'HEJ, HEJ!' - EXPERIENCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF VICTIMIZATION OF ROMANIAN ROMA WOMEN IN MÅLÖ, SWEDEN

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The following research project thematically analysed in-depth interviews of 5 socially vulnerable Romanian Roma women who support themselves only by means of begging in public spaces of Malmö, Sweden. This paper examined women’s experiences of victimization and their consequences, reasons behind the incidents as well as relationship with the police officers during their time spent in Sweden. The interviews put forward four common themes: frequent harassment during daytime, several grounds for victimisation, negative health consequences and deficient relation with police officers. Women described their experiences of sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse, feelings of constant stress, paranoia and fear. Interviewed study participants claimed that they are victimized because
they are Roma women and thus visible as a result of specific clothing and their activity of begging. Nearly all women reported lack of trust towards justice system. Discussion concludes with several policy suggestions.

*Keywords*: victimization of vulnerable populations, bias crimes, Sweden
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INTRODUCTION

As a result of transformations experienced by Romanian state since 1989 many Roma families chose to engage in a more general migration process of Romanian population (Migrom 2018). Better economic opportunities for themselves and their children are main pull factors underlying international migration besides objective push factors such as lack of employment opportunities, poverty, inadequate housing, limited access to medical care, marginalization and discrimination faced by Roma in their country of origin (Civil Rights Defenders 2015; Dragica & Greason 2016; MigRom 2018).

Sweden has become one of ‘migration hot spots’ (Wigerfelt & Wigerfelt 2015, p. 2) for vulnerable Romanian Roma since 2010’s (Polismyndigheten 2015; Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2016; Stockholms Stadsmission 2017; Zelano 2018). In general, Roma who choose to migrate manage to gather some resources to invest in migratory process however, they are not able to afford stable housing and as a result they are homeless and socially excluded in the Nordic country (Migrom 2018). Many vulnerable Romanian Roma men and women survive by begging in Sweden’s public spaces (SOU 2016). This precarious group’s life situation contributes to risks of becoming victims to various types of crime and discrimination motivated by ethnicity, gender and the act of begging (Wallengren & Mellgren 2018). In other words, bias crimes against Roma migrants in Sweden occur regularly (Hansson & Jansson 2019).

Focus on women

In experiences of victimization, gender and ethnicity go hand in hand (Wigerfelt & Wigerfelt 2015). Roma woman’s identity is in fact made up of multiple different identities including ethnicity, gender, age and socioeconomic status. Having all these identities can cumulatively result into multiple levels of discrimination (Shroff 2018). This can make Roma women more vulnerable to crimes motivated by prejudice and discrimination against their identity (Shroff, 2018). Roma women as part of their community are most poorly understood population in Europe in relation to behaviour and culture (C’vorovic 2014). As a matter of fact, previous research on victimization in Sweden showed that experiences of victimization are more common among vulnerable Roma women with more negative consequences on their well-being when compared to vulnerable Roma men (Andersson 2018; Wallengren & Mellgren 2018; Wigerfelt & Wigerfelt 2015). Perhaps, because vulnerable Romanian Roma women can become victims, on basis of several overlapping reasons such as being a woman, being part of a marginalized minority group, begging activity and being temporarily homeless during their stay in Sweden (Amnesty International 2018; Barker 2017; Beijer et.al. 2018; CRD 2015; Swedish National Police Authority 2015). Despite this evidence, Romanian Roma women who represent a hard to reach population are still excluded from social research and no large empirical studies have been conducted to document the experiences of this group. (Ellard-Gray et.al 2015; Liamputtong 2007; Sydor 2013).

Roma represents an umbrella term for a heterogenous group with internal cultural and language differences (Swedish Government 2011) for this reason, the present research clarifies that focus is on women who are self-declared Romanian Roma
and will be addressed as ‘vulnerable Romanian Roma women’. Present research is limited to women who support themselves solely through begging where begging is defined as a person who publicly and regularly asks for money from strangers without offering any service or product in return (Fitzpatrick & Kennedy 2010; Lankenau 1999; Menka 2013). Women resort to begging in public spaces. According to Jurgen Habermas public spaces are “any medium, occasion, or event which prompts open communication among strangers” (Teixeira & Hutchison 2016 p.4). He explained that it is a space where actors besides mere observing also take second-person attitudes and let others express themselves freely linguistically (Cassegård 2014). During their stay in Sweden vulnerable Romanian Roma women (RW) in addition to begging, are almost always homeless (Anderson 2003) according to the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion definition of homelessness (European Commission 2013). Given their living situation women are prone to victimization but their ethnicity might create additional risks and when ethnicity lies behind offender’s motivation it constitutes a bias crime. According to the Swedish law, hate crime or bias crime has at its base prejudice towards a person’s perceived race, nationality or ethnic origin, skin colour, religion, sexual orientation and is comprised of crimes such as violent crime, harassment, vandalization and theft (Andersson, 2016). Sweden also applies more severe penalties and has two legal provisions in relation to bias crimes however, beggars and homeless women are not included as protected group (Wallengren & Mellngren 2018).

As can be seen, it is necessary to gain more knowledge on Roma women’s own perspectives about their victimization experiences in host communities, in this case Malmö, Sweden. In absence of this information little can be done to facilitate forging of new social links with majority population and providing ways of securing a better, safer future for vulnerable Roma women moreover, law enforcement policies aiming Roma community are ‘seriously disadvantaged in absence of such information’ (Migrom 2018).

**AIM OF THE STUDY**

The overarching aim of this study is to report experiences and consequences of victimisation of Romanian Roma women who support themselves by begging in Malmö, Sweden public spaces. In-depth, semi-structured interviews will be thematically analysed in order to provide details on contextual account, depicting reasons for the attacks, expand knowledge on consequences of victimization from a gender perspective and understanding reasons for refraining from reporting the incidents to the authorities. The scope of this research project is to produce a more accurate image of socially vulnerable Romanian Roma women as victims of crime and to provide details on how this population could be studied in forthcoming projects that focus on victimization in order to advance in knowledge on this group.
The study aim is to answer the following questions:

- In what way Roma women are victimized during their stay in Malmö?
- What are the consequences of victimization on Roma women?
- What do women perceive as reasons for being victimized?
- Why some women refrain from crime reporting?

What do we know on victimization of Roma women so far?

Empirical data in relation to victimization of this group of women are scarce however, studies on Roma population in Sweden identified several reasons such as misogynistically motivated crimes mixed with bias motives behind attacks on Roma women in other words several layers of discrimination were identified (Andersson 2018; Wallengren & Mellgren 2018). Besides violent physical attacks and discrimination women are subjected to sexual harassment much more compared to vulnerable men population (Lee & Schreck 2005; Wenzel et.al 2000). It has been pointed out that women were intimidated by the police officers and treated disproportionately harsh in some cases (Barker 2017). This may be particularly relevant because lack of trust into the authorities (Pezzella et.al. 2019, Wigerfelt & Wigerfelt 2015) and general tendency amongst women to report less crimes then men especially when it comes to bias crime leads to absence of official records on how many crimes are committed against vulnerable Romanian Roma women in Sweden (Delin 2015).

Cost-benefit analysis in crime reporting

As mentioned earlier, previous research indicates that bias crimes suppress victim reporting for that reason government statistics on real numbers of bias crime cannot be reliable. Instances which report crime are very important for valid evaluations of crime prevention programmes (Skogan 1984). According to previous research, citizens most likely go through a cost-benefit analysis process before making decision to contact the police (Skogan 1984). Cost-benefit evaluation can be influenced by characteristics of the incidents and in general people will choose to report when they know they could get a compensation from insurance company or high chances of convicting the offender (Skogan 1984). Furthermore, reporting decision may be affected by victim’s fear of not being believed or that offender will not be punished as a result of lack of evidence (Skogan 1984). This is a highly relevant argument for vulnerable women since they face structural discrimination within criminal justice system.

Consequences of victimization

Previous research showed that victimisation is associated with health outcomes (Andersson 2018; Wallengren & Mellgren 2018). Experiences of victimisation of
Romanian Roma women are traumatic and would challenge most resilient ‘to question the basic assumption that the world is a safe place’ (Bonugli et al., 2013 p.833) Such incidents violate foundations of trust and as consequence produce feelings of helplessness, confusion and physical pain (Bonugli et al. 2013).

Studies showed that experiences of victimization have more consequences on physical and mental health of vulnerable Roma women then Roma men because they are more exposed to physical violence and sexual harassment (Beijer et al 2018; Wenzel et al. 2000). Moreover, women who become victims for several reasons at the same time suffer more when compared to individuals who are being victimized for one isolated reason (Bowling 1999). Experiences and their consequences tend to have a cumulative effect on the victim especially when it comes to bias crimes (Wallengren & Mellgren 2018). In long term, the inflicted harms can potentially limit possibility to be socially included, to form a sense of belonging and a connection to society as well as produce feelings of alienation and injustice (Andersson 2018). Homeless Roma women victims have different needs from homeless Roma men (Čvorović & James 2018; Phipps et al 2019) and specific community organizations should be able to identify these needs through research in order to be able to address them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a substantial number of theories that attempt to explain causes of susceptibility to victimization among marginalized groups. This chapter will touch upon lifestyle-exposure theory as explanation to experiences of victimization as well as structural choice theory to explain victimization on both micro- and macro- levels. Because crimes committed against women can be fuelled by resentment towards their ethnicity, some theoretical explanation will be given to concept of bias crime along with a feminist perspective on victimization.

Theoretical explanation to crime exposure

Lifestyle exposure theory
Different theories made attempts to explain why vulnerable populations are victimised. The lifestyle-exposure theory is the one that accounts for ‘differences in victimization risks across social groups’ (Meier and Miethe 1993 p. 466; Sampson et al. 1987). In line with this theory individuals are victimized due to their lifestyle. The way they live make them more susceptible to victimization (Wilcox 2010). RW spend most of their time in public spaces during both day and night which makes them vulnerable and exposed to offenders (Wilcox 2010). The fact that women are homeless has crucial role in their decision making which can often expose them to crime (Lee & Schreck 2009). Vulnerable Romanian Roma women engage in panhandling to survive, they are rough sleepers these all are risk factors in becoming victim of crime due to their lifestyle (Turner et al. 2018).
Structural choice theory

Structural choice theory (synthesized model of opportunity theory) is suitable to elucidate high rates of victimisation among homeless. Such theory connects victimization to structural (macro) factors that facilitate criminal opportunity and choice (micro) processes that contribute to pursuit of a certain target for victimization in this case vulnerable women that are temporarily homeless (Miethe & Meier 1990). Structural refers to proximity (spending a lot of time on the street, precarious spaces and being exposed to offenders) while choice processes refer to attractiveness of victimization target to an offender and the level of guardianship of the victim (Miethe & Meier 1990). Women have no resources to increase guardianship or decrease their exposure and proximity which explains both initial and repeat victimization (Garland et. al. 2010).

Theoretical explanation for bias crime victimization

Barbara Perry argued that motivations behind bias crimes lie within perpetrator’s prejudice and desires to reinforce the hegemonic and subordinate identities of the victimized group who are perceived as a threat to mainstream society, perpetrator and victim being strangers to one another. However, Chakraborti and Garland (2012) go beyond this reasoning and consider that perpetrator could also have more banal motives such as boredom and victim being easily accessible moreover, victimization occurs because of intersectionality of different aspects of a person’s identity, in this case gender, occupation and being part of marginalized group. This agrees with feminist concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) that women face multiple threats as they are positioned in centre of their intersecting identities of being Roma and being female. Chakraborti and Garland (2012) consider that besides membership to a group vulnerability should be central to research on bias crime.

In sum, victimization of vulnerable women occurs due to their lifestyle particularities and bias crime due to intersectionality of their identities. These are important aspects which indicate that victimization of vulnerable women should be analysed from both micro and macro perspectives. It is very likely that their victimization is a result of combination of social and contextual components.

METHODOLOGY

The victimised women, as part of ethnic minority, can pose methodological difficulties for researchers as they may be difficult to contact and may not want to share their experiences as part of social-science research perceiving it as a risk (Ellard-Gray et.al. 2015). Thus, it is important to invest time in developing strategies for study of victimization of this group to diminish challenges in providing appropriate policy support for women that have been victims of abuse (Aldridge 2014; Ellard et.al 2015; Safadi & Valerie 2017; Wallengren & Mellgren 2018). The following chapter will discuss the study’s approach and methodological considerations.
Study Approach
As described above, vulnerable RW represent a hard-to-reach population and the most challenging step is to get access to the vulnerable population (Liamputtong 2011). Chosen method of semi-structured interviews was able to provide detailed meaning-making attached to criminal incidents, and the consequences experienced by victims as well as reasons for underreporting (Sharan et.al. 2015).

A local organization named Crossroads (as part of Skanestadmission) which is offering support to vulnerable EU citizens was contacted in context of this project. Because RW visit the organization on daily basis author began volunteering at the organization during April 2019. Direct contact needed to conduct the interviews was established during morning hours which women spend on site of the organization before leaving to their usual day-time spots. At first student focused on volunteering tasks which enabled communication with visitors that was not related to the project. Gradually student approached several women of different ages to ask if they would like to participate in interviews after describing the project and its aim. Out of seven women who were approached five agreed to participate. It seems that communication and seeing women on almost daily bases influenced their agreement to participate. An interesting observation was that male visitors approached student for participation in the project.

Study Participants
A total of five women were extensively interviewed in context of this project. It can be challenging to get women to disclose because many of them strongly believed that no studies would help them change their difficult life circumstances. Some of them were very shy, timid and frightened to share their experiences on the other hand, a few women wanted to speak up for their community in general in hopes of bringing positive change.

Student was be able to build relation with organization visitors that meet the inclusion criteria needed for this project. Participants had to be female, willing and able to talk about their experiences of victimisation in Romanian, participants had to have self-reported Romanian nationality. All the participants had to be over the age of 18 as well as be socially vulnerable and supporting themselves solely through begging during the time interviews were conducted. The participant’s age ranged from 28 to 59. In context of this project women will be given pseudonyms as follows: Ana (30 years old), Brigitta who is a (28years old), Cristina (59 years old), Diana (40 years old) and Emily (50 years old). All of participants self-described themselves as Romanian Roma and were not in any way trying to conceal their Roma identity.

Interviews
Women were asked a total of 15 main questions and as many probing questions as needed. The questions focused on 4 different subject areas: If women had experienced victimization during their time spent in Sweden, their thoughts on why they became victims, if they had any physical or mental consequences after incidents occurred and if they ever reported incidents to the police officers. Student spoke to women in their native language (Romanian) so there were no linguistic challenges except in cases where participant was asked to explain region-specific terms, they used to express themselves. Perhaps because author is also woman it was easier for participants to speak and express themselves without
feeling ashamed to provide details on their victimization experiences. Interviews were held in a relaxed environment rather than official settings. This allowed the participants to feel comfortable which facilitated meaningful and rich data.

**Ethics**

Roma women are part of vulnerable and marginalized group in society that is why importance was emphasized on ethical considerations of the study. Roma women fear that society might discriminate against them even more if they openly speak about their victimization that is why they are a difficult group to study (Wallengern & Mellgren 2018).

Questions on experiences of victimization can be a sensitive subject for the participants. It is not always clear if respondent is offended or has vivid mental images of past experiences from her criminal victimization that is why student was as careful as possible to not provoke any unpleasant reactions. Malmö Crossroads organization were informed about nature of the research project and approved for the interviews to be held inside the organization’s building. This study received approval from Malmö University’s Ethical Council.

With that said, women were informed prior and during the interview about the subject of the study both in verbal and written forms, they were reassured that participation is anonymous and that they could leave the interview during any time and only answer questions they were comfortable with. Furthermore, potential informants had possibility to contact student if they had any questions before the interviews took place. Informed consent was obtained from all the women who participated in the research project. All five interviews were held on site of the organization in a separate office room. During the interview no one except the respondent and student were present.

**Data analysis**

For present study the interview method is most suitable as it provided an opportunity to gather comprehensive data in order to better understand women’s situation. As discussed earlier vulnerable Romanian Roma women who support themselves through begging in Malmö risk becoming victims due to their gender, vulnerable position as well as possible bias motivation against the group from majority population but most probably it is a mixture of all these factors. For women it is often difficult to recognize exact motives for why they become victims (Chakraborti & Garland 2012). Interviewing the victims is giving them opportunity to reflect on the incidents which in turn will offer opportunity for researcher to analyse the grounds on which they have been victimized. Questions posed during interviews were in relation to whether they had any experiences of victimization during their time spent on the streets of Malmö including the perceived offender motives (gender, ethnicity, or act of begging), on whether the abuse had negative consequences on their mental and physical state, as well as if they ever reported the incidents to the police.

Upon completing data collection student analysed them using thematic analysis with an inductive approach (Guest et.al. 2012). Braun and Clark in 2006 provided clear guidelines on how to make use of thematic analysis. The data were
examined using five steps: listening to the material and transcribing the essential information, reading the material whilst focalizing on repeated themes, original classification of the themes, additional refining of the themes and final categorization (Wallengren & Mellgren 2018). Theme formation was conducted in an inductive form with data collected precisely for this thesis and subsequent themes were related to the data. (Braun & Clarke 2006).

RESULTS

By conducting the interviews student discovered different opinions of women who often have totally different stories but what they have in common is that they feel helpless in their situation and that police officers are not on their side. Four themes were identified during the analysis: frequent harassment during daytime, several grounds for victimization, mental and physical consequences of victimization, and relationship with the police officers. Parts of the interviews of the women will be used and commented in relation to themes.

Frequent harassment during daytime

‘If people coming up to me and offering me money for sex and shouting at me that I must leave is considered abuse, then yes I get this every day. This is my life daily’ (Ana, 30 years old)

All the women who participated in present study went through at least one form of harassment or abuse during their time spent as street workers/beggars in Malmö, Sweden. All five women stated that at some point they were verbally abused in form of hate speech. Three out of five women spoke about how spitting, being showed obscene signs, threatened with violence, their paper cups being kicked were common incidents that happen to them regularly. Two out of five women reported physical assault in form of being strangled and kicked with feet and being held against their will. Three out of five women felt they were harassed by the police or security staff. Four out of five women spoke about sexual harassment in form of being offered money in exchange for sex.

‘Some men come and say that they will offer me a hundred or two hundred crowns to sleep with them. I say no. I have a family. They are crazy. They tell me that it is ok and that I can offer them my body and get money for it. Believe me, I feel horrible because in days like those you feel you have no value as human being if they dare to ask you things like this. This is very bad. If we were the same as them in their eyes they would not dare to ask. Three years ago, sexual harassment never happened to me. This is recent. I can see that respect towards women changed. Sexual harassment bothers me the most’ (Ana, 30 years old)

Three out five women understood English, so they knew what people were saying when they addressed them. Two out of five women had good knowledge of English so they could answer the offenders. Three out of five women spoke about the fact that men were not harassed in the same way because men are tough, and they would never get sexual proposals. Men wear regular clothes all day, whereas
women are recognizable when they walk the streets due to their attire which can make them more susceptible to abuse. Moreover, husbands tend to spend less time sitting down by the store and some of them choose to sell papers instead in hopes of getting a profit. Previous research confirmed that there are gender differences when it comes to risks of being sexually harassed (Andresson, 2018; Wallengren & Mellgren, 2017).

A woman in her early 50s talked about incidents that disturbed her deeply:

‘They propose sex to me. They say ‘Fuck’ and a few times I approved by mistake because I didn’t understand at first what they meant but I learned the word afterwards because when they saw that I don’t get it they would show me obscene signs. Sometimes men were very young I could have been their mother. Many people are gross… One time I was walking away from my store spot in the evening, but it was not dark yet, and a man passed by me. I thought I would have a heart attack. He was wearing a jacket, but he opened it and showed me his genitals. I was lucky that a jogging man was passing by and heard me screaming so he approached us and the man in jacket left in a hurry. I bless the jogging man to this day in my mind.’ (Emily, 51 years old)

A woman in her late 50s also stated:

‘People tried to offer me money for sex, but I did not react to it. They showed me money. I am ashamed to say these. They called me but I didn’t react to them. I just bowed my head and didn’t respond. If you don’t want it, then you don’t want it. They just leave me alone’ (Christina, 59 years old)

All five women stated that they were verbally abused at some point. Most offenders do not physically assault the women instead they use verbal abuse. They are used to this kind of behaviour and some are desensitized to verbal aggression, so they don’t see it as something that needs to be acted upon. Diana, 40 years old stated:

‘There are people that pass by the store and hit my paper cup with their feet, they also show obscene signs with their fingers. They put stones and papers and garbage in my cap. I just sit there and don’t bother anyone. I just say ‘Hej!’ No one stole money from me, but they still come and pick on me. I can hear them saying like ‘You bring shame to Sweden!’, they tell me to leave and they say ‘Zigan’ a lot. I never answer them because I am afraid. A woman screamed at me ‘Tiganilor, go Romania!’ I think both men and women can be racist towards us. They check if I have some money in my cup and then swear.’

For some women it is the same man who comes back repeatedly and makes offensive remarks each time he passes. Emily (51 years old) is especially tormented by a person she describes as a man white hair and white beard:

‘I’ve been coming to Sweden for about 5-6 years. During my stay in Sweden bad things happened to me. Especially during last 4 months there is rarely a day that passes by without this man coming to me and saying offensive words to me. I also changed my usual spot recently, but it seems like the devil helped him find me at my new spot. He passed by in his car and recognized me by the new place too. I knew it was him again because he passed by and said, ‘Fuck you, sugi pula’
(offensive phrase half in English, half in Romanian). This was same man as in my old spot. I can always recognize him after that.’

Ana was speaking about the same man as Emily during her interview:

‘A man came to the store where I seat and told me in Romanian an obscene phrase and asked me what am I doing here? But I could see that he is a Swede. He learned those Romanian phrases. He told me to go back to Romania. I asked him why he is saying these things to me because I didn’t bother him with anything. I threatened him that I will call the police. He started shouting at me in Swedish and left my spot, but he went to another woman that wasn’t sitting too far away from me.’

One of the coping strategies for women is to talk about the incidents with their husbands. Some of the husbands are upset and scared for their wives while some just say that there is nothing that can be done about it. Two of the women reported being physically assaulted. Their assault had witnesses but, Emily (51 years old) never addressed the police officers for help:

‘This one is very aggressive. He has white hair and white beard he seems Swede, but I am not sure. I don’t know where he comes from, but he is not Romanian for sure. He is fare. This man came to me very nervous one day. He checked left and right and then jumped to hit me. Other day he came and wanted to hit with his leg in my stomach, but I dodged him. Then, another time he came from a direction I wasn’t looking at and when I turned my head, he spit on me directly in my forehead and it got into my hair too.’

Brigitta (28 years old) was helped by the witness who also called the police for her:

‘I was spit on, pushed, beaten. I was robbed here in Malmö. I was sitting during work as begging is considered a job for us. A woman came from behind and strangled me with my own head scarf. She seemed drugged to me. I struggled with her so finally she let me go but she took money I had in my cup. She threw my cup on the ground, spit on me and hit me with her legs. After she left, I went inside the store and security there knew me, and they saw me crying. I showed them the woman who attacked me, so they called the police.’

Three women said that security guards from the store as well as store workers tried to force them to leave their spots. Vulnerable Romanian Roma women feel that people treat them worse when compared to other migrants in Sweden. They felt that people saw them as ‘different’ and ‘strangers’, so they don’t feel welcome in Swedish society. Ana spoke about her encounter with guards:

‘Guard from the store forced me to leave but I came back so he started screaming at me. I should have stayed to see what he does to me because I didn’t do anything wrong. I asked him if he had family and children and he said that he did so I told him that he has a job to support them. I told him that I don’t have a job and that this is my only way to support my family. I said to him that if he makes me leave from this place than my children back home will not have any food to eat.’

Moreover, Emily was held against her will by a store worker:
‘The salesman from the store came to me because he didn’t want to let me sit there so he took me and held me violently by my hand. I started crying. He took my cup also, but I wasn’t afraid for that I thought he is going to blame me for stealing. I never steal. He called the police about me, but I think police asked him if I did something, but he couldn’t say anything. I was just sitting by the door of the store and he was upset that I was begging by that store. I think he held me about an hour and a half and tried to call police again, but he told that I didn’t steal anything, so police never came. He told me I am crazy and that I should never come by the store again.’

Ana (30 years old) spoke about her friend who got her bag stolen by a group of men, but her friend never tried to address the police.

‘A woman that has 60 something years had her bag stolen with all her money and id by some men that came out of a car. They pulled on her and forced her, but no one around said anything about it.’

Cristina (59 years old) also spoke about how their possession got stolen:

‘I’ve been coming to Sweden for five years. I had incidents such as a man who was high stealing my phone and taking my money. But I could see that he was high.’

To sum it up thus far, women are weak and easy targets for offenders during the time they spend at their daily spots but also while walking on the street when they risk being followed. Their victimization experiences range from verbal violence to discrimination, sexual harassment and physical assault. Perpetrators include random passers-by but also security and staff at the stores. Sexual victimization seems to be the most disturbing for some women.

**Several reasons behind victimisation**

Women perceived multiple reasons to why they are attacked. Most common answers included combination of being a woman, a beggar, being ‘different’ and being visible on the street as ethnic Roma due to clothing. Three women claimed that things have changed in the last three years and social attitudes changed towards Roma beggars to worse. Ana spoke about it during her interview:

‘They would never come at a Swedish woman but because I am Roma and I am different from them they allow themselves. I am on the streets. I have no value in their eyes. Respects towards women changed. Everyone told me that women are respected in Sweden even Swedish police. But I see somethings else. It is other way around now. It doesn’t matter if woman comes from Romania or any other country she must be respected. They discriminate against us because we are women and we are not the same as them.’

Participants saw that attitudes changed, and vulnerable Romanian Roma are now seen as outsiders in Sweden. People seem to think that Roma do not want to work and prefer to beg. Informants felt that people. Ana (30 years old) said that things were different, and she felt she had no support anymore:

‘Three years ago, things were different. If someone would mock us other people would come and make them stop. People would stand up for us. Now people
swear and spit on us while telling us to go home. Attitudes changed. All I want things to be better for women because now it is not ok.’

Brigitta (28 years old) considered that media and political discourse affected how people treat street workers:

‘I think she attacked me because politicians made it clear that it is fine to treat us badly and act against us and make us leave. They spoke in interviews and on TV so that the Swedes would understand that they would not go to jail if they did bad things to us. They’re not afraid to this day either. General population can’t stand us, they hate us. They don’t see us, but we see them.’

Indeed, Roma became scapegoats in the Swedish society because of xenophobic politicians and media that brought up outdated Roma prejudices. This is dangerous because crimes against vulnerable Roma may have same reasons as crimes committed by Fascists and Nazis movements (Hammarberg 2008).

Most of the informants stressed that their ethnicity in combination with being a woman and begging was explanatory to their victimization. All the women talked about their visibility when compared to men. Brigitta explained during her interview:

‘Our clothes make us visible. I tried to talk to other women so that we all would start wearing pants. We are not ashamed in front of Swedes to wear our traditional style. We are ashamed in front of our own Roma men to wear clothes that make your legs visible. That is the issue.’

Diana (40 years old) considered that all three elements of being Roma, visible as woman and being a street worker influenced abusive treatment:

‘They act like this because we beg and because it is not in our culture for women to wear pants so than they can see that we are Roma. I feel they hate us especially when they scream ‘Go gypsies!’ This is offensive to me. It makes me want to cry.’

In same manner, Cristina suggested that it was her lifestyle that caused her vulnerable position. Her being a street worker made her at risk of facing potential offenders. She is not able to protect herself while sitting down so offenders see it as an opportunity for abuse:

‘We are Roma, we are strangers, we are just beggars that have no power. We just sit with our heads bowed down. That is how I do it. Even if they offend me or speak bad, I just smile at them and then they just leave me alone.’

Emily who doesn’t speak any English or Swedish found it difficult to understand what people were saying to her but still she could tell when they were aggressive towards her:

‘It happened to me because I was sitting down and begging. I don’t understand what they say so I don’t always know, and I can’t be sure. But I can see their disgust with me. I told you only recent things. People are racist, it is worse now.'
People call me ‘Zinger’ and that I understand. They recognize us from afar that we are Roma because of our clothes.’

All in all, according to women’s own understanding, they are victims for multiple reasons. Wrongdoers pursue the group to commit crimes motivated by their hate towards the group in general, but women are also an easier target and they are more visible on the streets. Begging as activity also provoked the offenders.

**Negative consequences on well-being**

Informants feel that life is difficult in home-country, but it is more difficult in Sweden because besides missing and worrying about their children who are left back home with grandparents, they feel stressed because of the offenders. Their overall mental and physical health are negatively affected by victimization. Women that are victimized repeatedly have elevated levels of fear of crime (Andersson 2018). Their emotional distress seems to be accumulating over time with various negative outcomes. Ana described situations that are most stressful for her:

‘Sexual harassment is bothering me the most. I get panic attacks because of it. I am left with this fear. Sometimes when I sit at the store my heart starts beating fast I can feel it in my throat because thoughts come to me that when I leave the store I might me raped or even killed in the park because it is so dark and there are no lights…My mental state is not good because of that. They don’t want to steal money from us they want our body.’

Women who get sexual proposals are afraid for themselves, their honour and how their family would be affected if they were forced. They feel that incidents provoke distress, feelings of paranoia and humiliation. Ana felt she had no value as a person for mainstream population:

‘The incidents happen so often that they accumulate and provoke stress for me. People swear and try to make me go away and on top of that when others come to ask me for sex, I feel even worse. Sometimes I feel dirty because I think ‘God, what do these people think of us women who come here to beg from other countries.’

Her husband is also affected by her sexual victimization:

‘I feel I have no value so many times. Yesterday I told my husband about men that come to me to ask for sex because it is better for him to hear it from me. In our culture it is not legal for a woman to go with another man. So, when I told him he felt like someone physically hit him. Now he is also afraid than someone could catch me and do things to me. For men this is also a stress. They have these thoughts about what happens if they leave us to beg during daytime and then someone catches us and rapes us. They could never touch us again even if it was against our will. My husband wouldn’t spend one more second with me after that. For Roma it is great shame and woman must respect their husband and even if we argue I would never get another man.’

Two of the informants said that they needed medical treatment because of their experiences of victimization:
'I was at hospital for the anxiety I have. They prescribed me pills for stress because of that. I never took them in my life before I just started taking them here (in Sweden). At the hospital they told me that my stress level is high. They told me that I had a panic attack, so I need to take this treatment.' (Ana, 30 years old)

'I went to emergency care because my heart was beating fast after a day of begging. It happened because they treat me like that. I don’t steal, I don’t pull on anyone. I just look at the ground.' (Diana, 40 years old)

The informants expressed feelings of sadness, pain, panic and hopelessness while they were victimized and after the incidents. Brigitta, who experienced physical attack in Malmö, said that that her mental state was affected ever since the incident occurred:

‘After the attack I felt so bad. I thought if that woman wouldn’t have let me go, I would have peed myself. I had a panic attack. I had no air. I felt like I was alone in a forest when it happened but maybe God made her let me go so, she didn’t hurt me more. I was terrified. Since then I am afraid to sit and beg, to walk alone on the streets’

Emily is being repeatedly abused by the same individual. Her mental state is being negatively affected by it:

‘Believe me, I felt stress when he came back. I thought I knew when he would come. I thought ‘he’s coming, he’s coming! He’s going to pick on me again!’ It was if I would have a partner who would come and beat me. The whole time I sat there I stressed about that. After having my own personal stress, I would worry about him even more. I started to recognize him immediately out of a hundred persons. He always speaks to me, but I don’t understand other languages. He stresses me very bad!’

To sum up, women informants expressed being constantly stressed for their children back at home and not being able to provide them enough money for decent living in conjunction with being exposed to traumatizing experiences of victimization. They felt that they were humiliated, dehumanized and compared with ‘dogs’ or ‘wolves’ among sheep in view of majority society. Some participants felt that a lot of women do not talk about their victimization enough so nothing can be done about it, on the other hand a woman in her late 20s expressed that she was deeply discouraged after she tried to make things better for the community during a long period of time but it didn’t make her or other Roma lives better in any way so she gave up. Women felt disconnected to society around them (Andersson, 2018).
**Relationship with the police officers**

When asked about reporting of the incidents to the police 4 out of 5 women believed that police are not to be trusted. Two of the five women faced language barriers, so it was difficult for them to report to the police. Ana spoke about lack of proof and the fact that her stories alone wouldn’t count for the police:

'Someone should film people that harass me with a hidden camera as proof for the police. Because I personally don’t have trust in the police. I would film them myself, but I don’t always have my phone charged. This is big reason for not going to the police because I haven’t got enough proof to show them. If I just say to the police that someone came to swear at me, they can do nothing about it. But if I had proof than they would be obligated to help me and other women too.'

She also believes that other women are afraid to contact police officers because they would provoke majority society to have even more feelings of hate towards Roma community:

‘Other women think that if they would go to the police than discrimination and hate against Roma would grow even more in society. I am not afraid about that because hate is hate and it grows anyway.’

Interviewed women consider that there is no witness support and people might help them for a short moment, but they will not help with police reporting. A witness might help and call the police, but they would leave after police came:

‘If people who witness incidents would offer us support and come with us to the police other women would have more courage to come forward and tell what is happening in Sweden. Many people don’t know what is happening in Sweden.’

Most women do not trust the police because they experienced aggression from the police such as confiscation of vehicles, possessions. Ana described how she was taken against her will to an unknown location by police officers:

‘I don’t trust the police. One night we were sleeping in the parking lot, but they don’t allow it because we must stay in a camping spot and not parking. There were many people sleeping in cars mostly husband and wife. Out of all cars they chose our car and they woke me up … They took me into car and drove me far away from the parking. They only took me alone and they didn’t have a right to do it. They took me somewhere between the buildings so that I wouldn’t know how to get back. They wouldn’t let me answer my phone because it was ringing the whole time.’

Emily also mentioned police waking her up during night-time:

‘Police woke us up late in night so we would have to find other places to sleep. We would find spots under buildings that are more covered. We are homeless people here.’

Vulnerable women do not have trust in anyone outside their community let alone the police. Many do not speak any English or Swedish which makes it difficult to
communicate and ask anyone for help, but main reason is that women are too scared to trust anyone.

‘Other women wouldn’t even tell you what I am telling you there is no way they would go to the police.’ (Ana, 30 years old)

‘Other women don’t go to the police either. What should we do at the police? God forbid. We had videos how police took our cars, but nothing happened. Police are the once who beat us and spit on us and made us go away. If police can beat us of course a random Swede or Arab or other nation can. I don’t even trust myself. How can I trust the police?’ (Brigitta, 28 years old)

Diana faced language barriers and has trust issues in relation to the police officers:

‘I never talked to police. I don’t speak English, but I would speak to them if I could every time something happened to me. We don’t trust them, and I think they are racist too. They always look bad at us. It happened that they took our car and took every clothes out of it. That’s why we don’t trust them.’

Emily has a similar opinion and feels that reporting wouldn’t make a difference for her:

‘I never went to the police. I cannot speak language and people who do this to me are their own people so they wouldn’t do me justice. There is no point of me going there. They don’t feel sorry for me. I feel a stranger here and decriminalized against. I am used to this. I don’t know other women that went to police.’

As we can see, women described their relationship with the police officers as unreliable and lacking trust. Roma women expressed their fear of police officers because they were aggressive and capable of committing bias crime against the group (Wigerfelt & Wigerfelt, 2015). Poor ethnic minorities are those who suffer most from nonreporting because they are the once who are systematically mistreated but still, they consider costs much higher then benefits in relation to reporting (Skogan, 1984). Their coping strategies never include talking with the authorities but rather addressing people in the community and family.

To sum up thus far, most RW feel completely disappointed with the system and don’t see how things could improve for them. They experience victimization repeatedly and suffer from it. Reasons for being victimized are overlapping so when something happens to them, they see it as consequence of their ethnicity, gender and occupation all at the same time. The feel unwelcome and insignificant in Swedish society with no one to protect them. It should also be pointed out that some of the RW became very used to being treated badly. Some women believe that finding a job would help them earn more respect. Most of the women are tired of their lifestyle and would like to work because it would offer them a stable income and respect from the majority society until then women would benefit from a safe place to sleep in order to have time to recover after difficult days.
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to give voice to women who are ‘socially and politically silent’ (McRobbie 1982 p. 52) and increase level of awareness amongst the public and the authorities of the vulnerability of Romanian Roma women who support themselves by begging on public spaces of Malmö, Sweden. This study has reported victimization experiences and their consequences for victims who are women and members of a socially vulnerable group who support themselves by begging in public spaces in Malmö, Sweden. Even though there are reasons to believe that women belonging to this group are exposed to multiple reasons for harassment, discrimination and verbal abuse (Andersson 2018; Wallengren & Mellgren 2018), they have been underrepresented in victimization studies. The following concluding chapter will discuss methodology, findings and will conclude with a discussion in relation to future research in this field. As previously stated, that lack of knowledge in this field may result into difficulties in creating policies for a safer, better future for vulnerable Roma women (Migrom 2018).

Results discussion

Present research project is one of a few studies that strived to report experiences of victimization of vulnerable Roma with focus on women. Author would like to bring up several interesting findings.

Firstly, results showed that majority of vulnerable Romanian Roma women had at least one experience of victimization ranging from verbal abuse, physical violence to sexual harassment during their time spent in Sweden. Women insisted that they became victims much more than men because men were not subjected to specific kind of violent crimes such as sexual harassment, physical assault. It is important to focus on the fact that women are victimized for several different reasons at the same time rather than one isolated motive such as ethnicity which indicates intersectionality in their reasons for being vulnerable. (Andersson & Mellgren 2018; Chakraborti & Garland 2012; Collins 2016). They also argued that men did not have to wear traditional Roma clothing style as women did. Clothing was perceived as a reason for being visible and risk being followed and assaulted also after leaving their usual spot at the store. Women felt they that are more exposed than men because they do not have means to protect themselves (Wallengren & Mellgren, 2018). Besides being sexually harassed and physically attacked, women were humiliated, spit on and had their possessions stolen. It was pointed out that perpetrators were mostly white males. Women indicated that most of the incidents happened while they were at public spaces either sitting down or walking on the sidewalk. During night-time women described as being threatened mostly by police officers and gangs.

Secondly, participants reported several reasons behind their victimization. Majority stated that they were victimized because they were Roma and they were women as well as labelled as ‘beggars’. Because reasons for victimisation seem to be diverse, they go in line both with lifestyle exposure theory (Meier and Miethe 1993; Sampson et.al. 1987) and Chakraborti and Garland’s (2012) argument that bias crime perpetrators can be motivated by aspects of identity that intersect with other contextual factors (in this case activity of begging and being a woman).
Structural choice theory can also be confirmed by the fact that women spend so much time outside in proximity with potential offenders who see them as easy target (Miethe & Meier 1990). All women believed that societal attitudes towards Roma changed for the worst in recent years possibly because media and political discourse presented Roma community in a negative way (Hansson & Jansson 2019).

Thirdly, women disclosed different consequences of their victimization. Their health was affected and some women were taking prescribed medication for anxiety which they stated they had never taken before coming to Sweden, also women reported being stressed and afraid that their offenders would come back, anxious and paranoid that they would be followed after leaving their spot. Mostly women stressed about being forced into sexual relations which affected their husband’s well-beings as well. In long run all these stressors might affect women’s mental and physical health (Beijer et.al 2018; Wenzel et.al. 2000). Aside from physical consequences some women felt discouraged, helpless and let down by the society around them in general which can stop them from creating bonds with host society that could help them change their occupation (Andersson 2018).

Most of the women stated that their relationship with police officers was tense. Police officers sometimes acted aggressively towards Roma homeless community. They confiscated cars and drove people to unknown locations. Women believe that police would not make any difference on the contrary, some women felt that they would be harmed by reporting their experiences. Another reason to refrain from reporting was lack of evidence as women said they contacted the police but because they had no proof nothing was done regarding their situation. A few women stated that they did not speak any English or Swedish so communicating to the officers was a problem too. Even though the process may be difficult it is important to facilitate a better communication with the police based on trust. Women may not want to communicate directly with the police that is why new ways of collaboration should be explored such as, third party reporting and NGO support.

Methodology discussion
Recent findings suggest that future research could benefit from documenting experiences of victimization of female Roma population in Sweden (Andersson 2018; Wallengern & Mellgren 2018). In recent years, research on Roma ethnic minority in Sweden progressed (ibid.) but knowledge on members of this minority is still scarce (Ellard-Gray et.al 2015; Liamputtong 2007; Sydor 2013). One possible explanation is that women often refuse to participate in any type of research, including victimization studies (Couper & Leeuw 2003; van Goor et. al. 2005). Another explanation is difficulties in accessing the group. According to present study, the most efficient way was to contact women through an organization and speak to them in settings that they felt comfortable with. Women did not feel the need to conceal their identities during the time they spent at the organization thus there was no questioning whether they belong to Roma community, also because all the women spoke a form of Roma language which is rarely known by persons outside the community. Semi structured in-depth interviews facilitated gathering of rich and meaningful data on experiences and consequences of victimization (Sharan et.al. 2015). This method gave opportunity
to clarify details that would not be possible to obtain with a survey (Sharan et al. 2015). By spending time at the organization student also had opportunity to get a better understanding of women’s present situation, attitudes towards the authorities and what changes they would like to see in relation to Roma women situation in general.

Student is not part of ethnic Roma community, but she is a woman with Romanian nationality. The gender and nationality of the student proved to be important when working with this minority group both for accessing the group and gaining their trust. Women are self-declared Roma, but they also hold on to their Romanian identity which created a common background with student. Some authors argue that vulnerable women are able to disclose more when talking to a female (Cotterill 1992; Davids 2014; Gerassi et al. 2017). But even though student constructed a relationship with participants some distance was kept because student treated the women with respect especially because most of the participants were much older than student.

The present study had some limitations which are comparable to most of qualitative studies that conduct interviews. Women participants might not be representative to all vulnerable Roma women who support themselves by begging in Sweden, still the results can help us understand experiences of victimization of vulnerable Roma women and are in line with the aim of this study. Another issue is that women talked about their experiences in retrospective so they might not have recalled all the exact details on the incidents regardless, women stated clearly the reasons they perceived to be victimized for and consequences the incidents had on them. Even if present project had its limitations it has potential to contribute in documenting crimes committed against vulnerable Romanian Roma women. One of the strengths of this project is the validity of interview data. Given responses tended to be quite detailed and student posed same questions at different times during the interviews and the answers were the same as the first version. Moreover, women were witness to one another’s experiences of victimization, women were interviewed separately from one another, but their story details matched perfectly. The only obstacle to validity may be that past events are not as clear in memory of victims.

**Conclusion and possible future studies**

This study demonstrated that vulnerable Romanian Roma women in Malmö, Sweden are exposed to different types of crime and endure their consequences. It was shown that many of the crimes may be result of bias towards Roma minority, but reasons intersect with gender and occupation of the women.

There are possible grounds for new areas of research proposed in this project. It would be interesting to gather information on perpetrators own perspectives on committing crimes against vulnerable Roma women. Furthermore, younger women seem to be more vulnerable to victimization, but they are often the once who do not want to disclose, even though they are the once who need to be helped the most so it could be an area for future examination. Women did not speak about being victimized by members of their own group and this could also be subject for future research.
Another interesting subject brought up by women is that they see as beneficial to have women-only meetings to encourage members of the group to speak up about their experiences. Having a safe place to sleep was also stated as something that would alleviate some of the daily stress.

Overall conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that policy makers should consider women’s vulnerability in order to be able to understand why women are so exposed to victimization and how victims can be offered more support. Vulnerable women have different needs from vulnerable men and, organizations and policy makers should create more possibilities for these women to help them change their lives and break cycle of victimization.
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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Ethical Approval

Project: Experiences and consequences of victimization of Roma women from Romania in Malmö, Sweden

Student: Victoria Iachim

Supervisor: Simon Wallengren

Rapporteur: Anette Gjörloff Wingren

The Ethics Council’s statement on application HS 2019 löp nr 85 presented 2019-04-12

Research questions:
- In what way Roma women are victimized during their stay in Malmö?
- What are the consequences of victimization on Roma women?
- What do women perceive as reasons for being victimized?
- Why some women choose to report while other women choose not to? What suppresses victim reporting?

Material and selection: 5-7 Roma women in Malmö. The information letter will be distributed in their language. Data collection: Interviews will be performed, recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymous. After the study is finalized, the data will be destroyed.

Report from the ethical board:
In the application, the student write “Results from this study may be published in relation to another ongoing project at … organization”. In case a publication, except for in MUEP, is planned, the information must be clearly included in the information letter.
The study can be performed as described in the documents sent to the board.
The board wishes the student good luck with the performance of the study.

For the ethical board

Anette Gjörloff Wingren
Member of the Ethics Council at the Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University

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Appendix 2. Introduction Letter

My name is Victoria Iachim and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project on the experiences and consequences of victimization among the Roma women who support themselves by begging in Malmö. The information will be used for a master thesis from Malmö University, Sweden. With the use of information collected in this study, I hope to highlight and raise awareness about the experiences of victimization and their consequences on well-being among the vulnerable Romanian Roma women in Malmö, Sweden.

If you decide to participate, I would like to conduct an interview with you. You have been selected for this study because you are a self-declared Romanian and are currently staying in Malmö and supporting yourself by begging. The interview will be done in a place where you feel comfortable and take approximately one hour. No one except you and me will be present during interview. The interview will be audio recorded in order to be transcribed and analysed by me at later phases of this study. In case you do not wish to be recorded I will take notes instead.

I hope that the information from this research project will be influential in raising awareness about experiences and consequences of victimization of the Roma women community in Malmö, Sweden. If you do find any of the issues discussed upsetting, I can refer you to a third-party organization for assistance.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point without stating reasons. Your decision whether to participate in this study will not affect any of the services that you currently access. You are not obliged to answer any questions which make you feel uncomfortable. Your identity will not be disclosed in any report resulting from the study. All names will be substituted with fictional names in the Master thesis. Results from this study may be published in a scientific journal.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research study, its procedures, or risks and benefits, you should contact me at the following number 0769310283.

Hereby, are you willing to participate in this study?
Appendix 3. Interview questions

Interview started with short introduction:

“My full name is Victoria Iachim, and I am a student of Criminology Master’s Programme here, in Malmö. I know that life on the streets is not easy and you might have gone through unpleasant experiences while being a street worker. I want to understand from your point view how these experiences affected you.”

The interview began with an ice breaker question:

- How long have you been in Sweden?

Interview had pre planned questions but were also flexible to stray from guide when appropriate. Probing questions were used as needed.

The interview guide contains topics and questions as follows:

Experiences of victimization during time spent in Sweden.

- Since moving to Sweden did you feel threatened or scared?
- Did you experience any type of harassment including intimidation more than once? Did you experience any physical abuse? Did you experience any verbal abuse? Did you feel discriminated against by anybody? Tell me more…
- How often do these incidents happen?
- Aggressors, were they male or female?
- In what circumstances did the event occur? During which part of your day incidents occur most often?
- Do you know other women who had the same experiences?

Perceived reasons behind victimization.

- Why do you think that person did it to you?
- Did aggressor ever give you an indication to why they acted this way towards you?

Possible impact on victims.

- How the incidents affected your mental and physical state?
- Have you ever visited hospital after it happened to you?
- Did you suffer materially from the events?
- Do you know anyone else hurt in this way? How did it affect you?

Reporting of the incidents.

- Did you ever try to report the incidents to the police?
- Could you describe why you did (or did not)?
- Do you know any other women that reported incidents to the police?