

Exploring the Self-Care Practices of Counselors Working with Sex Trafficking Survivors

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Sex Trafficking and Self-Care

Sex Trafficking in the United States

- The United States is listed among the top three countries of origin.
- Sex trafficking is a global concern affecting 4.8 million women, men, and children.
- Survivors experience multiple forms of trauma: physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.
- Multidimensional Impact: psychological, physical, vocational, relational, and spiritual.

(Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2021, 2025;
 Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000)

Counselors' Role in Supporting Survivors

- Counselors play a critical role in supporting survivors' healing journey and helping them connect with their authentic selves.
- Due to the prevalence of sex trafficking, counselors need to understand the experiences of counselors working with survivors.

Importance of Counselor Self-Care

- Ethical duty to identify any signs of impairment.
- Literature acknowledges the experiences of counselors working with survivors.
- Limited research focusing on the self-care practices of counselors to prevent experiences of impairment

(Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2024)

Current Study

- The purpose of this qualitative research study is to:
 - Explore the self-care practices of counselors working with sex trafficking survivors
 - Examine how their self-care practices have helped combat experiences of vicarious trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue.

(ACA, 2014; Helpinstine et al., 2021; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2024; Thompson et al., 2014)

Results

Sex Trafficking Training

- Emphasizes the importance of counselors having multifaceted knowledge when working with survivors
- Participants reflected on their experiences working with this population and the need for training
- Participants emphasized how working with survivors influenced their self-care in various ways

Sex Trafficking Training

Listening to Your Body

Impairment

Impairment

- Encompasses all the burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma.
- A participant introduced this term to add to their conceptualization of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma.
- Impairment extends beyond not doing self-care; it signifies a fundamental harm to the self and clients.

Listening to Your Body

- Encompasses all the self-care strategies and skills.
- Highlights the need for flexibility when responding to self-care needs
- Emphasizes the need to attend to signals from their mind, body, and spirit.

Implications for Counselors

- Counselors who work with survivors of sex trafficking emphasize:
 - Monitoring themselves for signs of impairment, as impairment affects their ability to work with their clients
 - The necessity of a deeper understanding of the issue to better support their clients.
 - Concerns about how supporting survivors affects their own self-care and the methods they employ for it.
 - The importance of self-care, advocating for it to be a fundamental practice, guided by the signals from one's own body.
- There is a need to incorporate sex trafficking training into the counseling curriculum to prepare counselors better to work with survivors.
- Counselors must prioritize their own self-care practices when working with clients

Methodology

- Transcendental Phenomenology, following Moustakas's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's data analysis.
- Semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes
- 10 female counselors who met the following Inclusion Criteria:
 - Fully licensed counselor
 - Residing and practicing within the United States
 - Having experience working with sex trafficking survivors within the past two years
 - 18+ years old.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

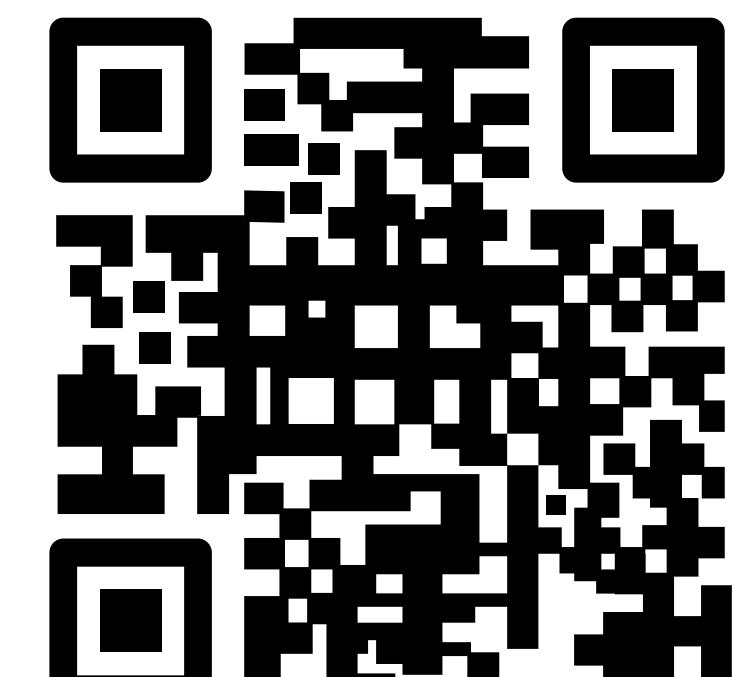
	n	%
Age		
30-40 years old	3	60
50-60 years old	2	40
Years of Experience		
5-14 years	4	80
15+ years	1	20
Race		
White	4	80
Chinese Jamaican	1	60

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