Creating New Stories, Creating New Lives: Applying Narrative Therapy to Survivors of Human Sex Trafficking
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PROPOSED METHOD OF STUDY

The driving theory which guides this study hypothesizes that narrative therapy will be an effective form of psychological treatment for the trauma experienced by survivors of sexual human trafficking. The objectives for this research include establishing a new mode of therapy for victims of sex trafficking, and to provide effective education which forms in eliminating an autonomous identity as well as extending traumatic events in order to overcome psychological and emotional distress. Participants (N=25) for this study will include females, ages 18 to 26 years old. In order to access this population, it would be ideal to work with the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) based in Los Angeles, the immigration office at Boyd School of Law, and the Salvation Army.

Materials and Procedure

This qualitative research design will measure symptom ratings based on the Posttraumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale, a 49 item questionnaire that gauges symptom severity and function (Foa, 1995). This questionnaire will provide thorough data on aspects of trauma involving anxiety, depression, and PTSD during the therapeutic process. Over the course of 12 weeks involving a 1 hour session per week, the therapist (in collaboration with a translator if necessary) will focus on decreasing the dominant story, externalizing the problem, exploration of alternate stories, and constructing new stories. Participants will be asked to complete the questionnaires at specific intervals of therapy: before treatment, after 5 weeks of treatment, and post treatment. Findings will be evaluated using either Q-Local Software or hand scoring with an assessment key that is included with the testing packet.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Traumatic Effects of Sex Trafficking

A report published by Zimmerman et al. (2006) from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine analyzed the prevalence of violence, freedom of movement, and the resulting psychological problems experienced by 207 European women who had been trafficked.

Type of Violence Percent (%) of Women (n=207)

- Physical Violence 20% 158
- Sexual Violence 96% 186
- Bath Types 74% 148

Most of the women in the study also experienced limitations on personal movement and loss of freedom during their time in forced prostitution.

Freedom of Movement Percent (%) of Women (n=207)

- Never 77% 151
- Seldom 19% 39
- Occasionally 4% 8
- Others 5% 9
- Always 2% 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Problem</th>
<th>Percent (%) of Women (n=207)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foulfulness</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder</td>
<td>85%</td>
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The Components of Narrative Therapy

Narrative Therapy is an approach that emphasizes personal agency. White explains that "personal agency is the capacity for responsible action," which enables the client to create new realities, emotions, stories, and interpretations of events (as cited in White, 2010, p.229). Establishing personal agency would be a positive step in helping re-write their life narrative and move forward in overcoming what has become their 'dominant' story. In narrative therapy it is believed that every person's life contains stories that can be dominated over others, and these dominant stories have a heavy influence on personal identity (White, 2010). Because of the powerful nature of this pre-dominant story, it is possible for a strong dominant story to take over a person's self-definition (White, 2010).

Narrative Therapy begins with "externalization" of the problem. Externalizing the dominant problem allows for deconstruction and objectification of the issue (White, 2010). Through this process, the problem or event is separated from the person's identity, which becomes the story that the dominant story has on the individual's concept of self (White, 2010). Externalizing the issue leads directly to the next step of "re-authoring." According to White (2010), re-authoring is the process of co-constructing a new reality and new dominant story that is free of the problem, which reduces the hold of the pre-dominant problem on the client's life.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

Narrative therapy is a method that will address the underlying issues of trauma and empower clients to regain stability over their life, identity, and mental health. Further research using narrative therapy on sex trafficking survivors will provide a new mode of treatment that simultaneously addresses the trauma previously experienced and acknowledges the potentially re-traumatizing effect of the legal process as it occurs.

Further studies can address the generalizability of these results to male and transgendered victims of sex trafficking. In addition to the limitations of generalizability for these populations, it will also be challenging to generalize the results of survivors applying for T-Visa status to those who are not in the legal process of gaining a T-Visa. Additional research in this area would further validate the use of narrative therapy for this population.

Previous Applications of Narrative Therapy

Narrative Therapy for Women Experiencing Domestic Violence: Supporting Women's Transitions from Abuse to Safety discusses the practical use of the narrative approach in helping victimized women regain their identities and assist in their transition from victim to survivor (Allen, 2011).

Working with a population that is likely applying for T-Visa status during the time of therapy offers unique challenges that must be acknowledged in order to administer successful treatment while their immigration status is pending.

The Legal Process: A Potential Obstacle in Therapy

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The psychological community at-large has yet to recognize that treatment of persons recovered from human trafficking requires greater attention and further research in order to provide successful treatment. Nancy M. Sidun, PsyD, supervising clinical psychologist for the Salvation Army.

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