

Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own, except where work which has formed part of jointly authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

Modern slavery is a heinous, unethical, and illegal phenomenon affecting more than 40.3 million individuals worldwide. It is spread across several sectors, with construction being one of the most important. Modern slavery in construction projects has been scarcely studied despite its relevance and prevalence. This PhD research addresses this gap in knowledge by investigating modern slavery in construction projects. It employs a qualitative research design involving three main methods: a systematic literature review on modern slavery in projects, a single case study of the construction of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program, and semi-structured interviews with 22 managers in the construction sector. The key contributions to knowledge made by this PhD are as follows. First, it develops a conceptual framework for the study of modern slavery in construction projects; second, it introduces modern slavery in construction management; third, it identifies why modern slavery occurs in construction projects and highlights the importance of “political will” in fighting the phenomenon worldwide; fourth, it introduces and contextualizes the phenomenon of modern slavery in construction projects through the Fraud Triangle Theory; and fifth, it reveals a disconnection between construction companies’ official anti-modern slavery statements and the reality on construction sites and identifies the reasons for this disconnection. The key limitations of this PhD research are the restricted nature of the sector, its geographic scope, its reliance on qualitative data and the effectiveness of modern slavery training. The limitations are followed by proposed areas for future research.

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List of Abbreviations

APM	Association for Project Management
CHAS	Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme
CIOB	Chartered Institute of Building
CMS	Critical Management Studies
EU	European Union
EURAM	European Academy of Management
FTT	Fraud Triangle Theory
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GLAA	Gangmasters & Labor Abuse Authority
GSI	Global Slavery Index
IBE	Institute of Business Ethics

ILO	International Labor Organization
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHS	National Health Service
NOC	No Objection Certificate
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OWP	Organization for World Peace
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
UAE	United Arab Emirates

List of Publications and Candidate’s Contribution

This section lists and briefly explains the three peer-reviewed journal articles included in this thesis. The three publications are fully included in Section 2 (Article Publication 1, 2 and 3). This PhD follows the “*alternative style of doctoral thesis*”. In order to fulfil the conditions for an alternative style of doctoral thesis, the protocol states that:

“A minimum of three manuscripts should be incorporated into the alternative style of thesis.

- *One of the included manuscripts should have been accepted for publication but it does not need to have been published at the time of the submission of the thesis;*
- *Another included manuscript should have been submitted and should have received either an invitation to revise and resubmit or a potential acceptance subject to major revisions.*
- *Other included manuscripts should have been submitted for publication..”*

Therefore, the three publications included in Section 2 fulfil the “*protocol for the format and presentation of an alternative style of doctoral thesis including published material*” by the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences of the University of Leeds, as shown below:

List of publications:

1. Alzoubi, Y., Locatelli, G., & Sainati, T. (2023). Modern Slavery in Projects: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda. *Project Management Journal*, 54(3), 235–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728221148158>. **Scopus-indexed journal, Impact Factor: 5.0/ 5-Year Impact Factor: 5.7.**
2. Alzoubi, Y., Locatelli, G., & Sainati, T. (2023). The ugly side of construction: Modern slavery in the 2022 FIFA World Cup program. *Construction Management and Economics*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2023.2269434>. **Scopus-indexed Journal, Impact Factor: 3.4, 5-Year Impact Factor: 3.8.**
3. Alzoubi, Y., Locatelli, G., & Sainati, T. (2023). Turning a Blind Eye: Ignoring Modern Slavery in the Race to Construction Project Completion. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*. (Major review). **Scopus-indexed Journal, Impact Factor: 5.1, 5-Year Impact Factor 5.6.**

For all the three Article Publications submitted, the candidate was responsible for the following:

- The identification of the research problem;
- The formulation of the aim and research questions;
- Identifying the appropriate data collection and analysis methods;
- The collection of data and analyzing it;
- The identification of a suitable theoretical lens after extensive research;
- Interpretation of results;

- Discussion of results;
- Complete writing of the first draft of the article;
- Finalizing the article.

The role of co-authors was to provide constructive feedback on the first draft of the article to help improve the content and quality of the article so that it is in line with the standards and expectations of peer-reviewed journals.

Current Status of the Article Publications:

The current status of the three Article Publications included in this thesis is as follows:

Article Publication 1: Published.

Article Publication 2: Published.

Article Publication 3: Major review.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in three main sections.

Section 1 (Introductory Materials): This section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection presents an introduction that includes a brief research background and identifies the gap in knowledge, the research aim, and the research questions (RQs). The second subsection is a literature review introducing the problem and developing a narrative on the whole body of research on modern slavery. Finally, the third subsection addresses the methodology, outlines the overarching research philosophy and research design of this PhD research, and explains the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Section 2 (Article Publications): This section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection presents Article Publication 1, which addresses RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 of the thesis,

and the second subsection presents Article Publication 2, which addresses RQ4 of the thesis. Finally, the third subsection presents Article Publication 3, which addresses RQ5 of the thesis. Each of these three article publications includes the following main sections: introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusions.

Section 3 (Discussion and Conclusions): This section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection presents a discussion that articulates the PhD's contribution to knowledge in the field of construction management and brings together and supports the three article publications. The next subsection is a conclusion summarizing the PhD research, its contribution to knowledge, its implications for practice, its limitations, and future areas for research. Finally, the third subsection presents a list of activities completed during the PhD research journey.

1.0 Introductory Materials

1.1 Introduction

Modern slavery is defined as “*the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised*” (Slavery Convention, 1926, p. 16).

It is a complex and sensitive worldwide problem (Benstead et al., 2018) affecting both undeveloped and developed countries (Han et al., 2022; Stevenson & Cole, 2018). There are more than 40.3 million victims of modern slavery worldwide (Banerjee, 2020; Dodd et al., 2022). Modern slavery involves holding individuals as modern slaves or in servitude, compelling them to work and live under poor conditions (Wen, 2016), or tricking them into traveling for good job opportunities with the intent of exploiting them (Szablewska & Kubacki, 2023).

The modern slavery literature is spread across various areas, such as agriculture (Howard & Forin, 2019; Kunz et al., 2023), manufacturing (Stevenson & Cole, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2019), construction (Dodd et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2021), public health (McCoig et al., 2022; Such et al., 2020), and sex work (Kempadoo, 2016; Maciotti et al., 2020).

The construction sector, with its complex supply chains, reliance on low-skilled labor (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021), and several low tiers of subcontracting, makes it the most prevalent project sector to modern slavery (CIOB, 2016, 2018), with an estimated 18% of the modern slavery cases worldwide coming from the construction sector (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020). Modern slavery not only violates the human rights of individuals but also has dramatic legal, ethical, and economic consequences for businesses, companies, and even countries (Alzoubi et al., 2023a).

The relevance and importance of investigating modern slavery in construction projects cannot be overstressed, given the critical role the construction sector plays in global economic

development (CIOB, 2016; Russell et al., 2018) and the great negative impact it has on human rights. Modern slavery, encompassing forced labor, debt bondage, human trafficking, and other forms of exploitation, remains a prevalent challenge in construction projects worldwide (Dodd et al., 2022; Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021), and totally contradicts the worldwide efforts aimed at promoting human rights and ethical labor practices (United Nations, 2023). The presence and use of modern slavery in construction projects present a way of work progress powered by practices that undermine the very essence of social justice and equality. Hence, this PhD research is important and timely for several reasons:

Firstly, the construction sector's complex supply chains, labor-intensive nature and low-profit margins (Greco, 2021; Khan et al., 2020) make it a fertile ground for exploitative practices such as modern slavery. Hence, this PhD research sheds light on the dynamics and mechanisms through which modern slavery is spread, often hidden by complex contractual layers and subcontracting practices in construction projects. Moreover, understanding the consequences of modern slavery in construction projects is crucial for informing stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and civil society, about the scale and nature of the problem. This knowledge enables them to take coordinated action against modern slavery, promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical business practices.

Secondly, the topic's relevance extends beyond bridging gaps in academic knowledge but also influencing practice through industry stakeholders who bear the responsibility for implementing ethical practices and policies with policymakers to create and enforce laws to protect vulnerable people from modern slavery. By investigating modern slavery in construction projects, this PhD research can inform policy and practical development and strategies aimed at reducing modern slavery in construction projects.

Thirdly, the significance of this PhD research topic lies in its potential to safeguard workers' dignity and promote social justice. By understanding the different forms of modern slavery as well as identifying the mechanisms and reasons that foster modern slavery in construction projects, this PhD research promotes more ethical and sustainable practices in construction projects. This is not only a moral imperative but also enhances the construction sector's reputation and long-term viability by fostering fair labor standards and human rights (Brookes et al., 2020; Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018).

Fourthly, understanding the prevalence and forms of modern slavery in construction projects is crucial for developing effective actions to reduce this illegal and unethical practice. As countries strive towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 8, which aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all (United Nations, 2023), addressing modern slavery is not optional but a fundamental requirement.

Project studies literature consider areas of research that are relatable to modern slavery in projects, such as ethics (Bowen et al., 2007; Müller et al., 2016; Sarhadi & Hasanzadeh, 2022), social sustainability (Kivilä et al., 2017; Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022; Troje, 2023), human resource management (Gurmu & Ongkowijoyo, 2020; Huemann, 2010; Rajhans & Bhavsar, 2022), and health and safety (Chan et al., 2020; Hare et al., 2013; Manu et al., 2013). However, modern slavery in construction projects is still scarcely studied. For instance, at the time of writing the systematic literature review (SLR) (Article Publication 1), there were no articles in construction management journals that discussed modern slavery. Therefore, given the significant research gaps and lack of comprehensive research on the topic of modern slavery in construction projects, it is the focus of the current PhD research.

Modern slavery can take a wide range of forms (Szablewska & Kubacki, 2023). However, the construction management literature has remained silent on what the main forms of modern slavery are, why and how modern slavery occurs in construction projects, and what approaches construction companies are taking to address this criminal activity. This PhD research set out to fill this gap in knowledge. Therefore, it aims to investigate modern slavery in construction projects. In pursuing this overarching aim, the PhD research was guided by the following RQs:

***RQ1:** What are the main forms of modern slavery and the associated literature (as an embryonic field of study)?*

This RQ seeks to clarify the concept of modern slavery by examining the different definitions of modern slavery and the diverse forms it may take worldwide. Moreover, the RQ involves a comprehensive literature review on modern slavery from various disciplines such as social sciences, law, public health and sociology. This review will cover general statistics on the number of modern slaves, what constitutes modern slavery and how to prevent or reduce modern slavery.

***RQ2:** Which key elements of modern slavery are significant for construction projects?*

The high number of modern slavery cases in the construction industry raises questions about its underlying causes. This RQ seeks to identify the elements that foster modern slavery in construction projects. It will explore the structural conditions that make construction projects susceptible to modern slavery, the impact of the kafala system and the complexities of the construction supply chain. Furthermore, this RQ will propose strategies to address modern slavery in construction projects at different levels.

***RQ3:** How can we move forward the discussion about modern slavery in the context of construction projects?*

Considering the lack of research into modern slavery in the literature on construction management, another key concern that oriented this PhD research was to determine the shape of a future research agenda in order to start and advance a discussion in the literature on construction management about modern slavery in projects, particularly construction projects.

These three RQs are covered in Article Publication 1.

RQ4: Why does modern slavery occur in construction projects?

This research builds on and extends the efforts to clarify the concept of modern slavery and develop explanations by focusing on the issue of why modern slavery occurs in construction projects.

This RQ is covered in Article Publication 2.

RQ5: What mechanisms explain the difference between the official anti-modern slavery statements of construction companies and the empirical observations in construction sites?

Despite the government legislation in several countries aimed at fighting modern slavery (Caruana et al., 2021; Wilhelm et al., 2020) and the publication of modern slavery statements by construction companies as a commitment to avoid this unethical and illegal practice, modern slavery continues to be highly prevalent in construction projects (Dodd et al., 2022). This situation highlights a disconnection between construction companies' stated commitments to fight modern slavery and the on-site reality. Following the results presented in Article Publication 2, future research articulated the importance of investigating the mechanisms construction companies employ to avoid modern slavery, which was the focus of this RQ.

This RQ is covered in Article Publication 3.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Introduction

Before discussing “modern slavery”, it is convenient to introduce the concept of “slavery”. Slavery is defined as *“the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”* (Slavery Convention, 1926, p. 6). Historically, slaves were in great demand in agriculture and sectors requiring high manual labor levels, such as construction, mining, and manufacturing (el-Mumin, 2020). Slavery has been in existence for thousands of years, and the first international agreement to abolish slavery came from the League of Nations’ “Slavery Convention of 1926” (Bales et al., 2011). Slavery has changed from being an officially legal trade of human beings based on ethnicity into a trade that is now unethical, illegal, criminal and hidden (Bales et al., 2011) and known as modern slavery.

Modern slavery as a term came into common use around 2007, popularized by academics investigating various types of involuntary labor (Smith & Johns, 2019). A universally accepted single definition of modern slavery does not exist. Still, a reasonable and applicable one is *“the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”* (Slavery Convention, 1926, p. 6).

There are significant differences between slavery and modern slavery. Compared to traditional slavery, modern slavery is less about race and ownership and more about exploitation (Stotts & Ramey, 2009). Modern slaves are exploited as long as they provide a profit and then dismissed with relevant ethical implications at personal, organizational and social levels. Throughout history, slavery was justified based on racial or ethnic superiority/inferiority; perpetrators of modern slavery do not attempt to justify this practice with such reasons; they are less concerned with color or race, being more geared towards exploiting the poor and vulnerable (Stotts & Ramey, 2009).

The problem of modern slavery is spread across the globe, with all countries being vulnerable to it (Christ et al., 2019; Wen, 2016). It is an unethical and illegal phenomenon mainly carried out in shadows, making it difficult to accurately estimate the total number of victims involved; however, estimations place the number of modern slaves in the order of tens of millions (Banerjee, 2020; CIOB, 2018; Esoimeme, 2020; Such et al., 2018, 2020).

Modern slavery encompasses keeping individuals in servitude, compelling them to work, or encouraging them to change or accept a job to exploit them later (Wen, 2016). Antislavery International defines the existence of modern slavery through one or more exploitative conditions: a) the coercion of individuals to work through mental or physical threats; b) the possession or exertion of control over an individual by the perpetrator, often through mental or physical violation; c) the dehumanization of individuals by treating them as property; d) the limitation of individuals' freedom of movement by physical means (Crane, 2013; Emberson, 2019; Flynn, 2019; Wen, 2016).

Modern slavery is a broad term that can be interpreted differently and includes many different forms that are more or less common depending on the culture and location. The forms include human trafficking (Bales et al., 2015; David & Salter, 2021; Scarpa, 2008; Turner, 2015), forced labor, sex trafficking (David & Salter, 2021; Phillips, 2020; Rioux et al., 2020; Such et al., 2018) and debt bondage (Bales et al., 2015; Natarajan et al., 2021; New, 2015).

Notable examples where modern slavery is taking place include *“the construction of FIFA World Cup stadiums in Qatar to the cotton farms of Uzbekistan, from cattle ranches in Paraguay to fisheries in Thailand and the Philippines to agriculture in Italy, from sweatshops in Brazil and Argentina to berry pickers in Sweden”* (Christ et al., 2019, p.837). Fighting modern slavery is a legal and ethical challenge for governments, nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs), media and other stakeholders (Larsen & Diego-Rosell, 2017; Stevenson & Cole, 2018).

Modern slavery literature is mainly related to law (Wen, 2016), geography (Cheer, 2018), public health (Helle & Steele, 2021) and gender study (Worden, 2018). Most of this literature focuses on the victims or the unethical and illegal organizations exploiting the modern slaves rather than the individuals who commit modern slavery (i.e. the perpetrators) (Crane, 2013; Laczko, 2005). Sectors of the economy in which labor exploitation is frequently employed include construction, manufacturing, agriculture and domestic services (GLAA, 2020).

1.2.2 Contextualizing Modern Slavery

Modern slavery is a widespread phenomenon despite the laws and initiatives developed to eradicate it. Until today, fighting modern slavery is a key challenge. It is included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals-08, target 8.7: *“Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end Modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”* (United Nations, 2020).

Modern slavery detrimentally affects the economic, physical, and social well-being of its victims and harms the operation of industries, communities, and entire nations (Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018). Nations, sectors, and communities involved in modern slavery are viewed as lacking integrity prioritizing profit over the well-being of individuals (IBE, 2019). For instance, Amnesty International (2016) highlighted how underpaid and exploited workers were being forced and used to construct the FIFA 2022 World Cup program in Qatar and described how these practices were criminal, unethical and undermining the reputation of the industries, communities and the country.

Factors contributing to the prevalence of modern slavery include corruption, conflict and war, natural disasters, economic challenges, limited educational opportunities, unemployment, discrimination, and poverty (Sabella, 2011; Such et al., 2019, 2020). Bales et al. (2011) argue that the cost of modern slaves is lower than that of historical slaves. For instance, in the 1850s, a slave in Alabama was estimated to generate approximately 5% profit based on their purchase price, while a modern slave can generate an annual return of two to eight times their purchase price. This enhances the benefit to slaveholders, making the overall cost/benefit balance extremely favourable for them (Bales et al., 2011).

Modern slavery is a public health concern (Srivastava, 2019). According to Cockbain & Brayley-Morris (2018) and Such et al. (2020), the implications for the health and safety of modern slaves depend upon the type, length, and level of abuse. Victims often have minimal or no job-specific training and are compelled to work long hours, increasing their risk of sustaining injuries, becoming disabled, or facing fatal accidents. When modern slaves have to work excessive hours in manufacturing, agriculture, construction or sex work, they are prone to experiencing a range of health issues that can affect them emotionally, physically, sexually, and mentally (Bales et al., 2011).

Insufficient awareness significantly restricts the efforts to eradicate modern slavery. A considerable part of the world's population remains unaware of the presence of modern slavery or is unconvinced about its existence (Bales et al., 2011; Heys et al., 2022). The hidden nature of modern slavery makes research in this area particularly difficult, leading to a lack of information, resources, and data for researchers, law enforcement, and policymakers. As a result, it becomes challenging to create laws, guidelines, frameworks, and strategies that could effectively address or eliminate the unethical and illegal phenomenon of modern slavery (Kidd & Manthorpe, 2017).

There is no straightforward way to determine whether a person is a modern slave or “just an exploited worker”. Conventionally, individuals employed in poorly compensated jobs are not classified as modern slaves, provided that the job is officially certified and they have the liberty to leave the job when they want. Modern slavery has an infinite shade of grey where there are situations that clearly fall into modern slavery as they include unethical and illegal elements such as force, coercion, intimidation or taking away identification documents.

1.2.3 Sensemaking of the Modern Slavery Literature

Globally, there are more slaves today than when slavery was legal (Christ et al., 2019; Gold et al., 2015). It is challenging to give accurate numbers of modern slaves. However, various estimates have been made in recent years, starting with the calculations of the Walk Free Foundation, which often estimates that 29 million people were in modern slavery in 2013, 36 million in 2014, and 45.8 million in 2016 (Landman, 2020; Landman & Silverman, 2019). The Walk Free Foundation and the International Labour Organization (ILO) collaborated in 2017 to produce an estimated 40.3 million individuals in modern slavery worldwide (Fellows & Chong, 2020; Landman, 2020; Such et al., 2018, 2020; Wright et al., 2020).

Modern slavery is recognized as existing in virtually every country, including Global North countries (Crane, 2013). The population held in what is considered to be modern slavery varies across the globe: estimates suggest that Europe and Central Asia have 3.59 million, the Arab States have 520,000, the Americas have 1.95 million, Asia and the Pacific have 24.99 million, and Africa has 9.24 million (Landman, 2020). According to the Global Slavery Index (GSI), in 2018, the highest number of modern slaves were found in North Korea. It is estimated that one in every ten people is likely to be victims of modern slavery (GSI, 2018). The ten countries with the highest rates of modern slavery globally are: “*North Korea, Eritrea, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Mauritania, South Sudan, Pakistan, Cambodia and Iran*” (GSI, 2018).

Modern slavery can take several different forms, and the literature does not agree on one definite list of forms of modern slavery. Forms of modern slavery include: 1. Human Trafficking, 2. Forced Labor, 3. Sex Trafficking, 4. Debt Bondage, and 5. others. This section provides a background on each of these forms.

1. Human Trafficking

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defined human trafficking as the *“recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”* (United Nations, 2020, p. 2).

Human trafficking is an unethical activity that involves moving people illegally, both internally within a country or internationally abroad, with the intention of their exploitation using abused power, abused vulnerabilities, coercion, or deception (Dando et al., 2016; GLAA, 2020; Machura et al., 2019). Human trafficking can take place for many reasons, including forced labor, sexual exploitation and forced marriage.

According to Emberson (2019), human trafficking often incorporates the following elements:

- “Movement”: This means being involved with dispatching, receiving, or transporting people. It is irrelevant how far the individuals involved are moved or whether they cross an international border.
- “Means”: These are the techniques involving traps, coercion, intimidation and false promises that traffickers employ to convince, encourage, or force victims to move.
- “Exploitation”: Refers to how an individual may suffer abuse, control, or be used as a profit-making commodity.

Human trafficking is quickly coming to represent one of the most rapidly expanding unethical aspects of organized crime (Stotts & Ramey, 2009). It represents the third-biggest income source after drug smuggling and the illegal arms trade. Criminal organizations frequently become involved in people trafficking as it yields high profits for little risk. In contrast to other commodities, a person can be used many times, and human trafficking does not demand significant capital investment (Bales et al., 2011).

Traffickers often make their victims pay in advance for travelling, telling them that a good job awaits them overseas; the money to make this payment is frequently loaned by the traffickers. Indebting the victims serves as another method of control. Upon reaching their destination, victims are told they must work for the traffickers to repay their debts (Emberson, 2019). The victim then effectively falls into the trap of modern slavery.

It is usual for the victims of human trafficking to have their identification documents, e.g. passports, taken away from them as soon as they arrive at their destination, which allows the traffickers to control the victims by isolating them and restricting their movement (Dando et al., 2016; Flynn, 2019). One common technique used by traffickers is to threaten to report victims to the authorities as “illegal aliens” or sex workers, causing them to fear reporting or communicating with the authorities regarding their enslavement (Stotts & Ramey, 2009). Moreover, other ways in which victims are bonded to their traffickers are threatening the victim or subjecting them to violence and withholding their wages (CIOB, 2018; Dando et al., 2016; Wilhelm et al., 2020). Also, controlling victims includes physical deprivation, e.g., withholding medical treatment, limiting food and water supplies, not allowing enough sleep, and creating fake debts (Dando et al., 2016).

2. Forced Labor

One of the well-known forms of modern slavery is forced labor (Bales et al., 2011; Crane et al., 2019). The ILO defines forced labor as “*all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily*” (ILO, 1930). Forced labor encompasses the exploitation of labor, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation (GLAA, 2020). Individuals subjected to forced labor are coerced into working and face mental, economic, and physical constraints that restrict their ability to leave their job (Rioux et al., 2020).

The ILO reports that the global illicit and immoral earnings from forced labor approximate US\$150 billion each year (Crane et al., 2019; LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2019; Stringer & Michailova, 2018). The ILO also notes that the profit made from each forced labor victim in countries of the Global North is triple that of victims in other regions. A majority of these victims are employed in sectors like domestic work, agriculture, construction, mining, or production (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2019), with an annual increase of over 1.1 million new forced labor victims (Kidd & Manthorpe, 2017).

3. Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is defined as “*the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act*”—and it’s considered “*severe*” when such an act is “*induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or . . . the person induces to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age*” (Sabella, 2011, p. 30).

The internet serves as a key tool enabling the sexual exploitation of millions globally (Giacobe et al., 2016). Sex trafficking is a critical and immoral problem that has extended worldwide, with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reporting in 2016 that approximately 54% of modern slavery survivors worldwide were initially trafficked for sexual (Worden, 2018).

The victims of this form of abuse were most frequently forced to work in massage parlours, strip clubs, brothels, or as escorts. Beyond psychological and emotional distresses, such as fear, anxiety, and depression, commonly experienced by those trafficked for sex work, they also face severe health complications and diseases, including trauma and HIV (Sabella, 2011).

Sexual exploitation of young women, in particular, represents a worldwide ethical issue. Criminal groups generate billions of dollars every year by illegally trafficking and exploiting young women (Bakirci, 2007). “Sex tourism” is an especially odious type of child sex trafficking that involves men travelling between different countries to sexually abuse children. However, regardless of the form the sex trafficking takes or the extent of the coercion or force involved in enslaving a victim, all sex trafficking is viewed as criminal and unethical activity (Sabella, 2011).

4. Debt Bondage

Debt bondage is a form of modern slavery that slaves often encounter. It is “*the world’s most widespread form of slavery*” (Natarajan et al., 2021, p. 242). The 1956 UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery defined debt bondage as “*the status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his personal services or of those of a person under his control as security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied towards the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services is not respectively limited and defined*” (United Nations, 1956).

Victims are compelled to work until they have repaid a financial debt, which could have been incurred by them or a family member. This debt often includes charges added by the perpetrators for transportation to the intended location. These individuals find themselves trapped in situations where they receive little or no compensation and are unable to negotiate

or alter the terms of their indebtedness. The earnings they make are almost for debt repayment (Sabella, 2011).

5. Others

Forced Marriage: The term forced marriage is used to describe situations in which individuals of any age are forced to enter into a marriage without their consent and are forced to remain married to their partner without wishing to do so (Patterson & Zhuo, 2018).

Child Labor: The ILO states that child labor deprives children of their childhood, undermines their dignity, adversely affects their future opportunities, and obstructs their mental and physical development. It typically includes work that is physically, emotionally, socially, and mentally strenuous, often carried out to the detriment of their education. Therefore, all work children perform should be regarded as child labor and should be outlawed (Srivastava, 2019).

Kafala System: The kafala system is a complicated system that is present and applied in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and consists of various legal components. These include specific residency regulations of the GCC members and appropriate employment and immigration statutes (el-Mumin, 2020).

The kafala system in the GCC is identified as a form of modern slavery due to several exploitative practices (el-Mumin, 2020). Firstly, it allows private authorities to exert full control over expatriates, often resulting in migrant workers receiving minimal wages as sponsors aim to minimize costs (Hall, 2018). Additionally, there are frequent instances of withheld wages, with migrant workers sometimes not being paid for their work, as seen in the case of an engineering company involved in the construction of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program in Qatar, where workers were not paid for months (Amnesty International, 2021; Bauomy, 2020). Moreover, the system imposes severe restrictions on the movement of migrant workers, using mechanisms such as non-objection certificates (NOC) and the confiscation of

passports by sponsors upon the arrival of migrants (Vachhatani, 2021). This is further exacerbated by the workers' inability to afford decent living conditions due to their low income, alongside the requirement of obtaining an exit permit from their sponsor to leave the country (el-Mumin, 2020).

1.2.4 Health Problems of Modern Slaves and Health Care Role

A key element that emerged from the literature is that research undertaken through support services with the survivors of modern slavery has noted several health problems which raise ethical issues. Many victims reported undergoing significant physical, mental, and verbal mistreatment, being viewed as commodities, and being expected to act with subservience (Williamson et al., 2020). Victims are exposed to physical health issues, mental health issues, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, panic attacks, suicide attempts, stress, anxiety, headache and depression, and sexual health issues, including sexually transmitted infections such as HIV (Ottisova et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020).

Slaveholders exacerbate the health issues of modern slaves by depriving them of adequate sleep or rest and restricting their access to food. Consequently, this depletion renders the slaves incapable of resisting their slaveholders or attempting to escape from their workplace (Bales et al., 2011).

Healthcare professionals are key in spotting cases of modern slavery (Such et al., 2018, 2019). Research with healthcare workers across various countries reveals a significant gap in knowledge and training on recognizing and responding to potential modern slavery cases (Williamson et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020). For instance, studies in the USA found that 28% to 50% of victims had encountered healthcare professionals during their enslavement without being identified (Grace et al., 2014). In the UK, a survey of 34 medical schools found that only nine provided training on detecting and addressing modern slavery (Saunders & Harris, 2019).

The Provider Responses, Treatment and Care for Trafficked People study also highlighted that National Health Service (NHS) staff often lack the skills to investigate modern slavery, with 78% feeling inadequately trained to recognize victims (Wright et al., 2020). This issue is concerning, given that healthcare professionals frequently come into contact with victims suffering from physical, sexual, emotional, or mental abuse (Grace et al., 2014).

1.2.5 Detecting and Fighting Modern Slavery

Workers in low-paid positions without job stability are at the highest risk of becoming victims of modern slavery, especially in industries more susceptible to such unethical and illicit practices, which include agriculture, food production, sex work, manufacturing and construction (Landman, 2020; Lewis et al., 2015). Migrant workers are the most likely to encounter insecurity as a result of what the UK's Trade Union Congress terms the increase of "vulnerable employment", i.e. any form of work where salaries are not enough for workers to avoid poverty (Lewis et al., 2015).

The detection, prevention, and mitigation of modern slavery are challenging because this unethical crime has many different manifestations, and it is widespread (Christ et al., 2019; Rauscher & Willert, 2020; Trautrimis et al., 2020). It is not always obvious where poor health and safety practices, inadequate working conditions, unfair payments or whether the person has the freedom to leave the workplace cross the line into modern slavery (GOV.UK, 2023).

Indicators of modern slavery can manifest in various ways, affecting victims' freedom, behavior, working conditions, accommodation, finances, and appearance (GLAA, 2020). Victims often find themselves without control over their personal documents, such as passports and travel permits, which the slaveholders usually hold. This lack of control restricts their ability to leave the country or seek employment elsewhere. Additionally, they may be confined

to their place of work and prevented from communicating, including being prohibited from accessing medical care.

Behavioral signs of modern slaves include an inability to speak the local language, a lack of awareness of their surroundings, and a tendency to let others, usually their exploiters, speak on their behalf. Victims often exhibit signs of anxiety, fear, or depression and may be coerced into criminal activities to survive. They also face physical and mental violence, making them too frightened to seek help, and are hindered from organizing or joining unions to voice their concerns.

The working conditions imposed on victims are severe; they have no control over their work schedule or location, often enduring excessively long hours across multiple jobs without breaks. They typically lack the necessary training or clothes for the jobs they do. Accommodation for victims is usually overcrowded and unsanitary, without the freedom to leave or choose their living conditions.

Financially, victims experience severe financial exploitation through non-payment or insufficient payment for the work they do. They are denied access to their savings and are often trapped in debt bondage. Physically, victims may have injuries indicative of abuse and wear the same clothes continuously without the opportunity to change, reflecting their lack of personal freedom. These indicators highlight the multifaceted nature of modern slavery, demonstrating how it severely impacts individuals' lives across different aspects.

To fight and eradicate the unethical and illegal practice of modern slavery, several countries have created legislation that makes international organizations and top companies more responsible legally and ethically for what goes on in their global operations and imposes a responsibility, both legally and ethically, for their worldwide businesses. These laws aim to

reduce the likelihood of human rights violations such as modern slavery (Wilhelm et al., 2020). Significant examples of such legislation include the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act in 2012, the UK Modern Slavery Act in 2015, France’s Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law in 2017, and Australia’s Modern Slavery Act in 2018 (Wilhelm et al., 2020).

Combating modern slavery requires political will and resources, elements frequently absent in governmental policies. For instance, Bales et al. (2011) provide an example by pointing out that Japan has every resource required to abolish modern slavery within its borders, but there is very little political motivation to do this; differently, some poor countries may be desperate to abolish modern slavery but lack the resources to deal with this phenomenon.

Businesses are obligated to ensure the protection of their workers from exploitation, maintain their safety, and comply with all relevant labor laws (including salaries and work hours), health and safety standards, human rights legislation, and international ethical guidelines (GOV.UK, 2023). More staff training is required for those who work in the clinical health sector to detect and fight the unethical activity of modern slavery. The clinical health sector has the greatest likelihood of receiving victims of modern slavery; therefore, more training helps them spot signs and respond to potential cases of modern slavery by directing the victims towards specialist support to explain their medical situation (Williamson et al., 2020).

1.2.6 Key Elements of Modern Slavery Relevant to Construction Projects

Modern slavery is prone to manifest in various projects, with construction projects being particularly vulnerable (CIOB, 2018; Dodd et al., 2022). This susceptibility can be associated with a) the significant proportion of migrant labor in construction, which increases the risk of modern slavery due to dependency on self-employment companies (Trautrimis et al., 2020); b) the industry’s low-profit margins, which encourages “cost-saving” measures that can sometimes be unethical and illegal, including poor living and working conditions (Greco, 2021;

Khan et al., 2020); c) the construction industry's lack of strict enforcement of labor standards (CIOB, 2018).

According to Russell et al. (2018), the worldwide budget for the construction sector will increase by 70% to 15 Trillion USD by 2025, fostering more cases of modern slavery. It is concerning that the nature work of the construction sector forces modern slaves to handle heavy materials, endure severe weather conditions, face exposure to dust and debris, and work from significant heights (Kamazima et al., 2012). Moreover, modern slaves are at risk of suffering injuries from transporting heavy materials from one place to another and operating unsafe machinery, often without adequate training or proper safety equipment (DeGraff et al., 2016). In the EU, the construction sector is second only to the sex industry in terms of the likelihood of encountering cases of modern slavery, especially during periods of labor shortages (CHAS, 2021). In this case, unscrupulous contractors may choose to overlook any irregularities in labor procurement, especially if they have to pay penalties for late projects (CIOB, 2018). Such informal practices frequently lead to fostering unethical and illegal practices such as modern slavery.

1.2.7 The Challenge of Detecting Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

The lack of precise data regarding the number of modern slaves in construction is because of a) the hidden nature of this unethical and illegal practice, b) construction sites being dispersed across the country, c) the reliance on temporary labor that moves from one project to another and d) the highly diverse nature of the international supply chains (Russell et al., 2018; Trautrim et al., 2020). Moreover, main contractors have a complex supply chain comprising many subcontractors, material suppliers and labor agencies. Thus, monitoring all these transactions is difficult because main contractors typically audit only the first two tiers of the supply chain, and organizations beyond these levels may remain unseen where cases of modern slavery are likely to take place (KPMG, 2020).

The ethical “transparency issue” to address the actual performance within the organization (Müller et al., 2013, 2016) and the lack of connection that sometimes exists between various tiers of a supply chain makes it relatively easy to hide modern slavery. For instance, while many construction companies claim to implement strict policies and procedures for worker protection, the lengthy and complicated procurement practices allow these companies to overlook the conditions of lower-tier subcontractors (CIOB, 2016). In the construction supply chain, some clients have created an environment where legitimate businesses struggle to operate and where unethical operators are facilitated. In the construction sector, certain practices encourage the reduction of labor standards, including project discounts, selecting the lowest bids for tenders, holding back fees, and the delay or absence of payments (CIOB, 2018).

1.3 Methodology

This section explains the overarching research philosophy and rationale behind the overall research design and explains how the data were collected and analyzed.

1.3.1 *Research Philosophy*

There are five major research philosophies as outlined by (Saunders et al., 2019):

1. **Positivism:** This philosophical approach operates on the premise that reality exists objectively and can be investigated and elucidated from outsiders' perspective without the researcher's influence. It formulates hypotheses based on established theories, frequently employing quantitative methods to collect empirical data. It underlines the importance of hypothesis testing as a fundamental aspect of its methodology.
2. **Critical Realism:** This philosophical approach acknowledges that although an objective reality exists, our perception of it is subject to the influence of social constructs and personal experiences. In essence, it asserts that our perceptions do not represent reality but rather a direct representation of it.
3. **Interpretivism:** This research paradigm offers new and detailed insights and interpretations into social contexts and situations. The task of researchers undertaking the interpretive approach is to comprehend and interpret the meanings individuals attach to their actions and social environments. Qualitative research methods are commonly employed, with a strong emphasis on comprehending complexity and context.
4. **Postmodernism:** This philosophical approach emphasizes the role of language and power dynamics in shaping our understanding of reality. It challenges established conventions while amplifying the inclusion of alternative and often overlooked perspectives.
5. **Pragmatism:** The pragmatism approach focuses on finding practical solutions to real-world problems that can guide future actions. It advocates for a flexible research approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to address research questions effectively.

This research adopts the philosophy of interpretivism. An interpretive stance sensitizes research to different points of view and, therefore, enables the generation of a rich understanding of the complex issue of modern slavery (Saunders et al., 2019). Modern slavery is a multifaceted and ambiguous phenomenon, ranging from work exploitation to modern slavery. This complexity is further exacerbated in construction projects due to the hidden nature of the phenomenon (Dodd et al., 2022; Pinnington & Meehan, 2023). Adopting the philosophy of interpretivism enables an in-depth exploration of these multifaceted elements and their interplay within specific contexts (Saunders et al., 2019). It also holds the potential to reveal the diverse and potentially contradictory interpretations and experiences of modern slavery (Yanow & Ybema, 2009).

Modern slavery in construction projects is closely linked with the prevailing social norms and business practices of the industry. An interpretive approach, which emphasizes understanding how individuals and communities interpret and perceive reality (Saunders et al., 2019), also holds the potential to provide valuable insights into the “how” and “why” behind the occurrence of modern slavery in construction projects as well as potential mechanisms for its prevention.

1.3.2 Research Design

This PhD research adopts a qualitative research design. Qualitative research allows an in-depth comprehension and interpretation of social phenomena to be gained within their natural contexts and places a strong emphasis on understanding the perspectives, meanings, and experiences of the participants involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). At its core, qualitative research delves into the “why” and “how” behind actions, decisions, and events to present a comprehensive and in-depth understanding that is often conveyed through textual or visual data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Given its capacity to provide depth, richness, and insight into human

behavior, opinions, and motivations (Creswell & Poth, 2016), it is appropriate for the exploration of the complexities, mechanisms, and motivations of modern slavery in construction projects.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of modern slavery in construction projects, this PhD research design incorporates distinct qualitative methods. These methods were chosen carefully to suit the five RQs guiding the research and provide a holistic and contextually rich perspective on modern slavery in construction projects.

Conducting an SLR served as a foundational step in addressing the first three RQs, offering a methodological approach that ensures a comprehensive and unbiased review of existing literature on a specific subject or research inquiry (Tranfield et al., 2003). The rigor and systematic nature of an SLR are crucial, as it involves carefully searching for, reviewing, and synthesizing available research according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This process enabled the candidate to examine deeply the various forms of modern slavery, facilitating a deep understanding of its diverse definitions across different contexts. This examination is critical, given the complex and multifaceted nature of modern slavery, which often experiences inconsistencies in its interpretation within academic literature (Caruana et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the SLR provided the opportunity to critically engage with the extant body of literature, allowing for the identification of critical elements of modern slavery relevant to construction projects. The SLR highlighted existing gaps within the current understanding of modern slavery in construction projects and also allowed the candidate to identify potential avenues for future research from the findings. These avenues are essential for promoting change designed to reduce and eventually eradicate modern slavery from construction projects.

A single case study was used to address the fourth RQ, leveraging this methodological approach's strength in offering great, detailed insights into particular phenomena. According to Yin (2017), the single case study is a powerful analytical methodology that facilitates an in-depth examination of specific issues, making it extremely suitable for investigating "why" modern slavery occurs in construction projects. Adopting a single-case study approach is particularly useful for investigating complex topics, providing a lens through which the multifaceted aspects of modern slavery in construction projects can be examined.

Moreover, as Yin (2017) articulated, a case study provides a unique opportunity to investigate and comprehend complex subjects within the context of real-world scenarios, such as the challenge posed by modern slavery in construction projects. The methodological rigour involved in selecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from a single case allows for an exhaustive exploration of modern slavery in construction projects. This enabled the candidate to articulate the underlying reasons that facilitate the occurrence of modern slavery in construction projects.

Exploring existing documents and reports allows the development of a comprehensive grasp of a specific case, as it reveals complex details, patterns, and compelling narratives (Yin, 2017). This deep exploration captures the essence of the phenomenon being investigated, enabling interpretations and exploration of its contextual realities (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021; Stake, 1995). Through this single-case study, the PhD research offers significant insights into a more profound, systemic understanding of "why" modern slavery occurs in construction projects.

Semi-structured interviews were used to address the final RQ of this PhD research. This method was appropriate because this RQ required the candidate to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences, perspectives, motivations, and emotions of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The semi-structured nature of these interviews provided a structured yet

flexible framework, allowing for an exploration of predetermined topics while also permitting the emergence of new insights and themes relevant to the participant's experiences with modern slavery in construction projects.

The use of semi-structured interviews is particularly suited to investigating phenomena that are as sensitive and multifaceted as modern slavery in construction projects. This methodology enabled the candidate to establish a connection with participants, fostering an environment where they feel comfortable sharing their experiences and viewpoints. Given the potential reluctance to discuss such a complex and uncomfortable topic (Locatelli et al., 2022), semi-structured interviews are a valuable way to capture the depth and diversity of viewpoints with respect to sensitive and complex topics (Keene et al., 2016; Loosemore et al., 2021), such as modern slavery in construction projects.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews offer the flexibility to adapt the questions based on the participant's responses, allowing the candidate to explore further into particularly rich or unexpected areas of discussion (Kivilä et al., 2017). This adaptability is crucial to capture the diversity of perspectives across different roles, backgrounds, and experiences, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issue in construction projects.

The richness of data gathered through semi-structured interviews enriches the overall PhD research findings with detailed, personal viewpoints that highlight the human aspect of modern slavery in construction projects. These narratives are crucial to drive change, offering insights into the effectiveness of current prevention mechanisms, the challenges faced by practitioners in addressing modern slavery in construction projects, and potential areas for future research and action.

The data collection and data analysis are explained below and in detail in the three article

publications. Table 1 summarizes the RQs and methodology and gives a brief description of each of the three article publications of this PhD research.

Table 1. Summary of the RQs, description, methodology, data collection, and analysis of the three article publications

Publication	Article Publication 1	Article Publication 2	Article Publication 3
Research Questions	<p>RQ1) What are the main forms of modern slavery and the associated literature (as an embryonic field of study)?</p> <p>RQ2) Which are the key elements of modern slavery significant for construction projects?</p> <p>RQ3) How can we move forward the discussion about modern slavery in the context of construction projects?</p>	<p>RQ4) Why does modern slavery occur in construction projects?</p>	<p>RQ5) What mechanisms explain the difference between the official anti-modern slavery statements of construction companies and the empirical observations in construction sites?</p>
Brief Description	An SLR on modern slavery in projects. The article organizes and presents the body of knowledge and starts a discussion about modern slavery in projects focusing on construction projects.	A case study of Qatar’s infrastructure construction for the 2022 FIFA World Cup program. This article explains why modern slavery occurs in the construction sector.	This article investigates the mechanisms behind the disconnect between construction companies’ modern slavery statements and the on-site reality, along with the reasons for this disconnection.
Methodology	Qualitative (SLR).	Qualitative (single case study).	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews).
Data Collection	Secondary data: 73 documentary data from various sources, including academic journal papers, books, and reports produced by NGOs or industrial associations.	Secondary data: 42 documentary data, including progress reports and documents issued by NGOs, assessment reports linked to the case of the FIFA World Cup construction program in Qatar, and articles from the media or newspapers.	Primary data: 22 semi-structured interviews with experts working in construction companies that have pledged to fight modern slavery.
Data Analysis	Thematic analysis using NVivo software.	Thematic analysis using NVivo software.	Thematic analysis using NVivo software.

1.3.3 Data Collection

Three main qualitative methods were used to collect the data for this PhD research: an SLR was followed by a single case study and, finally, semi-structured interviews, as explained briefly below.

The SLR presented in this thesis comprised two phases of secondary data collection. In both Phase 1 and Phase 2, data were collected from the Scopus database. Phase 1 involved searching for papers within the titles, abstracts, and keywords of journal articles using a specific search string to ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature on modern slavery. The candidate used the following inclusion and exclusion criteria for Phase 1: a) Inclusion criteria: The paper primarily focuses on and explains modern slavery; b) Exclusion criteria: The paper addresses modern slavery vaguely, such as within the broader discussion of various other unethical and illegal crimes, with only minimal emphasis on modern slavery itself. Applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in the finding of 49 relevant papers.

Phase 2 focused exclusively on modern slavery in construction projects. The candidate used the following inclusion criteria for Phase 2: The primary focus of the paper is on modern slavery within construction projects. The same steps as in Phase 1 were followed, and 13 papers were identified as relevant according to the inclusion criteria. However, the limited results from Phase 2 led the candidate to broaden the scope to include gray literature, including diverse sources such as websites, official documents, and NGO reports. This expanded search returned 12 additional documents meeting the inclusion criteria. This two-phased data collection process enabled an in-depth exploration of modern slavery in general and, more specifically, within construction projects (Alzoubi et al., 2023a).

The single-case study of the infrastructure for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program presented in this thesis investigated why modern slavery occurs in construction projects. Secondary data were collected from reports and documents issued by NGOs, assessment reports pertaining to the case study, and articles from media and newspapers such as The Guardian, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The candidate used the following inclusion criteria for data collection:

- The selected data must primarily focus on the mistreatment of laborers or the illicit and morally questionable activities associated with the construction of the 2022 FIFA World Cup program in Qatar.
- The selected data must originate from a credible source known for its discussions on modern slavery in the construction of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program in Qatar, including but not limited to NGOs (for instance, Amnesty International), newspapers (such as The Guardian), or news broadcasters (like BBC News).
- The selected data must repeatedly focus on the issue of modern slavery in the construction of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program in Qatar to ensure ongoing attention to the case, including any developments or changes over time.

The application of specific inclusion criteria resulted in 42 sources of information pertinent to the case study (Alzoubi et al., 2023b).

The final qualitative method was to collect primary data on modern slavery in construction projects by conducting semi-structured interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011) with managers in the construction sector. A diverse group of interviewees was chosen to guarantee a wide range of viewpoints, as suggested by Manu et al. (2015) and Yagci Sokat (2022). The interview questions were formulated based on the modern slavery statements published by large construction companies and the existing literature on modern slavery in construction projects.

After obtaining full ethical research approval, invitations to participate in the research, along with the participant consent form and interview questions, were sent to 329 experts working in construction companies via LinkedIn messages or email. The initial selection of individuals aimed to identify experts who are likely to possess relevant insights into modern slavery within the construction sector. The selection criteria of the potential participants were as follows:

- **Current position and industry:** The candidate targeted experts currently working in various roles in the construction sector, as they are likely to have direct or indirect experience or knowledge about modern slavery in construction projects.
- **Work experience:** participants with extensive working experience in the construction sector and those holding positions of influence, such as project managers, construction managers, sustainability and ethics managers, and human resource managers, were preferred, as they are likely to have a deeper understanding and experience of the construction sector labor practices.
- **Geographical and organizational size:** The candidate ensured that the sample represented a diverse range of locations and organization sizes to capture a broad range of perspectives on modern slavery in construction projects.

Finally, 22 online interviews were successfully conducted, representing an acceptance rate of 6.7% of the total potential participants contacted.

The data collection strategies are explained in detail in each of the three article publications.

1.3.4 Data Analysis

In this PhD research, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyze data. Thematic analysis was deemed particularly suitable for analyzing the data in this research due to its flexibility and robustness in identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes, as well as

highlighting similarities and differences within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Moreover, thematic analysis is particularly beneficial for large qualitative datasets, such as those in this PhD research, which aim to delve deeply into the complexities of human experiences and perceptions (Nowell et al., 2017), which is essential for comprehensively addressing the issue of modern slavery in construction projects.

The thematic analysis of open coding involved an in-depth engagement with the data collected in this PhD research. This stage of analysis requires the candidate to repeatedly examine the collected data from several sources to identify emergent patterns, ideas, and inquiries, thereby gaining a comprehensive understanding of the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The collected data were then input into NVivo software, facilitating a focused examination of specific patterns of the data through the coding of keywords, phrases, and sentences. This step is critical for identifying recurring and notable patterns within the dataset (Rodger et al., 2020). Subsequently, the codes were modified and examined to extract themes. Upon generating the themes, the candidate reviewed and refined them to ensure the accuracy of the process. This process was repeated until the themes articulated in the findings throughout the three article publications emerged from the coding process (Rodger et al., 2020). These themes were rigorously discussed between the candidate and supervisors and were characterized by frequent repetition within the collected data, confirming the achievement of theoretical saturation (King, 2004).

The full details of why thematic was chosen and how it was applied are explained in each of the three article publications.

2.0 Article Publications

This section presents Article Publication 1, which is based on an SLR; Article Publication 2, which is based on a single case study (the construction of the 2022 FIFA World Cup program); and Article Publication 3, which is based on semi-structured interviews with managers in the construction sector.

2.1 Article Publication 1

Alzoubi, Y., Locatelli, G., & Sainati, T. (2023). Modern Slavery in Projects: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda. *Project Management Journal*, 54(3), 235–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728221148158>. **Scopus-indexed journal, Impact Factor: 5.0/5-Year Impact Factor: 5.7.**

Modern Slavery in Projects:

A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda

Abstract

It is estimated that 40.3 million individuals are victims of modern slavery, including those exploited in projects. In project studies, there are growing research streams on topics, such as ethics, sustainability and fairness, yet modern slavery is vastly ignored. This article presents a systematic literature review on modern slavery. After summarizing the main forms and consequences of modern slavery, it focuses on construction projects explaining the structural conditions making construction projects prone to modern slavery, the kafala system, and what can be done to address modern slavery. Lastly, the article introduces propositions, a research agenda, and implications for practice.

Keywords: forced labor, debt bondage, critical management studies, dark side, human resources

Introduction

In project studies, there is a growing number of articles published about ethics (Müller et al., 2013, 2014; Sarhadi & Hasanzadeh, 2022) and social sustainability (Kivilä et al., 2017; Martens & Carvalho, 2017; Sabini et al., 2019; Sabini & Alderman, 2021). However, project studies literature is mostly silent on a relevant phenomenon: modern slavery. Modern slavery is one of the dark side phenomena of projects, which concerns “*any illegal or unethical phenomena associated with projects*” (Locatelli et al., 2022a, p. 4). Unfortunately, the dark side of projects in general, and modern slavery in particular, has received limited consideration in project studies, with Locatelli et al. (2022b) calling for more attention and publications on such phenomena.

The modern slavery literature is scattered across disciplines outside project studies literature, such as law (Fudge, 2018), geography (Cheer, 2018), public health (Such et al., 2020), and gender studies (Vijayarasa, 2020). In project studies, project management scholars have published papers on ethics in projects (Helgadóttir, 2008; Müller et al., 2013, 2014), sustainability in projects (Banihashemi et al., 2017; Gilbert Silvius et al., 2017), and critical management studies (CMS) (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Hodgson & Cicmil, 2008), which can inform the research and discussion around modern slavery. In this article, addressing the recent call for further research on the dark side phenomena (Locatelli et al., 2022a, 2022b), the authors contribute to the field of project studies by introducing modern slavery in projects, particularly in the context of construction projects. This article paves the way for a wider discussion regarding modern slavery in projects by leveraging a SLR. Similarly to Aarseth et al. (2017) and Martens and Carvalho (2017), the authors are in a situation in which the topic is highly relevant for project scholars yet the literature on project studies is scant, with most SLR references coming from outside traditional project-based journals.

Modern slaves are employed in agriculture (Quayson et al., 2021), food production, warehousing/logistics, manufacturing, cleaning, construction, and related service industries (Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority [GLAA], 2020). Among the project-based sectors, construction is the most affected by modern slavery, as evidenced by (Phase 1) of the SLR in the methodology. Modern slavery affects construction projects in virtually every country, as reported in the United Kingdom (Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Trautrimis et al., 2020), Nepal (Daly et al., 2020), and Qatar (Amnesty International, 2016; Millward, 2017). Moreover, modern slavery is present in construction supplies (Liu et al., 2022), for example, child exploitation for brick production in low-income countries (Larmar et al., 2017). The authors decided to focus on construction projects, given its relevance to both modern slavery and project studies.

Modern slavery is becoming an area of study, with academics across disciplines developing a relevant body of peer-reviewed scientific literature (Caruana et al., 2021). A relatively small fraction of those articles, such as those written by Cockbain and Brayley-Morris (2018), Gutierrez-Huerter O et al. (2021), Jones and Comfort (2022), Liu et al. (2022), and Trautrimis et al. (2020), deal with modern slavery in construction projects. There is also a body of gray literature dealing with modern slavery (which will be discussed separately in the following section), including books (Bales et al., 2011; Emberson, 2019), reports produced by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (Amnesty International, 2016), or industrial associations (Chartered Institute of Building [CIOB], 2018). A fraction of this gray literature considers modern slavery in construction projects (Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme [CHAS], 2021; CIOB, 2016, 2018).

This article aims to organize and present the body of knowledge and start a discussion about modern slavery in construction projects. In particular, the article answers the following RQs:

RQ1: What are the main forms of modern slavery and the associated literature (as an embryonic field of study)?

RQ2: Which key elements of modern slavery are significant for construction projects?

RQ3: How can we move forward the discussion about modern slavery in the context of construction projects?

Methodology

Following Tranfield et al. (2003), this article leverages an SLR structured in two main phases as shown in Figure 1. Phase 1 is an SLR aimed at providing a general overview of modern slavery and identifying its main forms. Furthermore, Phase 1 allows the authors to establish that the construction industry is, from a literature perspective, the most relevant project-based industry for modern slavery. The results of Phase 1 are also used to generate the keywords for Phase 2, which is focused on construction projects. Furthermore, to integrate the scarce literature about modern slavery in construction projects in Phase 2, the authors leveraged relevant gray literature published by leading institutions reporting about modern slavery in construction projects.

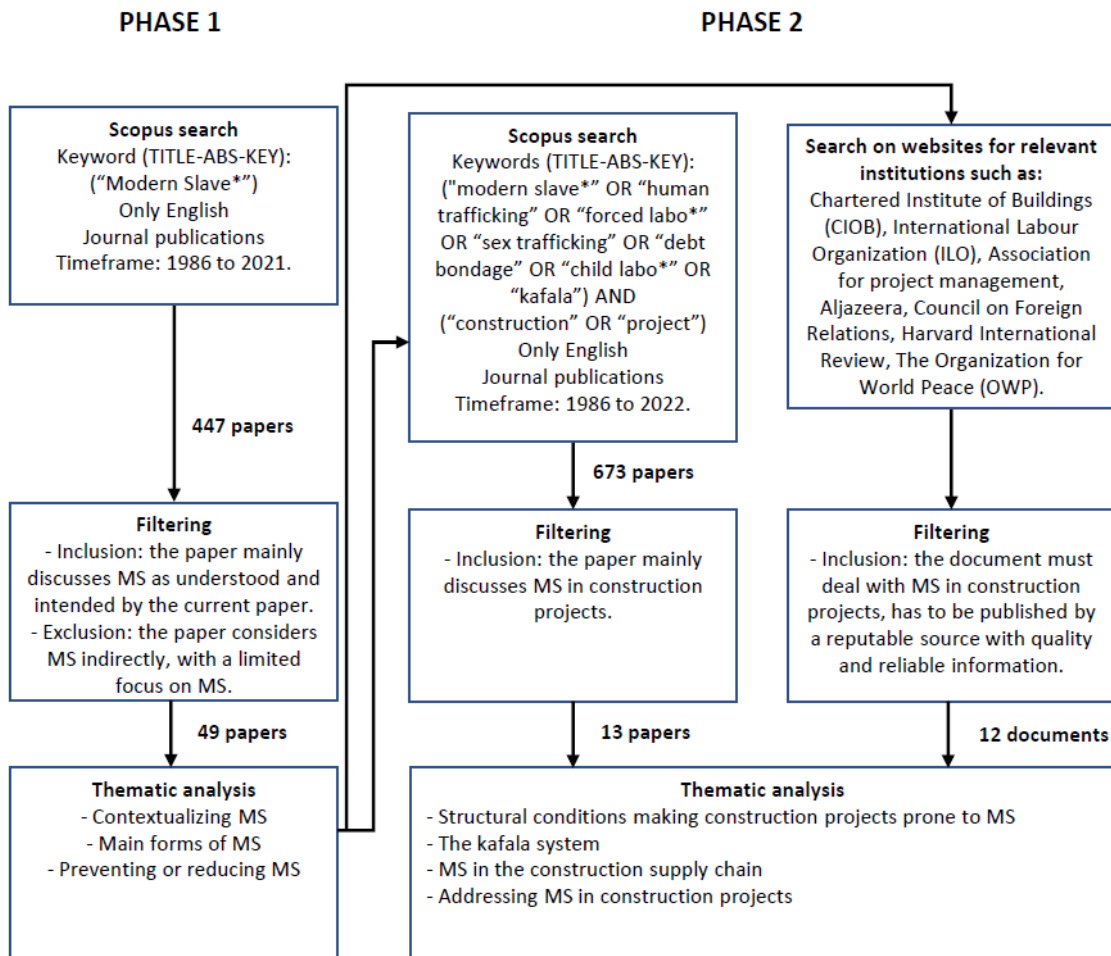


Figure 1. Main phases of the research method.

Phase 1: Data Collection—Modern Slavery

Scopus Search

The authors started the SLR using Scopus and searched for the term “modern slave*” in the title, abstract, and keywords. This initial search focused exclusively on journal publications in English from between 1983 and 2021, which returned 447 papers.

Filtering

The following inclusion/exclusion criteria have been applied to the title and abstract of the papers identified in the previous stage:

- Inclusion criteria: the paper mainly discusses modern slavery as understood and intended by the current article.
- Exclusion criteria: the paper considers modern slavery indirectly, for example, multiple crimes, but the focus on modern slavery is limited.

As a result, the authors identified 121 relevant papers that were downloaded and further scrutinized using the above inclusion/exclusion criteria on the whole text, resulting in 49 relevant papers. These 49 papers were reviewed using thematic analysis to derive the main forms of modern slavery discussed in the literature.

Phase 2: Data Collection—Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

Scopus Search

The authors retrieved 673 Scopus-indexed papers, applying the following search string on the title, abstract, and keywords of journal publications in English from between 1986 and 2022: (“modern slave*” OR “human trafficking” OR “forced labo*” OR “sex trafficking” OR “debt bondage” OR “child labo*” OR “kafala”) AND (“project” OR “construction”).

Filtering

The authors applied the following inclusion criteria to the title and abstract of the 673 papers previously identified:

- Inclusion criteria: the paper mainly discusses modern slavery in construction projects.

This initial filtering stage resulted in 673 potentially relevant papers. Next, papers unrelated to modern slavery in construction projects were excluded, leading to 64 papers that were read in full and further filtered down based on the previously mentioned criteria. After the filtering process, only 13 papers fully satisfied the inclusion criteria.

Search on Websites for Relevant Institutions

After the two phases of SLR, considerable gaps in the academic literature about modern slavery, particularly concerning construction projects (e.g., the kafala system), emerged. Gray literature, however, deals with this topic; therefore, following Adams et al. (2017), the authors decided to include gray literature. This process focused on specific and relevant topics that had not been adequately covered by Phase 2 of the SLR. Following Phase 1, the authors identified the key institutions that discuss modern slavery in construction projects, including the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), International Labour Organization (ILO), Association for Project Management (APM), Aljazeera, Council on Foreign Relations, Harvard International Review, and The Organization for World Peace (OWP). The authors visited their websites and collected the key documents on modern slavery in construction projects. The inclusion criteria for including the gray literature are:

- Relevance of the topic. The document must deal with modern slavery in construction projects.
- Relevance and reliability of the source. The document has to be published by a reputable source such as a university (e.g., Harvard), an established think tank (e.g., Council on Foreign Relations), or a news channel (e.g., Aljazeera).
- Reliability of the data and information. As discussed by Adams et al. (2017), assessing the quality of gray literature is notoriously difficult and *“it is often necessary to use fit-for-purpose quality criteria when selecting and evaluating gray literature”* (p. 442). Our approach to establishing quality was a triangulation of the data/information across different and unrelated sources.

This process leads to an additional 12 documents.

Thematic Analysis

The authors analyzed the 61 papers retrieved in Phase 1 (49 papers) and Phase 2 (13 papers, one of which was already included in Phase 1) using thematic analysis following Pittaway et al. (2004). All the papers were imported into NVivo software to help derive themes to answer the research questions. Later, as suggested by Davis (2014), all the papers from both phases were textually analyzed separately to determine the relevant themes. This transforms the filtered papers from both phases into relevant knowledge using open coding thematic analysis, and the results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Filtered Papers From Phase 1 and Phase 2

(Adapted from Pittaway et al., 2004)

Coding	Theme	Brief Description	No. of Papers	% of Themes
Phase 1				
1	Background on modern slavery	Papers that discuss the meaning and conditions of modern slavery, the differences between historical slavery and modern slavery, consequences of using modern slavery in communities and countries, elements fostering modern slavery, and statistics on the number of modern slaves.	21	34.4
2	Forms of modern slavery	These papers discuss different forms of modern slavery.	20	32.8
3	Health problems of modern slaves and healthcare role	These papers focus on the health implications of modern slaves and the role of the healthcare sector in detecting and preventing modern slavery.	12	19.7
4	Detecting modern slavery	Papers that discuss different ways and signs to detect modern slavery.	6	9.8
5	Fighting modern slavery	Papers that discuss fighting and abolishing modern slavery.	2	3.3
Phase 2				
6	Modern slavery in construction projects	Papers that discuss, in general, the existence of modern slavery in the construction sector and why it is prevalent in construction.	6	33.3
7	Detecting modern slavery in construction projects	Studies that explore the detection, challenges, and conditions fostering modern slavery in the construction sector.	2	11.1
8	The kafala system	A form of modern slavery specifically taking place in the construction sector.	2	11.1
9	Modern slavery in the construction supply chain	Studies that discuss modern slavery in construction projects in the area of supply chain.	6	33.3
10	Addressing modern slavery in construction projects	Papers discussing how to detect and reduce modern slavery in construction projects.	2	11.1

Bibliometric Findings

Being aware of Caruana et al.'s (2021) concerns about modern slavery being a non-field, the authors provide the key bibliometric highlights concerning the 61 papers identified in our SLR. As shown in Table 2, most journals had a frequency of “one” paper. The *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* is the journal that published more papers (four). Clearly, knowledge about modern slavery is scattered among these journals in disciplines such as sociology, public health, social sciences, and law. Furthermore, none of these papers comes from a project-based journal. As illustrated in Figure 2, the generic academic interest in modern slavery (Phase 1) has risen in the last decade, especially in the period from 2018 to 2021; however, the number of papers about modern slavery in construction projects (Phase 2) is still minimal. There are no papers related to modern slavery in projects except construction projects. Table 3 shows the forms of modern slavery and how often they are covered. A few papers deal with the kafala system, which is very relevant for construction projects. Conversely, human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, and sex trafficking have greater literature coverage.

Table 2. Distribution of Selected Publications for Phase 1 and Phase 2

	Journal Title	Frequency
Phase 1	<i>Supply Chain Management: An International Journal</i>	4
	<i>Journal of Public Health</i>	3
	<i>Australian Journal of Human Rights; The BMJ</i>	2
	<i>Academy of Management Review; Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal; American Journal of Nursing; Business & Society; British Journal of General Practice; European Journal of Political Economy; Federal Law Review; Frontiers in Psychiatry; Health & Social Care in the Community; Human Rights Quarterly; Human Rights Review; Indian Pediatrics; Journal of Business Ethics; Journal of Human Trafficking; Journal of Law and Society; Journal of Risk Research; Marine Policy; Multinational Business Review; Nature Human Behaviour; Pediatric Emergency Care; Politics and Governance; PLOS One; Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society; Progress in Human Geography; Regulation & Governance; Review of International Political Economy; Significance Magazine; Socio-Economic Review; The Journal of Adult Protection; The Journal of Humanistic Counseling; Arab Law Quarterly; Criminology & Criminal Justice; Alternative Law Journal; Social & Legal Studies; Development and Change; BMJ Open; Work, Employment and Society; Business Strategy and Development.</i>	1
	Total: 49	
Phase 2	<i>Child Abuse & Neglect; Policing (Oxford); Journal of International Development; Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies; Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development; Business Strategy and Development; Tanzania Journal of Health Research; Current Sociology; MDPI (Sustainability); Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies; Journal of Business Ethics; Sustainable Production and Consumption; Property Management.</i>	1
	Total: 13	

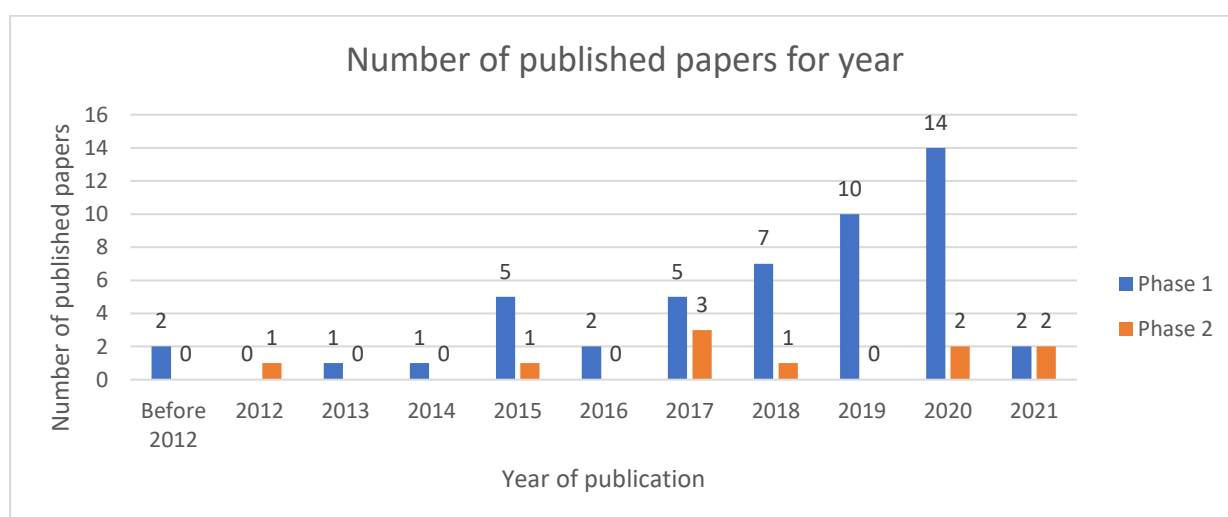


Figure 2. Number of filtered papers for Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Table 3. Number of Papers for Each Form of Modern Slavery for Phase 1 and Phase 2*

Form of Modern Slavery	Number of Selected Papers (Phase 1)	Number of Selected Papers (Phase 2)
Modern Slavery (General)	30	6
Forced Labor	18	6
Human Trafficking	19	4
Debt Bondage	11	3
Sex Trafficking	12	2
Child Labor	8	6
Kafala System	1	2

*(Some papers mentioned more than one form of modern slavery; therefore, the paper was counted more than once.)

About two-thirds of the 61 papers were conceptual, whereas one-third were empirical. This is hardly surprising given the struggle to collect primary data in this field, yet this is a call for more empirical research. An unexpected result is about the theoretical lens, or the lack of clear theoretical lenses, since 54 of our 61 papers did not declare any. This is particularly a concern, considering the need for a theoretical lens to explain the “why” of a particular phenomenon, as pointed out by Müller and Klein (2018). Of the remaining seven papers, the theoretical lenses are: institutional theory (Christ et al., 2019; Flynn, 2019; Crane, 2013), neutralization theory (Carrington et al., 2021), Marxist theory (Rioux et al., 2020), relational development theory (Natarajan et al., 2021), and framing theory (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021); two additional papers are based on grounded theory (Russell et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2020).

Regarding the method used in the 61 papers, approximately 28 papers did not state an explicit methodology. This is explainable considering that several epistemological communities are interested in modern slavery and publish in many different journals (see Table 2) with different styles. Of the 33 papers with an explicit or implicit method, most papers were case studies and interviews, whereas fewer papers were SLRs or surveys. The most common types of data analysis were the thematic analysis and content analysis used in five papers each, followed by the statistical analysis used in three papers. Several types of data analysis were used, including

comparative analysis, frame analysis, situational analysis, documentary analysis, cross-sectional analysis, and others. Remarkably, in many of the papers, the data analysis was not explicit.

Findings From Phase 1: Modern Slavery

Contextualizing Modern Slavery

There is no universally single accepted definition of modern slavery (Christ et al., 2019; Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Crane, 2013; Landau & Marshall, 2018; Smith & Johns, 2019; Stringer & Michailova, 2018; Trautrimis et al., 2020). This article employs the Bellagio–Harvard Guidelines definition: “*the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised*” (Slavery Convention, 1926, p. 16). To this end, the authors agree with Kevin Bales (the leading academic in developing the modern slavery narrative): “*For me, this is the ‘single’ and best definition. And it’s basically a definition of slavery that applies to historical AND modern slavery*” (Bales, 2022). The Appendix at the end of the article summarizes the definitions of slavery and modern slavery from the 61 papers in Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Modern slavery consists of keeping individuals as modern slaves or in servitude, forcing them to work, or inducing them to travel for the purpose of exploitation (Wen, 2016). People working in low-paid jobs during unsocial hours are not considered modern slaves as long as the job is officially recognized and they are free to resign. The literature indicates that modern slavery exists when individuals are exploited in one or more of the following ways: (1) forced to work by being mentally or physically threatened; (2) owning or controlling the individual by an employer, generally by mentally or physically abusing them or intimidating them with such abuse; (3) brutalizing individuals by treating them as commodities; and (4) physically

controlling individuals or restricting their movement (Wen, 2016; Emberson, 2019; Flynn, 2019; Crane, 2013).

It is estimated that 40.3 million individuals are in modern slavery worldwide (Landman & Silverman, 2019; Banerjee, 2020; Fellows & Chong, 2020) in different sectors, including construction projects (Liu et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2018; Trautrimis et al., 2020). Still, similar to other dark side phenomena, it is difficult to provide an accurate statistic of the number of modern slaves due to the hidden nature of this crime and the social stigma. Moreover, Landman (2020) and Gutierrez-Huerter O et al. (2021) criticized that the methodological aspects used in measuring the prevalence and statistics of modern slavery are seen as low quality and use limited data. Nevertheless, modern slavery is present worldwide (Christ et al., 2019; Wen, 2016) and it is estimated that there are 3.59 million cases in Europe and Central Asia, 520,000 in the Arab States, 1.95 million in the Americas, 24.99 million in Asia and the Pacific, and 9.24 million in Africa (Landman, 2020). The countries with the highest prevalence of modern slavery are: “*North Korea, Eritrea, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Mauritania, South Sudan, Pakistan, Cambodia and Iran*” (Global Slavery Index [GSI], 2018). Notable examples where modern slavery is taking place include “*the construction of FIFA World Cup stadiums in Qatar to the cotton farms of Uzbekistan, from cattle ranches in Paraguay to fisheries in Thailand and the Philippines to agriculture in Italy, from sweatshops in Brazil and Argentina to berry pickers in Sweden*” (Christ et al., 2019, p. 837), or rug production in India (GoodWeave, 2017; Nolan & Bott, 2018). Migrants in poorly paid jobs who do not have job security are the most likely to be victims of modern slavery, particularly in sectors that are more prone to this hidden, unethical, and criminal activity and in which wages are insufficient for workers to be able to escape poverty (Lewis et al., 2015).

Modern slavery negatively influences modern slaves’ economic, physical, and social well-being and damages the functioning of industries, communities, and even countries (Cockbain

& Brayley-Morris, 2018). Countries, industries, and communities that engage in modern slavery are perceived as untrustworthy, valuing profitability above people's welfare (Institute of Business Ethics [IBE], 2019). Elements fostering modern slavery are corruption, conflict or war, natural disasters, economic difficulties, low education levels, lack of employment, discrimination, and poverty (Such et al., 2019, 2020; Sabella, 2011). According to Bales et al. (2011), modern slaves are cheaper than historical slaves. For example, in the 1850s, a slave in Alabama was expected to make around 5% profit on their purchase price, whereas a modern slave can make a profit from two to eight times their purchase price. Modern slavery is a public health concern (Srivastava, 2019), with modern slaves often having little or no training for their jobs and forced to work excessive hours, making them more likely to be injured, disabled, or killed (Bales et al., 2011; Turner-Moss et al., 2014) and developing several emotional, physical, and mental health problems (Bales et al., 2011). Lack of awareness is a key obstacle to abolishing modern slavery (Bales et al., 2011), with people unaware, ignoring, and refusing to believe in its existence (Bales et al., 2011). Researching modern slavery is challenging because of its hidden nature; this generates a situation where little information, resources, and data are available for scholars, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers. The consequence is the difficulty in developing legislation, guidelines, frameworks, and approaches to mitigate or abolish modern slavery (Kidd & Manthorpe, 2017).

The Main Forms of Modern Slavery

Modern slavery can take different forms. Following the rationale presented in the previous section, the authors derived a classification of the main forms of modern slavery: (1) human trafficking, (2) forced labor, (3) debt bondage, and (4) sex trafficking. These forms are not mutually exclusive.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is the “*recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation*” (United Nations, 2000, p. 2).

There are two different views regarding the relationship between modern slavery and human trafficking. The first view considers human trafficking a form of modern slavery (Acharya & Suarez, 2016; Turner, 2015; Scarpa, 2008; Bales & Lize, 2005). The second view considers modern slavery the same as human trafficking (Sabella, 2011; Such et al., 2018, 2019). During trafficking, modern slaves are often not yet aware that they have been tricked into one of the forms of modern slavery as they had yet to experience any force, intimidation, or coercion. Once modern slaves arrive at their desired destination, only then they realize they have fallen into the trap of modern slavery (Emberson, 2019); therefore, for the scope of this article, human trafficking is a form of modern slavery.

Human trafficking is the third-biggest income source for a criminal organization after drug smuggling and illegal weapons (Bales et al., 2011; Stotts & Ramey, 2009). Promising a good job, slaveholders often make their modern slaves pay in advance for traveling, frequently lending them money (Emberson, 2019). Having modern slaves in debt is an additional way of controlling them. Once modern slaves arrive at their destination, passports are confiscated and they are informed that they must work for the slaveholders until their debts are paid (debt bondage), something the slaveholders are careful not to let happen (Emberson, 2019; Dando et al., 2016). Slaveholders threaten modern slaves to be reported to authorities as illegal aliens, making them scared to speak with authorities about their enslavement (Stotts & Ramey, 2009; Wilhelm et al., 2020). In addition, slaveholders threaten to harm modern slaves’ families,

intimidate the modern slaves, inflict violence on them, and refuse to pay wages (Dando et al., 2016; Stotts & Ramey, 2009; Wilhelm et al., 2020).

Forced Labor

Forced labor is “*all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily*” (International Labour Organization [ILO], 1930). This includes labor exploitation, criminal exploitation, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation (GLAA, 2020). Modern slaves work against their will and have imposed psychological, financial, and physical barriers to prevent them from leaving (Rioux et al., 2020). Child labor is particularly critical since it robs children of their right to a childhood, undermines their dignity, has a negative impact on their long-term prospects, and is detrimental to their mental and physical growth. Moreover, it often involves physically, emotionally, socially, and mentally demanding work and is frequently enforced at the expense of their education (Srivastava, 2019).

Illegal and unethical profit from forced labor amounts to approximately US\$150 billion annually (Crane et al., 2019; LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2019; Stringer & Michailova, 2018). Crane et al. (2019) state that, according to the ILO, the annual profit for each modern slave is approximately US\$3,900 in Africa, US\$5,000 in the Asia-Pacific region, and US\$34,800 in developed countries. Most of these modern slaves are found in construction, domestic service, agriculture, and mining or manufacturing industries (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2019), with over 1.1 million new modern slaves added to forced labor annually (Kidd & Manthorpe, 2017).

Debt Bondage

Debt bondage is “*the status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his personal services or of those of a person under his control as security for a debt, if the value of those*

services as reasonably assessed is not applied towards the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services is not respectively limited and defined” (United Nations, 1956), and possibly the most widespread form of modern slavery (Jones & Comfort, 2022; Natarajan et al., 2021).

The slaveholders force modern slaves to work until they have paid off a debt taken out by the modern slave or family member (Jones & Comfort, 2022). The debt frequently includes fees the slaveholder charges to get them to their desired destination (Sabella, 2011). Modern slaves are working for no or little pay and cannot challenge or change the terms of their debt (Sabella, 2011). Money earned is sequestered as a loan repayment (Sabella, 2011), and often entire families have to work off the debt from a loan taken by one family member (Wallis, 2017). Inevitably, the value of the work done will exceed the original loan sum, and any modern slave trying to leave will face threats, coercion, and physical and mental violence (Wallis, 2017).

Sex Trafficking

Sex trafficking is *“the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act”*—and it’s considered ‘severe’ when such an act is *‘induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or . . . the person induces to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age’* (Sabella, 2011, p. 30). The internet represents a primary mechanism that facilitates the sexual exploitation of millions of modern slaves (Giacobe et al., 2016). Nearly 54% of the modern slaves who survived modern slavery worldwide had been initially trafficked for sexual exploitation (Worden, 2018). In addition to the frequent psychological and emotional issues, including fear, anxiety, and depression, that plague those trafficked into sex work, modern slaves suffer from severe additional health issues and diseases such as HIV and infertility (Sabella, 2011). Criminal organizations earn billions of dollars every year through the illegal trafficking and exploitation of young women (Bakirci, 2007).

This form of modern slavery has a limited link to construction projects and will not be further discussed.

Preventing or Reducing Modern Slavery

Modern slaves have experienced high levels of physical, mental, and verbal abuse; treated as commodities; and expected to be subservient, leading to severe health problems (Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Rose et al., 2021), including physical and mental health issues (Gibson, 2018; Williamson et al., 2020; Ottisova et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2021). One way slaveholders increase the health risks of modern slaves is by not allowing enough sleep or rest, withholding medical treatment, and limiting their food supplies (Bales et al., 2011; Dando et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2009). This thus leaves modern slaves with no physical capability to fight back against their slaveholders or try leaving their workplace (Bales et al., 2011).

Healthcare professionals can play a crucial role in identifying cases of modern slavery (Grace et al., 2014; Helle & Steele, 2021). For example, suppose a worker is injured or exploited physically or mentally; in that case, healthcare professionals (if appropriately trained) can detect modern slavery through the behavior (GLAA, 2020) or the appearance of the modern slave, as outlined in Table 4. However, surveys undertaken with healthcare professionals in several environments indicate a lack of knowledge and training to identify an appropriate response to patients if they suspect modern slavery (Williamson et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020). For example, between 28% and 50% of modern slaves in the United States met with healthcare professionals during their enslavement (Grace et al., 2014); yet, in most cases, no identification took place (Grace et al., 2014).

Another example is in the United Kingdom, where only nine of 33 of the UK's medical schools offer any kind of training to detect and respond to suspected cases of modern slavery (Saunders & Harris, 2019). In addition, UK National Health Service (NHS) staff often did not know how

to question patients if modern slavery was suspected, and 78% stated that they felt they were poorly trained to help detect modern slavery (Wright et al., 2020). This is troubling, as healthcare professionals are the most likely to encounter cases of modern slavery during their treatment of physical, emotional, or mental abuse (Grace et al., 2014; Helle & Steele, 2021). Although there is no specific indicator that unequivocally demonstrates that an individual is a victim of modern slavery, there are several signs that indicate modern slavery, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. General Signs of Modern Slaves (Adapted from GLAA, 2020; Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Jones & Comfort, 2022)

Indicators	Explanation
Restricted Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not holding their passports, travel permits, or identity documents • Confined to one work environment • Prevented from communicating with others and accessing medical care
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being able to speak local languages • Appear ignorant about where they are • Not responding when spoken to directly, allowing others (usually slaveholders) to respond on their behalf • Showing signs of anxiety, fear, or depression • Appearing malnourished • Forced into criminal activity to obtain food or money • Subjected to threats of violence that render them scared and unwilling to speak up • Prevented from organizing, forming, or joining unions
Working Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have no choice about the time or place of their work • Working very long hours for many consecutive days • Lacking training or professional qualifications • Inadequately dressed for the type of work required
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living in crowded, cramped, unhygienic accommodations • Living in the workplace • Not being able to choose where or with whom they live
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being unpaid or very underpaid • Not being allowed access to their earnings and not having a bank account • Paying off debts to their slaveholders with no wages being paid until all debts are settled
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having injuries that appear to be caused by physical abuse • Appear to never change clothes

Fighting modern slavery is included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, Target 8.7 (United Nations, 2020). To this end, some countries have created legislation making organizations legally and ethically responsible for what goes on in their businesses and imposing a responsibility to minimize the chances of those employed by them being victim of modern slavery (Wilhelm et al., 2020). Such legislation includes the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act of 2010, the UK Modern Slavery Act of 2015 (Caruana et al., 2021), France's Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law of 2017, and Australia's Modern Slavery Act of 2018 (Wilhelm et al., 2020).

Fighting modern slavery requires political motivation and resources, two elements that are often missing in government policies (Bales et al., 2011). Ultimately, it is the responsibility of businesses to guarantee that workers do not suffer exploitation, that they are kept safe, and that all applicable employment laws (including wages and working hours), health and safety regulations, human rights laws, and international standards are ethical and abided by (GOV.UK, 2017).

Findings From Phase 2: Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

All the references identified in the second phase of the SLR and the gray literature about modern slavery deal with construction projects, which is, therefore, the focus of this section. Within the European Union (EU), only the sex industry outranks construction as the sector where modern slavery is likely to occur (CHAS, 2021), particularly in cases of labor shortages. Construction is an intrinsically dangerous sector requiring modern slaves to lift heavy materials, experience extreme temperatures, and work at height (Kamazima et al., 2012). Modern slaves can sustain injuries by carrying heavy materials and using dangerous machinery without sufficient training or access to appropriate protective equipment (DeGraff et al., 2016).

Structural Conditions Making Construction Projects Prone to Modern Slavery

There are structural conditions that make construction projects prone to modern slavery:

- The high percentage of low-skilled and migrant workers working on construction projects with socioeconomic difficulties, which increases the risk of modern slavery due to the reliance on self-employment agencies (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2020).
- Construction projects often face delays (Arditi et al., 2017; Assaf & Al-Hejji, 2006; Qazi et al., 2016). This could increase modern slavery, as workers could be pushed to work for extensive hours (Liu et al., 2022) with limited breaks to recover time and cost. Trautrimis (2020, p. 2) states that *“Production aspects such as seasonality increase the risk of modern slavery as workers are needed temporarily, often hired through agents or gangmasters, and operational pressures like [...] a construction project running late, may override ethical compliance considerations in operational practice”*.
- Despite much of the construction workforce being at or close to minimum wage, the sector has a low-profit margin (Greco, 2021), pushing to cost-saving in ethical and unethical ways, including poor working conditions (Khan et al., 2020; Trautrimis et al., 2020; Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021).
- The sector is not fully rigorous about enforcing labor standards (CIOB, 2018).
- Limited visibility and transparency in lower tiers of the supply chains (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021). Construction projects are characterized by complex supply chains comprising many subcontractors, suppliers, and labor agencies (Russell et al., 2018; Trautrimis et al., 2020). Therefore, it is challenging to oversee and govern all these transactions since the main contractors generally have systems to audit the first two tiers of that supply chain; below that level, organizations might not be visible (KPMG, 2020).

- The high dependence on continuous moving labor forces from one site to another (Russell et al., 2018; Trautrimis et al., 2020).

These structural conditions make it difficult to estimate the number of modern slaves in the construction sector. For example, construction companies insist they have worker protection procedures and policies in place, but complex procurement processes enable companies to ignore what happens in low-tier subcontractors (CIOB, 2016). Moreover, practices within construction drive the motivation for lowering labor standards, for example, demands for project discounts, awarding tenders to the lowest bidder, fee retention, and late/non-payment (CIOB, 2018). A remarkable example of a practice promoting modern slavery in construction is the so-called “kafala system,” as presented in the following section.

The Kafala System

The kafala system is a form of modern slavery endemic in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Jordan and Lebanon (Robinson, 2021); even though some GCC countries, such as Qatar, have claimed they have abolished it (el-Mumin, 2020). In those countries, the recruitment of migrant workers in the construction sector is common (Hall, 2018; Rak, 2020), and the kafala system consists of several legal elements, including the constituent’s specific residency rules and suitable employment and immigration laws (Malit & Tsourapas, 2021).

The kafala system has three key elements:

- A migrant worker cannot enter the country or take up employment without having a sponsor, and the migrant worker must only work for their sponsor (ILO, 2012).
- The right of residency for a migrant worker depends on the sponsor providing employment; the sponsor is responsible for every legal and financial aspect of the migrant worker (el-Mumin, 2020; Rak, 2020).

- Because a specific sponsor provides the right to work in the country, the sponsor must give explicit permission if a migrant worker wants to change jobs, end the job, or depart the country (Robinson, 2021).

The kafala system is considered a form of modern slavery for several reasons:

- Low wage: The sponsor has complete control over any expatriate and pays the lowest wage (Hall, 2018; el-Mumin, 2020).
- Withheld wages: Sponsors often withhold wages; for instance, a company building infrastructure for Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup did not pay its workers any wages for months (el-Mumin, 2020; Zayadin, 2021).
- Restrictions of movement and communication: Migrant workers are restricted in their freedom of movement because of their poor wages (el-Mumin, 2020). Moreover, sponsors can curtail the right of free movement through, for example, the use of non-objection certificates (Ghani, 2021) or by taking away their passports and phones when they arrive (Hall, 2018; Robinson, 2021; ILO, 2012).

Millward (2017) describes the kafala system concerning the development of the infrastructure associated with the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar. In such a context, several migrant workers have lost their lives or were injured while working on construction sites (Millward, 2017). Furthermore, migrant construction workers have complained about their poor living conditions and their sponsor's control by taking their passports away and/or delaying their wages (Millward, 2017; Hall, 2018). These exploitive and controlled practices have garnered a great deal of criticism from many NGOs (Amnesty International, 2016). Similarly, Sönmez et al. (2011) investigated the conditions of migrant workers in the construction sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), highlighting issues such as inadequate accommodations, overcrowded labor camps, and a contaminated water supply.

Modern Slavery in the Construction Supply Chain

The construction supply chains for materials and on-site labor were highlighted as two areas vulnerable to modern slavery (Jones & Comfort, 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2020). The level of vulnerability varies depending on the firm's size and position within the supply chain (Trautrimis et al., 2020). Liu et al. (2022) noted that even if a construction project occurs in developed countries with effective standards against modern slavery, contractors could unknowingly employ suppliers associated with modern slavery.

The construction work supply chain is a dangerous environment for child labor (Larmar et al., 2017). A remarkable example is the production of construction bricks in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nepal (Tahir et al., 2021). Brick production is a labor-intensive process, from molding to transferring heavy bricks from one place to another, with health and safety issues for children (Larmar et al., 2017). Moreover, brick production relies on the continuous operation of dangerous equipment and exposes child laborers to risks such as working at height and falling objects (Ahmed & Ray, 2014). It is estimated that between 28,000 and 30,000 children are employed in dangerous labor in brick kilns (Daly et al., 2020). Children employed within the construction sector have more training than those employed in other dangerous sectors yet they are often injured (DeGraff et al., 2016). Moreover, they work for long hours and live in overcrowded accommodations with poor sanitation, leading to health issues and suffering from mental health problems (Larmar et al., 2017).

Construction project managers should be concerned about modern slavery in the construction supply chain for at least three reasons: legal, ethical, and economical. First, from a legal perspective, countries have developed and enforced legislation against modern slavery (Wilhelm et al., 2020). For instance, the UK Modern Slavery Act of 2015 includes penalties for offenders up to life imprisonment (Jones & Comfort, 2022). Other countries, such as the United States, France, and Australia, have introduced similar legislation (Wilhelm et al., 2020).

Second, from an ethical point of view, construction project managers need to appreciate the importance of this phenomenon, not only for their companies but also for the organizations (such as subcontractors) working on their projects. Accepting bids or contracts that are far cheaper than the industry average can imply the presence of modern slavery, making the main contractor ethical (and, often, legally) guilty. Finally, the reputational risk associated with modern slavery can destabilize the economic impact on reputable stakeholders in construction (Brookes et al., 2020). By involving subcontractors or suppliers, employing modern slaves should be seen as a major risk to reputation and legal sanctions.

Addressing Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

Modern slavery in construction projects can be addressed at three main levels:

- 1. Countries/jurisdictions** would require stronger criminal and civil sanctions to discourage modern slavery in the construction sector. Furthermore, effective awareness campaigns are essential to informing and updating project professionals in the construction sector (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021).
- 2. Professional associations** can have a crucial role in educating and developing professional standards against modern slavery (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021). For instance, in the United Kingdom, the APM sponsored a report by Brookes et al. (2020) discussing modern slavery in projects and how this criminal activity can be abolished. Furthermore, professional associations should provide mandatory training about detecting and fighting modern slavery in the construction sector.
- 3. Organizations involved in construction** are also responsible for educating and supervising employees about business integrity, sustainable procurement and supply, and outsourcing for labor-intensive activities (Esoimeme, 2020; Trautrimis et al., 2020). These organizations should provide training on modern slavery for their personnel and

subcontractors, as they already provide their workers with the mandatory and repeated training on health and safety. Construction experts should make ethical decisions about whether to disseminate and enforce the standards for sustainable employment. Informal arrangements, such as overlooking certain criteria when procuring labor and the illegal actions (Müller et al., 2014), are often a precondition of modern slavery. Ethical labor practices should guide suppliers' selection (Esoimeme, 2020). Furthermore, companies often rely on whistleblowers to draw their attention to modern slavery; therefore, it is essential to make avenues of communication available and create an inclusive, non-discriminatory company environment that gives personnel the confidence to speak up (Stevenson & Cole, 2018). Managers must be trained to take reports seriously and respond with timely actions when necessary (Stevenson & Cole, 2018).

A Research Agenda for Studying Modern Slavery

In the previous sections, the article presented the state of the literature about modern slavery, focusing on construction projects. As emerged, this literature is published outside project-based journals. Therefore, the authors agree with Hodgson and Cicmil (2008) when arguing that project studies should pay more attention to social and ethical concerns. Modern slavery, an ethical and moral issue relevant to construction projects, is a clear example of a topic not getting enough attention.

In the following sections, the article presents a series of propositions leading to a research agenda. The first two sections provide specific propositions for construction projects, whereas the remaining sections provide propositions that can be generalized to a broader realm of projects. Finally, the authors explain how CMS can inform scholars interested in addressing such an agenda.

Organization

Trautrim et al. (2020) and Liu et al. (2022) mentioned the importance of auditing systems within the organization to address and detect modern slavery. Organizational mechanisms, such as whistleblowing procedures, are essential to enable workers to report unethical or illegal activities on-site, including suspects of modern slavery (Liu et al., 2022; Trautrim et al., 2020). However, developing and enabling such mechanisms might be a challenge in projects because of the temporalities involved (Söderlund, 2004), and the fact that organizations in the project network evolve over time (Artto & Wikström, 2005; Gil & Fu, 2021). Therefore, future research ought to be devoted to studying how project-based organizations (Winch, 2014) can capture and share lessons learned across projects (Davies et al., 2018; Fuller et al., 2011; Invernizzi et al., 2018). Such lessons learned can be used to develop the necessary capabilities to detect and avoid modern slavery in their construction sites. In addition, research should also be devoted to studying how construction projects can develop a routine for regular inspections and a rigorous and comprehensive auditing system for lower tiers of low-profile contractors (Dharmapalan et al., 2021) who are more likely to engage in modern slavery. Therefore, although the literature suggests that organizations, such as clients and main contractors, can play a key role in preventing subcontractors from using modern slavery, there is still very limited understanding on the *why* and *how*. This leads to the following proposition for further research:

Proposition (P1): Clients and main contractors can play a key role in preventing subcontractors from using modern slavery in construction projects.

The Project Network

Trautrim et al. (2020) discuss the need for further research to understand why modern slavery is an issue and a challenge in the supply chain. They mentioned the necessity to further learn about modern slavery to understand how it enters the supply chain and why the recently developed systems to fight modern slavery are inadequate. A key research area should investigate how government and professional associations can deal with modern slavery in construction projects from a project network perspective (CIOB, 2016, 2018; Brookes et al., 2020). Modern slaves can be employed at different levels, including the material supply chain (e.g., brick production). Supply chain visibility in projects is a recognized issue in the literature (Nolan & Bott, 2018). In addition, health, safety, and quality certifications should be investigated and, eventually, certification for training on modern slavery in construction projects can be developed. For instance, Trautrim et al. (2020) suggested that reducing modern slavery in the construction supply chain necessitated establishing robust training and educational programs targeted at all employees across the supply chain tiers. Moreover, Liu et al. (2022) recommend developing an online platform for collecting, filtering, and analyzing procurement data to conduct a modern slavery risk assessment, allowing for a rigorous modern slavery risk analysis and systematic supply chain monitoring. They also suggest increasing the traceability and transparency of firms' supply chains and making them accountable for modern slavery in their supply chains. In short, research should be developed to study how the project network changes when modern slaves are involved (e.g., investigating new links among stakeholders and, eventually, new stakeholders in the network). The collaborative effort done in the project network in the previous decade to improve health and safety in construction projects should be replicated for modern slavery.

Proposition (P2): The project network has a key role in preventing and fighting modern slavery in construction projects.

Individual Workers

The modern slavery literature stresses the importance of training and education to detect and fight modern slavery (Jones & Comfort, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2020). Landau and Marshall (2018) mentioned the need for workers to undertake training to detect and fight modern slavery; however, such training is still uncommon (David & Salter, 2021). Training is needed particularly for the people in the organization who are more likely to deal with modern slavery (Trautrimis et al., 2020). Traditional project management training focuses on hard skills, including tools and techniques, while ethical aspects are often downplayed despite their increasing relevance to the profession (Helgadóttir, 2008; Ljungblom & Lennerfors, 2018). Therefore, research should be devoted to establishing how to train project managers and workers to detect, fight, and deal with cases of modern slavery. In particular, attention should be given to contexts where training is notoriously difficult, such as in small and medium-sized enterprises (Tezel et al., 2018) or developing countries (Nguyen, 2007). Organizations truly committed to fighting modern slavery should train their workforces to identify modern slaves and be able to report this finding (or suspect) to the organization and legal authorities in a timely manner.

Proposition (P3): A trained and experienced workforce can reduce modern slavery in projects.

Human Capital

Human capital is a relevant contribution of a research agenda to project studies. Human capital is central in project studies for two main reasons: (1) projects are human-centric activities (Suhonen & Paasivaara, 2011), and (2) the project is a natural condition, as most human activities concern temporary endeavors (Jensen et al., 2016). While investing in innovation or training can lead to long-term benefits for the organization, employing modern slaves can be a

short sight solution that reduces cost in the short term but does not make the organization competitive in the long run.

Proposition (P4): Project-based organizations employing modern slaves have less human capital and are less competitive in the long run.

The Role of Critical Management Studies

CMS can offer a relevant perspective for project scholars in approaching such a research agenda. For example, Prasad and Mills (2010) emphasized how CMS offer scholars theoretical frameworks and analytical procedures that might effectively address and possibly mitigate ethical and social dilemmas that arise in businesses and organizations such as modern slavery. Fournier and Grey (2000) identified two principles relevant to researching modern slavery in projects. First, CMS has a non-performative intent grounded on the idea that topics of ethics and equality are just as essential, or perhaps more essential, than the classical considerations about organizational performance and productivity (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Fournier & Grey, 2000). Second, CMS aims to prevent oppression/exploitation; whether it is the exploitation of workers, women, or ethnic minorities, the overall objective of such work is to fight discrimination, exploitation, and coercion in organizations and society (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Fournier & Grey, 2000). Therefore, CMS can provide the scientific background for scientists interested in studying modern slavery.

Conclusions

Slavery has existed for thousands of years and has developed into what is now known as modern slavery (Bales et al., 2011). After a general SLR, without losing generality, the authors focused on the construction sector because it is an exemplar project-based industry in which modern slavery is prevalent. Construction project managers should take modern slavery seriously for legal, ethical, and economic reasons. Due to the frequent movement of construction workers among different locations and the nature of this hidden crime, it is difficult to detect cases of modern slavery within this sector (Russell et al., 2018; CIOB, 2018). Children, in particular, working in the construction sector (often in brick production) are exposed to dangerous working conditions, and the construction sector accounts for the most threatening form of child labor (DeGraff et al., 2016; Larmar et al., 2017).

Organizations should commit to fighting modern slavery, not only because of ethical and legal reasons but also because of the risk of reputational damage. As shown by the SLR presented in this article, the literature about modern slavery is rapidly growing; however, this is not the case for project studies. Modern slavery is what Geraldi and Söderlund (2018) call a “Type 3 research,” an area that, along with the studies on the “dark side of projects” (Locatelli et al., 2022a, 2022b), needs further development. There are no articles published in mainstream project management journals discussing modern slavery despite its relevance and prevalence particularly in the construction sector. Project management scholars should consider modern slavery a relevant research topic, perhaps starting from the research agenda and propositions derived in this article.

As seen from the different definitions in the Appendix, modern slavery is an umbrella term (Carrington et al., 2021; Nolan & Bott, 2018; Rioux et al., 2020) that is debatable and contentious, and researchers argue that the term does not adequately describe the situation of severe labor exploitation with no clear consensus on which practices or kinds of people would

be included under the term (Allain, 2012; Quirk, 2011; Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022; LeBaron, 2018). More radical scholars even discussed if the term “modern slavery” should be abolished because it describes many forms of unethical practices that cannot be tackled or treated as one specific issue (O’Connell Davidson, 2015). Nevertheless, despite these arguments and criticisms, modern slavery remains the most often used term in business and management studies (Caruana et al., 2021).

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Appendix. Definitions of Slavery and Modern Slavery From Phase 1 and

Phase 2

As presented in the following table, the authors collected all the definitions of “slavery” and “modern slavery” defined in our sample of 61 papers from Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Reference	Definition of Slavery
(Crane, 2013; David & Salter, 2021; Gold et al., 2015; Landau & Marshall, 2018; Landman, 2020; Mende & Drubel, 2020; Smith & Johns, 2019; Stringer & Michailova, 2018; Turner, 2015; Wen, 2016)	<i>“the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”</i> (Slavery Convention, 1926).
(el-Mumin, 2020)	<i>“the significant deprivation of a person’s individual liberty with the intent of exploitation through the use, management, purchase, sale, profit, transfer or disposal of that person”</i> (The Bellagio–Harvard Guidelines, 2012).
Reference	Definition of Modern Slavery
(Liu et al., 2022)	<i>“cases of serious human exploitation where the victim cannot refuse or leave. The Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth) further describes it as exercising ownership over another person, including through debt or contract”</i> (Australian Government, 2020).
(Jones & Comfort, 2022)	<i>“the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain”</i> (Anti-Slavery International, 2021).
(Srivastava, 2019; Such et al., 2018, 2019)	<i>“the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women, or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception, or other</i>

	<i>means for the purpose of exploitation” (Such et al., 2018).</i>
(Carrington et al., 2021)	<i>“a relationship in which one person is controlled by another through violence, the threat of violence, or psychological coercion, has lost free will and free movement, is exploited economically, and is paid nothing beyond subsistence” (Bales et al., 2011, p. 31).</i>
(Flynn, 2019)	<i>“the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018). This is the same definition of slavery from the (Slavery Convention, 1926).</i>
(Natarajan et al., 2021)	<i>“the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain, where ‘people are being controlled — they can face violence or threats, be forced into inescapable debt, or have had their passport taken away and are being threatened with deportation” (Anti-Slavery International, 2020).</i>
(Wallis, 2017)	<i>“the illicit trade in human beings turned into mere commodities to be bought, sold and exploited for vast profits with little chance of the perpetrators being caught or convicted, and with horrendous human rights violations for the victims” (Wallis, 2017).</i>
(Redmond, 2020)	<i>“situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power” (ILO, 2017, p. 9).</i>
(Such et al., 2020)	<i>“a human rights violation that encompasses a range of exploitative crimes. It refers to activities involved when one person obtains or holds another person in compelled service through mental or physical threat, violence or abuse” (Such et al., 2020).</i>
(Sabella, 2011)	<i>“activities involved when one person obtains or holds another person in compelled service” (U.S. Department of State, 2010).</i>

2.2 Article Publication 2

Alzoubi, Y., Locatelli, G., & Sainati, T. (2023). The ugly side of construction: Modern slavery in the 2022 FIFA World Cup program. *Construction Management and Economics*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2023.2269434>. **Scopus-indexed Journal, Impact Factor: 3.4, 5-Year Impact Factor: 3.8.**

The Ugly Side of Construction: Modern Slavery in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program

Abstract

Modern slavery is an illegal and unethical practice that is widespread across several sectors, including construction. This article investigates the mechanisms and motivations for employing modern slaves in construction projects and the role of “political will” in fighting it. To this end, using a cross-sectional single case study, the article examines the case of Qatar’s construction of the infrastructure for the 2022 FIFA World Cup—a large construction program in which modern slavery has been extensively documented. Our theoretical lens is the Fraud Triangle Theory (opportunity, pressure, and rationalization), which is rarely used in construction management but is useful for investigating illegal or unethical phenomena. The findings document the various factors contributing to modern slavery, including the kafala system, confiscated passports, debt bondage, contract substitution, salary abuse, program time constraints, cash flow shortage, and weak internal control systems. This article’s key novel theoretical contributions relate to identifying why modern slavery occurs in construction projects using the Fraud Triangle Theory and highlighting the importance of “political will” in fighting modern slavery worldwide.

Keywords: Forced labor; Labor exploitation; Ethics; Migrant workers; Discrimination

Introduction

Modern slavery is “*the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised*” (Slavery Convention, 1926, p. 16). Corruption, poverty, war, natural catastrophes, economic challenges, lack of education, unemployment, and inequality are all factors that contribute to modern slavery (Such et al., 2019, 2020; Sabella, 2011). Modern slaves are often exploited in three main ways: a) being manipulated to work through mental or physical intimidation; b) being treated as commodities; and c) being physically controlled or having their movements restricted due to being owned by their slaveholders (Wen, 2016; Flynn, 2019; Crane, 2013). Modern slavery has detrimental impacts on modern slaves, such as by affecting their economic status, physical health, and social well-being, and it also affects the reputation and credibility of companies, communities, and nations (Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018).

Modern slavery is widespread in the construction sector (Jones & Comfort, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrim et al., 2020a) across the world, including countries such as the United Kingdom (Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Trautrim et al., 2020a), Nepal (Daly et al., 2020), and Qatar (Amnesty International, 2016c; Millward, 2017). Moreover, construction supply chains (e.g. material supplies and services) can be subject to modern slavery (Larmar et al., 2017).

Construction management scholars have discussed topics linked to modern slavery, such as human resource management (Ness, 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2012), ethics (Bowen et al., 2007; Moodley et al., 2008), social sustainability (Kordi et al., 2021), inequality and discrimination of migrant workers (Abdul-Aziz, 2001; Hamid & Tutt, 2019; Oswald et al., 2018; Santoso, 2009), and health and safety of migrant workers (Tutt et al., 2013a). This article acknowledges and incorporates the existing literature and terms related to migrant and low-skilled workers in construction management to examine modern slavery in construction. However, in this work, the authors use the term “modern slaves” as it better captures the phenomenon the authors want to address.

It is well-known that modern slavery occurred in the construction of the infrastructure for Qatar's FIFA World Cup program (Christ et al., 2019; Locatelli et al., 2022; Millward, 2017). Therefore, using this case study, this article aims to investigate the mechanisms and motivations for employing modern slaves in construction projects by addressing the following RQ:

RQ) Why does modern slavery occur in construction projects?

Following the introduction, a concise literature review on modern slavery, modern slavery in construction, migrant workers in construction, and the theoretical background of the work is presented. Subsequently, a description of the methodology, including the justification of the theoretical lens, data collection and analysis, and case study context is provided. Following this, the findings are presented and discussed. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key insights in the article and offers suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Modern Slavery

Modern slavery as a term was brought into common around 2007 by academics investigating various forms of involuntary labor (Smith & Johns, 2019). It is estimated that there are 40.3 million modern slaves worldwide (Banerjee, 2020; Dodd et al., 2022; Fellows & Chong, 2020; Landman & Silverman, 2019; Leão et al., 2021), who are employed in different sectors, including but not limited to construction (Liu et al., 2022), manufacturing (Stevenson & Cole, 2018), agriculture (Kougkoulos et al., 2021), and fisheries (Vandergeest & Marschke, 2020). Modern slavery can take several different forms, such as human trafficking, forced labor, and debt bondage, which are described below.

Human trafficking: is the *“recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or*

receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation” (United Nations, 2000, p.02).

In human trafficking, modern slaves are promised lucrative jobs in the country of employment. They may borrow money from the slaveholder to pay for travel and the cost of finding them a job (GLAA, 2023) as a loan to be reimbursed later (Emberson, 2019). However, when they arrive at the country of employment, their passports are taken, and they are told they must keep working for their slaveholders to earn the money required to repay the debts taken from the slaveholders (Emberson, 2019; Dando et al., 2016). One-way slaveholders impose extra controls on their modern slaves by threatening to denounce them as “illegal aliens”, which terrifies many of them (Stotts & Ramey, 2009).

Forced labor: is *“all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily” (ILO, 1930).* Modern slaves are forced to work against their will and face mental health issues, physical abuse, and financial problems that prevent them from leaving their jobs (Rioux et al., 2020). Additionally, modern slaves are often forced to work in sectors such as construction, agriculture, or manufacturing (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2019), and there are approximately 1.1 million new modern slaves experiencing forced labor every year (Kidd & Manthorpe, 2017).

Debt bondage: is *“the status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his personal services or of those of a person under his control as security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied towards the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services is not respectively limited and defined” (United Nations, 1956).* In certain cases, once modern slaves arrive at their destination, they discover they have been deceived, as the job they traveled for differs greatly from the job that was advertised to them. At this point, modern slaves find themselves stranded trying to pay off their debts to the slaveholder (GLAA, 2023), are forced to work for little to no salary, and cannot contest or amend the conditions of their debt (Sabella, 2011).

Overall, as many different forms of modern slavery are experienced by modern slaves worldwide, and modern slavery significantly affects their physical and mental health, modern slavery is considered an international public health concern (Srivastava, 2019; Such et al., 2019). In many cases, modern slaves have little or no job training and are compelled to work for long hours, particularly in construction, which increases their chances of being injured, paralyzed, or killed (Sabella, 2011) or developing emotional and mental disorders (J. Gibson, 2018; Williamson et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020).

There are several signs that may indicate that a person is enslaved, such as restricted freedom, certain behaviors, working conditions, or accommodation conditions (Alzoubi et al., 2023; GLAA, 2020):

Restricted freedom: A modern slave's passport may be taken away by the slaveholder, thus preventing them from exiting the country or obtaining an alternative job.

Behavior: Modern slaves may be unable to communicate in the language of the country in which they are employed. Additionally, mental health problems such as anxiety, stress and depression are common symptoms of modern slaves. Modern slaves are also prevented from organizing or joining unions.

Working conditions: Modern slaves may be required to work extremely long hours without breaks. On occasion, slaveholders may assign the same modern slave to different jobs, thus extending their working hours even more.

Accommodation: Modern slaves are frequently forced to live in overcrowded, confined, and unsanitary accommodations.

Modern Slavery in Construction

One of the sectors regarded as being the most at risk of modern slavery is the construction sector (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022). The construction sector is exposed to modern slavery for three main reasons: 1) there are a large number of laborers working in the construction sector, which increases the opportunities for exploitation, as laborers are highly dependent on self-employment and umbrella agencies (Trautrimis et al., 2020a; Walsh et al., 2022); 2) the sector has a low profit margin, meaning that businesses may attempt to save costs in different ways, some of which may be illegal (Khan et al., 2020); 3) the sector is not rigorous in ensuring the legal requirements for employment are met by laborers (CIOB, 2018).

Determining the exact numbers of modern slaves in the construction sector is challenging due to the following issues: a) the hidden nature of this criminal activity; b) the dispersed nature of construction sites across countries; c) the high reliance of slaveholders on continuously moving migrants and low-skilled labor between construction sites; and d) the heterogeneity of international supply chains for goods and services (Russell et al., 2018; Trautrimis et al., 2020b). Furthermore, main contractors have a complex supply chain that includes many subcontractors, labor agencies, and suppliers. As a result, it is difficult to keep track of all these transactions; indeed, main contractors typically have processes to audit the first two tiers of the supply chain, but firms below that level may be able to avoid scrutiny (Alzoubi et al., 2023; KPMG, 2020). As such, even when construction projects are being executed in countries at low risk of modern slavery, firms may unintentionally aid modern slavery by importing construction materials from countries that use modern slavery (Liu et al., 2022).

In certain contexts, construction subcontractors are notorious for using illicit practices such as modern slavery (Alzoubi et al., 2023; CIOB, 2016). This criminal phenomenon occurs because when firms demand quick turnaround times and low pricing from subcontractors, there is significant pressure on the subcontractors to cut costs and find readily available labor, thus

making modern slavery more appealing to them (Barrientos, 2013; New, 2015). Additionally, the intricate and multi-tiered nature of the supply chains in construction may result in a lack of oversight and control over the employment systems of subcontractors (Liu et al., 2022).

Typically, construction firms implement employment protection requirements for their direct employees or the first-tier contractors, but lower-tier subcontractor employees may be exposed to modern slavery, and, importantly, these employees may represent the majority of construction site employment (CIOB, 2018). Furthermore, many construction practices promote the lowering of employment standards and the use of modern slavery, including discounts, lowest bidder selection, withholding fees, and late/non-payment of salaries (CIOB, 2018). Additionally, workers with low-salary jobs and a lack of job security have a greater chance of experiencing modern slavery, especially in industries that are more at risk of this phenomenon and where earnings are insufficient to allow workers to escape debts and financial difficulties (Lewis et al., 2015). Indeed, the construction sector is a notable example in this context.

Construction managers and relevant stakeholders (e.g., NGOs) ought to pay serious attention to modern slavery for legal, economic, and ethical reasons (Alzoubi et al., 2023). Firstly, from a legal standpoint, several governments have enacted and implemented laws to fight modern slavery (Wilhelm et al., 2020). For example, modern slavery in the construction sector in the United Kingdom is mainly found among small firms used as subcontractors, and this was a major motivation for introducing the 2015 UK Modern Slavery Act (Russell et al., 2018). Similar laws have been implemented to fight this criminal activity in nations like Australia, the USA, and France (Wilhelm et al., 2020). Secondly, construction managers must recognize the significance of modern slavery from an ethical perspective, not just in relation to their firm but also to the organizations that work on their construction projects. For example, when main contractors accept contracts that are much cheaper than the sector average, this might indicate the existence of modern slavery, and the main contractors would be responsible. Finally, from an economic perspective, modern slavery is a

significant danger in terms of reputation (Brookes et al., 2020; Shilling et al., 2021); indeed, contractors who use modern slavery harm their organization's reputations and, as a result, their overall economic outcomes.

Migrants and Low-Skilled Workers in Construction

Construction firms often aspire to reduce the cost of labor as much as is feasible, as labor represents a significant portion of expenditures; one approach to achieving this cost reduction is to employ migrants or low-skilled workers from countries with low salaries (Santoso, 2009). Unfortunately, due to a lack of employment opportunities in their countries, migrants and low-skilled workers frequently work in construction (Shepherd et al., 2021).

Although migrants and low-skilled workers in the construction sector play a fundamental role in the economies of the countries in which they live and work (Cha & Cho, 2014; Li et al., 2019), many of these workers are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination (Baey & Yeoh, 2018; Loosemore et al., 2020; Tutt et al., 2013b) for several reasons:

- These workers may experience language barriers and communication problems (Chan et al., 2016; Fellows et al., 2023; Hare et al., 2013) due to not fully understanding the language of the country in which they work (Flouris et al., 2021; Tutt et al., 2013a);
- They may incur significant debt in order to obtain employment abroad (Baey & Yeoh, 2018; Buckley et al., 2016), or they may receive low salaries or be subject to salary deductions (Abdul-Aziz, 2001; Al-Emad & Abdul Rahman, 2021; Baey & Yeoh, 2018; Hamid & Tutt, 2019; Huang & Yeoh, 2003);
- They are subjected to dangerous and poor working and living environments (Abdul-Aziz, 2001; Al-Emad & Abdul Rahman, 2021; Buckley et al., 2016; Flouris et al., 2021). For example, they may work continuously for extended hours (Amnesty International, 2010; Loosemore et al., 2020), experience serious injuries due to a lack of proper health and safety

training (O'Connor et al., 2005), or be exposed to extreme weather conditions, thus increasing their risk of heat-related issues and death (Flouris et al., 2021; Moyce & Schenker, 2018). Furthermore, these workers may reside in crowded, shared, and inadequate accommodations (Dhal, 2020; Oswald et al., 2018), for which they are compelled to pay expensive rent (Dhal, 2020);

- They experience verbal and physical abuse (Hamid & Tutt, 2019; Moyce & Schenker, 2018), significantly impacting their mental health (Chakraborty et al., 2018; Mucci et al., 2019).

However, many migrants and low-skilled workers often do not complain about how they are treated due to communication difficulties or fear of losing their job or being sent back to their home country (Moyce & Schenker, 2018; Oswald et al., 2018).

Theoretical Background: Fraud Triangle Theory

To study illegal or unethical practices, scholars have used several theoretical lenses, such as the Institutional Theory to study corruption (Xie et al., 2019), the Social Identity Theory to examine sexism (Foster et al., 2021), and the Regulatory Dialectic Theory to investigate money laundering (Dupuis et al., 2021). A powerful theoretical lens used to study illegal or unethical phenomena is the Fraud Triangle Theory (FTT). Indeed, the FTT is a widely accepted theory that explains why people engage in unethical or illegal practices (Hauser, 2019), and it has been used in the construction sector to explore topics such as corruption (Bowen et al., 2012), megaproject environmental responsibility behavior (Xie et al., 2022), and greenwashing behaviors (He et al., 2021). Moreover, the FTT has already been successfully used to study topics in projects outside construction management journals (Apriyanti & Rais, 2020; Deng et al., 2014; Hauser, 2019; Hogan et al., 2008; Steinmeier, 2016).

This article adopts the FTT as the theoretical perspective to investigate why modern slavery occurs in construction projects. A key point of the FTT is the concept that many people can engage in illegal or unethical practices if the situation allows it (Morales et al., 2014). Furthermore, the FTT suggests that illegal or unethical practices are not arbitrary but deliberate acts (Adeoti et al., 2021; Tuna et al., 2016). The FTT defines three elements that drive illegal or unethical practice: the “opportunity” to behave dishonestly, “pressure” to do so, and the person’s “rationalization” of their conduct (Cressey, 1950; Morales et al., 2014).

Opportunity

In the FTT, opportunity refers to the ability to commit unethical or illegal practices without expecting to be caught or punished (Schnatterly et al., 2018). Opportunities for committing illegal or unethical practices include weak internal control systems, a lack of ethical atmosphere and whistleblowing procedures, unfavorable working circumstances, and weak policy execution (Adeoti et al., 2021; Cressey, 1950; Sauser, 2007; Thanasak, 2013). In addition, when the organization has weak ethical standards, the mindset is focused on project success in terms of profit, time, and cost rather than moral values (Appelbaum et al., 2005).

Pressure

According to the FTT, pressure refers to the motive or necessity to commit fraud (Cressey, 1950). For example, work-related pressures in organizations, such as those in the construction sector, may encourage individuals to engage in unethical or illegal practices to fulfill the organization’s goals or comply with strict deadlines (Albrecht et al., 2008; Hauser, 2019). Moreover, individuals may engage in unethical or illegal practices due to economic pressure (e.g., pressure to achieve certain targets) (He et al., 2021). According to Adeoti et al. (2021),

the literature confirms FTT's fundamental premise that higher workload and work pressure are associated with a greater likelihood of illegal or unethical practice.

Rationalization

Rationalization represents a psychological element of the FTT (Anand et al., 2004; Schnatterly et al., 2018; Zhong et al., 2022). Specifically, rationalization allows people to psychologically reframe and justify their illegal or unethical practices, thus making those practices seem morally acceptable to them (Morales et al., 2014; Zhong et al., 2022). In the context of unethical or illegal practices, rationalization is necessary because the individuals are cognizant that their practice goes against society's moral standards and expectations (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Yu, 2013; Adeoti et al., 2021). According to Hauser (2019), if offenders believe that engaging in unethical or illegal practice is not rationalizable, they will not commit the act because of the feeling of guilt connected to it. However, if they trust that the unethical or illegal practice can be rationalized, they can negate the unpleasant feelings around participating in such practice. As rationalization is specific to each offender and the situation in which the unethical or illegal practice occurs (Mohd-Sanusi et al., 2015; Muhtar et al., 2018), and because it is impossible to fully understand the offender's perspective and thoughts (Cressey, 1953), this element of the FTT is the most ambiguous and difficult to detect (Cohen et al., 2010; Muhtar et al., 2018).

Relationships Between the Elements of the Fraud Triangle Theory

The three elements of the FTT are connected and interact together (Cressey, 1953; He et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2022), and according to the FTT, the three elements must all exist for an individual to act unethically or illegally (Hauser, 2019; He et al., 2021; Mayhew & Murphy, 2014). Therefore, unethical or illegal practices are unlikely to happen if any of these elements are missing (Hauser, 2019; Oliver, 2009; Schnatterly et al., 2018).

According to Bowen et al. (2012), it is erroneous to conceptualize the three elements of the FTT as equally important or as giving equal contributions to unethical or illegal practices. Indeed, the opportunity element is considered the most significant contributor to unethical or illegal practices (Awalluddin et al., 2022; Homer, 2019). This is because individuals can commit an offense if they discover a flaw in the organizational internal control systems and security measures (Awalluddin et al., 2022). Additionally, opportunity undoubtedly has a powerful “*pull effect*”, allowing individuals to participate in unethical or illegal practices (Bowen et al., 2012, p. 899). Conversely, pressure alone will not encourage an individual to commit unethical or illegal practices unless there is an opportunity to do so (Awalluddin et al., 2022; Turner et al., 2003). Even though rationalization relates to an individual’s ethics or personality attributes, individuals within organizations are subjected to various opportunities and pressures that might impact rationalization (He et al., 2021; Soltani, 2014). Therefore, rationalization is often the result of opportunities and pressures and is the “final step” in the development of unethical or illegal practices (Harrison et al., 2018; He et al., 2021).

Methodology

This article is based on the abductive, cross-sectional single case of the construction of the infrastructure for the 2022 FIFA World Cup program in Qatar. The authors consider the start time of the case study as the time when Qatar was awarded the hosting of the World Cup in 2010 and the end time of the case study as the time when Qatar completed the program in 2022. Moreover, the authors have chosen to study this case as it is a flagship case (i.e. what Siggelkow (2007) calls “*a talking pig*”). In particular, the authors selected this case because:

- The FIFA World Cup in Qatar has been well documented in media, including by The Guardian, BBC News, and NGOs, all of whom have reported explicit signs of modern slavery in the

infrastructure construction program, thus allowing for the collection of rich data from various sources.

- There have been an estimated 6,500 deaths of migrant workers involved in this construction program (Ibbetson, 2021; Pattisson et al., 2021), which is considered the single largest death count in the modern history of any major athletic event (Reuters, 2018) making this an interesting case to investigate.

Justification of the Fraud Triangle Theory

The FTT is ideal for exploring and understanding topics related to the “dark side” of construction projects, including modern slavery, for the following reasons. Firstly, the FTT explains why ordinary people make decisions or engage in illegal or unethical actions. The authors consider the element of morality to be crucial in studying modern slavery, which is deemed a wrongdoing in every context, area, or business in which it occurs, whether done by “good people” or “bad people”.

Secondly, the FTT elements (opportunity, pressure, and rationalization) are meaningful in the context of construction projects and programs and, even more importantly, are relevant and understandable for construction scholars and practitioners. In particular, within the construction sector, the opportunity to commit immoral acts might result from poor regulatory supervision and complex subcontracting chains, which create a lack of transparency and accountability (Bales, 2012). Indeed, the FTT can help identify these opportunities by focusing on structural weaknesses that may contribute to unethical or illegal practices, such as modern slavery.

Moreover, the element of pressure within the construction sector arises from high competition, low-profit margins (Greco, 2021), and tight deadlines (Fordjour et al., 2021), which may all encourage construction companies to engage in unethical or illegal practices, such as modern slavery. The FTT highlights the importance of these pressures and is useful for exploring how they may lead construction professionals toward unethical or illegal practices.

The element of rationalization is a psychological element of the FTT (Anand et al., 2004; Schnatterly et al., 2018) that is difficult to detect (Cohen et al., 2010; Muhtar et al., 2018). However, for example, the financial pressure often associated with construction projects may lead stakeholders to rationalize cutting corners to save money in unethical or illegal ways. For instance, during the development of a construction project, the contractor might use construction materials of a lower quality than those specified in the project requirements to deal with an extremely tight budget.

Data Collection

Case studies and theories can help researchers determine “why” certain phenomena occur (Yin, 2017). In our case, the authors aimed to examine why modern slavery occurs in construction projects. In this work, the unit of analysis is the opportunity, pressure, and rationalization in the context of the case. Secondary data were used, including progress reports and documents issued by NGOs such as Amnesty International, assessment reports linked to our case, and articles from the media such as BBC News or newspapers like The Guardian. Therefore, the authors have used the following inclusion criteria:

- The source should mainly discuss the exploitation of workers or the illegal or unethical practices during the construction of infrastructure for Qatar’s 2022 FIFA World Cup program.
- The source should be a reputable source that speaks about modern slavery in Qatar, such as an NGO (e.g., Amnesty International), a newspaper (e.g., The Guardian), or a news channel (e.g., BBC News).
- The source should cover the topic of modern slavery in Qatar repeatedly to ensure constant coverage of the case and updates over time.

Table 1 shows the organizations used to collect secondary data for the case study, while Table 2 displays the source types used for data collection and their total frequency, along with the name and frequency of each specific source.

Table 1. Name of the organization and the secondary data collected on the case study

Name of organization	Secondary data collected
The Guardian (Pattison et al., 2021, 2022); (Chaudhary, 2017); (Conn, 2017); (Conn, 2018); (Kelly et al., 2019); (Pattison, 2013); (MacInnes, 2022)	(Albawaba, 2021); (Barolini, 2021); (Doughty, 2021); (Garner-Purkis, 2021); (Harding, 2021); (Ibbetson, 2021); (McCarthy, 2021); (RBFA, 2021); (Vachhatani, 2021); (Wanjohi, 2021); (Pattison, 2021)
Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2013, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2019, 2020, 2021)	(Roan, 2019); (BBC, 2019); (BBC, 2016); (Molitor, 2014); (Shojaei, 2020); (IOHR, 2019)
Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2012, 2020b, 2020a)	(Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020); (Bauomy, 2020); (Molitor, 2014); (Shojaei, 2020); (Wanjohi, 2021); (Zayadin, 2021)
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC, 2015)	(Reuters, 2018); (Vachhatani, 2021); (Shojaei, 2020); (IOHR, 2019); (Wanjohi, 2021)
Euro News (Bauomy, 2020)	(Bauomy, 2020)
The Independent (Harding, 2021)	(Harding, 2021)
European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) (Molitor, 2014)	(Molitor, 2014)
Anti-slavery (Anti-slavery, 2022)	(Anti-slavery, 2022)
Los Angeles Times (Gambrell, 2022)	(Gambrell, 2022)

Table 2. Data collection sources and their frequency

Type of source	Total frequency	Name and frequency of source
News/Newspapers	24	The Guardian (8); BBC (3); The Independent (1); Human Rights Pulse (1); Construction News (1); Euronews (1); Republic World (1); The Wire (1); Life Gate (1); NPR (1); Sports Illustrated (1); Albawaba (1); International Observatory of Human Rights (1); Daily Mail (1); Los Angeles Times (1)
Data from websites	10	Amnesty International (3); Human Rights Watch (1); Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (1); Thomson Reuters (1); European Trade Union Institute (1); Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) (1); Global Voices (1); Anti-slavery (1)
Long reports	8	Amnesty International (4); Human Rights Watch (3); International Trade Union Confederation (1)
Total	42	42

Data Analysis

This article employed thematic analysis, which is a qualitative method for investigating research data (Elliott et al., 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Bowen et al., 2012). Thematic analysis involves familiarization with the collected data, developing initial codes, looking for themes, assessing the themes, and identifying and labeling the themes (Bowen et al., 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Zulu & Khosrowshahi, 2021).

Thematic analysis is suitable for analyzing our data as it can be used to effectively summarize the main characteristics of big datasets, as well as to identify similarities and variances in the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, thematic analysis is a flexible method for discovering, evaluating, and describing patterns evident in a large dataset to determine repeated meaningful insights (Rodger et al., 2020) and uncover unexpected findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the different phases of thematic analysis allow the researcher to adopt a well-structured analytical method to manage the data collected effectively, thereby facilitating the production of a well-organized and concise research report (King, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017). The open-coding thematic analysis stage involved familiarization with the collected data on the case. This process involved looking for patterns by frequently reviewing the collected data

to gain holistic knowledge that would facilitate the understanding of the nature of the entire dataset (Nowell et al., 2017; Rodger et al., 2020). In addition, this phase of thematic analysis facilitates the development of patterns, thoughts, and questions regarding the acquired data and permits the documentation of introspective reflections on the data collected (Nowell et al., 2017).

The data collected were imported into NVivo software (Davis, 2014), thus enabling the authors to concentrate on particular data qualities by coding the keywords, terms, and sentences; indeed, this process is important for identifying repeated and intriguing patterns within the data (Rodger et al., 2020). The codes were then revised and analyzed to find themes by combining repeated patterns from the data (Aronson, 1995). Following Rodger et al. (2020), once the themes were produced, they were examined and adapted by the authors to ensure they were satisfactory. Following an iterative process, this procedure was repeated until the themes presented in the findings were derived from the coding. These themes were discussed extensively among the authors and were found to be frequently repeated across source documents, ensuring theoretical saturation.

Case Study Context

Background

On December 2, 2010, Qatar was selected to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, officially becoming the first Arab country to be awarded the opportunity to host it (Reuters, 2018; RBFA, 2021). The 2022 FIFA World Cup was held between November 21, 2022, and December 18, 2022 (Vachhatani, 2021). The competition was shifted to the winter to escape the nation's high summer temperatures (Roan, 2019; Vachhatani, 2021). The construction of the FIFA World Cup program, including the construction and refurbishment of the stadiums for the event, new roadways, public transportation systems, airports, and accommodations (Harding, 2021; Barolini, 2021), is the focus of our study. Given the appraisal and extension of many of the construction projects, determining the actual

expenditure incurred was difficult; nonetheless, it is estimated that the expenses reached \$220 billion (Killingstad, 2022; Whiteside, 2022), meaning the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar was likely the most costly event in the tournament's history (Chaudhary, 2017; ITUC, 2015).

Around two million migrants work in Qatar in different sectors, including construction, which represents Qatar's main sector (HRW, 2020a); as a result, Qatar has the highest proportion of migrants to citizens globally (Zayadin, 2021). Even though many of the reports and articles concerning modern slavery in Qatar's FIFA World Cup program originated from the construction sector, which is the focus of our study, modern slavery has not been limited to construction. Indeed, other sectors essential to the FIFA World Cup program, such as domestic services, hospitality (Amnesty International, 2019, 2021; Anti-slavery, 2022), and security and waste removal, were also plagued by various forms of modern slavery (Anti-slavery, 2022).

Recruitment of Modern Slaves

Many of the modern slaves that worked on the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program were employed by local recruitment companies operating on behalf of companies and clients in Qatar. Indeed, many modern slaves travel to Qatar in order to support their families and to evade poverty and harsh living and working conditions in their country. These modern slaves usually obtain their paperwork, passports, job descriptions, contracts, and documentation from their slaveholders the day before they depart (Molitor, 2014).

Living and Working Conditions of Modern Slaves

Living conditions: Migrant workers in Qatar must be accommodated at the cost of their sponsors, and their accommodations must, in theory, adhere to the standard living conditions (Amnesty International, 2016c). However, many migrant workers did not have such standard living conditions, and sponsors violated Qatari law (Amnesty International, 2016c). The

accommodations provided to the modern slaves that worked on the construction of the FIFA World Cup program were frequently crowded, dirty, dangerous, and far from their working sites (Molitor, 2014; Amnesty International, 2016a; Patisson, 2021; Amnesty International, 2016c). For example, one of the migrant workers said: “...*the camp is no good, there are eight of us in one room – it is too many. But I cannot complain [because] they will end my job.*” (Amnesty International, 2016a). Some modern slaves claimed they were forced to work and were left hungry (Patisson, 2013). In addition, they were frequently subjected to restrictions on their movement at work and experienced mental and physical coercion (Amnesty International, 2016c).

Working conditions: As per the study on the Gulf’s harsh summer weather, significant numbers of modern slaves based on Qatari construction sites, including those that worked on infrastructure for the 2022 FIFA World Cup program, were exposed to potentially fatal working conditions involving high temperatures and humidity (Conn, 2017). In addition, modern slaves reported various heat-related health issues, such as migraines and breathing difficulties (Kelly et al., 2019). Modern slaves working on the program in Qatar worked in temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius despite the work prohibition during the warmest hours (ITUC, 2015; Kelly et al., 2019).

Additionally, heat-related deaths could have been avoided if the modern slaves had timely access to medical care (Kelly et al., 2019). However, several modern slaves interviewed in Qatar, including those that worked on the construction of infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program, reported that their slaveholders refused to grant them Qatari health cards or access to medical care if they became unwell (Kelly et al., 2019).

Conversely, reporters also spoke to migrant workers who were generally happy with their living and working circumstances. Therefore, Amnesty International could not state that all migrant workers working on the FIFA World Cup program in Qatar were subjected to signs of modern slavery. Some construction companies appeared dedicated to maintaining fair labor rules (Amnesty International,

2013). Despite this, Amnesty International's study and the available statistical data led the organization to conclude that modern slavery in Qatar was both pervasive and systematic (Amnesty International, 2013).

Number and Causes of Death of Modern Slaves

In 2021, The Guardian reported that more than 6,500 modern slaves that worked on construction sites lost their lives in Qatar since it was awarded the hosting of the World Cup (Harding, 2021; Ibbetson, 2021; Pattisson et al., 2021; Wanjohi, 2021). According to the data, 12 modern slaves died every week (Pattisson et al., 2021; Vachhatani, 2021; Albawaba, 2021; Doughty, 2021). This alarming statistic was discovered by studying government data from five countries from which modern slaves arrived to Qatar: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (Barolini, 2021). The Guardian's investigation revealed a lack of clarity, rigor, and depth in Qatar's death records. Indeed, for political reasons, the government hesitated to declare accurate death statistics. As a result, there were variations between the data kept by various state agencies (Pattisson et al., 2021). Furthermore, one of the government officials who was in charge of organizing the 2022 FIFA World Cup program in Qatar disclosed that the number of deaths related to the program was "between 400 and 500", adding, "I don't have the precise number, that is something that is being discussed" (Gambrell, 2022; MacInnes, 2022). Additionally, while death records were not characterized by the type of job done or the employment location, "a very significant proportion of the migrant workers who have died since 2011 were only in the country because Qatar won the right to host the World Cup" (Garner-Purkis, 2021).

Natural deaths, which are defined as "sudden and unexplained" deaths (Pattisson, 2021), were the most prevalent cause of death of modern slaves in Qatar between 2010 and 2021 (Amnesty International, 2021; McCarthy, 2021). In addition, throughout the summer, the extreme heat

contributed to many deaths (McCarthy, 2021; Pattisson et al., 2021), and road accidents, job accidents, and suicide were other common causes of death (Pattisson et al., 2021).

Previous World Cups

As presented in Table 3, this section compares the previous FIFA World Cup programs in South Africa, Brazil, and Russia with the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Table 3. Comparison of the FIFA World Cup programs from 2010 to 2022

Country	Year	Estimated cost of the World Cup program [billion USD]	Estimated number of jobs related to the World Cup ¹	Estimated number of deaths	Estimated deaths per million workers
South Africa	2010	4 (DiNuzzo, 2018; Rapoza, 2014)	160,000 (McTague, 2010; Mywage, 2009)	2 (Karlsson, 2014)	13
Brazil	2014	15 (Killingstad, 2022; Wade, 2015)	1 million (Alves, 2014; BTN, 2014)	8 (Benson, 2014; Davies, 2014; Watts, 2014)	8
Russia	2018	11.6 (Baxter & Ayres, 2018; Killingstad, 2022)	1.06 million ² (Guivernau, 2018; Instarem, 2018; Kiselyov, 2018)	21 (BWI, 2018; Minky, 2018)	20
Qatar	2022	220 billion (Killingstad, 2022; Whiteside, 2022)	2 million (Amnesty International, 2019)	6,500 ³ (Harding, 2021; Pattisson et al., 2021; Wanjohi, 2021)	3,250

¹ The estimated number of new jobs is not entirely related to the construction sector and includes other sectors such as tourism. There are no explicit statistics about the estimated number of new jobs in the construction sector.

² There are inconsistencies and significant differences regarding the number of new jobs in the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. Three sources show that the number of new jobs *annually* was 100,000 (Guivernau, 2018), 220,000 (Instarem, 2018), and 315,000 (Kiselyov, 2018). Therefore, the authors have multiplied the average by 5 years (which was the working period) to obtain an estimated number of 1.06 million new jobs.

³ The number 6500 represents the deaths since Qatar was awarded the hosting of the World Cup in 2010; therefore, this number is not entirely related to the World Cup program but also includes other projects. There is no available accurate data regarding the number of deaths explicitly related to the construction of the infrastructure for the World Cup program.

The authors normalized the data regarding the number of deaths with respect to the work done and the number of workers. The estimated costs of the World Cup programs were mostly proportional to the work carried out. Therefore, if more workers were involved in the program, it was expected that more workers would have died. When comparing the estimated costs of the programs in South Africa, Brazil, and Russia, the estimated cost of the program in Qatar was at least 14–55 times higher, yet even with the normalization, the number of deaths in Qatar was disproportionately high.

Findings

In this section, the authors present the findings according to the three elements of the FTT, namely opportunity, pressure, and rationalization.

Opportunity

The kafala system: The government of Qatar has one of the strictest migrant worker policies in the Gulf area, with the main one of these policies being the kafala system (HRW, 2012). As migrants arriving in Qatar must be sponsored under the kafala system, slaveholders were responsible for the modern slaves arriving in Qatar (Bauomy, 2020); therefore, they took advantage of the opportunity given to them to use the kafala system to control and exploit the modern slaves (Amnesty International, 2013) to develop the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program. Amnesty International (2013) mentioned that the goal of the kafala system, according to some state representatives, is to establish “*a balance between the rights of the worker and the rights of the employer*”. However, in reality, it produces a highly uneven power distribution and allows slaveholders control over modern slaves (Amnesty International, 2013), as described below.

The kafala system enabled the slaveholders to frequently assert control over modern slaves during the construction of the FIFA World Cup program in three main ways. Firstly, modern slaves can only switch or quit jobs, change sponsors, or enter and exit Qatar with consent from their existing

slaveholders (HRW, 2020a). This must be documented in the form of a No Objection Certificate (NOC) (Amnesty International, 2016b; Chaudhary, 2017; Vachhatani, 2021) or an exit permit (Amnesty International, 2016b; ITUC, 2015; HRW, 2020a). Secondly, modern slaves are not allowed to establish or participate in a union, which increases their risk of being forced to work and enduring unfavorable living and working conditions (Amnesty International, 2021; ITUC, 2015). Thirdly, it is illegal for modern slaves to leave their slaveholders and work for another (Conn, 2018; Amnesty International, 2016b). Hence, the kafala system plays a major role in enabling the slaveholders to exploit modern slaves in various ways, considering that Qatar's kafala system is a government law from a sovereign state.

Passport confiscation: Slaveholders had the opportunity to confiscate modern slaves' passports who worked on the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program to control and restrict their movement, threaten them, and prevent them from leaving Qatar (Amnesty International, 2016c). Many modern slaves claimed that slaveholders frequently took their passports, thus making them illegal immigrants (Pattison, 2013; ITUC, 2015; Amnesty International, 2016a). For instance, one of the modern slaves said: "*I remember my first day in Qatar. Almost the very first thing [an agent] working for my company did was take my passport. I haven't seen it since.*" (Amnesty International, 2016a). Although the legislation in Qatar states that modern slaves must have their passports returned after completing any administrative processes, over 90% of Qatar's modern slaves do not have them (Amnesty International, 2016b). As a result, some modern slaves were hesitant to leave their jobs (Amnesty International, 2016a). Furthermore, slaveholders who confiscate modern slaves' passports and are caught by the government face low fines as the rule is not implemented rigorously (Amnesty International, 2016c).

Debt bondage: Slaveholders took debt bondage as an opportunity to control and threaten modern slaves with debts to keep them working on the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program under poor working and living conditions (Kelly et al., 2019; Pattison, 2021) and restrict their movement. Although the use of recruiting fees is against Qatari labor law, many modern slaves were forced by slaveholders to pay recruiting fees in their home countries before arriving in Qatar (Molitor, 2014; Pattison et al., 2022); therefore, they were hesitant to leave their work after arriving in Qatar (Amnesty International, 2016a). Specifically, many modern slaves paid recruiting agencies unreasonable amounts varying from US\$500 to US\$4,300 (Amnesty International, 2016a) to secure a job in Qatar to work on the construction of the program and other related projects (BBC, 2016).

Weak internal control systems: Slaveholders used the poor labor inspection systems, weak ethical laws, and poor health and safety measures as an opportunity to exploit modern slaves during the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program. For example, slaveholders forced modern slaves to work overtime in high temperatures, often leading to the deaths of the modern slaves. However, slaveholders did not fear responsibility for these deaths, as the government of Qatar declared that most of the deaths were from natural causes (Amnesty International, 2021; McCarthy, 2021).

Salary abuse: The amount of control and power slaveholders had over modern slaves that worked on the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program gave them the opportunity to exploit and abuse modern slaves financially through low, late, incorrect, or non-payment of salaries (Amnesty International, 2021; BBC, 2019; IOHR, 2019). For example, Amnesty International (2020) reported that modern slaves that worked on constructing one of the stadiums had not been given their salaries for nearly seven months. One of the modern slaves said: *“My family is now homeless and two of my younger children have been taken out*

of school... Every day I am in tension, I cannot sleep at night. This is a torture for me.” (Amnesty International, 2016a). Moreover, between January 2019 and May 2020, Human Rights Watch interviewed 93 modern slaves, all of whom claimed that they had experienced some form of exploitation related to salary by their slaveholders (Business & Human Rights, 2020b). Qatari legislation and the Workers’ Welfare Standards consider these practices illegal; however, they remained a common practice (Amnesty International, 2016c).

Pressure

Program time constraints: As the FIFA World Cup is a flagship event and cannot be postponed, time was a crucial factor in the construction of the infrastructure for the event. Moreover, this FIFA World Cup was the biggest event to have ever been held in Qatar, and the entire country was under the world spotlight. Therefore, the government was under pressure to complete the program within the required time and specifications. Accordingly, the government further pressured construction companies to ensure the completion of the construction program on time. Therefore, slaveholders forced modern slaves to work overtime for long periods, even during the prohibited time of harsh summer, with no or minimal breaks (Conn, 2017; Kelly et al., 2019).

Contract substitution: Several modern slaves working on the construction program said that when they arrived in Qatar, they discovered that their contract’s legal terms and conditions were different (Business & Human Rights, 2020b) (e.g. reduced salary, different job roles, extended working hours). Hence, slaveholders pressured and controlled modern slaves to accept the contract substitution imposed on them, which is considered illegal because it violates employees’ labor rights. In that case, modern slaves cannot complain and felt compelled to accept the situation for several reasons. Firstly, they needed to repay debts incurred for securing a job in Qatar (Molitor, 2014; Patisson et al., 2022). Secondly, they felt trapped and controlled and unable to leave Qatar due

to passport confiscation by their slaveholders (Pattisson, 2013; ITUC, 2015; Amnesty International, 2016a), and finally, because of the fear of retaliation by their slaveholders.

Rationalization

The kafala system: Slaveholders use the control mechanisms of the kafala system to exploit modern slaves and abuse them in the form of frequent late or non-payment of salaries, debts, excessive working hours, passport confiscation, and poor living and working conditions (Bauomy, 2020). Slaveholders rationalize their actions by asserting that they are following and complying with the government's kafala system law. These control mechanisms make it highly challenging for modern slaves to quit working on the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program.

Shortage of cash flow: Slaveholders used the COVID-19 pandemic-induced cash flow constraints (HRW, 2020b) and the payment delays from primary stakeholders (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020) to rationalize the different forms of salary abuse toward modern slaves. For example, in a study by Amnesty International (2013), subcontractors who had not paid their modern slaves for long periods frequently blamed the cash flow issues caused by the main contractors.

Discussion

This article contributes to the stream of literature promoted by Müller et al. (2013, 2014, 2016), which states that project management professionals face three ethical issues during project development, which are highly relevant in construction projects: transparency, relationships, and optimization. The work of Müller et al. (2013) showed that the participants' most frequently stated ethical issue in projects was transparency issues, which refer to the unwillingness of the project manager to address the real project performance. Transparency

issues in organizations can help to hide cases and signs of modern slavery, such as in the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program.

Transparency issues arise due to weak relationships between the different tiers and limited visibility and traceability throughout the organization (CIOB, 2016), especially in lower tiers, where modern slavery is likely to occur in construction. In Qatar, instances of modern slavery have been reported in construction projects (not just in the FIFA World Cup Program), as modern slavery is relatively normalized. This is an example of the normalization of deviance, which suggests that *“the unexpected becomes the expected, which becomes the accepted”* (Pinto, 2014, p.377).

In our case study, the authors noted that the “opportunity” was the most significant element of the FTT that contributed to the occurrence of modern slavery. The opportunities in our case were (the kafala system, passport confiscation, debt bondage, weak internal control systems and salary abuse), which gave the slaveholders significant control and power over the modern slaves to exploit them. The authors agree with Awalluddin et al. (2022) that once offenders find a weakness in the organizational systems that facilitate an opportunity, they are more likely to be encouraged to commit unethical or illegal practices.

As shown in our findings, the kafala system, which is considered a form of modern slavery (Alzoubi et al., 2023; el-Mumin, 2020; Vachhatani, 2021), was the main enabler of modern slavery, as it helped to facilitate other forms of abuse due to the power held by the slaveholders over the modern slaves. However, this finding is ambiguous, as it is difficult to fully understand people’s intentions. From the FTT perspective, people’s intentions are related to the element of rationalization. Conversely, as Cohen et al. (2010) and Muhtar et al. (2018) noted, rationalization is the most difficult element of the FTT to detect.

The Importance of Political Will in Fighting Modern Slavery

The lack of political will to fight modern slavery in Qatar gave the offenders the opportunity and confidence to commit modern slavery. This lack of political will is mainly due to the government's support for the kafala system and the lack of legal prosecutions for modern slavery practices. In this section, the authors explain the importance of political will in fighting modern slavery worldwide.

Malena (2009) states that political will consists of three elements: "*political want, political can and political must.*" (p.19). Therefore, for the government, including power holders and lawmakers, to be able to act positively on a particular case, they need "*to want to undertake a given action, feel confident that they can undertake that action and feel that they must undertake that action*" (Malena, 2009, p. 19). However, currently, a lack of political will is considered a major barrier to addressing serious organized crimes (Idris, 2022; Marquette, 2022), such as modern slavery.

It is important to understand that "*the presence or absence of political will is not an external factor we must passively accept, but rather something we must actively seek to create and nurture*" (Malena, 2009, p. 19). Hence, the authors shed light on the importance of political will in fighting modern slavery by discussing and presenting recommendations for each of the three elements of political will.

Political want: Modern slavery in various forms still exists worldwide, but there is a lack of understanding and awareness regarding modern slavery (Heys et al., 2022). Governments should pay serious attention to the issue of modern slavery, as it is included in the United Nations SDG08, target 8.7, which aims to fight and eradicate it (United Nations, 2023). Additionally, governments should understand the consequences of modern slavery and act against it from ethical, legal, and economic perspectives. Governments can help to spread knowledge and awareness of modern slavery by highlighting the main topics related to modern slavery, such

as its indicators and ways of reporting modern slavery cases. Governments can highlight these issues through mandatory training (Alzoubi et al., 2023), posters, social media, and sharing previous real cases in different sectors to better educate the public about modern slavery.

Political can: Many countries lack the ability to fight modern slavery, such as due to a lack of legislation (Bales et al., 2011). Therefore, governments should develop legislation to fight modern slavery, perhaps using the legislation implemented in the United Kingdom or Australia as a framework. Each country requires different approaches to tackle modern slavery (Bales et al., 2011), but these examples are a good starting point upon which governments in other countries can reflect depending on their culture, laws, and economic situations.

Political must: Countries that are found to engage in modern slavery face reputational damage (Alzoubi et al., 2023). Therefore, countries should pay attention to their reputation, considering the example of the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program in Qatar; indeed, in this case, NGOs and the media criticized Qatar for allowing unfair working and living conditions and exploitation (Amnesty International, 2016c; Conn, 2017), resulting in the deaths of thousands of modern slaves (Pattison et al., 2021). This occurrence, in turn, affected Qatar's reputation by suggesting that the country uses modern slavery and breaches human rights. Moreover, governments worldwide should ensure that organizations share annually what steps they are taking to fight modern slavery in their organization, similar to the policies in the United Kingdom (GOV.UK, 2023) and Australia (Christ & Burritt, 2021). Finally, governments should impose strict penalties on organizations that do not comply with the regulations or laws to fight modern slavery (Alzoubi et al., 2023).

Lawmakers and those in power can significantly contribute toward the fight against modern slavery. Therefore, the authors believe that if countries consider the three elements of political will in relation to modern slavery, this will be a major positive step forward in fighting modern slavery worldwide.

Conclusions

This article has used the case of the construction of the infrastructure for the 2022 FIFA World Cup program in Qatar to investigate, using the FTT, why modern slavery occur in construction projects. The authors showed that the three elements of the FTT that contribute to the exploitation of modern slaves were present during the construction of the infrastructure for the World Cup program. In the case of opportunity (the kafala system, passport confiscation, debt bondage, weak internal control system, salary abuse), pressure (program time constraints, contract substitution), rationalization (the kafala system, shortage of cash flow). Moreover, our findings show that the kafala system was the main enabler of modern slavery.

This research is phenomenologically important to construction management scholars and practitioners. Construction companies using modern slavery are likely to face serious negative economic implications due to reputational damage, loss of investment, and legal penalties for the company. In this article, the authors have introduced the idea of political will, which can help to fight modern slavery worldwide.

As the implications and complexities surrounding modern slavery in the construction sector continue to manifest, future research should investigate the mechanisms construction companies utilize to fight modern slavery. This investigation will allow construction management scholars and practitioners to assess the efficiency of the mechanisms, which will help propose a strategy to adapt these mechanisms, promote best practices and guide the sector towards more ethical and sustainable practices to avoid modern slavery.

Disclaimer

This research presents a contentious case study regarding potential legal liability (and reputational damage) for private and public stakeholders involved in the construction of Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup program. The research is based on secondary data, mainly presented by media press and institutional reports that reported signs of modern slavery during the construction of the infrastructure for the FIFA World Cup program. However, until proven guilty in court, any program stakeholder (either directly or indirectly) shall be exempt from any legal liability or reputational damage. Therefore, this research acknowledges that any evidence presented is insufficient to ascertain any wrongdoing in legal terms. Any misconduct mentioned in this research is only for all program stakeholders and shall not be considered defamatory. Furthermore, the authors and the journal do not take any responsibility for any misleading information presented by the secondary sources analyzed. This conservative approach is consistent with the study's purpose, which was to study the phenomenon of modern slavery in construction projects to advance academic research. The purpose of this research is not any of the following:

- To inform the public about existing wrongdoing (e.g., public press);
- To ascertain whether any program stakeholders are guilty of any wrongdoing;
- To make any stakeholders accountable for any potential wrongdoing.

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2.3 Article Publication 3

Alzoubi, Y., Locatelli, G., & Sainati, T. (2023). Turning a Blind Eye: Ignoring Modern Slavery in the Race to Construction Project Completion. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*. (Major review). Scopus-indexed Journal, Impact Factor: 5.1, 5-Year Impact Factor 5.6.

Turning a Blind Eye: Ignoring Modern Slavery in the Race to Construction Project Completion

Abstract

Modern slavery is an illegal and unethical phenomenon concerning more than 40 million victims worldwide, many of whom are employed in the construction sector. This article aims to investigate why modern slavery still exists in construction sites managed by companies that pledged to fight modern slavery. Primary data is collected using semi-structured interviews with 22 experts working in construction companies and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The construction companies are the unit of analysis, and their managers are the primary source of information. The results present the mechanisms that explain the difference between the official anti-modern slavery statements of construction companies and the empirical observations in construction sites. The main mechanisms are lack of awareness, training, response and responsibility, and alternative priorities. The results further show the role and importance of reporting cases of modern slavery in addressing it and the risk areas of modern slavery in construction projects, which include the lower tiers of subcontracting and the construction supply chain materials. Furthermore, the article discusses the reasons behind the trivialization of modern slavery in construction companies: the presence of alternative priorities, the fear of reputational damage, blame-shifting and minimizing the modern slavery problem. Finally, the authors propose recommendations to construction companies and managers to help address modern slavery and offer areas for future research. This article offers two key novel contributions. Firstly, the authors discovered a disconnection between construction companies' official anti-modern slavery statements and the reality on construction sites. Secondly, the authors identified the reasons behind this disconnection.

Keywords: Dark side, Ethics, Labor exploitation, Social sustainability, Health and safety; Organizational issues; Labor and personnel issues

Practical Applications

Due to its low-profit margins and project time constraints, the construction sector is plagued by unethical and illegal practices such as modern slavery. Construction companies and employees must be better informed about the ethical, legal, and economic implications of modern slavery. Modern slavery can result in reputational damage, financial repercussions due to legal penalties, and loss of trust and opportunities among stakeholders. Construction companies must implement stricter regulations to address modern slavery. They should provide continuous and mandatory training to all employees, conduct regular site audits for laborers, raise awareness through posters and social media, and educate employees to report suspected cases of modern slavery. The modern slavery issue should be addressed not just for ethical reasons but also for the quality and sustainability of construction projects. Moreover, addressing modern slavery protects the reputation of construction companies and professionals and, most importantly, safeguards laborers' dignity, health, safety, and wellbeing.

Introduction

Modern slavery is an illegal and unethical phenomenon (Crane, 2013), negatively affecting the victims' physical, mental, and psychological health (Sabella, 2011; Such et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020) and the reputation of the companies involved (Gold et al., 2015; Kidd & Manthorpe, 2017; New, 2015; Yagci Sokat & Altay, 2023). Modern slavery is getting increasing attention from scholars in different sectors, including agriculture (Davies, 2019; Scaturro, 2021), manufacturing (Stevenson & Cole, 2018), fishing (Stringer et al., 2022), and others.

Construction management journals have a long history of academic publications on important topics relevant to modern slavery, such as ethics (Bowen et al., 2007; Mukumbwa & Muya, 2013), social sustainability (Kordi et al., 2021; Valdes-Vasquez & Klotz, 2013), wellbeing (Kotera et al., 2020; Sunindijo & Kamardeen, 2017) and human resource management (Gurmu & Ongkowijoyo, 2020; Rajhans & Bhavsar, 2023). Yet, modern slavery has been scarcely studied in construction and project management journals, exceptions being (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Locatelli et al., 2022).

Modern slavery is an increasingly relevant and prevalent issue in construction (Alzoubi et al., 2023). Construction companies rely on complex supply chains that could involve unethical or illegal practices such as modern slavery (Trautrimis et al., 2021). It is, therefore, essential to stress the importance of ethical procurement, sustainable sourcing, and due diligence in construction projects, along with the urgent need for training, raising awareness, and preventative measures to address modern slavery.

In the last two decades, anti-modern slavery legislation has been issued (Wilhelm et al., 2020; Wray-Bliss & Michelson, 2022), including the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act in 2012 (LeBaron et al., 2017), the UK Modern Slavery Act in 2015 (Home Office, 2014), the Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law in France in 2017 (Wilhelm et al., 2020) and the Australian

Modern Slavery Act in 2018 (Australian Government, 2018). Such legislation pushes organizations to develop their anti-modern slavery statements, explaining their strategies to ensure that modern slavery does not occur in their organizations (Wilhelm et al., 2020). Focusing on construction, many large construction companies developed their official anti-modern slavery statements (Jones & Comfort, 2022). Yet, despite all these statements, in the construction sites of these companies, it is still possible to find modern slaves, usually employed by sub-contractors (Alzoubi et al., 2023). There is, therefore, a disconnection between the official anti-modern slavery statements of construction companies and the on-site reality. Therefore, this article aims to investigate why modern slavery still exists in construction sites managed by companies that pledged to fight modern slavery. The RQ is:

RQ) What mechanisms explain the difference between the official anti-modern slavery statements of construction companies and the empirical observations in construction sites?

Following the introduction, the article delves into a brief overview of current literature on modern slavery in general and its presence in construction projects. Next, the methodology is presented, encompassing the rationale for the research design and the process of data collection and analysis chosen for this study. Subsequently, the results of this study are presented and discussed. Finally, the authors conclude the article by highlighting the main takeaways and proposing areas for future research.

Literature Review

Modern Slavery – Background

Modern slavery is “*the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised*” (Slavery Convention, 1926, p. 16). It is an umbrella term (Carrington et al., 2021; Nolan & Bott, 2018; Rioux et al., 2020) that represents

the severest or most heinous forms of labor exploitation (Caruana et al., 2021; Wray-Bliss & Michelson, 2022), including human trafficking, forced labor, sex trafficking and debt bondage (Alzoubi et al., 2023). Modern slavery affects individuals who are employed and forced to work under some threat, are subject to forms of control and intimidation by their employers (perpetrators), are categorically used as a commodity, and have some restriction placed on their movement (Crane, 2013; Flynn, 2019; Wray-Bliss & Michelson, 2022).

Modern slaves perceive low wages (compared to the market benchmark) that, together with other contextual factors, make their standard of living unsustainable (Han et al., 2022; Islam & Van Staden, 2022). It is deeply troubling that in today's world, many people continue to be subjected to physical and mental abuse by their perpetrators; according to several studies, this is a widespread issue (Bales et al., 2011; Wallis, 2017). The latest estimates suggest that more than 40 million people live in modern slavery worldwide (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Banerjee, 2020; Landman & Silverman, 2019). Moreover, what is even more concerning is that due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting global economic crisis, the number of cases of modern slavery is predicted to increase (Evans et al., 2022). This grave injustice requires the attention and action of scholars and organizations.

Millions of individuals worldwide live in extreme poverty, a phenomenon that the United Nations acknowledges to represent the primary cause of modern slavery (Han et al., 2022; Rassam, 2005). The reasons that enhance the likelihood of individuals falling into modern slavery include corruption, war and a social culture that is more oppressive and discriminatory (Sabella, 2011; Such et al., 2020). Moreover, uneducated individuals are often unaware of the risks associated with modern slavery (Han et al., 2022). Modern slavery is a worldwide issue that is not only confined to low-income countries, which are often characterized by weak job security and welfare; it is an issue affecting also developed countries (Han et al., 2022; Stevenson & Cole, 2018), such as the UK (Bales et al., 2015; Craig, 2017; Jones & Comfort,

2022) and Australia (Christ & Burritt, 2021; McGaughey, 2021). Although no definite indicators show that an individual is a victim of modern slavery, there are general signs to look at, as illustrated by the work of (Alzoubi et al., 2023).

Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

The construction sector is one of the most exposed sectors to modern slavery (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Dodd et al., 2022; Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021; Jones & Comfort, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2018; Trautrim et al., 2021), with an estimated 18% of modern slavery victims worldwide (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020). During different stages of the development of construction projects, temporary subcontractors are hired and let go of as they often switch jobs (Russell et al., 2018; Trautrim et al., 2021). Additionally, numerous workers may be required throughout the project's life cycle, most of whom are recruited from different subcontractors and employment agencies. Consequently, construction site workers can change daily, making it challenging to identify cases of modern slavery (Crates, 2022).

Due to the complex web of subcontractors and suppliers, there is limited transparency and visibility regarding what occurs in the lower contracting tiers of construction supply chains (Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2018; Trautrim et al., 2021), where the risk of modern slavery is high (Gold et al., 2015; Stevenson & Cole, 2018).

There are several drivers for modern slavery in construction projects:

- **Time constraints in construction projects:** because of limited materials and/or a labor shortage, some construction companies tend to disregard recruitment laws and requirements for getting labor on-site, leading them to unknowingly facilitate modern slavery (Crates, 2022) to avoid project delays (Liu et al., 2022).

- **Low-profit margins:** Construction projects have low-profit margins (Greco, 2021), which encourages using modern slavery through cost savings in unethical ways such as reducing labor costs, working overtime, and using poor living and working conditions of laborers (Alzoubi et al., 2023).
- **Poor government-enforced regulations:** Construction workers may attempt to enter the sector without fulfilling the legal entry requirements (Crates, 2022). For example, working full-time while on a student visa or overstaying (Liu et al., 2022). As a result, these workers are particularly susceptible to modern slavery.
- **Ambiguous terms and conditions of the contract:** This increases the probability of perpetrators using modern slavery. This is because of language difficulties in the case of migrant workers (Walsh et al., 2022) or workers being ignorant about their rights (GLAA, 2020), such as their pay, breaks, and overtime hours. This leaves workers with a lack of options for contesting unjust requests, such as being required to work long hours for lesser compensation (Crates, 2022).

As suggested by (Jones & Comfort, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2021), construction companies shall improve their monitoring and reporting of modern slavery. Additionally, because many workers are averse to reporting cases of modern slavery for fear of retaliation, techniques like anonymous phone calls and online reporting are becoming more used (Crane, 2013; Han et al., 2022).

Methodology

This article focuses on “construction” projects because of a) the relevance and prevalence of modern slavery in construction projects (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Dodd et al., 2022; Gutierrez-Huerter O et al., 2021; Jones & Comfort, 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2021) b) the relevance of construction projects for the economy; c) the accessibility to secondary data on modern slavery in construction projects, including research articles, government publications and professional associations reports in different countries such as the United Kingdom (CIOB, 2016, 2018; Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; Jones & Comfort, 2022; United Kingdom Government, 2023) and Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020; Dodd et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022) which helps the authors to familiarize with the approaches construction companies are taking to address modern slavery.

In this article, the authors use construction companies as a unit of analysis and the interviewees working for them as the primary source of information. As a combined entity, construction companies exhibit behaviors, make decisions, and hold conflicts. They frequently have specific statements highlighting the importance of ethics, integrity and community responsibility. However, when these statements are disconnected from reality, such as engaging in or ignoring unethical and illegal practices such as modern slavery, it is essential to investigate the mechanisms that explain this disconnection.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011) for the following reasons. Firstly, they are an extremely useful method by which the researcher and interviewees can make logical sense and explore complex, sensitive and evolving topics (Keene et al., 2016; Loosemore et al., 2021), such as modern slavery. Secondly, they enable the interviewees to voice their opinions and express their experiences and ideas openly and

comprehensively (Kivilä et al., 2017). They also allow the researcher to probe further with specific questions based on the interviewee's responses. Finally, semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to address potential "social desirability bias" (Loosemore & Lim, 2017) in a sensitive research topic such as modern slavery. This is because researchers could question interviewees further if they suspected that interviewees provided answers they believed to be socially acceptable as opposed to sharing their true opinions (Loosemore et al., 2021).

The interview questions were developed based on 1) the document analysis of modern slavery statements from large construction companies. This allows the authors to familiarize themselves with the approaches construction companies undertake to address modern slavery and 2) the existing literature review on modern slavery in construction projects. The interview agenda encompassed various subjects on modern slavery in construction projects, as presented in the Appendix. After conducting pilot tests (Zuofa & Ochieng, 2016) to ensure the reliability and validity of the interview questions (Yagci Sokat, 2022), the questions were reviewed by two experts on the topic of modern slavery, and their feedback was used to refine the interview questions. Due to the topic's sensitivity and being one of the "uncomfortable topics" (Locatelli et al., 2022) that many individuals dislike discussing, the questions were designed to encourage the interviewees to participate in the interview. Therefore, as shown in the Appendix, the questions do not reflect, suggest or reference any involvement of the interviewees or their companies in modern slavery.

The invitations to participate in the research were sent to 329 experts working in construction companies via LinkedIn messages or Email. Among the recipients, 291 did not respond, and 16 declined to participate. Among those who declined the invitation, the main reasons were that a) they felt uncomfortable speaking about modern slavery—with even two potential participants "blocking" communication with the researcher who contacted them after receiving the invitation, b) their company did not allow them to participate in the interview, or c) they

were not experts on the topic. These statistics show the methodological challenges experienced when dealing with a sensitive topic like modern slavery. In the end, 22 online interviews were conducted online from October 2022 to May 2023, resulting in an acceptance rate of 6.7%. The duration of the interviews varied, ranging from 16 minutes to 66 minutes, with an average length of 30 minutes. To ensure theoretical saturation (Saunders et al., 2018), interviews continued until no new or relevant insights emerged concerning the RQ of this study.

The interviewee sampling was kept broad to capture diverse perspectives (Manu et al., 2015; Yagci Sokat, 2022). The interviewees encompassed various roles and backgrounds and were based in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

Table 1 summarizes the sampling structure of the interviewees.

Table 1. Sample structure of interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Country	Role
1	Male	United Kingdom	Supply chain manager
2	Male	United Kingdom	Project manager
3	Female	United Kingdom	Sustainable procurement manager
4	Male	United Kingdom	Managing director in construction
5	Female	United Kingdom	Sustainable procurement manager
6	Male	United Kingdom	Project manager
7	Male	United Kingdom	Director of ethics and compliance
8	Male	United Kingdom	Health, safety, environment, and quality director
9	Male	United Kingdom	Senior construction planner
10	Female	Switzerland	Senior communication manager, leadership, and mental health
11	Male	United Kingdom	Construction manager
12	Male	United Kingdom	Construction manager
13	Female	Australia	Head of sustainable and ethical procurement
14	Male	Australia	Sustainable procurement manager
15	Male	United Kingdom	Director of pre-construction operations
16	Male	United Kingdom	ESG and sustainability director
17	Male	United Kingdom	Project manager
18	Male	Australia	Sustainable procurement and supply chain manager
19	Male	United Kingdom	Lead health and safety manager
20	Female	United Kingdom	Health, safety and wellbeing manager
21	Female	Australia	Corporate social sustainability manager
22	Female	Australia	Sustainable procurement manager

Data Analysis

After the researcher obtained permission from the 22 interviewees to record the interviews, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the NVivo software. Thematic analysis is a flexible data analysis method allowing for comprehensive data exploration. It enables the comparison and contrast of different views from different interviewees, leading to unexpected perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, it aids in summarizing essential aspects of large data sets by encouraging the researcher to organize and present the data in a structured manner (King, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017).

The authors followed the thematic data analysis approach outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012; Loosemore et al., 2021). Firstly, the authors read and reviewed the interview transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data collected. Secondly, open coding was employed to generate a preliminary list of codes from the collected data. The third stage required identifying repeated patterns from the preliminary code lists relevant to the research question. Next, the authors examined how the codes merged to form the main themes connected to the RQ. Subsequently, evolving themes were revised by seeking additional information to confirm or disprove the initial themes. This process facilitated identifying connections between themes to uncover new patterns. Finally, the authors named the final themes, as shown in the results section.

Results

This section presents the results that emerged from the thematic analysis. Specifically, the following main themes are presented: lack of awareness of modern slavery and alternative priorities, lack of training on modern slavery, lack of response and responsibility to address modern slavery, addressing modern slavery in construction companies, and risk areas of

modern slavery in construction projects. The authors have carefully chosen the direct quotes to be included, considering the length of the article.

Lack of Awareness of Modern Slavery and Alternative Priorities

Lack of awareness among managers significantly increases the risk of modern slavery in construction companies. Managers 1 and 20 said, “... we need to realize that slavery is not a thing from the history books. It is arguably never been more prevalent, and for me, working in the construction industry, after domestic services, the construction is the worst area of the UK economy for modern slavery.” and “People may have the mindset that [modern slavery] does not happen over here when it does, and it happens more often than you think.”. Some managers have the mindset that they do not expect to have victims of modern slavery in their company because they pay their employees real living wages. However, Manager 5 argued that “because you commit to paying the real living wage does not mean to say that it is [...] going to the workers themselves [...], exploiters are really clever, and they take away the bank cards.”.

Reflecting on a real-case scenario of the lack of awareness, Manager 5 said:

“I was delivering some training for site managers, and they all were able to articulate what modern slavery was. But when I said to them, have you ever seen anything on your sites dodgy happening there and they were all like, oh yes, definitely. And I said, ok, what did you do as a result of that? And they said we did not do anything because we were not sure if they were a slave, and if they were not, we did not want to cause a fuss. So, for me, they were site managers in a big main contractor, and it just made me think, the site manager is the eyes and ears on the ground!”.

Another example confirming the lack of awareness are the views of Manager 2 and 19: “As a project manager, if you work for me and for whatever reason I do not like you, I will try to

make the most out of you [...]. Is it slavery? I do not know.”, and “I do not think in the UK itself, there is a huge modern slavery problem.” (Manager 19).

Several managers declared the presence of alternative priorities of companies and managers, in which modern slavery is not one of them: *“I think that [modern slavery] is not visible, so it feels a bit like climate change [...]. So, especially in construction sites, project managers are under pressure with a lot of competing priorities. So that is their main focus, and everything else gets pushed down the priority list” (Manager 13).* Moreover, Manager 16 added, *“...people are selfish, and human beings are probably the most selfish creatures on the planet. [...] People have their own desires and priorities [...] Not everyone, but the people you are talking to do not probably have a lot of time to think about [modern slavery]”.* Most priorities were related to completing the project on time to avoid project delay: *“... when you are working in construction, what is important is the end product [...]. The time, the deadline is very important for the employers because their credibility depends on the timeline [...], so they are not interested in modern-day slavery.” (Manager 10).*

Lack of Training on Modern Slavery

Training managers to understand, detect, and respond to cases of modern slavery in construction projects is one of the main ways to address this criminal activity (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Jones & Comfort, 2022; Liu et al., 2022). As confirmed by Manager 17, *“I think the training is effective in a sense that it makes individuals aware [of modern slavery] so people can appreciate the situation and understand and have a more sympathetic and compassionate view”.*

Based on the personal experience of managers in their company, they believe modern slavery is a crime; *“I think that modern slavery signifies an unhealthy, unethical, and likely unlawful relationship that exploits the vulnerable” (Manager 9).* Moreover, Manager 10 added:

“Modern slavery to me is the exploitation of another human being, and aside from it being ethically wrong, whatever the context, I believe it is a crime against humanity. It is among the severest forms of violence that one person can inflict on another.”

However, many managers lack training, as their companies have never given them any, *“I have not particularly had any modern slavery training at my employer.”* (Manager 12). Also, Manager 11 added, *“... at the moment, we have not actually received any training.”* Furthermore, in some cases, the training is done very infrequently, as stressed by Manager 2: *“This is the first time I am looking at [the online training] [...] I think I have done it like ages ago”*. Table 2 further compares what construction companies claim to be doing to address modern slavery and an explanation of the real situation by their managers.

Table 2. Comparison between construction companies’ statements and managers’ explanation

The construction company’s official website statements	Explanation of managers
Company-A has a modern slavery and human trafficking statement and policy. It discusses the importance of training employees on modern slavery to raise awareness.	<i>“There is a [modern slavery] policy, but I do not believe that I have ever seen any training”</i> (Manager 9).
Company-B has an anti-slavery and human trafficking policy. It provides regular training for employees, and newcomers must complete the training within a short period.	<i>“... do I have a modern slavery policy? No, because, as I said, I think some of these things are just written for the sake of it. [...] I would say very little [training] before about a year or two ago”</i> (Manager 16).
Company-C has a modern slavery statement and training. It has a human rights risk assessment and a remediation strategy for modern slavery.	<i>“I would say that most businesses we work with, including ourselves, will do maybe a one-off training and that it might not necessarily be repeated after that.”</i> (Manager 13).

As affirmed by Managers 2 and 18, the modern slavery training provided by their companies is a “tick-box activity”: *“I have to tick the boxes, and one of the boxes will be to tick the slavery thing.”* and *“...I would say most training is simply a case of completing it”*. This is because some managers still think modern slavery is not prevalent and does not affect them.

The training is not mandatory nor consistent in some companies: “... *there is no mandatory or consistent training done internally*” (Manager 1), which also results in managers not knowing the importance or value of such training: “*You have got someone who sits in an office doing the accounts [...], but you would struggle to see the value in giving [the training] to certain people.*” (Manager 15). Moreover, Manager 5 added: “*Typically, a lot of people turn up thinking, why is [the training] relevant to me?*”. Therefore, to demonstrate the relevance and value of training to managers, construction companies ought to “... *make the information more contextualized and specific to the kind of work that employees do [so the training] becomes more interesting.*” (Manager 21).

On the contrary, very few companies conducted proper training for their managers, and few managers discussed the content of the training, including the length, points discussed, assessment, and frequency of the training. For instance, Manager 6 said that the training done by their companies is mandatory for everyone and repeated regularly, “... *every single staff member has to complete that training every year, and I personally monitor the completion rates, follow up directly with our staff to make sure it is completed on an annual basis*”.

Several companies only have mandatory training for newcomers, “... *we have a mandatory, modern slavery training, so every employee, when they start with the company, they need to do an online training*” (Manager 22). The managers who had the training said that their companies provided “an online training module” on modern slavery: “*It is an e-learning session*” (Manager 8), ranging from 30-45 minutes, and focusing on the following areas: understanding modern slavery, the causes of it, spotting the red flags such as high working hours, not having the proper ID papers, not having a contract, how to address it and how is it relevant to managers and their companies. In some instances, to facilitate effective training, real-case studies were used to “...*make sure there is a practical learning experience.*” (Manager 14).

After completing the training, some companies assess their managers to test their knowledge and “... *demonstrate the individual understanding of the policy.*” (Manager 17). In most cases, managers were tested through “*multiple choice questions, and [employees] needed to answer all those to go through the module.*” (Manager 14). Once the test is completed, managers need to score the minimum grade to pass the training module, as described by Manager 8, “... *it is a pass mark of 80%, and if they score any less than 80%, they have to go back [and] take the test again. If they fail again, they have to reset all of the programs.*”.

Lack of Response and Responsibility to Address Modern Slavery

Construction companies showed a lack of response to address modern slavery in terms of the amount of time spent and the availability of resources to check that modern slavery does not exist, which increases the risk of modern slavery: “*We have not had the tools to [address modern slavery]. We have not had the resources, or the skill sets internally within the business*” (Manager 14). Manager 18 added, “*I do not think [companies spend time and resources] at all. There is the very beginning of that [...], but I think very few construction firms are really doing a good job here.*”. There were different reasons behind the lack of response to address modern slavery. For example, Manager 21 said: “... *[people] do not have the expertise to dedicate to [check that modern slavery does not exist]*”.

Regular construction site audits in construction companies are essential to finding loopholes and issues, helping identify improvements, and detecting illegal or unethical practices like modern slavery. Managers stressed that their companies do not undertake audits to check timely and periodically that modern slavery does not exist. For example, Managers 19 and 21 said: “*We do not do audits on modern slavery*” and “*We currently do not have any audits at all.*”. According to Manager 3, audits do not occur because they can be expensive for the company: “... *it has a cost that has a cost. Not every project does it.*”.

A second reason for avoiding audits is that managers might believe that they are doing a very good job in avoiding modern slavery: “... *you think things are going well and it is a big company, or it is a well-reputed company, so everything is fine, but that is not the case.*” (Manager 10). Manager 18 pointed out the importance of undertaking audits in companies to help address modern slavery: “... *audits create a culture of complacency [...] so I think audits need to be done regularly [...] so conversations with the workers, and understanding whether they are being paid properly? Are they being paid regularly? Are they receiving their full entitlements? Are they receiving days off?*”. Furthermore, Manager 5 added, “... *if you are not doing audits, it is about those conversations. It is about somebody going and doing those kinds of spot checks with workers.*”.

All managers stated that their company has no employee solely responsible for dealing with modern slavery. However, some managers emphasized that not having one is not a bad thing. For instance, Manager 5 stated, “*Modern slavery is something that everybody within an organization needs to know about [...] It is like sustainability, isn't it? So ideally, you want sustainability to be embedded within your business.*”. On the other hand, Manager 22 highlighted the importance and usefulness of companies hiring an employee whose job is solely responsible for modern slavery:

“It is still a growing area of understanding, and I feel like I could spend my whole job on [modern slavery], and I would make a lot more progress [...] in terms of the learnings, best practices, putting things in place, risk mapping assessments. I still think that there should be a center of excellence or real subject matter experts who advise on [modern slavery].”.

Addressing Modern Slavery in Construction Companies

Reporting

If a case of modern slavery is suspected within a company, some managers said they would report a case against the perpetrators. For instance, Manager 8 explained, “*We would prevent [the offenders] from working for our organization again, but also we would report them to relevant authorities and make sure that they would not ever do any work for us in the industry.*”. Manager 6 explained the detailed procedure for investigating and reporting a case of modern slavery. First of all, to identify the problem, “*...gather the evidence and the facts and assess the incident and then understand whether [the organization] caused, contributed to or is directly linked [to the case of modern slavery]*”. Second, protect the victim by “*...escalating [the case] to the relevant bodies. If it is the police, legal help, border force [...]* NGO or a union.”. Next, fix the issue by “*figuring out how we would best remedy the situation*”, and finally, “*analyze the risk*” to make sure that it does not happen again.

On the other hand, surprisingly, some managers affirmed that no action would be taken if they reported a case of modern slavery in their company:

“I can tell you what I think would happen if I raised [a case of modern slavery]; nothing would happen. I would be told to ignore it, stop causing trouble, and stop getting involved. There is absolutely no reporting protocol to deal with [modern slavery]. It is too hot a topic. Main contractors are terrified of dealing with issues like that. Tier one contractors across the UK will not deal with it. They will not deal with it!” (Manager 9).

“Some of the subcontractors and workers are under so much pressure to get the job completed on time that if it meant reporting the problem to any superiors or any line management, then the line management is going to put a stop to it or ignore it because

that is going to affect their output and therefore extend the time and put themselves under more pressure to get the job completed on time.” (Manager 19).

Risk Areas of Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

The main area that is likely to have the highest risk of modern slavery in construction projects is subcontracting in lower tiers with low-skilled laborers as “...*there is less visibility [...] on the policies, the ordinance, and the procedures*” (Manager 1). Manager 3 added: “*In construction projects, you will have a huge sort of conflict between clients wanting [the work] done quickly, efficiently, cheaply at the same time*”. Therefore, this causes some pressure on the contractors as there is already a huge shortage of labors in construction, and since “*people for chasing profit [...] take shortcuts*” (Manager 4), many contractors will not care or pay attention to how they get the labors, and whether they are skilled or unskilled as long as they can perform the work.

Therefore, some construction companies take different approaches to address modern slavery. For instance, Manager 1 stated: “*The main answer that you are going to hear from myself and from other people is in prequalification*”. Prequalification is the minimum tool construction companies use to prevent contractors from using modern slaves while working on a construction project. For instance, companies will use the common assessment standard in which contractors must answer questions to meet the minimum standards around fair working practices, wages, right to work and having a policy on modern slavery.

A second risk area of modern slavery in construction projects is the construction supply chain materials. Manager 1 stated that “*a [risk], which is much more complex [...] would be on [...] raw materials*”. In addition, Manager 4 emphasized, “*suppliers remotely providing goods [...] the risk there is high. [...] where there tends to be forced labor to produce those goods.*”. This

is mainly due to complex supply chains and the presence of many tiers, making visibility difficult for managers.

Discussion

Lack of Action on Modern Slavery

According to our data, there are several reasons behind the lack of action by construction companies and managers to address modern slavery:

- **Lack of training by construction companies:** Several scholars described the importance of training managers in construction to address modern slavery (Jones & Comfort, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2021). The authors confirm the work of (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Cockbain & Brayley-Morris, 2018; David & Salter, 2021) that there is still a huge lack of training by construction companies to address modern slavery. If construction companies do not train their managers on what modern slavery is, how it occurs, what the signs are, and where it is common, managers will be unable to recognize it or believe in its existence (lack of awareness). Moreover, if managers suspect a case of modern slavery, they will not know how to report it and, therefore, ignore it (lack of response and responsibility).
- **Lack of awareness among managers:** Raising awareness is important to educate managers to address modern slavery (Jones & Comfort, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2021). However, as shown in our results, there is a huge lack of awareness among managers regarding modern slavery. So, even though it is estimated that there are more than 40 million modern slaves worldwide (Banerjee, 2020; Landman & Silverman, 2019), including those working on projects (Alzoubi et al., 2023), many managers still believe that modern slavery is not prevalent. Furthermore, some managers still believe there is minimal

risk of modern slavery in their company because they pay their laborers a real wage living according to the legal standards. However, perpetrators are trained and have different ways to take away laborers' wages, for example, by taking away their bank cards and not allowing them to control their payments.

- **Lack of response and responsibility:** A lack of response and responsibility by construction companies and managers will result in not being familiar with the strategies to report cases of modern slavery. For instance, most managers emphasized that modern slavery is a sensitive topic to discuss, implying their reluctance and discomfort to discuss or address it openly. Despite official website statements, modern slavery is still a “taboo” in construction sites. An explanation for this “taboo” is that if a manager reports a suspected case of modern slavery, it can cause reputational damage to the company (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Brookes et al., 2020), retaliation by the perpetrator against the manager, or the investigation of the incident will cause project delays. Hence, construction companies and managers often avoid discussing modern slavery and leave this topic to their HR or communication office, which often produces generic and brief statements against modern slavery.

Moreover, consistent construction site audits are important for companies to spot problems, improve on-site conditions, and detect modern slavery (Liu et al., 2022). If audits are not done, the laborers will not understand their rights, and the possibility of them becoming victims of modern slavery will be higher. Furthermore, many construction companies rely on modern slavery standards, which are good to include, but there are problems with these standards. For example, people can use corruption everywhere, and then standards will be ineffective. So, construction companies should not rely on them completely to avoid modern slavery.

Trivializing Modern Slavery in Construction Companies

A key result of our research is that construction companies and managers trivialized the issue of modern slavery, i.e. ignored it or made it less important and relevant. The following mechanisms lead to trivialization:

- **Alternative priorities:** Most construction companies and managers prioritize factors other than anti-money slavery, such as revenue maximization. Managers declared being under considerable pressure from their companies to finish the project within the time, budget and specifications. Manager 19 said, *“I think the modern slavery issue, in some respects, can be ignored in order to get the job done”*. Moreover, Manager 21 added, *“[modern slavery] is not even on the top 100 priorities [...] and really, [manager’s] goal and their job description is to deliver a project on time under budget.”* From these interviews, it is clear that managers are under considerable pressure when undertaking a project and are focused on the “iron triangle” of getting the work done with the constraints of schedule, budget and quality. These circumstances push managers to become “ethically blind” (Palazzo et al., 2012) and neglect ethical aspects, including modern slavery.
- **Fear of reputational damage:** Managers may fear speaking out or reporting a suspected case of modern slavery. This is because of the reputational damage (Alzoubi et al., 2023; Brookes et al., 2020) their companies could face, which will further have financial implications, including legal penalties and loss of trust and business opportunities. Consequently, companies and managers trivialize the issue and ignore the suspected or reported cases of modern slavery to avoid this potential risk. For example, Manager 9 said, *“If a person thinks there is [modern slavery] and raises it with the line manager, it will not go above that manager, and it will not be dealt with. [...] Nobody is interested in [modern slavery] because it means they have to do something, and it is a hot topic”*.

- **Blame-shifting:** Companies and managers could blame and shift the responsibility of modern slavery to other parties, such as subcontractors or material suppliers, to take away the responsibility from them. For instance, Manager 9 said, “[modern slavery] is not our problem; it is for the subcontractor to deal with.”. In addition, Manager 13 said: “It feels like [modern slavery] is not [manager’s] problem; it is somebody else’s problem [...] [modern slavery] is not really in their scope, or it does not fit within their role.”. Furthermore, Manager 21 said: “[employees] goal and their job description is to deliver a project on time under budget. Anything outside of that scope, in a way, is not their responsibility.”. Hence, managers should develop the mindset that modern slavery is everyone’s responsibility within the company, and companies should teach that to their managers through mandatory training, just like they do for health and safety.
- **Minimizing the modern slavery problem:** Companies and managers minimized the prevalence of modern slavery issues. This is because companies pay their labors real living wages: “We pay people properly, and its accordance with all the rules” (Manager 4) or because of a lack of awareness among managers in construction companies: “I do not think [modern slavery] happens probably less than 1% of the time.” (Manager 16).

Recommendations

Based on the previous results, the authors offer the following recommendations to construction companies and managers to address modern slavery:

- The grievance and remediation area of modern slavery is weak. Companies should raise awareness by providing all their managers with mandatory training. The same importance and training given now to health and safety should be given to modern slavery. Moreover, companies should improve and repeat the training every year to keep the managers informed and aware.

- Since modern slavery training is often considered a “tick-box activity”, companies should assess managers after completing the training to ensure they have a good understanding of what modern slavery is, how to detect it and how to report a case, including educating managers on employment rights. Moreover, the training should be repeated if the manager fails the assessment.
- The training should be more specific to the manager’s role so that they are engaged and interested in what they are being trained on. For instance, companies can use real-life case studies, which can promote better engagement and understanding of modern slavery among managers.
- Companies should have a clear strategy for their managers to report suspected cases of modern slavery in construction projects. Who should be contacted? What to do? How do you follow up with the case?
- Companies should teach their managers how to support a victim of modern slavery after their treatment when they can work again. For instance, companies could collaborate to look at how they can help victims of modern slavery find new jobs.
- Companies, managers and academics should promote the relevance and consequences of modern slavery in construction projects and raise awareness through social media platforms.

Conclusions

This article sheds light on the present state of the construction sector in dealing with modern slavery. It addresses the lack of information available on the topic in the context of construction projects, emphasizing that despite the fact that modern slavery is a significant and widespread issue in the sector, construction companies and managers tend to overlook it. Moreover, this article explains the mechanisms that explain the difference between the official anti-modern

slavery statements of construction companies and the empirical observations in construction sites.

The authors show that the mechanisms behind this difference are due to the construction companies' lack of training, which further resulted in a lack of awareness of managers and a lack of response and responsibility to address modern slavery among the construction companies and their managers. Moreover, another reason for the lack of action of construction companies and managers is the "alternative priorities", in which modern slavery is not one of them. Hence, construction companies and managers trivialized the issue of modern slavery. Furthermore, the results show the different variance of responses in reporting cases of modern slavery and understanding the risk areas of modern slavery in construction projects. Therefore, the authors conclude that there is still much work to be done by construction companies and managers to address modern slavery.

Construction companies and managers ought to act against modern slavery, perhaps starting from the recommendations provided in this article. Therefore, the timing of modern slavery in construction projects is critical now, and if construction companies and managers get complacent, the problem will worsen. This article focuses on modern slavery in construction projects. However, this research is interesting for other project sectors as modern slavery can occur in other types of projects. Moreover, future research should investigate the mechanisms construction companies use to address other dark side topics in projects, such as corruption, money laundering and sexism.

Appendix. Interview Questions

Interview Questions
1. What does modern slavery mean to you?
2. Does your organization provide training for employees on modern slavery? (If yes, how long is the training? How often is it done? Who has to attend the training? What kind of training is it? What are the key points discussed/addressed during the training? How are the employees assessed to ensure understanding of the training?)
3. Which areas within your organization have a higher risk of modern slavery? Why?
4. Is there anyone in your organization whose job description deals with modern slavery? (If yes, who are they? Is it their only job? If not, why?)
5. In your organization, what do you do when selecting contractors to avoid them using modern slavery?
6. What barriers are present to detecting modern slavery on construction sites managed by your organization?
7. How are audits carried out to identify signs of modern slavery in your organization?
8. How would you react to a case of modern slavery in your organization?

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3.0 Discussion and Conclusions

3.1 Discussion

This PhD research contributes to the evolving discussion on modern slavery in construction projects by systematically exploring its main forms, underlying causes, and the mechanisms that explain the difference between anti-slavery statements in construction companies and on-site reality. Through a comprehensive SLR, this PhD research has articulated a definitive set of the main forms of modern slavery. While the existing literature has addressed several forms of modern slavery (Crane et al., 2019; Dando et al., 2016; Giacobe et al., 2016; Jones & Comfort, 2022; Rioux et al., 2020; Stotts & Ramey, 2009), it often presented these forms in a dispersed and fragmented manner. The categorization of these main forms provides a coherent framework that advances the identification and understanding of the unethical and illegal practice of modern slavery.

The application of the FTT to explain why modern slavery occurs in construction projects represents a novel contribution to this PhD research. Traditionally used within the realm of financial fraud analysis (D. Cressey, 1972; D. R. Cressey, 1950, 1953), the adaptation of this theory to the context of modern slavery is innovative. Prior studies have not connected the opportunities, pressures, and rationalizations leading to modern slavery in construction projects with the components of the FTT. This PhD fills this gap by offering a unique perspective that broadens theory and practice in construction projects to identify and mitigate the risk elements associated with modern slavery.

Furthermore, while existing literature has underscored the importance of training in detecting and reducing the cases of modern slavery in different sectors (David & Salter, 2021; Jones & Comfort, 2022; Landau & Marshall, 2018; Liu et al., 2022; Trautrimis et al., 2020), this PhD research delves deeper into the disconnect between the anti-slavery statements of construction

companies and the on-site reality. It reveals that, despite widespread recognition of the issue and the articulation of commitments to combat modern slavery in construction projects, a significant gap remains in the actual implementation and enforcement of these commitments on construction sites. Additionally, this PhD research investigated the mechanisms that facilitate or prevent its effectiveness in combating modern slavery in construction projects. By exploring these mechanisms, the PhD provides insights into the factors that contribute to the persistence of modern slavery despite formal commitments to its eradication.

Building upon these significant findings, the candidate developed a conceptual framework on modern slavery in construction projects, which is discussed and presented below.

3.1.1 Conceptual Framework

This PhD thesis contributes to the literature in the field of construction management through the development of a conceptual framework on modern slavery in construction projects. The framework developed in this PhD research is comprehensive, encompassing four main elements: 1) forms of modern slavery, 2) why modern slavery occurs in construction projects, 3) mechanisms for the detection of modern slavery, and 4) mechanisms for the prevention of modern slavery. These elements are crucial to understanding and addressing modern slavery in construction projects. Table 2 summarizes the conceptual framework using these four elements.

Forms of modern slavery: This PhD research categorized the main forms of modern slavery, which include human trafficking, forced labor, sex trafficking, and debt bondage, as identified from dispersed literature through a comprehensive and rigorous SLR (Alzoubi et al., 2023a). This categorization is crucial as it lays the foundation for understanding the various manifestations of modern slavery as a basis for theorizing about modern slavery in construction projects. Moreover, defining these main forms provides a clear framework for identifying the root causes and developing targeted detection and prevention strategies.

Why modern slavery occurs in construction projects: The explanations developed by this PhD research regarding the occurrence of modern slavery in construction projects are multifaceted. Following the “*spectrum of levels of analysis*” proposed by Geraldi and Söderlund (2018, p. 62), macro-level explanations are provided that span three key locations, industry, organization, and country, that contribute to the prevalence of modern slavery in construction projects. These locations provide the context within which modern slavery forms occur and persist, guiding the development of mechanisms for detection and strategies for prevention.

Industry: This PhD research shows that the construction industry has several conditions that make it prone to modern slavery characteristics, including its low-profit margins, project delays, large numbers of migrant and low-skilled labor, and limited visibility and transparency due to the constant movement of labor (Alzoubi et al., 2023a). These industry-specific conditions create an environment where modern slavery can thrive and often go unnoticed.

Organization: After conducting semi-structured interviews with managers in construction organizations, this PhD research uncovered a disconnection between anti-modern slavery statements and the on-site reality in construction organizations. This contribution is crucial as it points out a gap between theoretical policies aimed at fighting modern slavery and their practical implementation by construction organizations. The results revealed a series of factors behind this disconnection, including a) the lack of training by construction organizations leading to b) a lack of awareness among managers about modern slavery, c) a lack of response and failure to take responsibility for addressing modern slavery, and d) trivializing the issue of modern slavery. Moreover, the research highlights that modern slavery is trivialized for several reasons, including the presence of alternative priorities, the fear of reputational damage, blame-shifting, and a tendency to minimize the issue of modern slavery. By uncovering these

discrepancies, the results also pave the way for more effective anti-modern slavery practices in construction projects by offering a series of recommendations for improvement.

Country: As shown in the case study presented in this PhD research, the kafala system in the GCC countries and, more specifically, in Qatar is a prime example of how national labor laws and practices can foster modern slavery in construction projects (Alzoubi et al., 2023b). This system's exploitative nature, characterized by practices such as passport confiscation, restriction of movement and communication, late or non-payment of wages, debt bondage, and poor living and working conditions, creates an environment rife with modern slavery (Alzoubi et al., 2023a, 2023b; Bauomy, 2020).

The FTT, a theory traditionally used in the context of fraud (Cressey, 1950), was applied to explain why modern slavery occurs in construction projects. The results show that specific conditions of a country (the kafala system), industry or organization (passport confiscation, debt bondage, weak internal control system, salary abuse) may together present an opportunity; program time constraints and contract substitution within the industry or organization may develop pressure; and the conditions of the country (the kafala system), industry, or organization (shortage of cash flow) may provide the rationalization (Alzoubi et al., 2023b). More broadly, these insights have highlighted the value of theorizing about modern slavery through FTT to identify the reasons for the occurrence of modern slavery in construction projects.

Detection of modern slavery: This PhD research has outlined the indicators and mechanisms for detecting modern slavery in construction projects, which is particularly challenging due to the hidden nature of the crime and the nature of the industry (Alzoubi et al., 2023a). As explained earlier in the SLR and case study, indicators for detecting modern slavery include restricted freedom, behavior, working and living conditions, financial situation, and physical

appearance (Alzoubi et al., 2023a, 2023b). Moreover, as the semi-structured interviews with managers have revealed, regular construction site audits and comprehensive training programs for managers within construction organizations are crucial mechanisms for detecting signs of modern slavery. The detection of modern slavery is directly influenced by the understanding of both the forms of modern slavery and why they occur, facilitating the identification of modern slavery cases in construction projects.

Prevention of modern slavery in construction projects: This PhD research developed macro- (organizational and national) and micro- (individual) level strategies for the prevention of modern slavery in construction projects. These strategies are designed based on the understanding of the main forms of modern slavery, the reasons behind their occurrence, and the understanding gained from detection initiatives. At the organizational level, the results obtained from the semi-structured interviews with managers indicate that enhancing grievance and remediation mechanisms is vital. Therefore, construction organizations should raise awareness and understanding of modern slavery among their managers by providing mandatory training and assessments tailored to their specific roles in the organizations. This training should include clear guidelines on how to detect and report modern slavery cases and how to support a victim of modern slavery and should provide education on employment rights.

Moreover, construction organizations should repeat this training program on a regular basis to ensure that managers remain informed and vigilant. At the national level, political will is fundamental in combatting modern slavery (Alzoubi et al., 2023b). As explained in the case study, the three elements of political will (political want, political can, and political must) (Malena, 2009) are important in preventing modern slavery. Therefore, governments should develop legislation, enforcement, and international collaborations to create the necessary environment to fight modern slavery (Alzoubi et al., 2023b). At the individual level, increasing awareness among construction managers and encouraging them to report cases of modern

slavery are critical actions that significantly contribute to its prevention in construction projects.

Table 2. Summary of the framework

Element	Details	Relationship
Forms of modern slavery	Human trafficking, forced labor, sex trafficking, and debt bondage.	Directly influence the development of detection and prevention strategies. These forms provide a clear framework for why modern slavery occurs.
Why modern slavery occurs in construction projects	<p>Macro-level explanations: Industry, Organization, Country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry: Low-profit margins, project delays, large numbers of migrant and low-skilled labor, and limited visibility and transparency. • Organization: Policy-practice disconnect due to the lack of training by construction organizations, a lack of awareness and response among managers for addressing modern slavery and trivializing the issue of modern slavery. • Country: Kafala system (or similar abusive systems). 	Influences the forms of modern slavery present. Determine the focus areas for detection mechanisms and shape prevention strategies.
Detection of modern slavery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators: Restricted freedom, behavior, working and living conditions, financial situation, and physical appearance. • Mechanisms: Construction site audits, training programs. 	Informed by an understanding of the forms of modern slavery and why it occurs. Essential for effective prevention strategies.
Prevention of modern slavery	<p>Macro-level: Organizational and National, Micro-level: Individual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational: Enhancing grievance mechanisms and mandatory training. • National: Political will. • Individual: Increase awareness and encourage the reporting of modern slavery cases. 	Depends on effective detection and a deep understanding of the forms of modern slavery and why it occurs. Aimed at mitigating the factors identified in why modern slavery occurs.

The issue of modern slavery in construction projects has been studied from different angles using three linked studies to gain a detailed and comprehensive overview of this criminal activity and potential solutions to address it.

The SLR provides the “big picture” of modern slavery. In other words, the candidate illustrates the scale and depth of modern slavery. Following the research agenda developed in this article, the candidate decided to research one of the areas suggested for future research, which is “why” modern slavery occurs in construction projects. This RQ was explored through a single case study, as described below.

The candidate chose a single case study to delve more deeply into the criminal phenomenon of modern slavery in construction projects and gain a specific and real-world view of the phenomenon (Yin, 2017). The exploration of the single case study helped further validate the findings of the SLR on modern slavery in construction projects. Following thorough research to identify a suitable case study, the candidate chose the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program in Qatar as the case to be studied. The kafala system, one of the main results and forms of modern slavery found earlier in the SLR, has been scarcely studied (Alzoubi et al., 2023a). Therefore, this case was the most suitable to investigate as it occurred in Qatar, a Gulf country known to use the kafala system. The suggested areas of future research proposed in this article encouraged the researcher to take a more challenging approach to this sensitive and uncomfortable topic by speaking with managers working in the construction sector to understand the mechanisms construction companies use to address modern slavery and look for potential solutions to address this crime.

Leveraging the results of the SLR and single case study, the semi-structured interviews with managers working in the construction sector focused on understanding what construction companies and managers are doing to address modern slavery. The results were unexpected.

They showed that construction companies and managers are doing very little to address modern slavery within their companies, especially in terms of training. Therefore, these results encouraged the candidate to investigate the reasons that the issue of modern slavery is trivialized in construction projects, propose areas for improvement, and call for further action.

In summary, the three connected article publications presented in this PhD research offer a comprehensive overview of modern slavery in construction projects, starting from the SLR, moving to a real-world single case study, and finally, to semi-structured interviews.

3.1.2 Ambiguous Forms of Modern Slavery in Construction Projects

There are situations in contexts where it is not clear if certain practices are considered modern slavery, especially within construction projects. These projects are characterized by set goals, temporariness, and uniqueness, which can lead to what might be termed “ambiguous forms of modern slavery”. The pressure to work, often in potentially dangerous conditions—a common scenario in many construction projects—may lead to subtle forms of coercion.

Table 3, adapted from Locatelli et al. (2022), explores the dark side of construction projects by examining the coercion of individuals through the lens of ethics and legality. To simplify the analysis, the candidate focuses on coercion, as it highlights a wide range of unethical and illegal behaviors associated with modern slavery. It is clear that coercion is “modern slavery” when it is both unethical and illegal. Conversely, coercion that is deemed both ethical and legal does not constitute “modern slavery”. An example of this could be the enforcement of contracts, which might be seen as coercive. However, this should not be confused with modern slavery, provided that the contracts are both legal and ethically justifiable. Judging the legality of coercion is feasible, as is evaluating it against domestic and international legal standards.

On the other hand, assessing the ethical aspect of practices is more challenging. However, establishing a diverse panel or focus group that includes individuals from various cultures, genders, backgrounds, and traditions can help in making ethical judgments more operational.

For a more straightforward analysis, one might consider adopting a conservative international ethical standard. According to this approach, if a practice is deemed ethically inappropriate by any one of the various traditions represented, it is classified as ethically inappropriate overall.

Table 3. Ambiguous and obvious forms of modern slavery in construction projects

	Legal practice	An illegal form of coercion affecting people in construction projects
Ethical practice	Not modern slavery	Ambiguous form of modern slavery
Unethical form of coercion affecting people in construction projects	Ambiguous form of modern slavery	A form of modern slavery

The variance in legal, cultural, and economic environments across different regions significantly influences what constitutes modern slavery and informs the strategies employed to tackle it. A prime example of how context influences the perception of modern slavery is the kafala system prevalent in the GCC region. As mentioned earlier, under this system, migrant workers’ employment status is tied to their sponsor, who is also responsible for their visa and legal status (el-Mumin, 2020). While this system is legal, ethical and widely used in GCC countries, it has been criticized internationally for creating conditions that can lead to the exploitation and abuse of workers, characteristics often associated with modern slavery (Hall, 2018).

The lack of freedom for workers to change employment or leave the country without the sponsor’s consent significantly restricts their rights and freedom (Robinson, 2021), highlighting a critical area where regional legal norms clash with international human rights standards. Hence, the kafala system is considered unethical under this standard because it is viewed as inappropriate by Western tradition. However, since kafala is legal in GCC countries, it represents an ambiguous form of modern slavery.

Another context-specific example of the practice is debt bondage, notably prevalent in South Asian countries. Workers, often in construction, are forced to work to repay debt under terms that are exploitative and designed to make the debt impossible to pay off (Dando et al., 2016; Emberson, 2019). The legality of such arrangements varies, with some countries having laws against coercion and exploitation but failing in enforcement and political will, leading to widespread abuse (Bales et al., 2011). This form of modern slavery is a clear violation of international human rights standards, yet persists due to economic conditions, lack of legal enforcement, and cultural acceptance of debt as a means to secure labor.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, child labor in the construction sector, often under hazardous conditions, is another example where contextual factors play a significant role. Economic hardship, lack of access to education, and insufficient legal protections contribute to the prevalence of child labor (Bhukuth, 2005; Sabella, 2011; Such et al., 2019). While such practices are illegal and ethically condemned in many parts of the world, in regions where they occur, systemic issues and cultural norms can reduce the perception of this as a form of modern slavery.

The forms of practices that are ethically acceptable yet illegal are also ambiguous. In countries with strict labor laws, like Canada, construction workers are provided with significant protections (CCOHS, 2023). For instance, during severe weather conditions, there are statutory requirements for workers to take frequent breaks. However, for tasks requiring continuous attention, such as operating heavy cranes, adhering to these breaks can be impractical. Workers might agree to continue working to complete their tasks under such conditions. This raises the question: could such voluntary actions, diverging from statutory requirements for safety or practical reasons, be misconstrued as a form of modern slavery?

Addressing modern slavery in construction projects requires context-sensitive strategies that consider legal, economic, and cultural factors. For the kafala system, international pressure and

support are critical, alongside local reforms to improve labor laws and their enforcement. In tackling debt bondage, strategies include legal reform, strengthening labor rights, and providing workers with access to their finances. To fight child labor, efforts should focus on improving economic conditions, access to education, and rigorous enforcement of child labor laws.

Understanding and addressing modern slavery in construction projects requires an approach that respects local contexts while striving for universal human rights standards. By recognizing the forms and conditions under which modern slavery occurs, stakeholders can develop more effective, contextually appropriate strategies to fight it.

3.2 Conclusions

This PhD research aimed to investigate modern slavery in construction projects, a highly relevant and prevalent topic that has been underexplored within construction management disciplines. Through a qualitative method that included an SLR, a case study of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program in Qatar, and semi-structured interviews with construction managers in OECD countries, this PhD research has shed light on the multifaceted nature of modern slavery in construction projects.

The rigorous SLR allowed the candidate to identify the main forms of modern slavery and the structural conditions within construction projects that facilitate this unethical and illegal practice. These conditions include low-profit margins, a high percentage of low-skilled and migrant workers, limited visibility and transparency in supply chains, and the pressures of project delays, to mention a few. Building on these findings from the SLR, the PhD research presented a number of prepositions leading to a research agenda in several areas, including organizations, individual workers, project networks and human capital, as well as the role of the CMS in reducing modern slavery. This research agenda is aimed at highlighting the need

for an integrated approach to understanding and mitigating modern slavery in construction projects (Alzoubi et al., 2023a).

The case study of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Program in Qatar used the FTT—focusing on opportunity, pressure, and rationalization—to investigate why modern slavery occurs in construction projects. This investigation revealed that the kafala system, passport confiscation, debt bondage, weak internal control systems, and salary abuses present significant opportunities for modern slavery. Moreover, program time constraints and contract substitution exert pressure, while rationalizations such as the normalization of the kafala system and cash flow shortages further facilitate modern slavery. Notably, the kafala system emerged as a primary enabler, underlining the critical need for systemic reforms (Alzoubi et al., 2023b).

Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews with construction managers uncovered a significant disconnection between the anti-modern slavery statements on construction companies' websites and the on-site realities. The findings showed that the mechanisms behind this disconnection are inadequate training in construction companies, leading to a lack of awareness and responsibility among construction managers towards modern slavery. Moreover, another reason behind this disconnection is the issue of “alternative priorities” within construction companies, with modern slavery not being recognized as a critical issue requiring immediate action.

This PhD research not only bridges a significant gap in the literature by providing a detailed examination of modern slavery in construction projects but also calls for intensive action among all stakeholders to reduce and prevent this unethical and illegal practice. The development of effective training programs, enhanced visibility and transparency in supply chains, and the reform of exploitative systems such as the kafala system are necessary. As this PhD research concludes, it is clear that tackling modern slavery in construction requires not

only regulatory and policy involvement but also a change in industry culture and priorities. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations proposed in this PhD research will pave the way for further scholarly inquiry and practical actions, contributing to the reduction and prevention of modern slavery in construction projects and ensuring fairness, dignity, and justice for all workers.

3.2.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This PhD thesis makes several significant contributions to the field of construction management by developing the understanding of modern slavery in construction projects. Each of these contributions not only fills a gap in the existing literature but also offers practical insights for practitioners in the construction sector to address and mitigate the issue of modern slavery within their projects. While the main contribution of this thesis is to the field of construction management, the insights provided by this PhD research also offer an understanding of modern slavery to other fields concerned with modern slavery, such as those on human rights, law, and CMS.

Introduction of Modern Slavery in Construction Management

The first contribution is the introduction of the topic of modern slavery into the field of construction management, marking a significant expansion of the field's scope. This addition brings to light the ethical, legal, and social implications of modern slavery in construction projects, encouraging a multidisciplinary approach to solving this global issue. It prompts scholars and practitioners to consider the human and ethical aspects of construction projects, extending beyond traditional focus areas such as time, cost, and quality.

Development of a Conceptual Framework

The second contribution is the development of a conceptual framework for studying modern slavery in construction projects. This framework systematically categorizes the main forms of modern slavery, explains the factors contributing to its occurrence, and outlines mechanisms for its detection and prevention. By doing so, it offers a structured approach to investigating modern slavery, providing a foundation for future research and enabling not only academics but also practitioners to identify and address potential vulnerabilities within their projects.

Identification of Causes and the Role of Political Will

The third contribution lies in identifying the specific reasons “why” modern slavery occurs in construction projects, with a particular emphasis on the crucial role of political will in fighting this issue worldwide. By highlighting the importance of commitment and action from governmental and international bodies, this PhD research highlights the need for rigorous action to address the root causes of modern slavery.

Application of the Fraud Triangle Theory

The fourth contribution introduces and applies the FTT for the first time to contextualize the phenomenon of modern slavery in construction projects. This theoretical lens allows for a detailed understanding of the opportunities, pressures and rationalizations that lead to committing unethical and illegal practices like modern slavery. By applying this theory, this PhD research sheds light on the psychological and situational factors that contribute to the use of modern slavery, offering new areas for improvement and prevention.

Disconnection Between Policy and Practice

Finally, the PhD research reveals a critical disconnection between the official anti-modern slavery statements of construction companies and the reality on construction sites, and it identifies the reasons for this disconnection. This finding challenges the industry to reflect on its ethical responsibilities and to align its practices with its stated commitments to human rights and labor standards.

3.2.2 Practical Implications

This PhD research investigated the complex nature of modern slavery in construction projects, identifying its main forms, structural conditions that make construction projects prone to modern slavery, why modern slavery occurs in construction projects and the mechanisms that explain the difference between the official anti-modern slavery statements of construction companies and the empirical observations in construction sites. The findings have significant implications for various stakeholders committed to eradicating modern slavery from construction projects worldwide, including individuals (construction workers and managers), organizations (construction companies), sectors (the construction sector), and government and policymakers.

Individuals (Construction Workers and Managers): Raising awareness and education are vital for reducing cases of modern slavery in construction projects (Alzoubi et al., 2023a; Trautrimis et al., 2020). Workers should be educated through training on recognizing the signs of modern slavery and understanding their rights and the ways available for reporting cases of modern slavery. Moreover, construction managers and supervisors should be trained and assessed in ethical leadership and oversight, ensuring they can identify and respond to instances of modern slavery within their construction projects.

Organizations (Construction Companies): The research highlighted the necessity for construction companies to implement robust policies and practices to avoid modern slavery risks, especially across lower-tier material supply chains and within construction sites. These companies need to mandate training for all staff, establish transparent grievance mechanisms, and foster a culture of accountability and ethical business conduct to fight modern slavery effectively within their projects.

Sector (Construction): This PhD research focused on the construction sector and highlighted the importance of sector commitment to transparency and collaboration in fighting modern slavery. Associations within the construction sector should collaborate to facilitate the sharing of best practices and develop standardized frameworks for detecting, monitoring and reporting on modern slavery. Such initiatives are anticipated to drive collective action and improve standards across the sector.

Government and Policy Makers: The findings highlight the need for rigorous regulations that mandate transparency and accountability in labor practices within the construction sector to fight modern slavery. Governments should pay serious attention to the issue of modern slavery and have a “political will” (Alzoubi et al., 2023b) to consider more strict policies that encourage ethical business practices through mandatory training and penalize non-compliance. Additionally, strengthening labor laws and enforcement mechanisms is crucial to protect vulnerable workers and prevent modern slavery in construction projects.

3.2.3 Limitations and Future Areas of Research

Following the completion of this PhD research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations encountered and suggest areas for future research:

- **Restricted sector**

Although construction projects are very relevant and prevalent for modern slavery, it is recommended that future research extends the investigation of modern slavery in projects to other sectors.

This PhD research specifically focused on studying modern slavery in construction projects. The construction sector, characterized by its complex supply chains, labor-intensive nature, and frequent use of migrant labor (Alzoubi et al., 2023b), presents a unique set of challenges and risks for the perpetuation of modern slavery forms. These include, but are not limited to, human trafficking, forced labor and debt bondage, as articulated in this PhD research (Alzoubi et al., 2023a). The focus on construction projects is driven by the sector's significant contribution to global employment and economy as well as its pronounced susceptibility to labor rights violations, as evidenced through the SLR (Alzoubi et al., 2023a), making construction projects a critical area for investigating modern slavery.

However, this focus on construction projects limits the generalizability of the results to other project sectors. By focusing on construction projects, the PhD research excludes other project sectors that are also vulnerable to modern slavery, such as IT, agriculture, manufacturing, and the service industry, each of which has distinct characteristics, risk factors, and mechanisms through which modern slavery is facilitated and avoided. Therefore, while this PhD research provided comprehensive insights into the forms of modern slavery, the prevalence and impact of modern slavery in construction projects, why it takes place in construction projects, and

what construction companies and employees are doing to fight it, its findings and conclusions may not be fully and directly transferrable to other project sectors.

The limitation outlined above presents several avenues for future research. For example, future research could investigate modern slavery forms and their persistence across different sectors to identify commonalities and differences. By broadening research to include other project sectors, scholars can discover sector-specific vulnerabilities that facilitate modern slavery. This could help in understanding the broader field of modern slavery and in developing cross-sectoral strategies to fight it.

- **Geographic scope:**

The single case study investigated in this PhD research was conducted in Qatar, a country within the GCC region. The results are particularly relevant to other GCC countries where the kafala system is prevalent, as this system is a major contributor to modern slavery in the region. This PhD research provided critical insights into how modern slavery manifests in Qatar through the kafala system. However, the focus on Qatar limits the generalizability of the results to countries where the kafala system does not exist, as modern slavery in construction projects might be spread through different mechanisms elsewhere. Given this limitation, future research could contribute to the understanding of modern slavery in construction projects by conducting comparative studies between GCC countries and regions without the kafala system, such as the EU. Such studies would offer valuable insights into how different regulatory, economic, and cultural contexts influence the prevalence and forms of modern slavery in construction projects.

- **Qualitative research:**

The exploratory research presented in this PhD research has been effective in providing deep insights into understanding the complex and social phenomenon of modern slavery in construction projects. By employing methods such as SLR, a single case study and semi-structured interviews, this PhD research has provided rich, detailed insights into how and why modern slavery takes place in construction projects, as well as providing a foundational understanding of its manifestations, drivers, and the challenges faced in eradicating it.

To further advance the field, future research should incorporate quantitative methods. This would enable the generation of empirical data that can be used to test hypotheses derived from the qualitative findings of this PhD research. For example, surveys and statistical analysis could be employed to measure the prevalence of modern slavery practices across different regions and construction projects, identifying patterns and correlations with certain risk factors. Moreover, quantitative research could facilitate comparative studies across sectors, enhancing our understanding of how modern slavery manifests differently across sectors and what sector-specific strategies might be most effective in fighting it.

- **Modern slavery training**

This PhD research revealed a significant gap in training within construction organizations and highlighted the crucial role such training plays in raising awareness and reducing the prevalence of modern slavery in construction projects. However, the effectiveness of current training programs remains unclear and should be investigated by future research. More broadly, future research should investigate the impact of anti-slavery measures on construction companies and examine relevant laws in different countries.

3.3 Activities Completed During the PhD Research

3.3.1 Presentations

- Participated as a session chair in the Student Industry Conference held at Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, United Kingdom (July 2023).
- Participated as a speaker at the European Academy of Management (EURAM) 2023 Conference, held in Dublin, Ireland, with the paper titled “Let’s not Ignore the Obvious: Modern Slavery in the UK Construction Sector (June 2023).
- Participated and presented as a speaker at the Project Management Group, with the paper titled “Let’s not Ignore the Obvious: Modern Slavery in the UK Construction Sector”, co-authored with Professor Giorgio Locatelli and Dr. Tristano Sainati. University of Leeds, Leeds, UK (January 2023).
- Participated in the Multi-Dimensional Impacts of Infrastructure Investment organized by the University of Manchester, held in Manchester, United Kingdom (September 2022).
- Participated as a speaker at the EURAM 2022 Conference, held in Winterthur, Switzerland, with the paper titled “How and Why Modern Slavery Occurs in Projects and Programmes” (June 2022).
- Participated and presented as a speaker at the Project Management Group, with the paper titled “Modern Slavery: A Systematic Literature Review”, co-authored with Professor Giorgio Locatelli and Dr. Tristano Sainati. University of Leeds, Leeds, UK (December 2021).
- Participated as a speaker in the EURAM 2021 Conference, held online with the paper titled “Modern Slavery: A Systematic Literature Review” (June 2021).
- Participated in the Warwickshire Modern Slavery Business Pledge Conference organized by the Warwickshire County Council, held in Warwick, United Kingdom (February 2020).

3.3.2 Teaching Experience

- Teaching assistant. University of Leeds. Teaching assistant for the course “Risk Management” for the Engineering Project Management and International Construction Management and Engineering Master programs (November 2023 – Present).
- Guest Lecture: Modern Slavery in Construction Projects, held at the University of Leeds, Leeds, UK (November 2023).
- Supervision. University of Leeds. Main supervisor for Master’s students (January 2023 – October 2023).
- Guest Lecture: “Modern Slavery in Projects: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda”, held online at the Riphah International University, Lahore, Pakistan (July 2023).
- Teaching assistant. University of Leeds. Teaching assistant for the course “Risk Management” for the Engineering Project Management and International Construction Management and Engineering Master programs (November 2022 – January 2023).

3.3.3 Reviewer

- A reviewer for the Journal of Production Planning and Control (November 2023 – Present).
- A reviewer for the EURAM 2023 Annual Conference (January 2023 – March 2023).
- A reviewer for the EURAM 2022 Annual Conference (January 2022 – March 2022).

3.3.4 Awards and Recognitions

- Major Projects Association Grant – Recipient of the “Major Projects Association PhD Research Grant (One-off Grant)” with a value of £1,000 (September 2023).
- EURAM 2023 Doctoral Colloquium – Shortlisted for the “Relevant and Responsible Research Award” for my project titled “Modern Slavery in Construction Projects” (June 2023).

- University of Leeds Travel Grants – Recipient of three travel grants with a value of £2,100 for attending multiple conferences.

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Appendix

Proof of Submission (Article Publication 3)

“Dear Yazan Alzoubi,

Your submission, entitled “Turning a Blind Eye: Ignoring Modern Slavery in the Race to Construction Project Completion,” has been assigned manuscript number COENG-14653 and has been received by the journal for processing. If your paper has been directly transferred from another ASCE journal, you will need to log in and review the pre-populated submission form before submitting your manuscript.

You may review and approve your transferred manuscript or check the progress of your submission by logging onto the journal’s Editorial Manager page at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/jrncoeng/>.

Thank you for submitting your work to this journal.

Sincerely,

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