment of people with disabilities.

Bezyak et al. (2020) found that disability inclusion policies were the most important strategy and had the strongest correlation with actual recruitment. Gilbride et al. (2003) identified 13 characteristics within three broad categories (work culture, job match, and employer experience and support) and found that disability inclusive work organizations were characterized by leadership commitments trickling down to all levels of the organization, diversity and disability inclusion policies and procedures, a strong focus on ability not disability, and knowledge and experience providing job accommodation and workplace supports.

In a study on employment of people with disabilities in the post covid-19 economy, Chan et al. (2020) found 10 disability inclusion practices that were significantly associated with employment rates of people with disabilities in the workforce and emphasized the role of leadership/senior management. Boehm & Dwertmann (2015) emphasize three types of enabling moderators that facilitate positive disability effects in the workplace: (1) leadership behavior, (2) organizational climates and (3) human resources practices.

Hulsegge et al. (2022) compared inclusive and non-inclusive employers in the Netherlands. They found that inclusive organizations had more inclusive human resource practices, initiated more supportive human resources actions, adapted the working conditions more towards the needs of employees and negotiated more about work time and absenteeism. In a systematic review of workplace accommodation among persons with disabilities, Nevala et al. (2015) came to similar conclusions.

The role of senior management commitment and CSR policies is stressed as enablers of disability inclusive work organizations in several studies (cf. Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021; Dibben et al. 2002; Dibben & James,2001; Dwertmann, 2016; Erickson et al., 2014; Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012). The moderating role of workplace culture and socialization to the workplace as well as experiences of workers with disabilities is also stressed in the literature (Collela, 1994; Lengnick-Hall, 2007; Collela & Bruyére,

2011; Wiggett-Barnard & Swartz, 2012; Hagner et al., 2014; Medina & Gamero, 2017). The literature on 'Individual Placement and Support' (IPS) emphasizes the importance of job design, job carving, and continuous job support (Drake & Bond, 2014; Suijkerbuijk et al., 2017).

It is important to note the discrepancy between what employers say (attitudes) and what they do (behavior) (Hulsegge et al., 2022). The majority of studies find that employers generally express positive attitudes to recruiting persons with disabilities, although some employers also express concerns about accommodation costs, fear of litigation, work performance and the qualifications of persons with disabilities (Burke et al., 2013; Graffam et al., 2002; Hernandez et al., 2000; Kaye et al., 2011; Morgan & Alexander, 2005; Unger, 2002; Waxman, 2015). Employer attitudes depend on several factors, including the type and severity of disabilities, perceived co-worker acceptance, previous experiences, knowledge of disability, accessibility of the workplace, perceived costs of accommodation, company policies and strategies as well as the size and sector of the employer (Gilbride et al., 2003; Gustafsson et al., 2014; Levy et al., 1992). However, studies of employer attitudes may be prone to social desirability bias (Kaye et al., 2011).

Field experiments and correspondence studies provide more reliable information about the recruitment practices of employers towards persons with disabilities (Baert, 2017; Riach & Rich, 2004; Rooth, 2014). The studies have found evidence of disability discrimination in recruitment by comparing call-back rates for (fictitious) applicants signaling either a disability or no disability. The studies find that jobseekers with disabilities are significantly less likely to be invited for job interviews compared to persons without disabilities (Ameri et al., 2018; Baert, 2016; Bellemare et al., 2018; Hipes et al., 2016; Stone & Wright, 2013; Krogh & Bredgaard, 2022). The extent of the penalty for disclosing a disability depends among other things on the national context, the type of disability and the type of job. Bredgaard (2018) connects employer attitudes with employer

practices and identify four types of employers: committed (positive attitudes and recruitment), passive (positive attitudes and non-recruitment), dismissive (negative attitudes and non-recruitment) and skeptical employers (negative attitudes and recruitment). In Denmark, 54 percent of employers were classified as passive employers, 22 percent as dismissive employers, 20 percent as committed employers, and the remaining 4 percent as skeptical employers. Similarly, Hemphill & Kulik (2016) differentiate between different types of employers in a study of recruitment practices towards people with disabilities in South Australia (antagonists, non-hirers, light-hirers, and loyal hirers). In a qualitative study of Swedish employers, Strindlund et al. (2019) identify three different views on employability, namely employability as constrained by disability, employability as independent of disability and conditional employability.

The main enablers of disability inclusive work organizations are summarized in the table below and classified at three different levels of the organization.

**Table 1**

*Potential enablers of disability inclusive work organizations*

| Level of the organization | Enabler | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Individual | Positive attitudes | Positive attitudes among co-workers, supervisors and managers towards hiring and retaining persons with disabilities |
| | Knowledge of disability | Information about disability in general and compensation and accommodation opportunities in particular |
| | Experiences with disability inclusion | Previous (positive) experiences with hiring and retaining persons with disabilities |
| Management | Leadership commitment | Leadership and management commitment to disability inclusion |
| | Disability inclusion policies | Inclusion of disability in the organizations policies and procedures |

| | Disability inclusive HR practices | Human resource policies and practices that include disability employment, incl. training programs |
|---|---|---|
| | Job design and job support | Jobs and tasks that are suitable to employees with disabilities and a willingness to design jobs for persons with disabilities. Providing job coaches to support onboarding and alignment. |
| Organization | Inclusive culture | A culture and tradition for including persons with disabilities in the workplace |
| | Size, sector, job types | Larger organizations in (e.g., the public) sectors with job types that are suitable to persons with specific types of disabilities |

This is not an extensive list of enablers, but the most common enablers found in the literature on disability inclusive work organizations. We will use this list to structure the data collection by searching for the potential enablers in the case studies and to compare the findings from the case studies.

## METHODOLOGY

Our epistemology is a constructionist grounded theory approach that focuses on understanding the shared meanings from the respondents we interview (Charmaz, 2006). We take the viewpoint of the respondents and pull out their perceived meaning within a given environmental context (Crotty, 2003; Merriam, 2009). The sample criterion was to identify organizations with a strong reputation for recruiting and including people with disabilities in different national, policy and institutional contexts. We adopted the causes-of-effect approach to explanation by starting with cases and their outcomes and then moving backwards to examine their causes, i.e., enablers (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). If the organizations shared common enablers of disability inclusion across these different contexts, we would be more confident that they were generalizable across contexts (cf.

Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011). In Table 2 we provide an overview of the five organizations.

**Table 2**

*Setting, Demographics, and Samples*

|  | USA | | Netherlands | | Denmark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Company** | Walgreens | Sephora | Philips | Vodafone-Ziggo | Grundfos |
| **Facility** | Distribution center | Distribution center | Manufacturing | Telecom Service | Manufacturing water pumps |
| **Total employees** | 225,000 | 39,000 | 5,000 and 3,400* | 6,500 | 19,500 |
| **Participants** | 15 | 21 | 9 | 11 | 10 |

* Two locations at Philips.

These five organizations are large, private, and successful companies recognized for their inclusion of people with disabilities. Based on knowledge and experience of the authors in the different countries, the cases were selected. The diversification of sectors across all countries was considered. In each of the organizations, we interviewed managers, supervisors, and employees with and without disabilities. We selected employees such as HR project leaders, team managers and team members who had the greatest knowledge and exposure to recruitment and workplace integration. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted from 20 to 60 minutes with the researchers taking notes on the employee responses. All the interviews were transcribed and broken down into units by using collection and coding methods outlined by Strass and Corbin (1990). We analyzed and coded our information by using our field notes, interview transcriptions and conducting member checks. The member checks consisted of checking the validity of interview findings and interpretations with the respondents and collecting additional information. These member checks helped us achieve research trustworthiness by making sure our analysis did not contain researcher bias. In the following, we briefly present the national

context of disability employment and the case organizations.

*Walgreens and Sephora (USA)*

In the liberalistic business climate in the USA, organizations have a large freedom of discretion to decide if they want to employ people with disabilities. However, the government did pass the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that prohibits discrimination based on disability in employment. American organizations typically hire disabled citizens based on the business benefit and rationale. They take the economic rationality perspective instead of a social legitimacy perspective (Bousquet, El Haddad & Moore, 2023). Overall, one disabled American citizen in five is employed (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

**Walgreens** is a national pharmacy and started an inclusive initiative with the startup of two new distribution centers in South Carolina and Connecticut in 2010. Among the 550 employees in the two distribution centers, 220 are employees with disabilities (40 percent). The inclusive vision was championed by Randy Lewis a Senior Vice President who wanted to create a business environment where employees with disabilities would be able to work side by side and doing the same level for the same pay as employees without disabilities (Lewis, 2014).

Seeing the success of this inclusive organization **Sephora**, a multinational retailer of personal care and beauty products, followed suit in 2017 by integrating employees with disabilities to an existing distribution center in Mississippi and bringing inclusion to a distribution center startup in Nevada. Among the 400 employees in the distribution centers, 105 are employees with disabilities (26 percent). We studied the four distribution centers, two at Walgreens and two at Sephora (Moore & Hanson, 2023; Moore, Hanson & Maxey, 2022). The distribution centers were studied over five years, through on-site visits and interviews as well as online and in-person member checks. Findings were gathered through

talking with executives, distribution centers general managers, human resource staff, managers, supervisors, and employees about their inclusive workplace reality.

*Philips and VodafoneZiggo (The Netherlands)*

The institutional context in the Netherlands is characterized by strong labor market regulation, which is the product of negotiations between the government and social parties (employers' organizations and trade unions). In the Netherlands there is a large gap in the employment rate between people with (46%) and without disabilities (78%) (UWV, 2020). To stimulate employers to hire people with disabilities, the Participation Act came into force in 2015 and aims at everyone with capacity to work that are out of work. The Participation Act sets out the framework for this support, while local authorities have the freedom to determine how they wish to guide the target groups into work, and which instruments they deploy to this end. In the 'Guaranteed job agreement' Dutch government, employers' organizations and trade unions committed themselves to create 125,000 extra jobs for people with reduced work capacity before 2026 compared to 2013 (100,000 in the private sector and 25,000 in the public sector). If employers do not create the agreed number of jobs, a quota can be activated (Disability Employment Targets and Quotas Act).

Founded in 1891, **Philips** is a global manufacturer of electronic devices, medical systems, and lighting products. Philips is acknowledged as an inclusive employer that takes care of their employers and the local community. Philips' societal inclusion program is the Philips Employment Plan (WGP). This program allows job seekers with a distance to the labor market, such as people with disabilities, to gain work experience within Philips for a year, combined with a solid development program. The WGP was set up in 1983 to make this group of jobseekers more promising for the labor market, so that afterwards they can find a regular job inside or outside Philips. The WGP is part of Philips' broader vision on Inclusion & Diversity. Philips has many different locations of which we visited two. The

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first location employs 5,000 employees and includes 38 employees with a disability. The second location employs 3,400 employees and includes 37 employees with a disability. Although this number might not seem very high, it is influenced by the government definition of a person with a disability (so there may be many more, but they do not count). Philips also intend to train people with disabilities, build their CV within one year to find employment elsewhere, which means that the in- and outflow of people with disabilities is relatively high.

**VodafoneZiggo** is a Dutch provider of cable television, internet, and mobile telephony. In 2017, the company was created as a merger between the Dutch activities of Liberty Global and Vodafone. The organization embraces differences and states that various backgrounds and perspectives lead to richer ideas, new services, and better results. The company has many initiatives focusing on breaking the barriers around gender, LGBT+, disability, multiculturalism, and age. VodafoneZiggo believes the key to this is increasing awareness of unconscious bias and offer face-to-face training, along with e-learning, webinars, and events to highlight key areas that bias can creep into the workplace and form barriers. VodafoneZiggo employs 6,500 employees and includes 160 employees with a disability.

### Grundfos (Denmark)

The Danish labor market is a hybrid between the liberalistic US labor market and the more regulated Dutch labor market. In Denmark, labor market regulations are relatively flexible and employment protection regulation is limited even for workers with disabilities. Relatively generous income security and active labor market policies compensates for the job insecurity created by the flexible labor market (Bredgaard & Madsen, 2018). However, anti-discrimination laws prohibit unfair dismissal and provide rights to reasonable accommodation at work for people with disabilities (Liisberg, 2011). In 2020, the

employment rate of people with disabilities was 55 percent compared to 84 percent for people without disabilities (Larsen et al., 2021).

**Grundfos** started to include people with disabilities in their production facilities long before these changes in the policy context. Grundfos is one of the world's largest water pump manufacturers with an annual output of more than 17 million units. Grundfos has around 19,500 employees in 56 countries and has headquarters in the small town of Bjerringbro in central Jutland. Founded in 1945 by Poul Due Jensen, the company is owned by the Grundfos foundation, the employees and the founder's family, with the foundation as the primary owner. Grundfos has more than 50 years of experience in employing people with reduced work capacity and was the first Danish company to establish a sheltered workshop within the company for people with intellectual disabilities. Grundfos is inspired by the UN and EU definitions of disability, but finds the translation and measurement of disability challenging in an increasingly global setting. At Grundfos, a disabled person is defined as a person with a permanent limitation in the ability to work because of e.g., physical, mental, or psychological impairments. The person cannot work on equal terms with other employees without job adaptions, like special aids, reduction in working hours or pace. Currently, Grundfos employs more than 600 employees with reduced work capacity due to attrition or disability, which is equivalent to 3.15 percent of the total number of employees. The objective is to reach 5 percent globally by 2025.

## FINDINGS

In the analysis, we identify the common enablers of disability inclusive work organizations. We started by identifying the enablers cited in the literature review. In addition to these enablers, we captured common themes articulated by participants about key enablers that supported inclusion in their organization. In the following, we describe

the four common enablers we identified with examples from the five disability inclusive organizations.

(1*) Inclusive core values*

At the heart of all five companies, we find company core values care for others that are vibrant. Many companies have core values that are just words in a strategy document. In these workplaces, they are lived out and cherished. One reason for this is that employees with disabilities have overcome so many hardships and provide an example of resilience, positive outlook, courage, and tenacity that is inspirational to those who take the time to develop an authentic relationship with them (Moore, Hankins & Doughty, 2021). In the two case studies from the USA, the core values of caring for others are lived out in transformed teams. A respondent at Walgreens state:

> "We have empathy for the marginalized. This is the only opportunity that might ever
> be given them."

At Walgreens and Sephora, employees volunteer to become champions and are the first point of contact for coaching employees with a disability (Moore, Hanson & Maxey, 2022). The Dutch case study shows that team members are the ones who are empathic, patient, and willing to help. At Vodafone, an employee state:

> "We are a customer service team and all of us are service oriented individuals. We
> take care of our team members and make sure that everybody feels at home."

Vodafone have volunteer team members who are 'buddies' that provide the first line of support in the workplace to those with a disability. This reciprocal team dynamic strengthens the commitment to the core value of caring for others through their mutual actions creating an inclusive culture.

In the Danish case, the core values of Grundfos are 'love for your neighbor' and 'care for people', which have been hallmarks of the company since its foundation. The founder Poul Due Jensen had a motto that is still alive today:

> "You must believe that you are something, and no matter what you are, then
> you are capable of doing somehing that we can benefit from."

Poul Due Jensen grew up at a poorhouse in the village Sahl, where his parents were managers, and he got a sound knowledge of how it was to work with the most vulnerable groups in society. To this day, these inclusive core values are still communicated and alive in the organization.

### (2) Senior management commitment

To activate inclusive core values, senior management commitment is a necessary condition. In all five organizations, we found there was a senior management commitment in recruiting and retaining workers with disabilities. Without senior management commitment, inclusive core values may wither away and lose relevance in a changing context.

At Sephora, the new CEO, included this inclusive initiative as part of the company's strategy and aligned institutional resources and efforts to accomplish its goal. It sparks enthusiastic commitment from leaders and supervisors:

> "What I have seen is leaders wanting to be part of something special, where
> they can feel they can have a positive impact on a person's life as part of their
> job as supervisor."

At Walgreens, the Senior Vice President of Operations was the executive champion who provided the executive support for launching and operationalizing the inclusive hiring initiative. Corporate sponsorship leads to determining the key performance indicators

(KPIs), staffing, and budget of the inclusion program.

At Philips, their WGP program is firmly established in their corporate strategy long before the Dutch government introduced the Participation Act, which mandates companies to hire people with disabilities. However, the performance of employees with disabilities are not part of the KPI's. This means that departments who hire people with disabilities are not held accountable when the overall (financial) targets are not met. VodafoneZiggo have expanded the inclusive initiative to treating everyone equally breaking barriers of gender, disability, ethnicity, and age.

In Grundfos, there is a long history of CSR and commitment to disability inclusiveness. In 1968, Grundfos was the first Danish company to establish a sheltered workshop (called flex-department) within the company. Initially, the flex-department were employing persons with intellectual disabilities, now they are mainly used to retain employees with reduced work capacity due to attrition or disability. As Grundfos has grown from a medium-sized Danish company to a multi-national company, senior management have insisted on preserving and developing the legacy of disability inclusiveness even in new production facilities abroad. In the current strategy period, Grundfos is transforming its social responsibility to align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

*(3) Disability inclusive culture*

Related to inclusive core values and senior management commitment, we identified disability inclusive work cultures as important enablers in the five organizations. Disability inclusive cultures are the actual implementation and embodiment of inclusive core values and corporate commitment. It includes the values and actions of middle managers, supervisors and colleagues in the work setting of the disabled employee. In a disability inclusive work setting, disabled workers are treated and managed with respect and equal opportunity.

In the case study of Walgreens' distribution center in Connecticut (USA), we found that the inclusion of people with disabilities dramatically altered the culture in the workplace (Moore, Hanson & Maxey, 2020). Disability inclusion altered the organizational culture, specifically making autocratic managers become people-focused with relationship-based leadership styles. The author also studied the impact of inclusion on teams and discovered that managers showed mindfulness and empathy in developing authentic relationships with their employees (Moore, Maxey, Waite & Wendover, 2020). Employee openness and safe attachments increased employee engagement, adaptability, innovation, and resiliency while exceeding performance metrics. The inclusive teams also adapted to the unique disabilities existing among team members and became self-organizing and adaptive. Key to supporting this transformation was the development of onboarding training in partnership with local supporting agencies (Maxey, Moore & Hanson, 2017). Managers play a central role in all the case studies to facilitate the effectiveness of the employees with disabilities through supporting healthy team cultures. At Walgreens and Sephora, employees with a disability are part of the core business of the organization.

In the Netherlands, respondents describe successful inclusive managers as authentic, patient and involved. At Philips, the managers decide who will join their team. The management of the WGP program stresses that managers must be authentic people managers, who are willing to help and guide others.

> "You must make sure you have the time, if you are very busy on your
> production floor, you should not hire someone from the WGP program. It is
> not good for the person and not good for the team."

At VodafoneZiggo, managers have the freedom to make the choice themselves to hire someone with a disability. Vodafone team managers signal that team members include people with disabilities in the group quickly and adjust their behavior accordingly and that

there is great enthusiasm by colleagues:

> "The willingness to become a buddy is greater than we needed. That is our strength."

At Grundfos, the disability inclusive culture is the result of the core values of 'care for people' (people-centered management) and management commitment to inclusiveness and social responsibility. In interviews with the senior manager on CSR, it was clear that the original disability inclusive culture at Grundfos was challenged by the globalization of the company and the competition for market shares. The tension became visible in the job design in the flex departments. Originally, employees with intellectual disabilities performed simple, repetitive manual tasks in internal jobs that were reserved for them (e.g., assembly work, emptying dustbins, assisting in the canteen). While many companies have outsourced or automatized such activities to reduce expenditures, Grundfos tries to keep these jobs and services inhouse as they are suitable for employees with disabilities that cannot perform ordinary jobs. Grundfos also strive to integrate workers with disabilities in the ordinary production in the company but finds it difficult to balance social concerns with performance and production metrics. To bridge this gap Danish companies, have access to wage subsidy programs that subsidize the employer for the reduced work ability of a person with disabilities, e.g., flexjobs (Bredgaard, 2020).

### (4) Community partnerships

In all five organizations, we identified an enabler, which was not clearly identified in the literature review, namely: community partnerships. Community partners can be local community organizations, disability organizations, and public employment services, who are the experts or authorities with the experience in assisting individuals with disabilities develop workplace skills. They collaborate through knowledge sharing and providing

personnel who assist in the development of training, job design, onboarding programs, and hands-on job coaching.

In the Walgreens case, local government organizations serving the needs of the disabled partnered with Walgreens to develop a transitional work group (TWG) as a pre-hiring 9-week onboarding program (Maxey, Moore & Hanson, 2017). This pre-hire training program assists employees with disabilities to execute core business functions. The TWG program aims to help candidates with a disability to demonstrate technical tasks and soft skills such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and overall job readiness (Maxey, Moore & Hanson, 2017). Sephora acknowledges the importance of state involvement but are not currently satisfied with the collaboration:

> "I have learned that the state is a key enabler. The government agency for the disabled failed us because they were unwilling/unable to change their processes. We are in the process of building a structure that can function without their connectivity in the local communities."

In the Netherlands, Philips' WGP program works closely with the municipality and the Public Employment Service (UWV) to bring knowledge and expertise to the company. The HR manager is in regular contact with them and play a broker role in matching candidates with team managers. VodafoneZiggo uses partner agencies for finding candidates who are a match for the job posting. However, they have hired job coaches as VodafoneZiggo employees to provide better support to employees with disabilities and their managers. In both Dutch cases, the length of the contract for employees with disabilities is only one year, after which they need to find new employment.

In Denmark, Grundfos has a long-standing partnership with public employment services, local authorities, and the local community. The local authorities collaborate with Grundfos to match unemployed jobseekers with disabilities as well as other groups (e.g., ethnic minorities and refugees) with vacancies and to carve out jobs for people with

disabilities. Due to its role as the major local employer and its commitment to disability inclusion, Grundfos has also hired an internal social advisor that performs work assessments, interviews, and job design.

## DISCUSSION

At the heart of all five companies, we found inclusive core values that extend beyond economic values and includes social and societal purposes (cf. Gilbride et al., 2003). To activate inclusive core values, senior management commitment is a necessary condition (cf. Chan et al., 2020). The actual implementation and embodiment of inclusive core values and senior management commitment is found in a disability inclusive culture in which disabled workers are treated and managed with respect and equal opportunity (cf. Collela, 1994; Hagner et al., 2014; Medina & Gamero, 2017). Finally, we identified community partnerships as an enabler, which was not as clearly identified in the existing literature. These partnerships include local community organizations, disability organizations, and public employment services and include collaboration on training, job design, onboarding programs and job coaching. A similar finding is alluded to in the literature on Individual Placement and Support (Drake & Bond, 2014; Suijkerbuijk et al., 2017) and supported employment (Bond, 2004; Bond et al., 2008).

Disability inclusive work organizations also face tensions and challenges. Tensions and challenges can stimulate organizations to find innovative solutions or become disabling and unproductive. The basic tension we identified was the balance between economic and social values. At Walgreens and Sephora, the hiring of employees with disabilities has become a key performance indicator for their distribution centers, which can conflict with the need for productivity. In both cases, managers hire disabled employees as well as ensuring that employee productivity metrics are reached (Hanson & Moore, 2023). In the Dutch and Danish cases, there was also a tension between the performance improvement

plans and the measurement of key performance indicators. In Denmark, Grundfos is struggling to retain the tradition of disability inclusion and CSR while expanding to new global markets. The integration and retention of employees with disabilities comes with costs and is not necessarily profitable in the short term. This may produce internal tensions where coworkers and supervisors become skeptical and critical of disability inclusion.

In this study, we have identified the common enablers of disability inclusive work organizations across very different institutional and national contexts. We suggest that other organizations that intend to become disability inclusive or community organizations that intend to persuade employers to recruit and retain employees with disabilities, should examine their core values, management commitments, work cultures and partnerships. These enablers have emerged from the experiences and practices of companies that have proven successful in including employees with disabilities.

We suggest that rather than focusing on barriers we can learn to facilitate the labor market integration of persons with disabilities by studying the enablers of disability inclusive work organizations. In future research, we invite researchers to test these enablers of disability inclusive work organizations in a larger population through quantitative research methods and determine the relationships between enablers to the successful hiring of disabled employees. This would provide evidence to build solid and cross-disciplinary models and theories of disability inclusive work organizations.

## CONCLUSION

Persons with disabilities have significantly lower employment and higher inactivity rates compared to people without disabilities and are more likely to work in precarious and atypical jobs. To better understand how to include more people with disabilities in the labor market, we have explored the common characteristics of disability inclusive work organizations. The study is based on a strategic selection of companies that employ a much

larger proportion of employees with disabilities compared to similar companies in their country: Walgreens and Sephora in the USA, Philips and VodafoneZiggo in the Netherlands and Grundfos in Denmark. They are large, private, and successful companies in very different contexts. Across three most different national and institutional contexts and five different private organizations, we identified four specific enablers of disability inclusive work organizations: (1) inclusive core values, (2) senior management commitment, (2) disability inclusive cultures and (4) community partnerships. The enablers are related and mutually reinforcing. The findings from our case studies are consistent with the existing research on disability and employment and adds to our understanding of the relationships between the enablers of disability inclusive work organizations.

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## ABSTRACT

Street vending was declared illegal by an Act of parliament in Zambia in 1992 because of the increase in negative outcomes including pickpocketing, worsening public hygiene and order, exacerbating the spread of diseases, tax evasion, and environmental pollution. Despite the numerous negative outcomes of street vending, it is undoubtedly the largest creator of informal jobs, both for skilled and unskilled immigrants and citizens. Despite many suggestions, strategies and efforts of many stakeholders and researchers to find a lasting solution to street vending in Zambia, the vendors are still trading on the undesignated streets. The aim of this research was therefore to explore the views and experiences of the participants on the sustainable panaceas for street vending in Ndola. The failure of the Local Authorities (LAs) in Zambia to permanently evict street vendors from trading in the undesignated places, despite their various interventions and resources committed, necessitated this research. Researchers conducted legal analysis to examine the current laws against street vending and found lacunas that need to be addressed. Qualitative research methodology and phenomenology design employed to explore the lived experiences of the participants. A conceptual framework for negotiated and tailored vendors' access to rights claims and trading spaces in urban areas was adopted for this research. Key findings of the research reveals the need for the engineers under the planning department to redesign the town and markets to promote not only market access but also to accommodate population growth. There is also

inconsistent enforcement of the law by each new political party in power, while vendors see street vending as a source of household (HH) livelihood due to high unemployment levels. Furthermore, it was found that there are allegations of unreasonable use of force by some LA security officers during crackdowns. In addition, a wide range of sustainable panaceas for street vending noted by the respondents, together with some paradoxical tensions be examined by authorities and stakeholders. The exercise to remove street vendors from the streets resulted in increased alleged corrupt practices by some law enforcement officers. The study concludes by clearly stating the pertinent issues that need to be considered including revisiting the current law on street vending with a view to regulating street vending and finding a win-win strategy to amend the law, coming up with measures to allocate a timeframe for street vending and the issuance of trading permits. Furthermore, consideration should be made to formulate tax system (e.g. presumptive tax) for street vending, and reintroduce Hawkers licenses that was abolished. This could be done by the Ndola City Council Councilors in liaison with the Central Government, by coming up with a bye law specially dealing with the above, or, in the alternative and better still, the Local Government Act (2019) itself could be amended, or indeed, a Statutory Instrument (SI) could be issued by the Minister with a view to incorporating into the law the foregoing matters. In addition, markets need to be redesigned to increase both capacity and resolve the unfair trader-buyer market access challenge, address all the paradoxical tensions noted, and improve hygiene and sanitary facilities in market places.

# INTRODUCTION

Street vending is a global phenomenon that in some developed countries, is no longer viewed as a public nuisance because of the public health measures put in place. The various social, economic, and political factors of different countries shape the historical context of street vending. This global phenomenon can be traced back to periods of early urbanization through the 21$^{st}$ century, where globalization has largely influenced the emergency of street vending in most African countries. Since time immemorial, Zambia has also grappled with the challenge of street vending. Chileshe and Moonga (2017) argued that increased urbanization, high rates of poverty in Zambian cities, and a dearth of suitable official sector job prospects have forced some citizens to turn to the informal sector in order to make a living. Zambia's declining industrial sector in the wake of trade liberalization and privatization in the early 1990s is largely responsible for the country's overall economic downturn, which is also strongly linked to the country's emerging informal economy (Resnick, 2018). According to Ndhlovu (2011), street vending is among the informal livelihoods that many impoverished and jobless Zambians rely on. However, street vending presents a dichotomous situation as there are merits and demerits that come with it leading to endless controversies (Chileshe, 2020).

A study conducted by Hansen (2004) on Zambia gives a foundation to the issue of street vending and the mediations that the administration has implemented so far. In the last part of the 1990s, Zambia developed another ultra-modern day market in the capital city of Lusaka to cater for street vendors; the construction of the market was done before the migration of all street vendors who used to maintain their day-to-day business in the space distributed for the new market foundation. At first, the street vendors battled to be allocated stores in the new market. However, most street vendors went to the streets again as the expenses for working in the new privately operated market were excessively high for most sellers to manage (Hansen & Vaa 2004). Thus,

those that could stand to pay took possession of the stores, and those that couldn't kept trading on the street roads.

In 1999, a mission of expulsion of street vendors from the central business district of Lusaka to occupy formal markets was championed by local authorities (LA). However, it was not until 2002 that LA, with help from the police, achieved its mission to remove street vendors from the streets. Hansen (2004) claimed that the policemen were positioned in high-density areas of Lusaka for a surprisingly long time to guarantee that street vendors didn't get back into the city. This mission was persuaded by the need to establish a conductive environment, advance better wellbeing, and expand security for the city populace and vendors (Hansen, 2004). The same approach to removing street vendors was taken last year, around January 2023, when the New Dawn President, Hichilema Hakainde, issued a presidential directive to remove all street vendors from selling in the streets. As of today, most street vendors are back on the same streets where they were evicted. We argue that evicting street vendors from the streets is not a guarantee of a sustainable solution in Zambia. We further argue that although there are several studies conducted on this subject globally, a gap exists on sustainable panaceas for street vending, contextualized in African countries. Furthermore, it is unknown which recommendations put forward by the various researchers have been successfully implemented by the authorities. Therefore, there is a need for governments to evaluate successful and unsuccessful recommendations implemented to address the problem of street vending.

Despite the numerous vices of street vending, it is undoubtedly the largest creator of informal jobs, both for skilled and unskilled immigrants and citizens. It is estimated that over two billion people work in the informal sector, or about 60% of the world's total employed population (ILO, 2022). In Zambia, the annual labor force survey report (2022), "Of the 3,273,123, employed

persons, 63.5 percent were in the informal economy while 36.5 percent were in the formal economy" (p.45).

In this study, researchers attempted to answer the research question, *How do participants describe sustainable panaceas for street vending in Zambia?* Furthermore, the research problem that was addressed in this study is that although the local authorities in Zambia have on several occasions removed street vendors from trading in the streets, the exercise has not yielded the desired results over time. Street vendors are determined to continue trading in the undesignated places because of economic reasons (Matamanda et al., 2023). In addition, in Maseru, many residents are forced to turn to street hawking due to the city's socioeconomic problems, which include high unemployment, rising poverty rates, and declining living standards (World Bank, 2019). In various cities, there are cycles whereby local government officials first tolerate, then control, and finally remove street vendors in response to demands related to urban management, election cycles, and economic trends (Ndhlovu, 2011). These inconsistencies noted in the different political parties that come into power, tend to defeat the purpose of enacting the law against street vending in Zambia. In this regard, the researcher focused on the following objectives in this study:

1. To explore the lived experiences of street vendors in Ndola.

2. To explore the experiences of decision-makers in addressing street vending.

3. To find out the possible lasting solutions to street vending in Ndola.

The limitations of the research included untimely crackdowns by LA security officers during data collection and the sensitive nature of the topic, where some street vendors felt that the data collectors were actually secret service officials. The researchers overcame the aforementioned limitations by ensuring only a few interviews were planned and conducted per day, and by wearing university identification cards in the field.

The final part of this paper focuses on the literature reviewed, conceptual framework, discussion of findings, conclusion, recommendations, and areas for future research and policy implications have also been highlighted.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A synthesis of the literature review was carried out by the researchers to derive themes from the sources. We argue that although there are several studies conducted on this subject globally, it is unknown which recommendations put forward by the researchers have been successfully implemented by the authorities in Africa and in particular, Zambia. For example, Chileshe (2020) noted that some of the major suggestions to address street vending include:

- No buyers, no vendors: Principle of Collective responsibility

- Strengthen and enforce laws against street vending or regulation

- Provide jobs for street vendors

- Provide environmental education to street vendors

- Provide adequate trading places

- Training and regulation

- Space and time allocation for street vending

- Issue street vending licenses (Chileshe, 2020).

Despite all these suggestions, the Local Authorities in Zambia are yet to find a lasting solution to street vending because vendors are still trading in the undesignated streets.

The following are the themes that emerged from the synthesis of literature reviewed and the Zambian legal analysis on street vending.

**Perpetual Street Vending**

A synthesis of the literature review clearly indicated that although the law against street vending is clear in many countries that do not support legalizing it, street vendors' perpetual trading in the streets has continued. As Matamanda et al. (2023, p. 6) found in their study from interviewing one of the street vendors, selling of fruits was justified by several vendors who pointed out that "selling fruits makes it possible to access claim rights to use and appropriation of the streets as the use of wheelbarrows, carts, or small tables does not take much space and also allows me to be mobile and evade the authorities." The existing research clearly shows that street vendors have devised strategies to evade the authorities and are committed to doing so at the expense of being penalized. For example, some of the street vendors sell goods that are easy to move and evade authorities as and when LA operations are conducted to evict them (Matamanda et al., 2023, p. 6). In addition, some street vendors not only sell goods on behalf of shop owners but also have a mutual relationship where their goods are securely stored in the shops whenever authorities implement a crackdown. For example, Yemmafouo (2018) argued that vendors procure goods from suppliers on credit because of the commercial or familial relationship that links them. Furthermore, this kind of relationship has been described as a fidelity alliance, which ensures the supplier's control over the street seller and perpetuates street vending (Yemmafouo, 2018). On the contrary, in most countries in Africa, authorities disparage and despise street vending to the extent that it is outright criminalized (WIEGO, 2019). In this regard, there is a perpetual antagonistic relationship between street vendors and the authorities. It can be argued that the motivations of street vendors being defiant to the law of the land have not been considered by authorities because of the illegal nature of their business activity. As long as street vending is illegal, it offers no opportunity for stakeholder dialogue. To effectively address this issue, it is imperative to critically examine what constitutes this defiant behavior of street vendors against the prevailing law because it is unclear how other scholars and researchers have addressed these tensions with tangible results.

**Perpetual tensions and allegations of corruption.**

Tensions between street vendors and the authorities arise not only because of the crackdown operations but also because of corruption. Some local authority officers tend to engage in all forms of corruption during the crackdown on street vendors. When authorities engage in negotiations with street vendors, most often than not, it can lead to corruption and patronage systems (Pulliat et al., 2023). The best strategy employed by African governments to address the issue of street vending is usually to engage in crackdowns on street vending, which tends to not only worsen the abuses but also increase government corruption and the general lack of accountability (WIEGO, 2019). As a result, there are perpetual tensions and corruption cases where street vendors are evicted from accessing public spaces.

**The Economic Reasons of Street Vending**

The majority of people in developing countries (DCs) resort to street vending as a way to make a living. Anja and Zhang (2023) claimed that rising unemployment levels, the desire for unrestrained autonomy, low initial investment requirements, easy market entry, social connections, and the quest to boost meager wages constitute major factors for people engaging in street vending. In recent years, it has been noted that street vending is not only for the poor and uneducated people but also the well-to-do and educated ones, largely because of the increasing levels of urban unemployment as a result of the impact of COVID-19, the global financial crisis, and the deteriorating economic variables of most countries (Al-Jundi et al., 2022; WIEGO, 2019). Al-Jundi et al. (2022) argued that the unemployment rate is obviously going to remain high in DCs as compared to developed countries due to low income per capita because the ratio of their investment to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is lower. However, the illegal nature of street vending does not exclude street vendors from paying taxes for doing business, and yet governments do not consider this huge source of potential revenue. On the contrary, street vending is problematic and leads to

numerous vices, including conflicts and sometimes violence. Unlicensed street vendors employ children who have been accused of counterfeiting and illicit drug trading in their quest to reducing poverty and unemployment (Al-Jundi et al., 2022).

**Strategic Spaces**

Despite street vending compromising the aesthetics of the CBD, street vendors focus on thriving businesses as they also seek to strategically position their goods where there is high traffic of passersby. The issue of market access by street vendors has been a huge concern that authorities pay a deaf ear to because of the illegal nature of the business. There are several issues that arise because of regulatory frameworks that prohibit street vendors from accessing public spaces and incomes for groups and poor people (Pulliat et al., 2023). Therefore, the unfavorable conditions for possible dialogue to find a lasting solution to street vending between street vendors and authorities are far-fetched (Matamanda et al., 2023). On one hand, street vendors have no right to access strategic spaces in public as long as the law for that particular country does not allow it. On the other hand, Sustainable Development Goals numbers eight (8) and eleven (11) promote sustainable economic growth and inclusiveness, making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, respectively (UN DESA, 2023). We argue that promoting inclusiveness in accessing public spaces without capturing informal actors such as street vendors is a missed opportunity in many countries.

**Legalized Vending Sites**

There are countries with success stories of regulated street vending (Shula, 2023). In urban communities like New York City and Los Angeles, selling on the streets is managed through permits and assigned vending zones. This takes into consideration a controlled extension of street vending while guaranteeing consistency with wellbeing and security standards. Merchants are

expected to adhere to and comply with explicit regulations, finding some kind of harmony between vendors and order. Japan's "yatai," or mobile food shop stands, have a long practice of sanctioned selling in the streets. These mobile food shop stands are regulated in view of wellbeing and cleanliness guidelines while safeguarding the social experience, and mobile food shop stands are customary for local people and vacationers. A few European urban communities, like Amsterdam and Barcelona, have assigned street vending zones where merchants can legitimately work. Guidelines guarantee the protection of public spaces while permitting merchants to add to the neighborhood, economy, and culture. Chinese urban communities like Shanghai and Beijing have assigned street vending regions and night markets where merchants can legitimately work. While regulators control these regions with strict adherence to standards, the government values the significant role of street vending as a component of the social and financial aspects of the locals, keeping harmony between control and liveliness. By creating Town Vending Committees and designated vending zones in India, the Street Vendors Act of 2014 offers a legislative framework to control street vending. According to studies, the act supports urban peace and vendor rights, although it is difficult to implement and strike a balance between the interests of the public and vendors (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022). To assist street vendors, Bogotá in Colombia has put in place formal market areas, training programs, and microloans. Vendors continue to face operational expenses and accessibility challenges in spite of these initiatives (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022).

It can be argued that in the aforementioned countries where street vending is legalized, informal traders enjoy protection from authorities, participate in local authority planning, and cities promote the cultural identity of their respective countries. A paradigm shift is required not to always think of criminalizing street vending and other people accessing urban spaces by local authority planners in order to put up measures to address demand-side factors (Solidum, 2023, as cited in Igudia, 2020).

**Legal Analysis of the Zambian Law**

As regards the law on street vending in Zambia, the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019 is the main law. This is the new law in the sense that it repeals and replaces the Local Government Act, 1991. The 1991 Act, just like the 2019 Act, is now the enabling law vis-à-vis the management of municipalities countrywide. Under both laws, the Minister of Local Government and Housing (now called the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development) has the power by SI to make regulations for any purpose. Under the same token, a LA is also empowered to make by-laws or standing orders. Whereas an SI applies throughout the country, by-laws or standing orders only apply within the district where the by-laws or standing orders are made. A perusal of both the repealed Local Government Act and the one that is in force shows that the law does not cut down on street vending and, in particular, matters connected thereto, such as the allocation of a timeframe for street vending and the issuance of trading permits. Rather, what the law requires is to prohibit street vending altogether on account of the many menaces associated with it. In view of the menaces that were deemed to be associated with street vending, which include the following, there was, in the central government's view, a need to enhance the law:

(a) Indiscriminate disposal of solid waste;

(b) Blocking of drainages;

(c) Erection of makeshift stores and booths;

(d) Preparation and selling of foodstuffs in an unsafe environment;

(e) Illegal sale of intoxicating substances, including liquor;

(f) Non-payment of council levies; and

(g) Deterioration of public health and safety standards. (Parliament, n.d.).

Thus, in response to the foregoing, the then Minister aforesaid added stringent provisions to the SI that dealt with street vending and matters related thereto. This was done through the Street Vending and Nuisances Regulations, 2018 (Parliament, n.d.). In this case, the Minister came up with the Local Government (Street Vending and Nuisances) (Amendment) Regulations, 2018. It follows that this is the law that all LAs in the country, including the Ndola City Council, the LA under consideration herein, have lately been invoking following a directive from the central government to remove street vendors from the street and other undesignated trading places. It is worth noting that the said SI of 2018 simply amends the Local Government (Street Vending and Nuisances) Regulations, 1992, and the said 2018 Regulations are thus to be read as one with the 1992 Regulations. Thus, the 2018 Regulations prescribe many offenses associated with the topic under consideration. These include the following offenses, inter alia:

a. Throwing a liter on, or along, a street or prescribed road

b. Sale of local produce in any street or in a public place other than a market established by the council, except with the permission of the councils

    i. Food

    ii. Any other item or product...

c. Disposing or allowing to accumulate or keeping upon any premises any dirty, filthy, rubbish, or offensive matter or matter likely to become offensive...

d. Conduct street business or sell ready meals in a van or other conveyances that are not licensed... (The Local Government (Street Vending and Nuisances) (Amendment) Regulations, 2018).

In terms of penalties for the above offenses and others not listed, they are prescribed in Penalty Fee Units, and they range from 333.33 Fee Units for the offense associated with spitting

or vomiting on or alongside streets or roads as the lowest penalty to the maximum of 2,500.00 Fee Units for many offenses, for example, the foregoing offense of street business or selling ready meals in a van, etc. The penalties are high in view of the provisions under the Fees and Fines (Fee and Penalty Unit Value) (Amendment) Regulations, 2015, made by the Minister of Finance pursuant to the Fees and Fines Act, 1994. The value of a penalty unit is thirty ngwee. By way of example, a person found guilty of street business or selling ready meals in a van, etc., will have to pay 2,500.00 fee units, which comes to K750 in actual monetary terms, or serve a term of imprisonment as the sitting magistrate would deem fit. The foregoing proposition is premised on the assumption that since the Local Government (Street Vending and Nuisances) Regulations, 1992, and the 2018 Regulations, when read together, only provide a fine, the court, in cases where the convict is not able to pay the fine, uses its discretion to impose a sentence reasonable in the circumstances. The Criminal Procedure Code, 1934, under Section 7 thereof, is thus instructive. It enacts, inter alia, that:

Subject to the other provisions of this Code, a subordinate court of the first, second, or third class may try any offense under the Penal Code or any other written law and may pass any sentence or make any other order authorized by the Penal Code or any other written law. The authors opine thus that the fact that courts want to assist in curbing the offenses associated with street vending, its rate of recurrence, and also the fact that street vendors want to only break the law, inter alia, are some of the matters that courts consider when arriving at an appropriate sentence.

The authors further opine that the law as regards dealing with street vending is okay, in particular the penalties associated with it; however, the law needs attention to allow for regulated street vending that also takes into account security, hygiene, payment of applicable council levies and fees, inter alia, for purposes of attainment of much-desired economic growth and eradication of poverty in the country, especially among the citizens that are not able to, due to one reason or

another, find formal employment, be it in government or the private sector. The foregoing could be attained by way of the Ndola City Council Councilors in liaison with the Central Government coming up with a bye law specially dealing with the above, or in the alternative and better still, the Local Government Act (2019) itself could be amended, or indeed, a Statutory Instrument (SI) could be issued by the Minister so as to incorporate into the law the above matters.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Researchers adopted the framework for negotiated and tailored vendors' access to rights claims and trading spaces in urban areas. The framework draws upon principles of urban planning, community engagement, and inclusive governance. In this research, three key elements of the framework were examined, which included the lived experiences of street vendors, planners, and policymakers, as well as science, research, and development focusing on sustainability. The aforementioned key elements of the conceptual framework helped the researchers provide a theoretical lens through which this research was undertaken to derive the meaning of the complexities inherent in this global phenomenon. In this regard, the researcher examined the interconnectedness of the three key elements in Figure 1 triad as suggested by Matamanda et al. (2023) as follows:

- Investigation of existing lived experiences and constraints for and by street vendors in Ndola.

- Critical examination and gap analysis of legislative and policy frameworks in support of or against street vending in Zambia.

- Gap analysis and examination of street vendor decisions, area and physical siting of conducting business, type and model design of vending structures and building plans,

format and display table forms and types, as well as vending structure development

materials utilized, for example, wood, plastics, polythene, and so on.

- A thematic analysis technique to generate new ideas on vending issues and paradoxical

   tensions between street vendors and authorities with a focus on sustainability issues.

**Figure 1**

*Framework for negotiated and tailored vendors' access to rights claims and trading spaces in urban areas.*
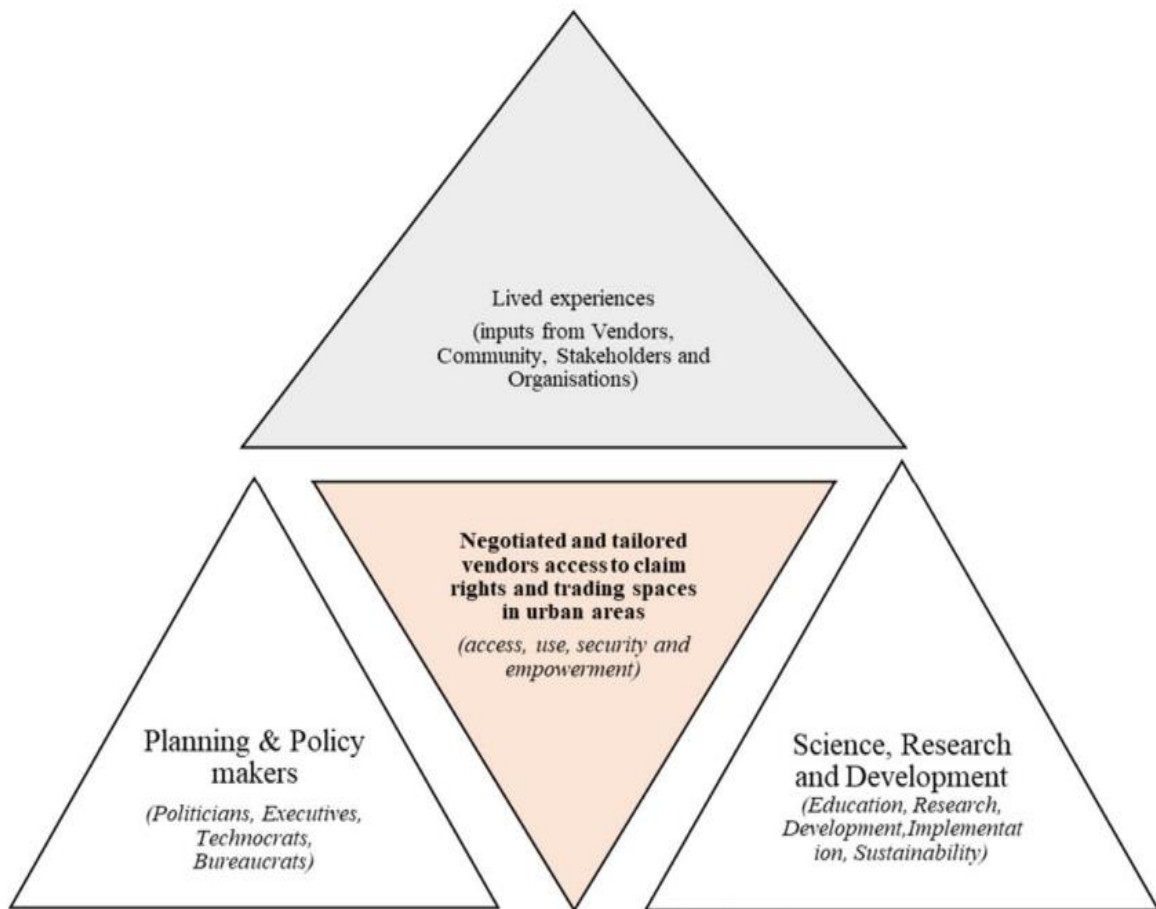


*Source:* Matamanda et al. (2023)

# METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodology was adopted in this research because of the nature of the research problem, which required an in-depth inquiry. Furthermore, researchers applied phenomenological design to explore street vending, which is a global phenomenon. Three (3) in-depth interviews were conducted with four (4) key informants from local authorities and one (1) in-depth interview with one (1) subject matter expert from the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA), five (5) shop owners, and twenty (20) street vendors participated in the in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling technique was employed in this research, where only street vendors who have experienced local authority crackdown operations on street vending were interviewed, and only key informants who were subject matter experts from the government participated. The researchers employed a thematic analysis approach to analyze qualitative data collected using semi-structured interviews. Six steps to thematic analysis, as coined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed. Furthermore, the concept of trustworthiness was employed in this research to guarantee the reliability and validity of the qualitative findings where member checking was conducted during the data collection process as well as after the report was generated. Furthermore, researchers ensured that the interpretations and conclusions resonated with the experiences of the participants. Data triangulation (method and data source triangulation), adherence to the research process, and data analysis procedures were followed, confirming the findings with the existing research on this global phenomenon.

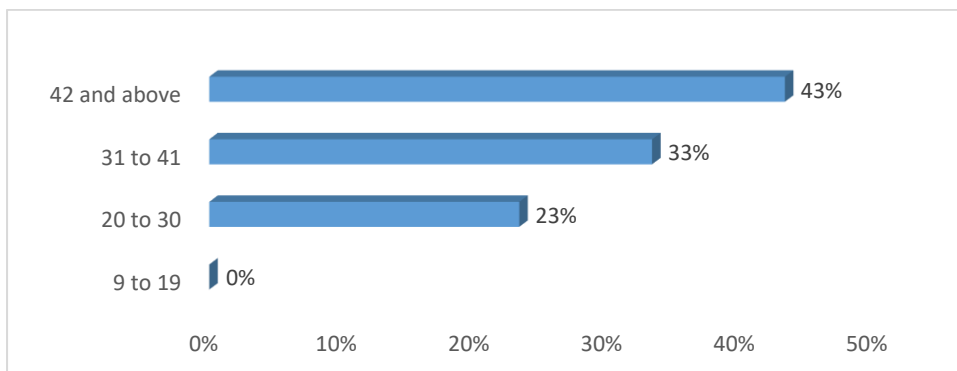# FINDINGS

## Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Figure 2**

*Gender*
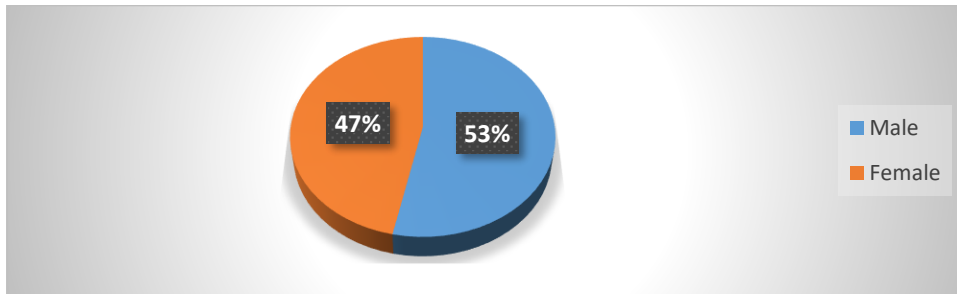


*Note.* In this research, there were 47% females and 53% males, as shown in Figure 2.
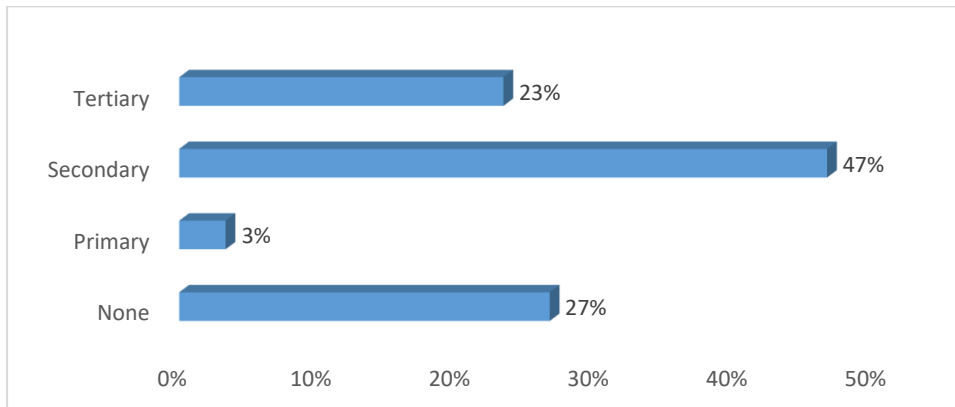
**Figure 3**

*Age Range*



*Note.* Figure 3 shows that 43% (the majority) of the respondents were 42 years of age and older.

It is evident from Figure 3 that most street vendors have family responsibilities.
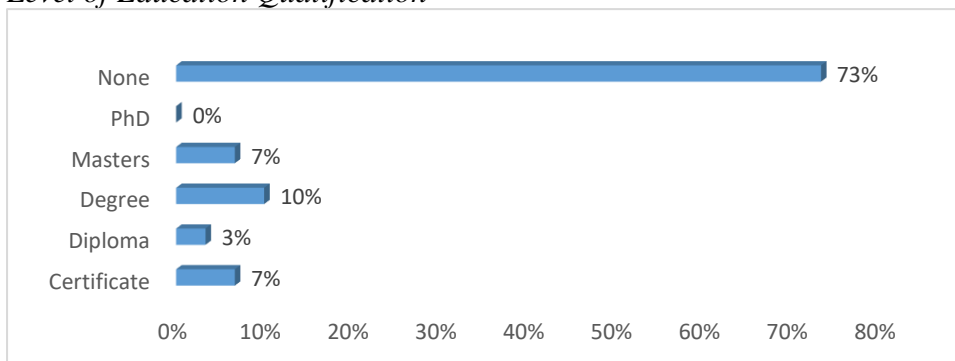
**Figure 4**

*Level of Education Attained*



*Note.* Figure 4 shows that 47% (the majority) of the respondents have completed secondary school education and 27% have never attained any education level. 23% have attained tertiary education, while only 3% (the lowest) have attained primary education. It is clear from Figure 4 that the majority of the respondents do not have the skills to sustain themselves. Furthermore, those who have a skill are engaging in street vending as a form of informal employment.
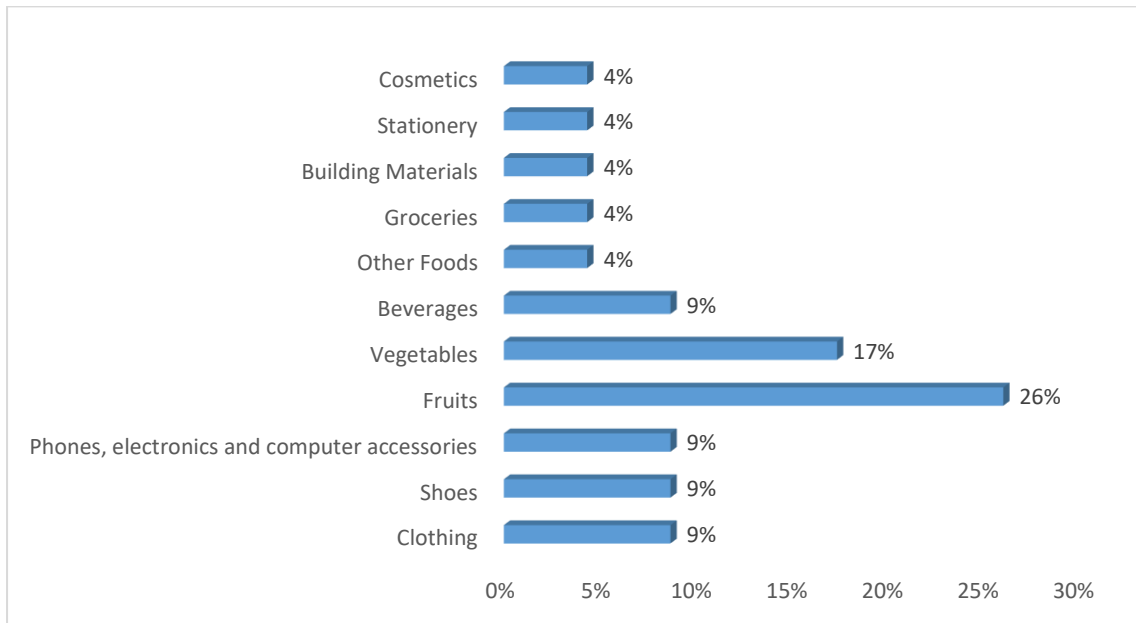
**Figure 5**

*Level of Education Qualification*



*Note.* Figure 5 shows that 73% (the highest) of the respondents have never attained any educational qualifications, while only 3% (the lowest) have attained diploma level. It is clear from Figure 5 that most of the street vendors have no skills that they can use to sustain themselves.

**Figure 6**

*Nature of Business*



*Note.* Figure 6 shows that 17% and 26% of street vendors engage in the vegetable and fruit business, for a combined total of 43% (the highest). According to LA officials in Ndola, fruits and vegetable sellers generate the highest municipal solid waste.

**Experiences of Street Vendors in Ndola**

*Inconsistent Enforcement of the Law*

Inconsistencies in the enforcement of the law on street vending by each political party that comes into power have been noted as one of the major challenges faced not only by law enforcers but also by street vendors. We argue that there are inconsistencies in the enforcement of the law by different political parties in power based on their development agenda. From the time of Movement for Multi-Party Democracy in 1991 to the current party in power-United Party for National Development (UPND) it can be observed below:

- MMD-Focused on Liberalism/multi-partism

- PF-Focused on Pro-poor policies

- UPND-The focus is mainly Economic reconstruction, diplomacy and expansion

One Street Vendor (SV) narrated that "each government comes in with their own policies, which change every time." Furthermore, another respondent was quick to add that "street vending is political because policies fluctuate; today they say yes, you can trade, and tomorrow another leadership says no, you cannot." The question that begs answering is: does political interference always override the rule of law? The fact that street sales and purchases continue to occur indicates a lack of enforcement of these SIs. To stop street vending, there must be a strong political will, just like for many other unlawful activities occurring in city precincts (Chileshe & Moonga, 2019). From the findings of this study, it seems that the rule of law is not applicable when political interference is at play. The experience of street vendors with different political parties in power has tended to leave them in a state of confusion, anger, and frustration because of the seemingly unending shift of goal posts where enforcement of the law is concerned. Besides, there are no advocacy groups to speak for them, largely because of the illegal nature of their business undertaking.

### Source of Household (HH) Livelihood

Although street vending is illegal in Zambia, street vendors (SVs) claim that selling on the streets is their main source of household (HH) livelihood. One SV explained that "This is what we use to feed our children and our families at large; we want to make a profit, no matter how little it may be." Another SV supported the argument of HH livelihood by adding that "the little we make helps us develop our lives and the livelihood of our families." It is evident that although street vending is illegal in Zambia, many SVs engage in gainful informal jobs. According to the Labour Force Survey (2021), the Copperbelt unemployment rate stands at 18.7%, second only to Lusaka province at 23.3%, the highest. Arguably, it remains to be proved whether the street vending

informal jobs contribute significantly to the economic wellbeing of Zambia or not. Lessons can be drawn from other countries where street vending is regulated. The researchers are of the view that the central government, local authorities, and interested future researchers should consider undertaking exposure visits, especially to China, with a view to conducting a comparative study between regulating street vending and its potential economic benefits, as opposed to focusing only on its unlawful nature in Zambia. It is worth noting that the largest workers earn their living in the informal sector globally. For example, WIEGO (2024) argues that:

"61% of the world's workers earn their living in the informal economy—in jobs and enterprises that are not regulated or protected by the government but that provide critical economic opportunities for the working poor. In these jobs, poverty rates are high and respect for human rights and workers' rights is low (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO, 2024)."

### *Alleged Unreasonable Use of Force*

It was found that at times, the law enforcement officers have allegedly applied unreasonable force to remove street vendors in Ndola Town, to the extent that injury and the unreported death of one street vendor occurred in 2023. One street vendor narrated that "someone was beaten up by law enforcement officers and died a few days later." However, the researchers could not establish if the cause of death for this particular street vendor was indeed the beating he received, as this was outside the scope of the research. Nevertheless, this allegation from the street vendors is worth noting because it borders on a human rights violation. It is hoped that further investigations can be undertaken by the relevant authorities concerned. On the other hand, it was also reported by one of the LA officers that "some of the Local Authority Police Officers were also beaten up by street vendors due to an altercation they had." In this incident, the LA officer disclosed that "all the street vendors involved in violence were arrested and charged." The law is

clear on the use of reasonable force by any arresting officer on any person who forcibly resists such arrest or attempts to evade being arrested. In any case, it is the purview of the court to consider whether the means utilized by the arresting police officer were essential or the level of power utilized was sensible for the apprehension of such an individual, having respect to the gravity of the offense that had been, or alternately was being, committed by such an individual and the conditions in which such an offense had been, or alternately was being, committed by such an individual.

*Allegations of Increase Forms of Corruption*

Street vendors disclosed that there is an increase in the forms of corruption whenever law enforcement officers execute their operations in Ndola Town. These forms of corruption include bribery and abuse of authority, where the illegal acquisition of pecuniary resources by the aforementioned officers has been noticed. One street vendor even said, "Sometimes they collect bribes from us, and yet we haven't even made proper sales." Another street vendor added that "the way these methods are being done is not professional because they also take bribes from the same vendors in order to allow them to trade here, which again is solving nothing." According to the Anti-Corruption Act No. 3 of 2012, corruption is defined as:

- Soliciting, accepting, obtaining, giving, promising, or offering gratification by way of a bribe or other personal temptation of inducement.
- Misuse or abuse of a public office for private advantage or benefit.

If law enforcement officers are allegedly taking bribes during their operations to remove street vendors from the streets, then it defeats the purpose of implementing the law on street vending.

*Unfair Treatment*

Most, if not all, of the street vendors interviewed expressed their frustrations with the manner in which the LA security officers implemented their mandate to remove them from the streets. The two major issues noted are the imposition of fines not receipted and the irrevocable seizure of their goods whenever LA security officers confiscate them. One street vendor disclosed that "sometime back they used to give trading permits; if they can re-introduce that, it would be better and maybe make a more modern market than the one that is already there, because taking our food is not necessary, and to make matters worse, they don't return our food back." LA officers have been accused of effecting double punishment by street vendors. We argue that although it is the purview of the courts of competent jurisdiction to enter an order on all the street vendors convicted, many are yet to be tried in the same courts.

*Rationale for People Engaging in Street Vending*

Some of the street vendors interviewed disclosed that selling on the streets is the easiest and fastest way to make a living. Furthermore, other street vendors lamented the lack of financial capacity to rent shops as well as the high cost of living as some of the reasons they opt to sell in the streets. Some of them disclosed that "it requires less start-up capital" to sell in the streets, and others argued that inadequate market spaces and a lack of market access to customers force them to sell in the streets. Street vendors want to strategically position themselves among pedestrians, who are potential customers. Street vending is "unregulated and hence provides quick access to the market," argued one of the street vendors. It was also found that some of the market spaces allocated to traders remain unutilized for some time, if not years. It is not clear whether the council earns revenue on a continuous basis from these traders with unutilized market spaces allocated to them. The local authority will do well to conduct a market space audit in all the registered markets in Ndola district.

**Current Situation of Trading Spaces in the Markets (Registered and Unregistered)**

*Hygiene and Sanitary Facilities*

The researchers noted that the street vendors come from different locations in Ndola Town and have information on the prevailing hygiene and sanitary conditions in the respective markets. Almost all the street vendors complained about poor hygiene and sanitary facilities in both registered and unregistered markets in Ndola. Some of the street vendors were quick to argue that poor hygiene and sanitary conditions forced them to trade in the streets. One participant disclosed that "The hygiene is not good and the way they were built is not up to standard and our customers are not always ready to come all the way to the market which means no sales, it is not located in a nice area." It was also found that markets located near residential areas tend to have poor waste management, as most of the time, the garbage is not collected on time. It was also noted that this poor garbage collection challenge is largely caused by some households who dump their refuse in the night for fear of paying appropriate garbage collection fees. Furthermore, garbage bins fill up at a faster rate in markets where most of the vegetable sellers are largely dominant. This is in line with what Chileshe (2020) found in his study that street vending has been identified as an unsanitary practice that may have contributed to the 2017 cholera outbreak in Lusaka, Zambia, which was the latest in a string of outbreaks the country has seen.

*Poor location of markets*

The location of markets as well as market access by traders to potential buyers were found to be some of the major challenges facing traders and marketers in the markets. Street vendors complained of poorly located markets, and the design of the markets do not easily allow them to have easy access to potential passers-by buyers. In view of the traditional four (4) P's of marketing mix, "place," or location, is key if any business is to have access to potential buyers (Xia, 2023).

A business cannot exit and survive if it is poorly located. In this regard, street vendors opt to remain in the streets because passersby are not only potential customers for their goods but also buy from them as they find it convenient. By implication, street vendors defined market access as "public convenience service and quick sale" of their goods.

**Photo 1**

*Vehicle Street Vending of dry fish and Kapenta*



Suffice to argue that "public convenience and quick access to market" is one of the driving forces behind street vendors' adamant position on their illegal vending. However, striking a balance between the vices of street vending, its illegal nature, and street vendors offering "public convenient service and quick access to market" is one area that can be considered by LA and policymakers as opposed to completely closing the door for dialogue and law reforms. It was observed during the interviews with street vendors that some of the prominent customers of street vendors include law enforcers themselves. The tension is that street vendors not only want market access but also the need to make quick sales, while the public want convenience and quick and easy access to goods and services despite been aware of the illegal nature of the business.

We argue by way of projection that as long as the general public continues to promote street vending because of convenience and easy market access, the efforts, strategies, and resources of the current and future governments will always not yield the desired outcomes. The questions that begs answering is: will the general public cease to buy from street vendors even if the penalties

of doing so are increased? Will the street vendors cease to abrogate the law with increasing levels of unemployment in the country?

*Capacity of Markets*

Some of the street vendors disclosed that the Chisokone Town Market is smaller than the Kapalala Market, which has over 2000 trading spaces. They were of the view that the opposite should have happened: Chisokone Market should have been bigger than Kapalala Market, located outside the Central Business District (CBD). One participant argued that "the markets are small and they cannot accommodate us that is why we have no option but to do street vending, and out here we have been making more than we do when we are in the markets." It was also found that Mushili Market has a capacity of about 330 trading spaces.

In this regard, most of the street vendors have called for engineers to redesign all the markets to address the issue of market access for potential buyers who are passersby for all traders in the available markets. "If your stand in the market is poorly located where potential buyers cannot easily reach it, it is difficult to sell, and at times, you cannot even sell anything in a day," said one street vendor interviewed. As if that were not enough, another street vendor lamented that "some traders in the markets use witchcraft charms to attract customers, and this tends to scare away other traders from the markets." Some traders use vehicles to vend in the streets of Ndola especially the CBD.

**Street Vending Eviction Approach**

Shop owners in the CBD were interviewed on their views of the LA interventions to curb street vending in Ndola. The findings from shop owners were mixed. One of the shop owners was of the view that the LA plans to curb street vending do not yield the desired results because it is a "cat and mouse exercise". Another shop owner argued that the intervention plans by LA to curb

street vending was inhuman and uncivilized because street vendors are beaten up to a point that one allegedly lost his life and others end up badly injured. Some shop owners also disclosed that the LA approach has led to corrupt activities were street vendors bribe them with money and goods to remain in the streets. Some LA officials are allegedly abusing their authority in the process and enrich themselves during the operation. However, other shop owners were of the view that LA's approach to remove and prevent street vending is a good approach. However, this particular shop owner was quick to add that LA needs to find a better approach to prevent street vendors to avoid loss of lives and injury.

**Shop Owners' Views on LA Plans to Curb Street Vending**

Some shop owners interviewed are of the view that the LA has not imposed stiffer punishment on street vendors when caught because of corruption. For example, one shop owner disclosed that "The way these methods are being done is not professional, because they also take bribes from the same vendors in order to allow them to trade here which again is solving nothing." Another shop owner added that "it is more corrupt and less of a solution, because these people often come to take their foods and products and do not return them," "how is that solving a problem?" Furthermore, implementation of LA plans to curb street vending has been described by other shop owners as ineffective. For example, one shop owner argued that "the positive way forward has not been found, it seems like we are going around in circles, because in the first place the council should have found a better place to take the vendors before chasing them, now they are promoting theft, street kids and poverty with the methods they are using and its quite evident they always have not been effective." It has been noted that the implementation of LA plans to curb street vending does not show any signs of providing a sustainable solution. For example, another shop owner argued that "the way they are implementing the methods is not very promising in terms of providing a long term solution to our problem." It has been argued by shop owners that removing

street vendors by force will not deter them from getting back to sell in the streets. Better approaches and enforcement of the law is needed. Furthermore, the shop owners have described the implementation of LA plans to remove street vendors from the CBD as unethically done and uncivilized. For example, one shop owner argued that "I don't see it to be ethical, it is not humane although the council are civilized professionals." Moreover, "…in as much as they are doing this for the good of the people, they must do it in an orderly non-violent manner."

The argument is that, since time immemorial, street vendors have been chased from the streets but up to today they are still in the streets. It is rational to argue that the LA officials need to re-think their strategies and do it differently or still, the lawmakers must revisit the current law and amend it. LA should learn from other countries which have successfully allowed street vending without comprising on among other things including the security, hygiene and sanitary conditions.

**Local Authority Plans to Curb Street Vending**

The LA disclosed their intentions to relocate street vendors to Kapalala market which has capacity of over 2000 market spaces. In addition, the LA security Officers have been patrolling the CBD to ensure there are no street vendors. It was noted in one of the interviews with one LA official that, so far, the LA management has been commended for rendering unwavering support to law enforcers in the fight against street vending in terms of logistics. It was found that, there are no hygiene and sensitization programs targeting street vending. In this regard, LA officials have made proposals to engage in public sensitization programs to curb street vending. However, implementation of these plans by LA has not been without challenges. Most often than not, LA officials not only face resistance from street vendors, but also the public who find it convenient to buy from them. In addition, there have been times when the LA officials have been over-powered by street vendors because of limited capacity. In this regard, during the course of duty some LA officials have been beaten up by street vendors who were later arrested and charged. There have

been a number of accidents both by LA officials and street vendors during the crackdown operation. Some of the street vendors have devised other ways to continue abrogating the law, for example they wait until LA officials knock off to start selling, others display their goods immediately LA officials leave a particular area, others keep shifting places to sell in the effort to elude the LA officials, and others resorted to a confrontation approach. It was also noted that sometimes lack of political will and political interference in the past has rendered the LA efforts to remove street vendors from the streets not to yield the desired results. It is clear from the interviews conducted that LA officials expend a lot of resources and effort to remove street vendors from the streets despite the negative results achieved in the last few months in some streets of Ndola CBD. It is evident that management support and the will to enforce the law is there but for the resistant street vendors. A more professional and well thought-out win-win strategy is needed as opposed to only focusing on the enforcement of the law, if street vending challenge will be sustainably addressed. Zambia can learn from other countries that have successfully addressed this problem and contextualize the solutions.

**Reasons for disregarding the Law**



**Photo 2**

*Street Vendors selling vegetables after a year of street vending crackdowns by LA in Chisokone area of Ndola CBD.*

The LA officials disclosed that street vendors intentionally violate the current law on street vending for various reasons. For example, one LA official argued that "the general public promotes street vending because they buy from them due to convenience and easy market access."

If street vending is to end in Zambia, the public should be sensitized to the dangers of street vending and stop buying from street vendors.

However, other LA officials were of the view that unfavorable economic conditions force people to engage in street vending. "Now days, others even sell their goods in their parked vehicles on the streets," narrated one LA official. It was also found that the issue of market access by street vendors is also one of the major reasons people engage in street vending. For example, "street vending is the easiest way for the old-aged women to sell in the streets to provide for their families," claimed one LA official. Furthermore, the population has grown, and the designs of the markets have not been updated to modern ones since the era of the first Republican president. Arguably, most often than not, traders opt to trade outside the markets in search of buyers because of poorly designed market structures," claimed one LA official. This argument is in agreement with what the street vendors claimed.

It is without any doubt that the issue of redesigning market structures is key in the quest to address street vending in Ndola. Although the aforementioned reasons why people intentionally violate the law on street vending cannot be justified by supporting total disregard for the law and impunity, these are valid points that should not be ignored by policymakers and lawmakers. We argue that street vending is no longer undertaken by the poor and vulnerable people but also the educated and formally employed people.

**Plans by ZEMA to Curb Environmental Pollution**

An interview was conducted with one subject matter expert at the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA). ZEMA is mandated by law to ensure the following plans are implemented effectively:

- Timely approval of the disposal of waste management sites.

- Technical guidance on the disposal of waste management site standards

- Provide approval conditions for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

The official from ZEMA disclosed that street vendors generate what is known as municipal waste and fall under the LA mandate to address it. A perusal of the law indeed shows that ZEMA does not have direct jurisdiction over the management of municipal waste. The provisions of Solid Waste Regulation and Management Act No. 20 of 2018 in this case are instructive. Part II of the Act deals with the management of solid waste. Section 6 in particular is the section that provides for the control of solid waste by LAs. Notable findings from this interview included the need to have markets redesigned to accommodate population growth and also resolve the inability of all traders inside the markets to have equal market access to potential buyers. It was also noted that sometimes the LA is faced with inadequate provision of waste disposal bins to all markets and CBD. Furthermore, due to population growth, the town also needs to be redesigned to facilitate efficient market access points for goods and services. To address the challenge of street vending in Ndola, the ZEMA expert has recommended the following:

- Designate streets in the CBD for street vending for a certain period of the day or time.

- Provide adequate sanitary facilities in all market access points.

- Create bus stations near markets.

- Address the root cause of perpetual street vending as opposed to enforcing the law.

It is evident from the interview with the ZEMA expert that policy and law makers need to re-look at the current strategy and law to come up with a win-win formula to address perpetual street vending.

**Paradoxical Tensions to Sustainable Panaceas for Street Vending**

The respondents in this research expressed their mixed views on sustainable panaceas for street vending. We argue that there are paradoxical tensions to sustainable panaceas for street vending. Synthesis of the findings reviewed key sustainable solutions for and against street vending worth considering by policy and law makers urgently as follows:

**Table 1**

*Sustainable Panaceas to Street Vending (SV) Arguments for and Against*

| | Argument for SV | Argument Against | Paradoxical tensions: Research gaps |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regulate street vending by: allocating a timeframe, give trading permits, consider a form of tax system for street vending, and reintroduce Hawkers licenses.<br><br>-Win-win Approach | Political will is needed to sustain the efforts. | There is tension between regulating street vending due to high unemployment levels versus the political will to eliminate street vending. |
| 2 | Revisit the current law on SV. | The current law is adequate. Enforce the law.<br><br>Stiffen the SV Penalties | There is tension between revisiting the current law to amend it versus enforcing the sufficient law. |
| 3 | Redesign Markets: Build big and modern markets in CBD. | Land in the CBD is depleted. | There is tension between building big modern markets in the CBD area versus no land available. |
| 4 | Although the LA has yet to come up with hygiene and sensitization programs, it was found that these programs are key to changing not only the mindset of street vendors but the general public at large. | Street vendors selling fruits and vegetables generate the highest municipal solid waste in Ndola. | There is tension between the promotions of hygiene programs versus the behavior of street vendors. |
| 5 | Re-design market structures to address access points and capacity. | | |
| 6 | Build modern structures and more market spaces. | Markets have empty spaces. E.g., the Kapalala market with over 2,000 market spaces is not full. | Tension between markets with empty spaces versus building more markets. |

| 7 | Reducing Corruption through the Promotion of Ethical Conduct by Law Enforcers | LA to Re-Strategize its Street Vending Eviction Interventions | There is tension between reducing corruption versus allegations of LA officers enforcing engaging in corruption during street vending crackdowns. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Introduce mobile trading stands, e.g., Yatai of Japan. | | |
| 9 | Allocate streets and time for street vending. | Poor hygiene, sanitation, and other vices that come with street vending | There is tension between regulating street vending and addressing the vices that result from it. |
| 10 | Improve sanitary facilities | | |
| 11 | Build police posts near markets. | | |
| 12 | Clean markets adequately | | |
| 13 | Permanent temporariness of informal symbiotic business relationships between shop owners and street vendors for mutual benefits. | Enforcing the law against street vending. | The tension between dismantling the informal cartels between suppliers (e.g., shop owners) with street vendors versus lack of customers their products. |

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents are for street vending in Ndola. However, to develop a win-win strategy, policymakers and lawmakers should consider resolving the eight paradoxical tensions highlighted in Table 1. Although the researchers did not in any way recommend a complete set of paradoxical tensions, the highlighted ones can be viewed as critical ones on the path to finding a lasting solution to street vending in Ndola. As long as these tensions continue to exit, the city will be divided on matters to do with street vending as the scripture puts it: "…Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand…"(Matthew 12:25b). Furthermore, investigations can be carried out by future researchers using quantitative research methodology on all the eight paradoxical tensions. As long as the impasse between these street vendors and the government exists, there will probably be no sustainable solution on street vending.

# DISCUSSION

Arising from the key findings, there are discussion points that can foster dialogue with key stakeholders including the street vendors, shop owners, market managers, policymakers, LA officials and central government officials

Street vending contributes to boosting the economic activities of a particular economy through easy access to markets and the creation of informal employment for street vendors. For example, Du et. al. (2024) contends that the street vendor economy is a well-established and widely influential economic model in China and other developing nations. Although street vending as an economic model is not formalized in Zambia, it has significant potential to contribute to the growth of the economy because many players are involved. Street vending should not only be viewed in the context of the Zambian law where sellers sell in the undesignated sites but rather, it should also include those who sell via various online platforms such as meta (formerly facebook), whatsap groups, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and also vendors who sell merchandise in their vehicles. The economic value of business transactions conducted on various online platforms in Zambia is also not known. On the contrary, there are also business trading risks involved on all the various social media platforms including cybercrimes. The Zambian government should therefore, re-consider this influential economic model and learn from countries like China and America (e.g. New York City) which have successfully formalized street vending.

There are paradoxical tensions to sustainable panaceas for street vending. As long as the impasse between these street vendors and the government exists, there will probably be no sustainable solution to street vending problem. This agrees with Njaya (2024) who argued that even though it's against the law to sell street food, doing so has greatly lowered unemployment, raised vendor earnings, and given urban residents access to affordable, diverse native meals in

Zimbabwe. The establishment of legislation and a code of conduct for street food vendors are two ways the government should acknowledge the street food business (Njaya, 2024).

Although there are several studies conducted on this subject globally, a gap exists on sustainable panaceas for street vending, contextualized to African countries. Many African countries focus on the enforcement of the law against street vending as opposed to formalizing it. In the process, the motivations of street vendors have not been considered by authorities because of the illegal nature of their business activity. Therefore, many African governments do not see the need to draw lessons from other countries on how to contextualize solutions for street vending. Ogunkola et. al. (2021) claimed that there has been reduced economic growth and increased hunger among individuals involved in street vending practices due to the prohibitions put in place by governments. Promoting inclusiveness in accessing public spaces without capturing informal actors such as street vendors is a missed opportunity in many African countries.

There are inconsistencies in the enforcement of the law by different political parties in power based on their development agenda.

- MMD Party-Focused on Liberalism/multi-partism.

- PF Party-Focused on Pro-poor policies.

- UPND Party-The focus is mainly: Economic reconstruction, diplomacy and expansion.

It is evident from the historical context of Zambia that each government in power has a different agenda for street vendors. This agrees with Chileshe (2020) who argued that A review of the literature reveals that street vending creates polarizing circumstances and sparks a great deal of debate. Furthermore, According to Resnick (2014), taxation is always political and especially so in Zambia where the Patriotic Front's slogan of 'more jobs, lower taxes, more money in your

pockets' resonated strongly among urban marketeers and street vendors during the multiple electoral campaigns under the late president, Michael Sata.

Although it is the purview of the courts of competent jurisdiction in Zambia to enter an order on all the street vendors convicted, many are yet to be tried in the same courts. In many cases, street vendors are not tried before the courts of competent jurisdiction when caught selling in the streets. Although fines are paid, their goods are seized and in most cases they are not given receipts and there are no advocacy groups to champion their cause. Besides, despite the local authorities having on several occasions removed street vendors from trading in the streets, the exercise has not yielded the desired results over time. This unsuccessful eviction operations in most cases is largely attributed to what the street vendors and shop owners have described as "Cat and Mouse" approach. Street vendors keep going back to sell in the same and in some cases shift to other streets to evade the LA security officers. For example, the Lusaka City Council in Zambia, has maintained that it can only be successful in managing vendors if all city dwellers cease purchasing food and non-food items from vendors and also lend support to council police personnel (Lusaka Times, November 4, 2018). Residents of Lusaka, however, seem to have ignored this plea, since they have kept purchasing goods from the street vendors (Chileshe, 2020).

Street vending is no longer undertaken by the poor, uneducated, and vulnerable people but also the educated and formally employed people because of deteriorating economic conditions. For example 'Vehicle Street Vending' i.e. street vending using vehicles (vans) is on the rise and causing congestion in the CBD of Ndola Town. The Zambian government can learn from the USA on how to regulate food vans. For example, In 2015, the US city of Albuquerque explored enacting a new law that would have prevented food trucks with vending machines from operating within 30 meters of eateries that were already established, unless the owners of the properties specifically gave their consent (Ehrenfeucht, 2016).

**Sustainable Solutions: Participants views**

Study participants were of the view that dialogue needs to be promoted in the absence of advocacy groups for street vendors in the following ways:

1. *Formalize Street Vending:* Government to put in place measures to formalize street vending because of the high levels of unemployment. See table 2 unemployment statistics.

**Table 2**

*Unemployment Statistics*

| No. | Description | Rate (%) | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Copperbelt unemployment | 18.7% | Labour Force Survey (2021) |
| 2 | Country level unemployment | 68.5% | ZAMSTATS (2024) |
| 3 | Sub-Saharan Africa size of Informal sector | 72.0% | ILO (2018) |
| 4 | Global size of informal sector | 60.0% | ILO (2018) |
| 5 | Informal economy | 63.5% | ILO (2018) |

2. *Re-Strategize:* Develop a "win-win" and not "cat and mouse" strategy.

3. *Consistent law enforcement:* Different political parties that come into government must be consistent with the law.

4. *Stop double punishment:* Stop seizing goods where a ransom payment was made.

5. *Inclusivity in accessing public spaces:* The LA to put in place measures of how street vendors can access public spaces because they have a right to do so.

6. *Consider the motivations of street vendors*: The LA should seek to understand the motivations of street vendors to come up with a lasting solution.

7. *Quick and convenient market access*: Quick and convenient access to goods is what motivates the public to keep buying from street vendors, which defeats the efforts of LA.

8. *The educated and formally employed people*: Street vending is no longer undertaken by the poor, uneducated, and vulnerable people but also the educated and formally employed people because of because of deteriorating economic conditions. Therefore, the government needs to consider formalizing street vending.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the efforts and resources expended by the Local Authority in Ndola, street vending is still a big challenge. The Local Authority should change its strategy and find a sustainable solution. We are of a considered view that a "win-win" rather than a "cat and mouse" strategy be implemented by the Local Authority because of the unfavorable economic conditions. Dialogue should also be encouraged that can culminate into law reforms to enhance justice and efficiency in the delivery of legally approved goods by all vendors.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The central government and the LA need to consistently enforce the law. However, this research has found that amending the law to find a win-win strategy is a better option than enforcing the current law. Besides, there are valid economic reasons why street vendors engage in the informal sector to sell in the streets that academicians, policymakers, and other interested parties need to further conduct research on. Policymakers should also evaluate the economic value of street vending in the informal sector of Zambia. However, the questions that beg answers are: Does the informal sector contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Zambia? If yes, what is the monetary value of street vending if it were to be legalized? The LA security department should encourage their officers to exercise maximum restraint and operate within the confines of the law during their street vending operations. The LA security department should also encourage their officers to exercise professionalism and refrain from engaging in alleged corrupt activities during their street vending operations. The LA Security officers who have been executing the mandate to remove street vendors from the streets should restrain from implementing double punishment where street vendors' goods are confiscated and not returned to them even after they pay the required fines. LA needs to improve hygiene and sanitary facilities in both registered and unregistered markets in Ndola. LA engineers need to consider redesigning the markets to meet modern demands. LA should consider undertaking a study to increase market spaces in view of the projected population growth in the different areas of Ndola District. The street vending deterrence approach by LA should be re-considered to become effective. Chasing street vendors time and again has been viewed by the respondents interviewed as a "cat and mouse" strategy and not sustainable. Due to decreasing public confidence in the current LA street vending operations, LA should consider re-strategizing its operations to find effective ways to execute its mandate. LA policymakers and lawmakers should consider a wide range of sustainable panaceas for street vending, as highlighted in this research article. To address perpetual street vending, the focus

should be more on resolving the eight paradoxical tensions highlighted in this research. In view of the various valid reasons for street vendors engaging in this business, there is a need for dialogue between policymakers and lawmakers to find a lasting solution.

## AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. **Strategic focus:** Future researchers to focus on how to craft a "win-win" strategy as opposed to the current "cat and mouse" approach to controlling street vending.

2. **Value for money analysis:** Future researchers conduct a cost-benefit analysis of LA crackdowns versus the outcomes achieved.

3. **Law reforms:** Future researchers to specifically focus on an analysis of the current law on street vending to determine the possibility of street vendors offering "public convenience and quick access" to goods.

4. **Market audit:** Conduct Market audits of spaces (utilized and unutilized) in all the registered and unregistered markets in Ndola to determine the availability of trading spaces.

5. **Exposure visits:** Consider undertaking exposure visits to other countries that have formalized street vending and draw lessons.

6. **Paradoxical tensions:** Future researchers investigate the best approach to addressing paradoxical tensions.

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# Exploration of factors associated with challenges faced by internationally trained health professionals in Copperbelt Provence, Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

Studying in overseas institutions presents students with exciting opportunities, however, with these opportunities comes challenges. Therefore, this research sought to explore the factors associated with challenges faced by internationally - trained health professionals in Copperbelt province, Zambia. The literature used comprised published articles from journals. The study utilized a Phenomenological descriptive qualitative research design and a convenience sampling method was used to select 26 participants from the Copperbelt province. Thematic analysis was used to present the experiences of the professionals while in foreign countries and after completion of the study. The results revealed various experiences relating to studying internationally, factors associated with the challenges faced and methods used to overcome the challenges. The study recommends that; the ministry of education and Zambian scholarship programs should introduce language programs prior to travel and ensure that when students are going abroad they are fully supported with financial assistance, if possible financial assistance be in American dollars to mitigate effects of kwacha depreciation. In addition, the Ministry of Health, Zambia should design a program for foreign trained health personnel to be integrated into the Zambian workforce without

difficulties. In conclusion the study identified various experiences that stood out from their time abroad. Many of the subthemes identified overlapped with common challenges that many international students face such as diet, weather, and language barriers. Although each of these subthemes were important experiences, more unique experiences revealed included challenges that stemmed from racial differences and integration into the Zambian workforce. Exploring these challenges and experiences led to the emphasis on the need for further research and exploration into these aspects of international experiences.

# INTRODUCTION

## Problem Statement

While traveling overseas for studies comes with a lot of excitement, it is accompanied with anxious uncertainties about what students are likely to face or experience once they get to the foreign nation. Over the years there have been numerous studies regarding challenges faced by students studying in foreign nations. The commonly highlighted challenges include language barrier, financial challenges, cultural adjustments and loneliness as discussed in a study by Khanal and Gaulee (2019). As a result, some students are discontinued from their programs of study leading to deportation; others may resort to illegal activities such as drug trafficking and end up being jailed in a foreign country. Such students are prone to psychological distress and mental health conditions like depression because of failure to accomplish their goals. Identification of factors that are leading to these presented challenges is needed to help students circumvent failures in the future.

**Significance of the Study**

  The findings of this research have useful implications for the government, the policy makers, and administrators of educational institutions of higher learning that seek to enroll international students, as well as prospective students. The government should be made aware of the factors associated with challenges faced by internationally trained health professionals, which will enable formulation of policies that will address these factors and ensure adequate support is provided. Additionally, the government will be recommended to invest in its citizens through the provision of scholarship programs for international study. The administrators of educational institutions will know the necessary measures to address the identified factors. The common factors leading to challenges encountered by international students have been highlighted, which provides information for prospective students and adequately prepares them to adjust and overcome the challenges when in the host country.

**Research Questions**

1. What experiences do internationally trained health professionals face while studying abroad?
2. Why are health professionals faced with challenges when they go overseas for studies?
3. How can challenges faced by internationally trained health professionals be addressed?

**Purpose Statement**

  The purpose of the research was to explore the factors associated with challenges faced by internationally trained health professionals currently working in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia.

**Scope, Limitation, and Delimitation of the Study**

Several challenges were encountered while conducting the research. Recruitment of a sufficient number of participants was a challenge due to busy schedules of the study participants, the medical professionals. Despite this limitation, researchers were able to work around the time constraints of participants. In addition, the researchers had restricted time, being full-time lecturers, they had other duties like teaching and continuous assessment of students. Researchers worked together with their various schedules in order to overcome their time constraints.

This study was delimited methodologically by a qualitative component that involves in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of internationally trained health professionals currently working in Copperbelt Province in Zambia. The challenges faced by internationally trained health professionals was not the focus of this study as this topic has been frequently and exhaustively discussed in other studies. This study did not provide literature review on similar studies conducted locally as there is no available published literature on the factors associated with challenges faced by internationally trained health professionals.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research methods and a phenomenological research design so as to describe the factors leading to challenges faced by internationally trained Zambian health professionals. Creswell and Creswell (2018) states that, "phenomenological research design is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher studies the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 171). This study was conducted within the Copperbelt Province of Zambia, the setting was appropriate as it increased the chances of recruiting a sufficient sample. A convenience sampling method was used

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to select twenty six (26) internationally-trained health professionals currently practicing within the Copperbelt Provinces in Zambia, who were interviewed using the Semi-structured face to face and phone interviews. Ethical approvals which were sought from Tropical Diseases Research Centre (TDRC) and the National Health Research Authority (NHRA).

## FINDINGS

The themes and subthemes identified are presented within Table 1. Using a thematic analysis of participants' experiences, the themes and subthemes were extracted in order to better understand the experiences, factors related to challenges, and measures to better handle identified challenges faced by Zambian medical professionals who received their education abroad.

**Table 1**

*Summary of themes and subthemes.*

| Themes | Number of participants who discussed subject | Subthemes | Number of participants who discussed theme/ subtheme | Percentages of participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theme 1: Experiences | 26 | 1.1. Foreign Languages | 20 | 76.9% |
| | | 1.2. Diet | 12 | 46.2% |
| | | 1.3. Weather | 7 | 26.9% |
| | | 1.4. Racial Differences | 17 | 65.4% |
| | | 1.5. Integration into Zambian Workforce | 17 | 65.4% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theme 2: Factors Associated with Challenges | 26 | 2.1. Differences in Zambian and Foreign Curricula | 11 | 42.3% |
| | | 2.2. Financial Restrictions | 11 | 42.3% |
| | | 2.3. Inadequate Pre-Travel Knowledge | 4 | 15.4% |
| | | 2.4. University Location | 6 | 23.1% |
| | | 2.5. Inability to Learn Foreign Language Prior to Travel Abroad | 3 | 11.5% |
| Theme 3: Measures Implemented to Overcome Challenges | 26 | 3.1. Self-Motivation | 5 | 19.2% |
| | | 3.2. Friend and Family Support | 8 | 30.8% |
| | | 3.3. Mentorship and Support Programs | 4 | 15.4% |
| | | 3.4. Avoidance Coping | 7 | 26.9% |

*Demographic Data*

There were 26 medical professionals who participated in the research interviews. Of the 26 interviews, 25 of the interviews took place via phone call. One interview took place in-person.

The demographic data is presented in Table 2. The majority (92%) of participants were medical doctors who studied in the countries of China (69%), followed by Russia (19%). One participant studies in the United Kingdom, one in Ukraine, and one in Cuba. Of the 26 participants, 24 studied medicine towards becoming medical doctors, one studied pharmacy, and one studies biomedical engineering.

**Table 2**

*Demographic of interview participants.*

| Category | Subcategory | Number of Participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 20-25 | 2 | 7.7% |
| | 26-30 | 16 | 61.5% |
| | 30-40 | 7 | 26.9% |
| | 40+ | 1 | 3.8% |
| Gender | Male | 10 | 38.5% |
| | Female | 16 | 61.5% |
| Country in which participants studies abroad | China | 18 | 69.2% |
| | Cuba | 1 | 3.8% |
| | Russia | 5 | 19.2% |
| | Ukraine | 1 | 3.8% |
| | United Kingdom | 1 | 3.8% |
| Living arrangements while abroad | Hostel (dormitory) | 12 | 46.2% |
| | Apartment | 2 | 7.7% |
| | Hostel and apartment at different times throughout stay abroad | 11 | 42.3% |
| | Other (hotel) | 1 | 3.8% |
| Profession/ study program | Medicine (medical doctor) | 24 | 92.3% |
| | Pharmacy | 1 | 3.8% |
| | Biomedical Engineering | 1 | 3.8% |
| Length of study | Less than 1 year | 1 | 3.8% |
| | 1-3 years | 1 | 3.8% |
| | 4-6 years | 16 | 61.5% |
| | More than 6 years | 8 | 30.8% |
| Year of completion | 2010-2015 | 5 | 19.2% |
| | 2016-2020 | 11 | 42.3% |
| | 2021-2024 | 10 | 38.5% |

*Theme 1: Experiences*

Experiences are events or occurrences that leave an impression on someone. The aim of objective one of the research study was to explore the experiences of medical professionals who trained internationally. Many of the experiences recalled by participants revolved around the challenges they faced during their studies abroad along with the challenges faced when they returned to Zambia to join the workforce. The subthemes that were reoccurring within interviews included experiences related to foreign languages, diet, weather, racial differences, and integration into the Zambian workforce.

For those individuals who studied in China, most of the medical programs were taught in English. As participant #11 stated, "My program of study was taught in English, so that was an advantage as well." The participants still found communicating outside of the classroom setting difficult, but the program of study itself did not have a significant language barrier. Differences in accents from professors and lecturers were a factor contributing to language barriers, though participants generally felt this was insignificant compared to learning Chinese. One of the participants who studied in China completed her program in Chinese because the policy of that university required it for students on scholarship. She noted that it was extremely challenging to master medical terminology in Chinese.

The participants who completed their medical studies in Russia and Ukraine found more challenges as their program of study was taught in the local language. They expressed the frustration of not only learning a new language to get around their new city or town, but also having to understand higher level medical terminology in order to be successful. Participant #10 stated that, "the first few months were a challenge because they don't speak English and I did not know Russian. So it was a very big challenge to communicate, to get what you want, to move around."

The challenge of settling into the new environment was compounded by the fact that locals only spoke in their native language and knew very little English. Another aspect that arose from learning medicine in a foreign language was the challenge in returning to Zambia and having to relearn terminology and phrasing in English in order to work.

The participant who studied in Cuba discussed similar challenges to other participants. Most foreign-speaking countries required a year of language courses and training to be completed prior to starting the program of study. Participants discussed that this was helpful, but not enough training to master the language. Participant #10 stated, "That's very difficult, because everything that you know, that you're supposed to know, you are supposed to do it in a different language. And you're only given one year to learn the language." As language is a pivotal element of communication, it is clear that the experiences surrounding issues of foreign language were significant to the participants.

*Subtheme 1.2: Diet.* When asked about experiences abroad, food was one aspect of experiences that stood out for participants. Many students who study abroad have an emotional need for food that is familiar to them. Traveling to a country with vastly different food cultures was brought up as something that stood out in their experiences. Getting used to a new food was brought forward by 12 (46%) of the 26 participants. One participant made mention of the fact that in Chinese culture animals such as dogs, cats, and rodents were used as meats and this not something they desired to integrate into their own diet; "diet, one needs to be careful and learn about the foods eaten in China" (Participant #15). Getting used to new, unfamiliar foods took time, just allowing time for foods to become more familiar was the reason cited for being able to overcome diet as a challenge. A longing for more familiar foods that Zambian students were accustomed to was also identified by participants.

5 participants (19%) felt that in order to adapt to the new food, time was the key factor. "I got used to the environment, got used to the food" (Participant #8). Participants felt they were able to overcome diet changes as a challenge with enough time and immersion in the culture. "Diet modification was another challenge. I had to get used to foods I was not familiar with" (Participant #13). "Getting used" to foods was one of the requirements the participants faced while studying internationally.

The longing for familiar foods can be an emotional experience for students abroad. It not only reminds them of home but can be a form of comfort during times of change; "I missed the food from home. But then I actually started enjoying the food [in Russia]... I missed the food, I missed my family" (Participant #11). Missing the local foods from Zambia was discussed by 6 participants (23%). Specifically, participants missed nshima, which is considered to be the staple food in Zambia. One participant who studied in Russia would bring back mealie meal from Zambia when he visited home during school breaks and would share it with fellow Zambia students. Participants noted the differences of foreign food from the ones they were more familiar with; "We had to adjust to the foods available which were different from what we have in Zambia. For example, where you expect the juice to be sweet it would taste salty" (Participant #20). The desire for more familiar foods such as nshima was a common experience identified within the study.

*Subtheme 1.3: Weather.* New locations around the world expectedly will have different weather patterns. Weather was mentioned by 7 (27%) of the 26 participants interviewed. Weather was not a major focus during discussion of experiences, it was mentioned in passing by many. Participant #5 stated, "of course climate can also be a challenge somehow but you get used [to it] after a while." Cold weather was a barrier to acclimating to a new country; cold weather and snow being new to Zambians led to difficulty traveling locally.

Coming from a tropical climate, few Zambians have been introduced to snowy climates. Navigating in this new environment proved a challenge as discussed by 4 (15%) of the participants. Participant #5 stated that, "the weather [in Russia] is cold, that means you need to buy something warm." Buying new appropriate clothing was necessary to walk between buildings and travel to shops; "The country is very cold but it's nothing warm clothes cannot solve" (Participant #14). One participant discussed her experience of standing in the snow waiting for a taxi, "it would be winter, it's snowing and then no one would stop. Like no cab drivers would stop for you, so you would be on the streets for so long" (Participant #3). Learning to navigate and travel in a new climate was an experience shared by many participants.

*Subtheme 1.4: Racial Differences.* Racism was cited by 17 (65%) participants as one of the challenges experienced during their times studying abroad. Racism and racial discrimination was a prevalent challenge faced by internationally trained medical professionals; "They kept on emphasizing I was a foreigner. That was the only thing, I always felt like a foreigner. No matter what" (Participant #1). The feeling of always being seen as a foreigner and the inability to blend in was noted by participants. The foreign countries participants were studying in did not have a large black population, so dark-skinned individuals from Zambia continued to stand out. Participant #4 discussed her experiences regarding standing out in a non-black community, "you are an African person in an Asian land, so everyone will look at you differently, your hair is different, so everyone will point out like very often the kids would make silly comments but with time I think you get used to it." Local people would take notice of Zambians because of the unfamiliarity of black skin in their culture. Some locals reacted with interest and curiosity. Participant #10 described her experiences; "not that they were racist, but they were just so excited

to see somebody that was different. I think for me that was quite intriguing … knowing that people had never seen such a race."

While some interactions surrounding racial differences were relatively harmless, some individuals reacted in fear resulting in hurtful racism as cited by Participant #2; "There weren't many foreigners in the city. The locals were never exposed to many foreigners, especially blacks. This made them not want to associate with us or even sit next to us." Discrimination was cited to have occurred often throughout participants' studies, with even professors and lecturers being discriminatory at times. Participants #10 stated that, "there are some teachers who would actually not maybe grade you the way they would grade a Russian even though you answered almost the same...I think they were always shocked as to why a foreigner would do better than a Russian." Racial differences were at the core of experiences had by Zambian medical professionals who trained internationally.

***Subtheme 1.5: Integration into Zambian Workforce.*** Although one of the research focuses was experiences of individuals studying internationally, participants brought up many challenges related to returning to Zambia after the completion of their program. For some participants these challenges appeared during the final year of their program when they had the opportunity to go for clinical practice in another country and they chose to complete this year in Zambia. "The divide-foreign vs Zambian trained- still exists several years after completion of studies" (Participant #14). A gap existed between foreign-trained medical professionals and Zambian-trained medical professionals. This divide was identified in the experiences of many participants; "there were situations where foreign trained were treated differently from locally trained medical officers" (Participant #14). These experiences included bullying from peers and other medical professionals in the clinical setting, lacking certain skills required for Zambian

trained medical professionals, and difficulty in finding employment related to education bias towards foreign-trained individuals.

Bullying and discrimination from peers and superiors was an unfortunate experience of many of the participants when they returned to Zambia to practice; "I was thought of as being dull, too slow and faced a lot of bullying" (Participant #20). The medical programs, in the various foreign countries, participants attended had differences in the skill sets that were taught to students. These programs did not train doctors to master more simple procedures such as, "manually checking vital signs, vein puncture and so many procedures that we were not exposed to during the training" (Participant #20). With the gap of knowledge for such skills, those who trained locally and other medical professionals had preconceived ideas about the intelligence of those who were foreign-trained. "The medical personnel already have the notion that foreign trained [people] don't learn much. So they have the stereotype so loud, that even before you try, you are already dismissed" (Participant #11). Participants described being belittled, called names, and their intelligence put into question.

Because of the differences in the educational programs, participants noted that they were lacking skills required for Zambian practice. "When you come back, there [were] certain skills you were going to be lacking…I was aware that I was going to be lacking certain skills but when I came back, before I joined the workforce I did a few rotations" (Participant #8). The knowledge of tropical diseases and diseases more prevalent to Zambia was also noted as a gap in knowledge by participants. Participant #10 stated, "It was also a challenge and I came back and I saw [that] these are diseases that we focus on in Zambia." Participant #15 recalled an instance of this, "for example, during one of the doctor's rounds, my senior shouted at me for not knowing what HIV is and how to manage patients with HIV." Participant #4 states, "I faced a lot of challenges

especially when it comes to doing some procedures that in China were done by nurses then over here [in Zambia] the doctors do it. So I found those challenges because I wasn't able to do those procedures that my colleagues who were trained here were capable of doing." This knowledge gap continued to fuel the bullying and discrimination directed towards the foreign-trained participants.

Difficulty finding employment was an experience cited by participants. They expressed

*Subtheme 1.1: Foreign Languages.* Every participant cited language barriers as a challenge faced when studying abroad to varying degrees of difficulty. All but one of the participants studied in countries that had native or national languages other than English. For the participant who studied in the United Kingdom, he was still met with challenges in communications related to native accents despite the UK being an English speaking nation.

That priority is given to Zambian trained professionals first before hiring foreign-trained professionals; "Employment opportunities were first given to Zambian trained medical officers" (Participant #20). When it came to finding employment, foreign trained medical professionals felt left out as, "employment opportunities were first given to Zambian trained medical officers" as cited by Participant #20. Other participants remained unemployed for a period of time; "There are people who stayed in Zambia, without working for years and years, not working, always left out" (Participant #24). Participant #14 expressed their frustration in the Zambian system, "For those who have studied abroad, the authorities should make it easier for them to be incorporated in the system, as in make it easier for them to register and join the practice." The challenges and experiences surrounding returning to Zambia for work were a prevalent theme found throughout the participant interviews.

*Theme 2: Factors Associated with Challenges*

Objective 1 of the research explored the experiences of the participants and by doing so participants identified various challenges faced. From these challenges, researchers identified the factors that were associated with each. These factors are the circumstances, facts, or influences that contributed to the challenges identified. Within the theme of factors associated with challenges five subthemes emerged. These factors identified in the subthemes include differences in Zambian and foreign curricula, financial restriction, inadequate pre-travel knowledge, university location, and inability to learn foreign language prior to traveling abroad.

*Subtheme 2.1: Differences in Zambian and Foreign Curricula.* One experience discussed by participants was returning to Zambia and integrating into the Zambian workforce. This challenge arose from the differences in the Zambian approach to education and the approach of the foreign country they studied in. As stated by Participant #5, "the curriculum again is different from what we have here in Zambia." "The approach to medicine is totally different" (Participant #15). The differences highlighted by participants was a major factor contributing to the challenge of integrating into medical practice in Zambia.

Participants expressed that the foreign country they chose to study in had a more advanced education system than Zambia. This was a factor contributing to the challenges faced as, "it becomes difficult to find students to study abroad because the level [of ] education at grade 12 is not [as] advanced as [in Russia]... you find that you have challenges because the first year of learning, it's like you are learning the basics" (Participant #24). Participants highlighted that they felt unprepared to start at the level in which locals were starting as the standard of education in Zambian secondary schools was behind. Participant #24 further discussed that they valued their education in Russia as they received, "better learning because I feel the education [in Russia] is

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way [more] advanced… our education system is quite lagging. It needs some improvement… people struggle because it's more advanced, we were way, way behind." Participants noted that they had to work harder than their peers to catch up and be successful in their studies.

The examination style used in foreign countries was noted as being significantly different than those in Zambia. The differences of education and examinations were often only revealed to participants when they returned to Zambia to take the Zambian licensure exams. "The studying was a bit different in that in China most of the exams were prepared in a specific way… I have noticed that the exam set in Zambia was totally different" (Participant #4). Participant #2 states, "The licensure exams were equally a challenge. What was in the exam is not what we learned in China. I had to start coaching classes just to prepare for the exams focusing on [the] Zambian syllabus." The factors highlighted by the participants contributed to delayed integration into medical practice in Zambia.

More advanced technology was used within medical training and medical facilities in the foreign countries participants studied in. Another factor the participants pointed out was the unavailability of advanced medical equipment within Zambia. During their studies, participants were exposed to advanced medical equipment which was not available for practice after returning to Zambia; "they have modern equipment in the UK compared to Zambia. So after taking time studying in the UK even after this time the government has not purchased the equipment for calibration and testing of biosafety cabinets, so it's quite difficult to continue with practice where there is no equipment" (Participant # 5). According to Participant # 4 "The technology there is more advanced and you're a bit more up-to-date, there are certain procedures or methods that they use that we [are] not able to use yet here, because we are still a developing country. But having

that exposure, because at the end of the day you come back and it will help you develop your country."

Along with more advanced technology, more up-to-date medical practices and procedures were noted by participants. As expressed by participant #23, "the top research and ongoing programs are, like, the latest information in terms of medicine development." There was a desire to take the knowledge of medical advancements back to Zambia to improve patient treatment and care; "there are so many things that you can say, like I think this could be introduced in Zambia or I think [that] we could do better because the Russians do it like this." "You know the standards you're supposed to achieve, so even when you're here, you know what you're aiming for. Whereas if you're [in Zambia], you never really know that there's more. You wouldn't realize that there's a lack" (Participant #23). The knowledge of both developed countries' medical standards compared with those of Zambia gave participants the aspiration to apply those practices when they returned to the workforce in Zambia.

Diseases focused on in foreign nations were regionally specific which led to less knowledge of prevalent diseases in Zambia. Participant #10 states that, "even the education that we received is totally different because there you are actually taught about the diseases that are in that country and how they do their things rather than teaching you the broad medicine."  This knowledge gap contributed to the challenge of integrating into the Zambian workforce. On the advice of a peer, Participant #15 was aware that this factor contributed to the challenges experienced; "He advised me to frequently come to Zambia for clinical practice which I started doing frequently and I spent 2 months in Zambian hospitals just to catch up with clinical experience." The factor of differences in Zambian and foreign education contributed to challenges faced by participants.

***Subtheme 2.2: Financial Restrictions.*** While 15 (58%) of the participants indicated that they had no financial challenges while studying abroad, some participants were faced with some challenges including delayed remission of funds by the bursaries committee, fluctuations in the exchange rates, and using a weaker currency against strong currencies in foreign countries. Financial restrictions were factors that led to challenges such as graduation delays and pressure on the student and family to earn school fees or to maintain scholarships. One factor that led to further challenges was due to the exchange rate of the Zambian currency.

Scholarships are one way that many students are able to study internationally. Many students rely on outside funds to be able to pursue education. Despite having scholarships, financial restrictions still contributed to the challenges faced by participants. "Towards the end of my studies I was forgotten. The bursaries committee had forgotten about me. They delayed sending money and never purchased my return ticket on time. I remained in Cuba for another 2 months after completing my studies. There were no means of sending money by any family member at that time" (Participant #13). For those students who were on "self-pay" finances were also of concern. One participant was unable to rely on scholarship, "at that time there was no Ukrainian scholarships for Zambians" (Participant #14). This led to pressure on the student and his family to earn the money for school fees. Financial restrictions led to delays in graduation and obtaining a diploma for one participant; "I was not allowed to graduate because of outstanding fees" (Participant #17). Financial restrictions were a prevalent factor that led to challenges by students both on self-pay and those on scholarship.

The Zambia kwacha is considered a weaker currency and will not go as far as US dollars (USD) or stronger currencies. Participant #5 stated, "It becomes very difficult especially for us in Zambia, it means you have to save for quite some time or even get a loan." With a fluctuating

currency, the exchange rate would impact students' ability to have financial stability whilst abroad; "Visa clearance and financial challenges because when you convert the kwacha it's not matching with the money [in the UK]" (Participant #5). Even with what would be considered a lot of money in Zambia, because of exchange rates those finances did not last as long in a foreign country, "for example when you have a K15000 from here and you are going to the UK, when you convert it you will find that the money can only buy about 4 meals, so sometimes it's so frustrating" (Participant #5). Issues of inflation related to the COVID-19 pandemic even impacted some participants. "I faced some financial challenges, especially during COVID time, because there was the inflation and the kwacha to the dollar was high, so during that time it was quiet hard because now the fees had gone up and things were expensive because of the same inflation, accommodation and all that" (Participant #4). Participant #9 stated, "Studying abroad is expensive especially when the kwacha has lost value and when you are from underprivileged families." Challenges faced by medical professionals studying abroad were highly impacted by different forms of financial restrictions.

*Subtheme 2.3: Inadequate Pre-Travel Knowledge.* Of the challenges faced by Zambian medical professionals who studied internationally there were many challenges that arose when returning to Zambia to join the workforce. A major factor influencing this challenge is related to the knowledge they had prior to embarking on studying internationally. "Upon returning to Zambia, there were no clear instructions on what to do next. It was challenging because there was no one to guide us on the next steps" (Participant #13). The procedures on how to progress once completing an international program were not clearly specified to participants and contributed to the challenges they faced. "If you were foreign trained you would have to come back… they need to check if your school is accredited and you need to write the HPCZ licensing board in Zambia.

Which by then, I think local students did not do. So that was kind of a lot of stuff I didn't expect before I went to university" (Participant #3). Procedures and examinations were required once foreign-trained students returned to Zambia which was not previously communicated to them. This lack of knowledge prior to starting their program of study was a factor in the challenges they face when returning to Zambia.

Lack of research into the program of study, the selected institution of learning, and expectations upon returning to Zambia after completion of studies was another factor cited to have contributed to the challenges faced by the participants. The participants emphasized, "I would tell them that they should do a lot of research into the university they are going to, because there are so many universities out there" (Participant #4). When discussing whether other prospective students should pursue international studies, participants generally recommended that thorough research should be done prior to making any decisions, "if they know what they are getting into. I think that when I went there I didn't know about coming back to do exams and me having to do rotations again at local hospitals … So if they're aware of all the steps that they have to do when they get back, then sure enough, I recommend it" (Participant #3).

*Subtheme 2.4: University Location.* Six (8%) participants reported facing racist discrimination while studying abroad. The affected participants related this experience to the location of the university. One participant discussed that studying at a university located in a small town where the locals were not exposed to a lot of Africans compounded these challenges of racism. "I think they weren't just exposed to a lot of Africans… that was the reason why we faced such kinds of discrimination. My city was a very small city and it was full of old people so they've never really gotten to see this part of the other culture" (Participant #10). The realization that many

locals lacked exposure to different races and led to racial discrimination. Participant #3 stated, "You start to realize that there's parts of China where they're just not exposed to black people."

Another participant narrated that their group of study was the second group of Africans studying in that town. Hence, the locals were not comfortable with dark skinned people. "Because the town I was studying in, Mainchung, we were, I believe, the second batch of Africans to be there. So for a lot of them it was just them not being very comfortable with seeing dark skinned people." (Participant # 23). The location of the university was identified within smaller towns where less foreigners usually travel to; "because my city was a small city – it was not a big city like these cities like Moscow, Petersburg – these are tourist capitals where you know people are exposed to a wide range of people" (Participant #10). Participant #11 also cited the smaller towns as a factor contributing to issues of racism, "I felt that the racism was so much because I wasn't in a city. So my school was like the first black, or international school. So there were some old people who had never met a black person in their entire life." University location was a factor identified that added to the challenges of racial discrimination while studying foreign countries.

*Subtheme 2.5: Inability to Learn Foreign Language Prior to Travel Abroad.* Three (12%) participants expressed their desire to have been able to start learning the language prior to traveling abroad. One participant discussed how his program typically required language courses prior to travel, but because of a delay in admission to the program, he was not able to take these pre-travel language classes which caused him to be disadvantaged. "I never had the opportunity to learn the language prior to departure" (Participant #15). From the time of being accepted into a foreign program to the point where students are actually moving abroad is limited, so the opportunity to study the language was not available to them.

*Theme 3: Measures Implemented to Overcome Challenges*

Participants reacted differently and took different actions in order to overcome the different challenges they faced during training and after returning back to Zambia. From their different expressions, the following themes emerged.

*Subtheme 3.1: Encouragement and self-motivation.* Encouragement and self-motivation was presented as one of the factors that drove some participants to never give up. This was displayed in the form of threats from family members' while others due to pressure of an uneasy environment by failing to interact due to language barrier so they had to work hard to the best of their abilities so as to later become comfortable. For example Participant #1 explained that, "you know I received consistent reminders from people back home, saying 'you know how much you're paying right?' So that was the pull as well. And also just to practice what you came there for, other than that, I would have lived there for a long time." Others found the joy and excitement of having new experiences as the motivation they needed to persist; "the excitement helped me to settle in within 6 months and I was eager to learn. I had prepared myself psychologically and was ready to overcome whatever challenges" (Participant #2). Participants were able to draw on motivation from both internal and external sources in order to complete their studies. Others explained that learning a language was key in adapting for example; Participant #1 noted that, "it was aggressive, I didn't want to feel the way I was feeling. So I was very aggressive, I put myself out there. It was six months, I was learning the languages and then after that I was very comfortable."

When asked about how they overcame the challenges they faced while they came back to Zambia, participants gave notable responses such as; "I needed to relearn everything from the start like manually checking vital signs, vein puncture and so many procedures that we were not exposed to during the training" (Participant #20). Participants were aware of the increased effort

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they would need to exert in order to be successful, especially when compared to their Zambian-trained peers; "In terms of settling back into Zambia, I had to put in extra work. Whatever my Zambian trained colleagues were doing, my effort was twice as much" (Participant #13). Others added that, "just being aware that when you come back, there were certain skills you were going to be lacking. That was very helpful, because I knew I wouldn't go straight into working when I came back" (Participant #8).

When participants discussed the language barriers they face while abroad, the motivation of the individual was the sub theme that emerged. Of the 26 participants, 6 (23%) expressed the sentiment that they were motivated to embrace the new language. Personality type and excitement to learn a foreign language was what participants cited as the reason they were able to push forward in order to complete their studies. Participant #15 discussed that, "when I learned the language, it made it easier to interact with the locals which promoted further understanding of the language."

In order to complete their studies successfully learning the new language was a requirement. The necessity of understanding the local language was the driving factor that pushed individuals to learn; "with us, the university, it's like a language is [required]. If you don't pass that you don't go into second year. So that was also one of the reasons I had to learn Chinese as much as possible" (Participant #1). For some individuals the program of study was in the foreign language and became a requirement for success; "I took Chinese for a year, but I also had lectures in Chinese. My program was taught in Chinese. Unfortunately the program, because I was on scholarship, was in Chinese" (Participant #25). "Spanish is used in Cuba, I had to learn Spanish in the first years of training and continued learning throughout my training" (Participant #13). Because of the requirements to learn the new language, participants cited this as the motivating factor in learning. Others added that; "By learning the language, I feel like that's what sorted out

most of the issues. Then, I think when it comes to, it also kind of requires the Chinese people there to, like, get comfortable with you" (Participant 23). "Integrating with Chinese people is easier once you learn the language. Once they realize you can speak to them, they are much more friendly and welcoming and actually want to converse with foreigners" (Participant 26). "I am a Christian, I am a firm believer of Christ, and so I would pray more, study more, we created friends fortunately from all those universities so it was easy to mingle at a certain time" (Participant #20).

***Subtheme 3.2: Friends and Family Support***. Participants cited building a family and community around them as one of the ways they were able to overcome challenges. Friends and family support was one of the themes that emerged. Some participants had family members in the host country where they studied who supported them emotionally and financially, while others made friends from the host nation and among themselves as foreigners so as to encourage each other in order to overcome the challenges while in the host nation. Notable are the responses below:

"I had support from my family overseas. They helped me somehow and I had friends that came through and I also saved some money, but I had got a loan" (Participant #4).

"The goodness is that I was not alone, I had friends and we all were a lot of foreigners from different countries. So we all pushed ourselves to learn the language and to know why we came there" (Participant #10).

"I had to join a community of foreign trained practitioners and that way, we supported each other through the adaptation process, shared notes on how to overcome the challenges we were facing" (Participant #13).

"I formed a lot of friends from Asians who helped me with communication and understanding the language" (Participant #22).

"I found a new family in foreigners, so that's what really kept me going, the family I found

there. The friends I made, the family I had, so after some time it became better"

(Participant #25).

***Subtheme 3.3: Mentorship and Support***. Is one of the ways that helped participants in

overcoming the challenges like adapting and learning a language in the host countries, certain

institutions had put up such deliberate measures so as to help foreign students to learn the language

and adapt to the culture in the host nations; these were noted in their narrations below:

"The institution was helpful when it came to orientation and helping us settle, we were assigned a

mentor who we could call in case we needed anything. That was helpful" (Participant #2).

"There's a program that we had where you would be either assigned a Chinese family or, like,

you'd have interactions with Chinese students, so you could get to know each other and get

integrated into their culture. So that helped us overcome that" (Participant #24).

***Subtheme 3.4. Avoidance Coping.*** One of the ways of coping that emerged from the

participants was avoidance. This was in relation to overcoming racism and segregation. After being

subjected to racism in the host nations. Participants overcame these challenges by avoidance as

noted from their responses:

"I think avoiding certain areas which had a lot of racism. Something I just did, pretty much

I just stopped going to certain areas" (Participant #3).

"I just refused that's all, when I wasn't comfortable with someone touching my hair or

taking pictures" (Participant #6).

"You just have to have a mentality of understanding, honestly. If you take it at heart it will

get to you and then life will become very difficult. So something you just overlook and life

goes on. If you really take it to heart, life becomes difficult for you" (Participant #24).

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## DISCUSSION

### *Theme 1: Experiences*

Zambian students still face the challenges discussed within the literature review such as language barriers, cultural differences, dietary preferences, but unique challenges arose, such as integrating back into Zambian work culture where individuals found themselves experiencing bullying by peers, delays in finding employment, a gap in knowledge in some medical procedures, and a less organized working environment in Zambia when compared to how they were taught in the programs abroad. Zambian medical professionals who trained internationally have experiences that are unique to them. These experiences were events or occurrences that left impressions on the participants. Participants were asked to recall experiences from different stages of their time abroad. The themes that emerged from participants' responses ranged from positive experiences to challenges that they encountered. The majority of participants cited that the time they spent abroad was invaluable to them as it helped broaden their perspective of the world, they gained new knowledge and skills, and that it shaped the person they are today. Despite the overall experience being viewed as positive, participants repeatedly cited the challenges as some of the most memorable experiences they had.

Experiences that discussed challenges that were highlighted by the participants included language barriers, diet, weather, racial differences and issues surrounding returning to Zambia to integrate into the workforce. Challenges such as cultural differences, language barriers, academic requirements, financial difficulties, homesickness, or physical and mental health issues have been cited in previous studies and are well understood within the existing literature (Bakloshova & Kasakov, 2016; Heiberg et al., 2019). Despite an understanding of some of these challenges did not diminish their significance to participants. Two particular experiences brought forward by

participants appeared to be more unique to Zambian students; racial differences and integration into the Zambian workforce.

Culture and culture shock can play a role in adding to the mental stress international students' face whilst studying abroad (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). Through the thematic analysis it became increasingly clear that Zambians, as black people of color, face racial discrimination and racism in foreign countries. Eighteen (69%) participants studied in China, 5 (19%) studied in Russian, 1 (3.8%) studied in Ukraine, 1 (3.8%) studied in the United Kingdom, and 1 (3.8%) studied in Cuba. The predominant race in these counties include white East Slavic, white European, and Chinese. The only country with mixed cultural populations with African origins was Cuba. With 7 (27%) of the participants having studied in predominantly white countries and 18 (69%) studying in China with a predominantly Chinese population, their foreign heritage was visual as evident by their darker skin. Preconceptions and stereotypes can pose challenges to students coming from culturally different backgrounds than their host country (Sobkowiak, 2019). Participants cited experiences of blatant racism related to the color of their skin. Locals would choose not to associate with them leading to issues with transportation, forming friendships, and gaining experience within their clinical practice. Participants often felt that lack of exposure to different races was the factor that led to the challenges they faced surrounding racism. One participant even discussed being discriminated against in the classroom setting by the professor. Although participants did feel hurt by the racism they experienced, most felt they were able to ignore the interactions and persist in their studies.

Integration into the Zambian workforce was an experience that was discussed by 17 (65%) of the participants. There is fragmented literature surrounding international students' workforce integration surrounding multiple disciplines such as management, education, and sociology (Han

et al., 2022). The focus of studies regarding international students primarily "has been on their academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment while completing their education" (Han et al., 2022). There is insufficient research surrounding post-graduation employment and the integration of international students into the workforce of receiving countries. As evident by the experiences of the participants, returning to Zambia and attempting to join the Zambian medical workforce was a significant challenge faced. The process to obtain a license after completing an international program was not clear in Zambia. Zambian licensure exams were structured differently than those within the programs completed internationally. Participants cited bullying from peers and superiors because of their foreign training. Participants also noted discrimination in that employers would blatantly choose Zambian trained professionals before considering a foreign trained person. These various challenges compound the need for further research and understanding of integration into the Zambian workforce post international studies.

### *Theme 2: Factors Associated with Challenges*

Incorporating internationally trained health professionals in the Zambian workforce plays a role in addressing shortages in human resources for health in the country. While integrating a labor force that has been exposed to advanced education systems strengthens research, evidence-based practice and contributes significantly to a global wealth of experience, it comes at a cost for those professionals who train internationally. The research findings identified various factors associated with the challenges faced by internationally trained health professionals while studying abroad and upon completion of their programs of study. The influencers of the identified challenges include differences in the Zambian curriculum compared to curricula in various universities attended by the study participants, differences in Zambian educational models and

foreign models, financial restrictions, inadequate pre-departure knowledge, university location as well as inability to learn the foreign language prior to traveling abroad. A study on internationalization of the curriculum in health programs by Davey (2023), addresses the multicultural health related environments that health professionals are likely to practice from as well as encountering global health challenges. The author further states the need for universities and other institutions of higher learning to develop strategies that will enable graduating students to practice competently in a global environment. The differences that exist in the curricula create a barrier for internationally trained health professionals as it requires them to readjust after completion of studies and re-learn medical practice in their home country. Addressing the differences through government policies and regulators of health professional training by internationalizing the curricula would improve professional practice and address global health challenges.

Another factor that the internationally trained health professionals encountered was financial restrictions that may have been related to additional unforeseen expenses that were not covered by scholarships and some hidden costs that were not reflected in the program fee structure. Participants associated the financial restrictions with fluctuations in foreign exchange rates, instability of the Zambian currency and inefficiency in financial aids for those under government sponsorship. Financial restrictions have been identified as one of the factors causing stress and anxiety in foreign trained professionals. This factor has been associated with destabilization of student academic activities and brings about an interruption in academic performance (Larbi et al., 2022). Although the majority of the participants reported minimal financial challenges while studying abroad, it is important to adequately address issues surrounding funding of study programs pursued internationally.

Inadequate pre-travel knowledge, the location of the university and inability to learn foreign language prior to travel all center on inadequate pre-departure preparation. Pre-departure preparation enables candidates wishing to study abroad identify goals, expectations and explore the cultural differences they are likely to face (Chan et al., 2018). The lack of thorough investigation into the location of the university, the lack of information on expectations after completion of studies and failure to learn the language prior to travel contributed to challenges faced by internationally trained professionals while in the host country and returning to their home country after completion of studies.

### Theme 3: Measures Implemented to Overcome Challenges

The study findings showed that participants utilized measures like avoidance coping, friends and family support, mentorship and support and encouragement and self-motivation in order to overcome the challenges they faced. Particularly, participants reacted differently to challenges and took different actions for different challenges, for example avoidance coping was used mostly to overcome racism, while encouragement and self-motivation was commonly used for academic challenges and learning of the new language while mentorship and Support programs which were organized by certain institutions was to help participants learn the language and culture by assigning them a mentor or the family. These findings correspond with the study finding of Sobkowiak, (2019) who postulated that despite stressors caused by cultural differences, many students were prompted to develop better coping strategies allowing them to foster intercultural competences. On the contrary, even though certain strategies like avoidance coping were utilized, it involves cognitive and behavioral efforts oriented toward denying, minimizing, or otherwise avoiding dealing directly with stressful demands, therefore, it is closely linked to distress and

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depression (Holahan et al., 2005). However, the use of avoidance coping among the foreign-trained can be attributed to failure to communicate and express themselves. This is evident in by participants having difficulties denying unpleasant things politely, such as being touched and taking pictures of them in public places without permission.

## CONCLUSION

The theme of experiences clearly identified as participants reflected on various experiences that stood out from their time abroad. Many of the subthemes identified overlapped with common challenges that many international students face such as diet, weather, and language barriers. Although each of these subthemes were important experiences of the participants, more unique experiences revealed themselves. These experiences included challenges that stemmed from racial differences and integration into the Zambian workforce. Exploring these challenges and experiences led to the emphasis on the need for further research and exploration into these aspects of international experiences.

The theme of factors associated with challenges identified different factors that were led to or influenced the challenges faced by international trained Zambians. The influencers of the identified challenges include differences in the Zambian curriculum compared to curricula in various universities attended by the study participants, differences in Zambian educational models and foreign models, financial restrictions, inadequate pre-departure knowledge, university location as well as inability to learn the foreign language prior to traveling abroad. The differences that exist in the curricula create a barrier for internationally trained health professionals as it requires them to readjust after completion of studies and re-learn medical practice in their home country. Understanding this as a factor of challenges can be used to shape employment policy in home

countries and curricula policy by foreign institutions. The financial restrictions related to currency exchange can push foreign institutions to standardize billing into a stable currency. Though this will not eliminate all financial restrictions, it will help to mitigate financially based challenges.

The study findings showed that participants utilized measures like avoidance coping, friends and family support, mentorship and support and encouragement and self-motivation in order to overcome the challenges they faced. Participants cited implementing these measures to help overcome challenges they faced. By identifying coping strategies, further investigation into the effectiveness of each will help to better prepare prospective students who are interested in pursuing international studies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the challenges identified within the literature review were not expressed to be the most difficult issues faced by Zambian medical professionals. Many participants expressed that though language, food, and weather were somewhat of a challenge; the integration into the Zambian workforce challenges they faced were far more significant to them. Researchers recommend further investigations into this area of international educational experiences. Other areas of further research are in the effectiveness of various coping strategies and techniques used by participants to overcome challenges.

Recommendations to the Zambian scholarship programs have also been made as a result of the findings. Scholarship programs should require language programs prior to travel, explain the process of when they complete their studies and return to Zambia.

Recommendations for governing bodies include; The Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Education (MoE). Researchers recommend that MoE should ensure that when students

are going abroad they should be fully supported with financial assistance, if possible financial assistance be in USD to mitigate effects of kwacha depreciation. The Ministry of Health should design and implement a program for foreign-trained health personnel to be integrated into the Zambian workforce more seamlessly. Educating Zambian-trained staff on how to conduct themselves with professional behavior will help to mitigate the bullying and discrimination that occurs.

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the "AI, Culture, and Arts" course at Handong Global University case. It examines how AI can enhance students' creative and technical abilities across various artistic disciplines. Through 62 surveys and 7 in-depth interviews with students, the research identifies the strengths and areas for improvement in the current curriculum. In particular, the development of storytelling through Chat GPT and visual communication practice based on Midjourney and Dall-E were found to have significantly improved AI literacy. We found that this not only fostered confidence and competency in utilizing generative AI services within major subjects but also expanded perspectives on new career development. The findings highlight the need for more practical examples and clearer project guidelines, aiming to refine the course to better prepare students for future careers at the intersection of new tech and the arts. Accordingly, we hope that this study will contribute to the promotion of follow-up research in terms of not only academic insights in the AI & Arts field, but also educational policy and practical implications.

*Key Words*: AI Literacy, Artistic Experience, Convergence Education, Cultural Arts, HTHT
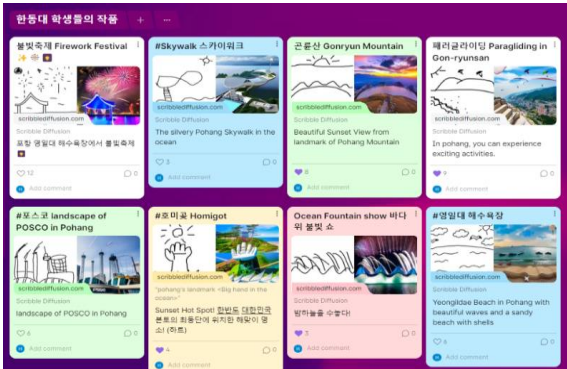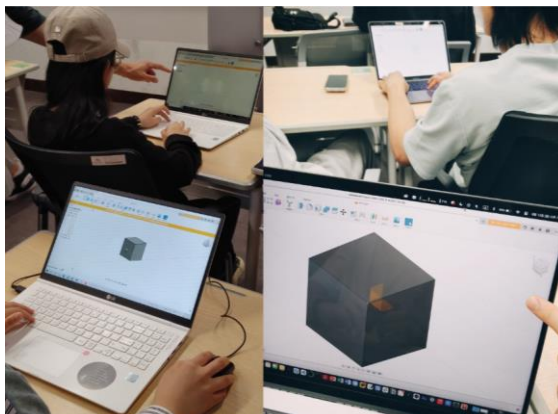
**INTRODUCTION**

At the Handong Global University in South Korea, the School of Creative Convergence Education offers a unique course titled "AI, Culture, and Arts" from the 2023 Fall Semester. This interdisciplinary course, designed for third-year students majoring in digital content, explores the intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with cultural and artistic studies. Conducted twice per week, with additional periods dedicated to self-study through online resources in LMS, the course integrates 45% tele-education with in-person sessions, making it accessible to a diverse range of students. Topics covered include generative AI concepts, AI applications in literature, art, music, and film, and hands-on projects utilizing AI algorithms such as Stable Diffusion and Midjourney. Students engage in practical exercises and project work, developing AI-based artworks and exploring the implications of AI in various artistic fields.

The course aims to enhance students' creative problem-solving abilities and their understanding of AI's role in the arts. It includes field trips to art museums (gallery), discussions on art market trends like NFTs, and practical sessions on 3D modeling, printing, and VR experiences (Figure 1.). The curriculum also features presentations and peer evaluations to foster collaborative learning. Lectures are complemented by guest speakers from the industry, providing real-world insights into AI applications. Also, assessment is based on attendance, exams, projects, and participation, with a strong emphasis on active engagement and the development of creative convergence skills. Despite being an introductory course, "AI, Culture, and Arts" offers a comprehensive foundation, preparing students for future careers at the intersection of AI and creativity.

**Figure 1**

*High Tech High Touch Class Activity with AI and Arts Curriculum*



| | |
|---|---|
| Creative Portfolio with Music Gen. AI | Discussion about AI at the gallery fieldtrip |
| Interaction on Padlet AI Showcase | Graphic Design with Adobe AI Tools |

|  |  |
| VR/AR Contents Usability Test | 3D Modeling Hands-on Class |

Recognizing the potential for deeper, more sustained engagement with AI technologies, this thesis proposes a research project aimed at developing a "continuous" outcome. Rather than limiting the application of AI tools to isolated class presentations, this project seeks to integrate these technologies more substantively into the curriculum to support and enhance students' major studies, potentially aiding in the creation and commercialization of their work. Furthermore, the course does not require prerequisites, allowing any student to enroll regardless of their major or background. This inclusive policy, while commendable, may not fully leverage the potential benefits of AI in enhancing education tailored to specific fields such as design and media arts. This thesis argues for a strategic revision of the course prerequisites to target students in design-oriented majors or those who can directly apply AI insights and tools to their future careers. Such a targeted approach could significantly enhance the relevance and applicability of the course content, making it a more valuable component of the university's curriculum.

Holmes and Tuomi (2022) underscore the importance of educators and administrators understanding the potential of AI in education to effectively incorporate this groundbreaking technology into their practices. Meanwhile, Miao et al. (2021) highlight the urgent need for educational systems and training providers to prepare workers for new occupations that AI

technologies will create, emphasizing the importance of equipping them with both technical and social skills to ensure a smooth transition in a dynamically changing job market. Kim and research colleagues (2024) confirmed that visual art creation activities with AI have a positive effect on students' creativity and digital media literacy. Based on this, they suggested more effective educational strategies and directions by utilizing cutting-edge technologies in future class curricula.

The integration of AI in creative processes could be particularly transformative in design and media arts, where AI can assist in generating innovative ideas and references. This thesis will explore these potentials through surveys and interviews with class participants to assess the real-world applicability. In addition, benefits of AI integration in their academic and professional pursuits will be explored. The feedback collected will inform the development of a more structured curriculum that aligns with the needs and aspirations of students, thereby enhancing their educational experience and preparing them for future challenges in the rapidly evolving field of AI.

**BACKGROUND**

In recent years, the integration of generative AI into various sectors has showcased substantial advancements, profoundly transforming technology's role across industries (Dai & Liu, 2024). Generative AI has proven instrumental in enabling creative content production, enhancing data augmentation, facilitating complex simulations, aiding in personalized recommendations, and accelerating scientific discovery. These capabilities significantly expand the applications and effectiveness of AI systems in a myriad of domains, thereby driving innovation and efficiency (Ramdurai & Adhithya, 2023).

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As a student, undertaking this thesis is a pivotal step in my academic journey. The significance of the chosen topic is underscored by recent studies, which highlight the critical need for further exploration in this area (Jaiswal, 2023; Khan, 2023). Engaging in this research will not only enhance our understanding but also contribute valuable insights to the field, aligning with the scholarly consensus on the importance of this work (Ge et al., 2024)

This paper will be a blend of subjective and objective perspectives, as it will include many general views, as well as opinions from other individuals such as students and stakeholders, which will be detailed in the methodology section. Furthermore, the incorporation of AI in educational settings, particularly in arts and media, underscores a crucial consideration—the necessity of a solid foundational understanding of traditional processes. Before students embark on leveraging AI tools, it is vital that they possess a firm grasp of the underlying principles of their field.

For example, in design and arts education, understanding traditional design processes is essential before one can effectively integrate and utilize AI technologies. This prerequisite knowledge ensures that the use of AI not only enhances creativity and productivity but also aligns with established professional standards and practices. Therefore, a more selective approach to course enrollment could potentially enhance learning outcomes (LO). Restricting access to such advanced AI-integrated courses to students who have a background in relevant domains—such as arts or design—may prove beneficial. It could even be argued that such courses should be mandatory for students within these departments, ensuring that all potential practitioners are equipped with the necessary AI skills and understandings to excel in their respective fields.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into arts education at Global University-level provides an exciting opportunity to blend technological advancements with creative disciplines. This literature review explores the implications and applications of AI in the context of arts education, supporting the thesis objective to enhance pedagogical practices and foster critical thinking among students.

The utilization of generative AI has revolutionized the way creative content is produced across various domains. In arts education, these AI tools empower students to explore new forms of expression and creativity, pushing the boundaries of traditional artistic practices. According to Ramdurai (2023), generative AI facilitates the creation of innovative artistic outputs, enhancing the learning experience for students by providing new tools for creativity and design. Teaching AI to students from diverse academic backgrounds necessitates a foundational understanding of both the technology's capabilities and its potential implications.

De Freitas and Weingart (2021) emphasize the importance of introducing AI concepts comprehensively, ensuring that students are not only technically proficient but also aware of how AI can impact society and their respective fields. This is particularly relevant for students in the arts, where the integration of technology and creativity must be approached with a balanced perspective. The ethical considerations of deploying AI within educational settings are also paramount. It is crucial to address the responsible use of AI technologies, particularly in fields that heavily influence cultural and societal norms such as the arts. Discussions around ethics ensure that students appreciate the broader implications of their work and the technology they use, fostering a responsible approach to AI integration.

Moreover, the curriculum development for AI in arts education must reflect a thoughtful integration of technology and traditional artistic values. The curriculum maintains a strong foundation in fundamental artistic principles while introducing advanced AI tools. This approach supports the development of well-rounded artists who can navigate both the technical and creative aspects of their field. The role of AI in enhancing creativity among students is supported by the ability of AI tools to simulate and model complex artistic processes. This not only provides students with a practical understanding of AI applications but also inspires innovation by demonstrating the potential of AI to extend human creativity.

Feedback from students and faculty through surveys and interviews, as proposed in the thesis, is critical for refining the curriculum. This feedback mechanism ensures that the course content remains relevant and effective, addressing the specific needs and preferences of the student body while aligning with educational goals. The potential for AI to facilitate personalized learning experiences in arts education cannot be overstated. By leveraging AI to tailor educational content to individual learning styles and preferences, educators can enhance student engagement and improve educational outcomes. This personalized approach is particularly effective in the arts, where individual creativity and expression are key. The integration of AI into the arts curriculum at the University offers a promising avenue to enhance educational practices and student outcomes. This literature review (table 1) confirms the potential of AI to not only augment the creative capabilities of students but also to equip them with the critical skills necessary to use technology ethically and effectively in their future careers.

The integration of AI into art and creative projects presents numerous innovative opportunities that can transform both the creation and commercialization of art. One prominent idea is the selling of AI-generated art, which has been explored extensively in recent studies.

Kumari et al. (2023) discuss the capabilities of AI in creating and commercializing art through blockchain marketplaces, providing a foundation for understanding the feasibility of such ventures. Similarly, Anyatasia (2023) delves into how AI-generated art is shared and evaluated in online platforms, highlighting the potential for commercial success. Another promising direction is the combination of AI with traditional academic majors to create integrated projects. Taylor, V. El Ardeliya, and J. Wolfson (2024) conducted a comprehensive review of AI applications in creative industries, emphasizing the benefits of interdisciplinary integration.

**Table 1**

*Key Studies on the Intersection of AI and Artistic Creativity*

| Research Topic | Description | References |
|---|---|---|
| Opportunities of AI Integration in Art | Emphasizes the integration of AI with traditional academic majors to create innovative projects in industries. | Taylor, El Ardeliya, Wolfson (2024) |
| Legal and Artistic Issues in AI Understanding | Stressing the importance of research and theoretical understanding of AI in the arts for advancement. | Bamal, Sherwani (2024) |
| Sharing AI Art on Online Platforms | AI presents innovative opportunities that can transform both the creation and commercialization of art. | Anyatasia (2023) |
| Utilization Generated Art in Marketplaces | The potential for creating and commercializing art through blockchain marketplaces is discussed. | Kumari et al. (2023) |

| Research Topic | Description | References |
|---|---|---|
| Transformative Potential of AI in Arts | Supplements with case studies that offer practical insights into curating AI-generated art and education | Hutson (2022) |
| Development of AI-Generated Art Portfolios | Highlights the practical application of developing AI ART portfolios with Generative Adversarial Networks | Hughes, Zhu, Bednarz (2021) |
| Financial and Ethical Implications | Discusses the financial and ethical implications of AI in creative fields. | Clancy (2021) |

Furthermore, focusing on the research and theoretical understanding of AI in the arts is critical for advancing the field. Clancy (2021) offers insights into the financial and ethical implications of AI in creative fields, while Bamal and Sherwani (2024) discuss the legal and artistic issues surrounding AI-generated works. Lastly, developing a portfolio of AI-generated art is a practical application of these technologies. Hughes, Zhu, and Bednarz (2021) provide an extensive review of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and their artistic applications, which is essential for creating diverse and high-quality art portfolios. Hutson (2022) supplements this with case studies that offer practical insights into curating AI-generated art. These studies collectively highlight the transformative potential of AI in the arts and provide a robust foundation for integrating AI into art education and practice.

The future directions for this research include further exploration of the impact of AI on student creativity and its long-term effects on educational outcomes. As AI technology continues to evolve, ongoing research will be essential to understand its most effective

applications in arts education and to continually adapt educational practices to best serve students' needs.

## METHODOLOGY

For the methodology, we, the researchers prepared a survey for students currently enrolled in this class. This survey was conducted during the 12th week of a 16-week course, a period when students are well-acquainted with the course content and are in the process of preparing their final projects. This timing is optimal as it allows students to provide their best ideas for class improvements. Throughout the course, as outlined in the curriculum, they have experimented with several AI services, including ChatGPT and other AI tools.

The methodology consists of several stages. After conducting a literature review, we identified several research papers (Kim et al, 2024; Anyatasia, 2023; Cooper, 2023; Hutson, 2022) emphasizing the importance of the role of young people, particularly the current undergraduate students. These 62 students play a crucial role in integrating technological and cultural advancements and in promoting creativity and globalization with AI technology. This involves detailed surveys and interviews with 7 students. The 15 survey questions are designed based on the previous research, to gather in-depth feedback on their experiences with the AI services used in the class, their overall satisfaction and suggestions for future improvements (Lee, 2024). Online surveys administered to students in 1st May to 14th May, for gauging their opinions on the necessity and feasibility of integrating AI technology in this class. The surveys will also aim to identify the current levels of AI literacy among students and instructors.

The next subjects are the current students enrolled in the class. Their perspectives and experiences provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and areas for improvement in the curriculum. These students will be interviewed through a survey to analyze their current grades

and whether they took this class last semester or are currently enrolled. The results will be categorized accordingly in the result & discussion section. We will also gather data on how they rate the class overall and which aspects they find most engaging. This is crucial because understanding what students like and feel comfortable with can enhance their learning experience. Additionally, we explore the integration of their future career plans with their reasons for taking this class and their opinions on guest lectures. Specifically, we want to know if they find the guest lectures engaging and if these sessions inspire them to pursue careers in certain industries. Furthermore, interview will cover the students to rate the usefulness of the learning materials, such as the LMS or video clips, to determine if these resources are helpful or not. Also assessing is given their confidence in applying the AI tools they have learned to real projects and whether they have noticed improvements in their design or artistic skills.

Students will also rate the clarity and manageability of assignments and projects in this course. Additionally, we want to understand how often they receive feedback from the professor or peers and if this feedback is beneficial. Finally, researchers will ask for their opinions on specific challenges they face and their suggestions for enhancing the class. We have also listed some new outcome ideas, considered after reviewing various papers to see if they resonate with the students or if they have better suggestions. These questions are designed to help to compare, analyze, and develop ideas with both students and the faculty. It aims to improve the class and ensure it has clear, beneficial outcomes that support students' futures.

**Table 2**

*Survey Questions for the Participants in the Class*

| Question | Answer type/choices |
|---|---|
| 1) Please choose your current grade. | · Senior (4th grade) and more<br>· Junior (3rd grade)<br>· Sophomore (2nd grade)<br>· Freshmen (1st grade) |
| 2) Please identify yourself. | · Female<br>· Male<br>· Don't want to declare |
| 3) Please fill in your major. | Fill with the blank |
| 4) How would you rate your overall experience in the <AI, Culture and Arts> class so far? | · very satisfied(5)~very dissatisfied(1) |
| 5) Which aspects of the course do you find engaging? (multiple choice) | · special guest lectures<br>· using AI tool (practical assignments)<br>· weekly learning video<br>· field study (Gallery, 3D Lab)<br>· good assignments PT sharing<br>· discussion with students<br>· other: |
| 6) Do you think the course content is relevant to your major and future career aspirations? | [rate between 1 to 5]<br>and give more details to support |
| 7) How effective do you find the guest lectures from industry leaders in enhancing your understanding of AI applications? | [rate between 1 to 5]<br>and give more details to support |
| 8) How helpful are the learning materials (ex. online resources) provided in the course? | [rate between 1 to 5]<br>and give more details to support |
| 9) How confident do you feel in applying AI tools and techniques to your own creative project? | [rate between 1 to 5]<br>and give more details to support |
| 10) Have you noticed an improvement in your design or artistic skills since taking this class? | [rate between 1 to 5]<br>and give more details to support |
| 11) How clear and manageable do you find the assignments and projects in the course? | [rate between 1 to 5]<br>and give more details to support |
| 12) How often do you receive feedback on your work, and how helpful is this feedback? | [rate between 1 to 5]<br>and give more details to support |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *13) Are there any specific challenges or difficulties you have faced in this course?* | [rate between 1 to 5] and give more details to support | |
| *14) What suggestions do you have for improving the <AI, Culture and Arts> class? [optional]* | [rate between 1 to 5] and give more details to support | |
| *15) How do you wish the outcomes of this course to be structured? (select all that apply)* | · make an actual project like an exhibition in school<br>· sell arts piece<br>· focus on research and theoretical understanding of AI in arts<br>· develop a portfolio of AI-gen. art<br>· other | |

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

From the survey results obtained from various questions as presented above, we received a total response from 62 students currently enrolled in the AI, Culture, and Art class, 2024 spring semester. The purpose of this survey was to capture their perspectives, satisfaction levels, and the challenges they faced in the class. Table 3. presents the percentage distribution of responses from students enrolled in the new liberal arts course at Handong Global University.

**Table 3**

*Key Results of Student Survey (n=62, unit: %)*

| *Rating* | Course Relevance | Effectiveness of Guest Lectures | Helpfulness of Learning Materials | Confidence in Applying AI | Improvement in Skills | Manageability of Assignments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1* | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| *2* | 10.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 0.0 |
| *3* | 32.5 | 2.5 | 12.5 | 22.5 | 32.5 | 15.0 |
| *4* | 40.0 | 37.5 | 55.5 | 52.5 | 37.5 | 50.0 |
| *5* | 15.0 | 60.0 | 25.0 | 52.5 | 22.5 | 35.0 |

The table categorizes the feedback into several key aspects of the course, including course relevance, effectiveness of guest lectures, helpfulness of learning materials, confidence in applying AI tools, improvement in design or artistic skills, and manageability of assignments. The ratings are measured on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the lowest level of satisfaction or relevance and 5 indicating the highest. The table provides a clear overview of how students perceive each aspect of the course, helping to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

In summary, the average response came from seniors in their fourth year of study: 7 were first-year students (11.3%), 15 were second-year students (24.2%), 22 were third-year students (35.5%), and 18 were in their fourth year or beyond (29.0%). These figures 2. are significant and provide a good sample since this class is open to students from any grade. The results are positive because, for students who have been in college for four years, they have considerable experience in their field of study and can integrate their skills with AI services, which have become prevalent in 2023.

These students also come from various departments as shown in figure 3. They include majors such as AI Convergence, Business Management, Communication, Visual Design, Computer Science, and related fields affiliated. Interestingly, the largest number of students coming from the Computer Science department (27.5%). This is a good result because Computer Science students are typically the most updated with technological developments and understand the practical application of AI systems.
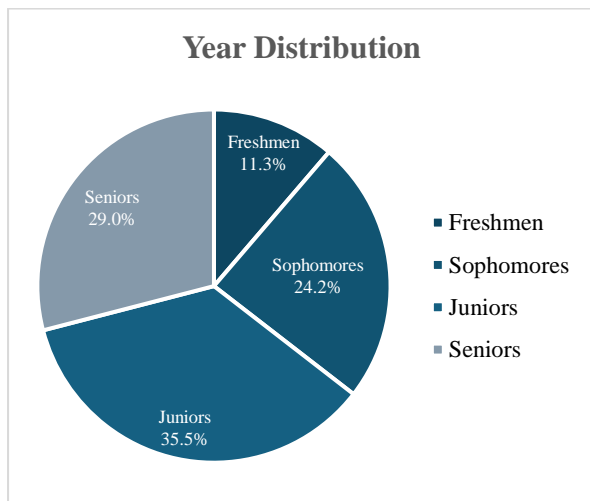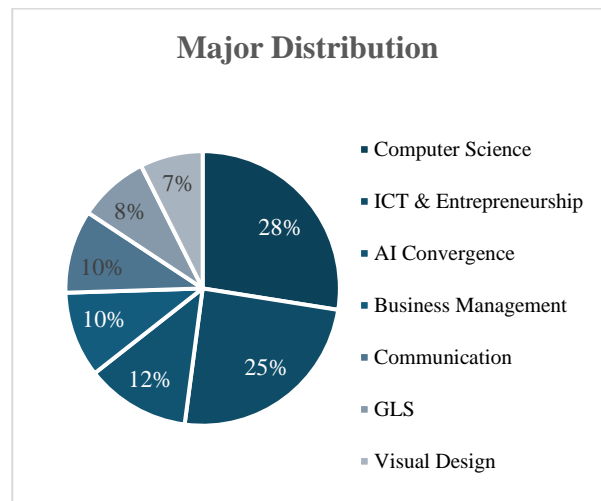
**Figure 2.** *Student's Academic Year*

**Figure 3.** *Student's Academic Major*



**Year Distribution**

Freshmen 11.3%
Sophomores 24.2%
Juniors 35.5%
Seniors 29.0%

- Freshmen
- Sophomores
- Juniors
- Seniors



**Major Distribution**

28%
25%
12%
10%
10%
8%
7%

- Computer Science
- ICT & Entrepreneurship
- AI Convergence
- Business Management
- Communication
- GLS
- Visual Design

Regarding overall experience, 45% reported being very satisfied, 50% were satisfied, and 5% were neutral. This is an excellent outcome, exceeding expectations, indicating that students are pleased with the instruction and find the class useful. For scientific analysis, these positive results can be used as evidence to improve the class rather than to justify or evaluate any dissatisfaction or inadequacies. Our research implication focus is on enhancing the standards of the class, ensuring it keeps pace with the ever-evolving AI services and the curriculum remains up to date.

When analyzing which lectures or topics they found most engaging, 92.5% chose the times they used AI tools or services themselves. Approximately 67.5% chose special guest lectures, and options like weekly learning videos, field studies, good assignments, peer teaching, discussions with students, practical assignments, and theoretical lectures were all checked. However, the most impactful and engaging aspect for students was using AI services themselves. This is a positive result as it aligns with the core curriculum of the class, which

involves hands-on experimentation with AI services, making it accessible and beneficial to students with the information provided in the classroom.

For the next question, we asked if the course content was relevant to their majors. Most students rated the relevance as level 3 or 4. This isn't entirely negative and supports the primary reason why class improvements are needed. Several students added personal opinions in the optional data, often mentioning ChatGPT. They noted how it helped them, especially in coding for Computer Science students. Many found it impressive and helpful, suggesting that exploring other AI services for the class would be beneficial. Researcher was also surprised by the number of students mentioning the impact of AI services on business, stating that the ideas provided by AI were significantly beneficial and could support their future endeavors in business and marketing.

As the follow question, it is about the effectiveness that students find from the guest lectures from industry leaders. This time it has a very good result; no one chose the lowest (1 and 2 scale), and 60% of students chose the highest rating, indicating they are fully satisfied. This is a good result, showing that the guest lectures help and satisfy the students in the class. Another question is about how helpful the learning materials (e.g., YouTube clips, TED, Coursera online resources) are. 25% rated them as very helpful (5), and 55% rated them as helpful (4). Unfortunately, 2.5% of the students said the materials are not that helpful. This suggests a need for some improvements in this area.

Moving to another question, we asked how confident students feel in applying AI tools and techniques in their own projects. Most students find it useful, indicating that the class influences their confidence in applying AI in real projects. Following that, I asked if students noticed any improvement in their design or artistic skills since taking this class. The average response is 3, indicating some improvement. Importantly, no one chose 1, indicating no

improvement at all. Some students explained their improvements, though some expressed challenges in developing good prompting skills for AI. Others mentioned they learned how to integrate AI tools with software like Adobe, which they found beneficial.

We also asked if the assignments and projects are clear and manageable. Over 70% of students chose a rating of 4, indicating they find them manageable. Additionally, students find the feedback moderately to very helpful, suggesting they receive proper feedback in class. The table 4. indicates the challenges that students are facing, and direct suggestions for improving the AI, Culture, and Art class from 7 students with in-depth interview. Lastly, we asked students how they wish the outcomes of this course to be structured. Figure 4. shows the answer of students after provided some sample ideas.
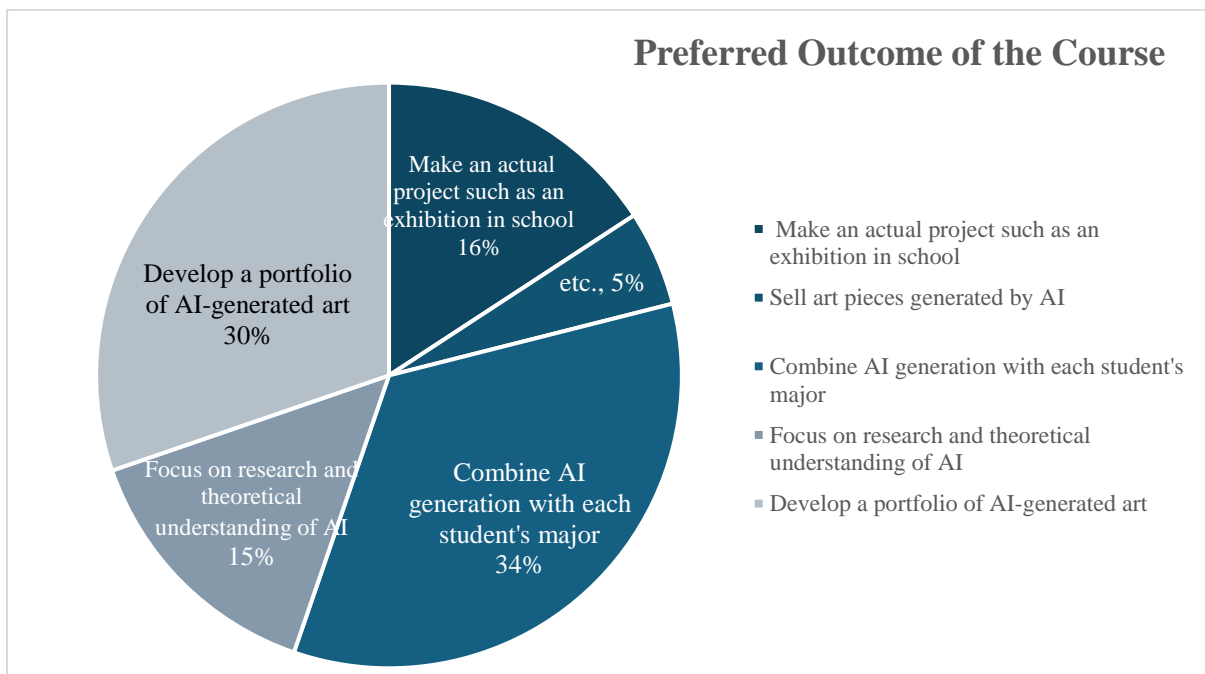
**Table 4**

*Suggestion for the improvement course from 7 students with in-depth interview*

| Challenges Faced by Students | Relative Suggestions |
|---|---|
| *The quality of tasks is not well-defined, making it difficult to set goals.* | Explain the application of AI tools in real industry/company contexts for better career connections. |
| | Organize competitions to motivate high-quality work. |
| | Share presentation topics in advance for better preparation. |
| *Difficulty balancing academic workload with assignments from this class.* | More explanation from the professor to avoid confusion with time-consuming projects. |
| | Provide support/expenses for using premium versions of AI tools for better results. |
| *Challenges in making videos due to lack of experience.* | Experience higher-level AI tools (e.g., the latest versions of ChatGPT or Midjourney) |
| | Provide more information on AI tools. |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Difficulty using English for AI prompts, especially for non-native speakers.* | Have offline meetings twice a week for practical experience, with online materials studied outside class. |
| *Law majors find the content less relevant and sometimes awkward.* | Combine AI tools with each student's major for creative projects. |
| | Invite more diverse guests for special lectures. |
| *Limited examples make it hard to try AI tools for the first time and to express creativity with videos, images, and music generation.* | Provide more examples of prompting and illustrations. |
| | Add team projects for better sharing and results. |
| | Create an online community for students to share and inspire each other. |

**Figure 4**

*Student's Preferred Outcome of the Course <AI, Culture and Arts>*



Preferred Outcome of the Course

- Make an actual project such as an exhibition in school — 16%
- Sell art pieces generated by AI
- Combine AI generation with each student's major — 34%
- Focus on research and theoretical understanding of AI — 15%
- Develop a portfolio of AI-generated art — 30%
- etc., 5%

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the "AI, Culture, and Arts" course at Handong Global University has made great strides in blending technology with creativity. Students from various majors have found value in learning how AI can transform their creative processes. They particularly appreciate the practical aspects of the course, such as using AI tools and learning from guest speakers who are experts in the field. This hands-on approach not only makes the class engaging but also equips students with skills that are relevant to their future careers.

However, there's always room for improvement. Students have suggested that more real-world examples and clearer project guidelines could make the course even better. By refining the curriculum to include these suggestions, the course can become even more effective in preparing students for the future. The goal is to ensure that students not only understand AI, but can also apply it creatively and ethically in their chosen fields. By doing so, the program can continue to evolve and remain a valuable part of the university's offerings, helping students to thrive in a world where technology and creativity increasingly intersect.

Based on the above, we would like to make the following suggestions for developing a new HTHT course that utilizes AI tech. First, AI-based creative tools and software education should be designed to encourage students to use technology for creative expression. Second, critical thinking should be fostered through continuous discussions on the socio-cultural impact and ethical issues that AI has on culture and arts. Third, it would be important to foster practical skills by allowing students to experience cases of AI and culture and arts convergence through projects that they can actually carry out. Moreover, regarding the implementation of AI & Arts convergence education at an international level, further research is encouraged to be conducted considering the unique circumstance of each local education system.

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