

JUST SIX  
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH  
SUMMARY



## Working with Victims of Human Trafficking

### Key Details

#### KEY WORDS

Psychotherapy; Multicultural; Human Trafficking; Trauma; Services

#### POPULATION GROUP

All Youth

#### STEPPING UP THEMES

Health & Wellness  
Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety

#### RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA & Canada

#### SOURCE

Academic

**“Survivors of human trafficking often undergo emotional, psychological and physical pain, and seek the basic needs of life, including shelter, food, legal assistance, social support and psychological treatment” (p. 51).**

#### 1. What is the research about?

This research examines effective ways to work with survivors of human trafficking. Survivors (including young people) face a variety of challenges, including isolation, psychological manipulation, dependence and resulting mental health issues. Other concerns include cultural, linguistic and trust barriers when accessing services. Additionally, counselling services catering to this vulnerable population are lacking.

This research highlights the importance of conducting comprehensive psychiatric evaluations and understanding the client prior to trafficking as key elements to unpacking trauma. Major risk factors when working with youth include poverty, young age, limited education, lack of family support (i.e. family members collaborating with traffickers), limited employment opportunities, homelessness, a history of displacement or running away, histories of sexual abuse, living in vulnerable areas, and health or mental health challenges.

#### 2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in the United States and Canada (Ontario).

#### 3. Who is this research about?

This research is about victims of human trafficking. The research can be used by therapists and youth workers who are completing assessments in order to further understand various aspects of the trafficking experience and to better support the youth they work with. A mixed methods approach was taken where data was collected through interviews, informal conversations, case studies, surveys and reflections from therapists.

#### 4. How was the research done?

A systematic and comprehensive review of victims of human trafficking research was conducted for this article, utilizing North American sources. Existing theories and studies from 1998 to 2015 were reviewed in order to understand survivor experiences of vulnerability, manner of recruitment or capture, the trafficking process and exploitation. By analyzing these issues researchers explored best strategies to provide services to youth or clients.

#### 5. What are the key findings?

The research reviews short-term and long-term service requirements for survivors, over the course of recovery. The key findings can be summarized into short- and long-term service that can be supported by therapists and youth workers. Strategies include:

#### a) Immediate Term/ Short-Term

- Survivors in need of safety planning
- Clothing
- Housing
- Crisis Intervention
- Language support (i.e. interpreter) to access and maintain supports
- Need for covered transportation costs to access treatment locations and appointments
- Accessibility needed through monetary funding for phone
- Affordable medical and dental care
- Employment support
- Legal assistance

#### b) Long-Term

- Assistance with job training
- Job placement support
- Education counselling and support
- Family reunification
- Mental Health treatment
- Repatriation (in some cases)
- Counselling with clinicians being cognizant of cultural competency

The research highlighted the importance of paying attention to how key factors limit or advance service provision. Researchers recommended paying attention to the impact of :

- Ethnicity
- Culture
- Language (which might limit availability of resources or impede therapeutic progress when interpreters are needed)
- Computer literacy or access to online resources
- Client safety within treatment programs (i.e. being flirted with by other group members when survivors are accessing focus groups violated safety)
- Challenges faced by organizations: organizational funding/financial resources, lack of housing, providing financial support to the victim and finding counselling for the victim
- Lack of funding for long-term care (i.e. limiting number of therapy sessions)
- Lack of training in how to gain survivors' trust and develop cultural competency

The research found that conducting a complete psychiatric evaluation allowed providers to better understand supports needed by survivors. The research recommended exploration of the following:

- Clients' psychological needs
- What issues were present before the trafficking experience
- Reviewing for any co-morbid disorders
- Screening for sexual abuse
- Assess for sexually-transmitted diseases
- Explore initial vulnerability
- Explore the manner of recruitment or capture
- Explore the primary trafficking process and the exploitation as experienced by victims

#### 6. Why does it matter for youth work?

These findings demonstrate that clinicians and service providers working with youth can improve the quality of service to survivors of human trafficking by providing adequate supports and building a non-judgmental approach, coupled with perseverance by service providers.

The key aspect is taking time to develop a strong therapeutic alliance with the client in reducing the risk of dropout and increasing willingness to explore traumatic experiences. Some of the promising strategies are safety planning, collaboration, culturally-appropriate services, relationship development and trauma-informed programming, specifically emotion-focused therapy for complex trauma cases.



Pascual-Leone, A., Kim, J., & Orrin-Porter, M. (2017). Working with Victims of Human Trafficking. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 47(1), 51-59.