

WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING:



A BRIEF MANUAL FOR SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

**Brought to you by Project REACH,
Crisis Mental Health Services for Victims of Human Trafficking**

WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

CONTENTS

- Human trafficking: An Overview 1
- The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) 3
- Potential Benefits for Victims of Trafficking 4
- Potential Benefits for Trafficked Children 4
- Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking 5
- Conducting Interviews with Survivors of Trafficking 7
- Assessment of Client Needs 11
- Community Coordination 12
- Safety Issues when Working with Trafficking Survivors 13
- Traumatic Stress Reactions in Survivors of Trafficking 15
- Hints for Working with Trauma Survivors 17
- Cultural Factors and Trauma Treatment 19
- Vicarious Trauma and Self-care for the Caregiver 21

Human Trafficking: An Overview

What is human trafficking?

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. Traffickers target people, often women and children, who are poor and have limited resources. They attract individuals with the promise of a better life and then force them to live and work in unfair, inhumane, or abusive conditions.

Human trafficking has been defined as:

sex trafficking in which a commercial sexual act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Human trafficking involves the use of coercion, fraud, or force to control another person. Human trafficking is a crime under U.S. Federal Law, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

Who are the victims?

Hundreds of thousands of people are trafficked across international borders each year. Although there is significant variation in the estimates of the prevalence of human trafficking in the United States, the State Department estimates that 14,500 to 17,500 women, children, and men are trafficked against their will into the United States each year. People who have been trafficked into the United States come from all over the world, including Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean; Europe and Eurasia; the Near East; Africa; East Asia and the Pacific; and South and Central Asia. Other victims are U.S. citizens who are trafficked within country borders.

What types of work are people trafficked into?

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

- Prostitution
- Pornography
- Erotic massage
- Exotic dancing

Forms of Labor Exploitation

- Domestic servitude
- Sweatshops and factories
- Restaurant work
- Hotel/motel housekeeping
- Construction work
- Begging
- Agricultural work

Methods Used By Traffickers to Control Victims

- Deception, fraud, intimidation
- Illegal contracts and debt bondage
- Holding documents, withholding pay
- Lack of information
- Isolation
- Social and cultural disorientation
- Dependence on trafficker for sustenance, work
- Withholding basic needs- adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical care
- Threats
 - Threatening family or friends in home country
 - Threats to report illegal immigration status to authorities
 - Threats of violence against victims
- Distortion of cultural and religious beliefs
- Migration, movement
- Imprisonment
- Emotional and psychological abuse
- Physical abuse and violence
- Sexual assault and rape
- Torture

What have victims experienced?

Individuals who have been trafficked are often vulnerable and isolated. They have been separated from their family, friends, home, and anything that is familiar or safe. They may have experienced a number of traumatic experiences, including: early traumatic experiences in their home country (loss of family members, assault, war trauma, forced migration); violence and abuse during migration; and psychological, physical, and sexual abuse during trafficking. Victims of trafficking often lose their sense of identity and worth while they are trafficked; they are treated as property and may lose their sense of self and their will to resist.

Even after victims of trafficking are rescued or escape, they face many stressors. They are in a foreign country where they may not speak the language or understand the customs. They often have immigration issues and may face possible deportation to unstable or dangerous conditions in their home country. They often do not have work permits, so they are unable to support themselves. They usually lack support and face a host of unmet physical and psychological needs.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000

The TVPA is the first federal law directly addressing human trafficking and is the largest anti-slavery law that the U.S. has adopted since 1865. The act defines human trafficking and takes a three-pronged approach to combating trafficking, including: prevention, prosecution, and protection.

Prevention

- Identifies at-risk populations and encourages public awareness
- Established the Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking
- Country reports which evaluate countries' efforts to fight trafficking
- Allows for assistance to foreign countries to fight trafficking

Prosecution and Punishment

- Established felony criminal offenses for trafficking
- Allows prosecution of both physical and non-physical types of coercion

Protection and assistance to victims

- Permits continued presence of a victim who is a potential witness for the prosecution of a trafficking case. "Continued presence" refers to a deferred immigration status of one year duration, in which federal law enforcement officials "request the continued presence in the United States of certain victims of severe forms of trafficking in persons, who are aliens and are also potential witnesses, in order to effectuate the prosecution of those responsible." In order to receive continued presence, a victim must be identified as a victim of a severe form of trafficking as defined by the TVPA, must be a potential witness, must be willing to assist in the prosecution of the trafficker, and must be sponsored by a law enforcement agent. Continued presence is authorized by the Department of Homeland Security and also provides a temporary work permit.
- TVPA regulations include procedures to protect victims and their families from intimidation, threats of reprisals, and reprisals from traffickers and associates.
- The TVPA established a certification process that allows some trafficking victims to be eligible for benefits and services similar to those offered to refugees, including cash assistance, medical care, food stamps, and housing.

Why is the TVPA important to victims of trafficking?

The TVPA allows victims who are a severe form of trafficking and who are willing to assist in the prosecution of a trafficker certain benefits. Individuals who are "certified" by law enforcement as a victim of a severe form of trafficking may be eligible for some of the same public benefits as refugees. In addition, these victims may apply for a T-visa, a visa which allows them to remain in the country for three years. At the end of that 3-year period, victims may apply for a green card for permanent status.

Reauthorizations

The TVPA was reauthorized in 2003 and 2005, adding additional benefits for victims and their families, strengthening law enforcement's ability to prosecute traffickers, and providing additional funding for anti-trafficking efforts in the U.S.

Potential Benefits for Victims of Human Trafficking

Victims who are identified by law enforcement as victims of a severe form of trafficking, and who are willing to assist in the prosecution of the traffickers, may receive certain government benefits. Potential benefits include:

- Health Screening and Medical care- through the State Dept. of Public Health, Medicaid, Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance
- Food stamps
- Work visa
- Job preparation and job placement assistance
- English as a Second Language classes
- Financial assistance- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance, Match Grant

In order to receive these benefits, victims must receive “certification” from the Department of Health and Human Services/ Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Potential Benefits for Trafficked Children

Minors under the age of 18 who have been trafficked are not “certified” but deemed eligible. Unlike adults, minors who have been trafficked into the sexual industry do not have to prove force, fraud, or coercion in order to receive services. Additionally, they do not need continued presence or a T-visa application to be deemed eligible. These children must be referred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement by a federal law enforcement agency.

Children who have been trafficked may be eligible for participation in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Programs. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) provide services for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Programs. The URM program coordinates housing for child victims of trafficking, either in foster care, group homes, or independent living. Efforts are made to match children with homes that are compatible in terms of language, culture, and religion. Children who have been trafficked are also eligible for medical care, mental health services, educational assistance, job skills training, legal assistance, and indirect financial assistance.

Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking

How do I know if a person is a victim of trafficking?

Victims of trafficking typically have limited freedom of movement and are under the control of the traffickers. Traffickers often recruit victims with false promises, making promises that are later broken. They frequently organize the victims' migration, charging exorbitant fees for the migration and holding victims in debt bondage when they are unable to pay the fees. Fees may be increased once victims reach the destination country. Traffickers may confiscate victims' identification documents before or upon arrival in the destination country to ensure that victims will not try to escape. Trafficked persons often have poor working conditions, are paid little if at all, and are unable to leave their place of work without being monitored. Traffickers use threats to control their victims, such as threatening to call the authorities, threatening to hurt victims' families, or threatening physical violence. Victims may be psychologically, physically, or sexually abused.

Questions to assist you in identifying whether someone may be a victim of trafficking:

- How did you get to the U.S.? Did someone help you?
- Did you owe money for your trip?
- What did you think you were going to be doing?
- Could you come and go as you pleased?
- Were there usually people around, watching you?
- Did you have your documents? Did someone hold them?
- What kind of work did you do?
- Were you paid? Regularly? How much?
- Did your boss hold your money?
- Did you owe money to your boss or anyone else?
- Did you get medical care/ dental care?
- Were you free to contact your family?
- Were you allowed to make friends?
- Could you leave if you want to?
- Did your boss or anyone else threaten to report you to the authorities?
- Did you feel scared?
- Did you see anyone else get hurt?
- Did your boss or anyone else threaten to hurt you or your family?
- Did your boss or anyone else hurt you?

What is the difference between smuggling and trafficking?

In both smuggling and trafficking, an individual is charged money in order to be transported across international borders. In both cases, there may be an unauthorized crossing of borders.

However, in smuggling situations, there is no coercion. The relationship between the smuggler and immigrant typically ends at the border and is akin to a business transaction. In the case of trafficking, there is force, fraud, or coercion. The trafficker continues to exploit the victims after they have been transported across borders. Immigrants who have been smuggled illegally into the country are seen as criminals by the U.S. government, while people who have been trafficked are viewed as victims.

What should I do if I suspect that someone may be a victim of trafficking?

Your first step should be to call someone who has expertise in working with victims of trafficking. They will be able to help you further assess whether this person may qualify as a victim of trafficking. They will also be able to help you work out a safe plan for addressing this person's needs.

Agencies that you may wish to contact include: agencies funded by the Office for Victims of Crime to provide services for pre-certified trafficking victims such as Project REACH, agencies funded by the Office for Refugee Resettlement to provide similar services, or other agencies who have worked with trafficked individuals.

You should also assist that person in contacting an attorney, particularly regarding immigration issues.

Conducting Interviews with Survivors of Trafficking

What is the purpose of the interview?

It is important to have a clear idea of what information you are trying to obtain and why it is needed. Interview formats will vary as a function of your role in relation to the client. For instance, attorneys will gather information about their client's experiences as they relate to legal issues and potential criminal activities of the trafficker. Mental health providers will focus more on current trauma-related symptoms and coping strategies. Case managers and advocates will focus more on current needs.

Legal cautions

In any trafficking case, there is a high potential for legal involvement. Specifically, there may be a criminal case, involving prosecution of the traffickers. There are typically immigration issues, and your client may wish to apply for a T-visa or other immigration relief. Finally, there may be a civil case against the traffickers.

Because of the potential legal issues, you should use caution during the interview, particularly in your written notes. Any information could potentially be subpoenaed during a criminal prosecution; this information could then be used by the defense. In order to address this concern, service providers are encouraged to:

- Keep minimal notes
- Don't ask detailed questions about their case (e.g., date of entry into the country, etc.) which increases the likelihood of inconsistencies if records are subpoenaed
- Establish a policy for length of time records are maintained
- Consider the timing of legal issues: if the civil case is conducted after the conclusion of the criminal case, records from the civil case will not be available for subpoena.

What is informed consent and why do I need it?

It is important to get informed consent from the client. This involves letting the client know the purpose of the interview, describing the risks and benefits of participating in the interview, and providing information about the process of the interview. Be prepared to give as accurate information as possible to clients about the potential uses of the information, both how it may be used and by whom. This includes explaining confidentiality and its limits in your particular setting. Explain clearly the length of interview, the kinds of questions you will ask, and the purpose of these questions. For example, "We will talk for about an hour. I am going to ask you some questions about your living situation. This will help me to figure out what kinds of services you might need." Giving clients this kind of information will help clients feel more in control and respected.

General interview guidelines

- **Setting.** Consider issues such as lighting, space, and privacy. Certain settings may be reminders of traumatic events. For instance, holding victims in prison-like detention facilities can elicit traumatic stress reactions in some people.
- **Nonverbal behaviors.** Pay attention to your nonverbal behaviors: posture, tone of voice, etc. Nonverbal behaviors such as nodding your head, using appropriate (particularly culturally appropriate) eye contact, and speaking in a calm, concerned tone are likely to make the survivor feel more comfortable.
- **Body Language.** Use body language to communicate support and concern. Make sure that you are seated at the same level as the person you are interviewing to minimize power dynamics. Keep an open stance rather than crossing your arms. Be cautious about personal space issues.
- **Sensitivity and empathy.** Ask about experiences & reactions in a sympathetic, non-judgmental way. Keep in mind the seriousness of what this person has experienced, and the current stressors they are experiencing.
- **Timing of the interview.** Approach the interview in three phases.
 - (1) **Introductions and rapport-building:** Spend a little time settling in and making small talk. Make sure that you allow adequate time for the survivor to develop a basic comfort level with you and the surroundings. The amount of time spent in this phase should be culturally informed.
 - (2) **Goal-centered interviewing:** The bulk of the interview will be directed towards your purposes as a service provider.
 - (3) **Resolution and wrap-up:** At the end of the interview, allow plenty of time to wrap up, including time to deal with emotional reactions the survivor may have. Allow time for the survivor to ask questions and address concerns. Also make sure you address future steps, or what will happen next.
- **Working with an interpreter.** Caution should be exercised when selecting and working with interpreters. Several factors about the interpreter should be taken into account during the selection process, including: age, gender, general translation experience, experience with the field you are working in, cultural background, and potential connection with the survivor or trafficker. Interpreters may be used as both language translators and culture brokers. They should be able to translate the nuances and meanings of language, versus simply a literal translation. On the other hand, they should be instructed to completely translate all communication. Be aware of cultural differences in material that is deemed “acceptable” to discuss. For instance, some translators may avoid material that is sexual in nature, due to cultural taboos. Be cautious about selecting a translator who may have connections to the trafficker or their associates. Also be aware of potential vicarious trauma responses in the translator, and provide a forum for them to process the difficult material that they have heard.

Conducting a trauma-informed interview

When interviewing a person who has undergone traumatic experiences, your approach towards that person is very important. If you appear intimidating or push too hard, you may elicit a traumatic reaction that will interfere with the purposes of your interview. Alternatively, if you approach the survivor in a sensitive and concerned manner, you are much more likely to both obtain the information you need, as well as to form a positive relationship with the interviewee.

Providers need to be aware of the ways in which psychological trauma may impact the interview process. It is important to be aware of environmental factors such as lighting, space, and privacy. The interview setting may in some way be a reminder of previous traumatic situations. For instance, if the client feels coerced into answering questions or pressured to give certain responses, this may act as a trigger to previous times in which they felt manipulated or controlled. Therefore, if the client appears uncomfortable with the setting, it is important to address this and to accommodate the client as much as possible.

As you are conducting an interview, it is also helpful to be aware of the client's physiological and psychological reactions related to traumatic events. Often clients will not be aware of their own reactions or may feel that they are not in a position to speak up for themselves about their distress. It is up to the interviewer to set a comfortable pace and to time the interview so as not to re-traumatize the client. There should be a significant amount of time for the interview, there should be pauses to allow the client to regain his composure if difficult material was covered, and enough time at the end of the interview for the client to ask questions and to get feedback. Offer the client choices along the way, such as whether or not to answer certain questions. If the interview seems too overwhelming, it may be more prudent to postpone the interview for some future date until the client is more stable or has more supports.

Cautions during the interview

- Individuals who have been trafficked may wish to be helpful to the interviewer. They may ignore their own reactions and follow the lead of the authority; therefore, it is important that the interviewer pay attention to cues from the client. Cues such as facial expression, eye contact, breathing, etc. may be helpful indications about how the person is doing.
- Clients may attempt to get through the interview by continuing forward as rapidly as possible, ignoring distress, in an attempt to be “done” with both the interview and with memories of traumatic experiences. They may unwittingly be re-traumatizing themselves during this process.
- Emotional distress may be expressed in a variety of ways: some people may shut down emotionally, others may react with anger or rage (sometimes directed towards people who are trying to help them), some may minimize the experiences that they went through or the reactions that they are having, and others may experience distress through somatic reactions such as stomachaches or headaches. It is important to maintain a broad view as to how survivors may express their emotional reactions.

- It is not helpful for interviewers to discuss traumatic content unless they are doing so in a purposeful way and unless they know how to “apply the brakes.” Interviewers should have strategies for decreasing the victim’s hyperarousal, or helping to calm them down.
- Individuals who have been trafficked and who are involved in the legal system may have to tell their stories repeatedly. Consider what information is necessary for you to perform your functions, without needlessly having clients repeat stories of traumatic experiences. Keep in mind that reliving painful memories in detail, with a focus on the negative, may increase the likelihood of traumatic reactions in the future.

Strategies for managing affective reactions during an interview

- Pay attention to cues from the client: If client is showing signs of distress or numbing, you should consider taking a break or postponing the interview.
 - Distress cues: physical arousal reactions (such as rapid speech, shallow breathing, being jumpy, restlessness or shifting around), outward signs of distress (such as shaking, crying, or verbally expressing being upset)
 - Numbing/avoidance cues: avoidance of eye contact, talking in a flat tone or without emotion. Don’t interpret calmness or composure as indications that the client has not undergone traumatic experiences or is “fine;” shock, numbness, avoidance, and dissociation are common reactions to trauma.
- What can you do to *decrease hyperarousal*?
 - Take a break
 - Use a calm, relaxing tone of voice and slow your speech
 - Name what is happening (i.e., “It seems like this is difficult for you to talk about and that you are getting upset.”)
 - Use distraction- move the topic of conversation to something innocuous
 - Have the client come back to the “here and now” by noticing current surroundings, using their senses (sight, sound, touch, etc.)
- What can you do if the survivor seems *numb, spacey, or dissociated*?
 - In some cases, this may be an adaptive reaction; avoidance can be a useful coping strategy for getting through difficult times. If the client does not wish to talk about their traumatic experiences, you should respect this way of coping, while providing them with resources should they want to talk.
 - If a client appears to mentally “disappear” or if their expression “goes blank,” it may be helpful to talk to them in a calm voice about where they are and that they are safe. You may also attempt to have them connect to their current surroundings by noticing things with their senses. For instance, have them name things that they see or hear in the room.

Assessment of Client Needs

What is a Psychosocial Needs Assessment?

A needs assessment is a structured interview designed to assess the basic daily needs of the trafficking victims that are currently not being met. The needs assessment is the basis of a service plan, or the plan detailing how each need will be met.

What areas should be included in a Needs Assessment?

Demographics

Language, education, and occupation

Current concerns

Living situation back home

Information about the trafficking situation

- Working conditions
- Methods of coercion

Current health, medical issues

Current mental health

Assessment of current unmet needs

- Interpretation services
- Housing
- Food and Clothing
- Emergency medical care
- Safety planning
- Mental health care: crisis intervention, supportive, trauma-specific
- Legal & Immigration Services
 - What is their immigration status?
 - Is there a criminal investigation or prosecution going on?
 - Do they have access to a civil attorney?
- Independent living skills
 - Financial management
 - Basic self-care
 - Ability to navigate living environment (public transportation, etc.)
- Access to government benefits
- ESL training
- Long term medical care
- Job skills training and job placement
- Assessment of coping skills
- Social relationships
- Religious/spiritual needs
- Human rights education

Current supports and resources*

Strengths and coping skills*

Community Coordination

It is likely that clients will need ongoing support to deal with long term consequences of their experience, as well as dealing with complex legal and social service needs. It is important to prioritize needs, have the client be an active participant in making decisions about what is important to them, and to establish a plan towards meeting these needs. Clients may or may not wish to participate in the legal system, including criminal and civil cases. Advocacy is essential for them to make informed choices after they have been provided with accurate information about the risks and benefits of particular decisions.

Because of the complex multiple needs of trafficking victims, a team of providers is needed to create a safety net for victims. These providers come from different disciplines (legal, medical, social service, advocacy) and often come from different agencies. Thus, good communication and collaboration are essential.

Agencies should identify a lead person who will coordinate the care from each agency. These lead representatives should then establish regular service planning meetings, so that there is smooth coordination among various social service providers. It is important to keep a human rights perspective in mind so that the client's best interests are always at the forefront of decisions made. Clients will need considerable support to regain a sense of their own dignity as persons.

As agencies work together, it is important to establish some basic guidelines on how they will work together collaboratively. Principles should be established on:

- Identifying key players
- Communication forums and strategies
- Sharing of information/confidentiality
- Building relationships/trust
- Dealing with political and personal differences
- Team work

The focus of the team should be directed towards the needs and best interest of the clients.

Safety Issues When Working with Trafficking Survivors

What safety considerations should I keep in mind when working with a survivor of trafficking?

- Risk of harm to your client from trafficker or associates
- Risk of harm to client's family from trafficker or associates
- Potential risks *within* a group of trafficking victims (for instance, are some victims more connected to the traffickers)
- Potential risks by linking client to his/her ethnic community (consider potential connections to trafficker or associates)
- Risk of harm if the survivor wishes to repatriate
- Potential risk to social service agencies from trafficker or associates
- Other safety considerations (any other risk of harm)
- Psychological safety of client

How do I assess the safety of these situations?

A safety assessment should be conducted to assess current risk of harm to the client or client's family members. A standard safety assessment will include the following:

- Basic information about the trafficker and associates (whereabouts, organized crime affiliation, weapons)
- Fears that the client has about potential safety issues
- History of threats or violence against client or others
- Current threats or violence against client or others, including risk of lethality
- Connection to traffickers or associates (from same community, located in nearby area, recent contacts)
- Legal status of the case (criminal or civil case in progress, client's participation in prosecution, risk of retaliation, traffickers in custody)
- Any concurrent safety issues

Establishing a safety plan

- Ensure that client is in a safe, secure location- safe house, shelter, etc.
- Address confidentiality issues
- Consider utilizing legal protections
- Legal issues if trafficker threatens victim- instruct client about gathering evidence (saving threatening telephone messages, etc)
- Establish a safety plan if the trafficker or associates contacts the victim
- Informing client's family in home country

How do I protect my own safety and the safety of my organization?

- Be aware of potential risks
- Consider how accessible information about your organization is, including: staff names, phone numbers, addresses, etc.
- Screen potential clients carefully
- Offer supervision around safety issues
- Establish safety procedures within your organization

Maintaining confidentiality

Maintaining client confidentiality is essential to the victim's safety and psychological healing, as well as to the maintenance of a trusting relationship. Clients should be informed at the beginning of any meeting or interview your policy on client confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality. You should be careful not to disclose identifying information about your clients to other parties. Consultation can be obtained by describing the general situation, without identifying information.

Media requests

Media requests should be approached with caution, particularly regarding specific individuals. A good rule of thumb is to avoid media coverage of specific cases unless there is a compelling reason to do so. Even if a survivor provides informed consent for you to speak with the media, that individual's identifying information should never be released, even if the case is closed.

Traumatic Stress Reactions in Survivors of Trafficking

What common reactions may victims of trafficking experience?

Many trafficking victims have been exposed to chronic trauma. Traumatic experiences that victims may have endured include: victimization in their country of origin; abuses in the context of the trafficking situation including psychological abuse, lack of basic human necessities, physical violence, and sexual violence; and displacement and isolation after their escape. Such chronic, repeated trauma is associated with a range of psychological effects; some common reactions include depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress responses.

- Depression
 - Depressed mood
 - Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
 - Problems with concentration or decision-making
 - Hopelessness
 - Suicidal thoughts
 - Irritability
 - Significant weight loss or gain
 - Insomnia or hypersomnia
 - Psychomotor agitation or retardation
 - Fatigue or loss of energy

- Posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSD)
 - Intrusive symptoms: intrusive thoughts and memories, nightmares, flashbacks, triggered reactions (physical and emotional reactions to being reminded of the trauma)
 - Avoidance symptoms: avoidance of reminders of the trauma, social withdrawal, emotional constriction, inability to recall details of the trauma
 - Hyperarousal: sleep disturbance, concentration problems, irritability, hypervigilance, startle response, jumpiness

- Complex PTSD- chronic interpersonal trauma tends to impact victims' lives across a wide range of areas. Victims may have difficulty managing their moods and impulses, have problems with dissociation and memory, experience somatic complaints, feel negatively about themselves, have difficulty trusting others, and have a loss of sustaining religious or moral beliefs.

Physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral consequences of trauma

Consequences to the body

- Bodily injuries or medical problems
- Somatic symptoms (stomachaches, headaches, nausea, muscular tension)
- Disturbed circadian rhythms (irregularities in sleeping, eating, energy level)
- Physical reactions to traumatic memories (sweating, rapid heart rate, phantom pains- “body memories”)
- Chronic hyperarousal & fear
- Touch as triggering, painful
- Physical numbing

Emotional Consequences

- Depression, sadness, loss
- Anxiety, panic, fear
- Shame and guilt
- Feeling helpless or trapped
- Anger, rage
- Emotional numbness
- Affective reactivity- difficulty regulating emotional reactions

Cognitive Consequences

- Shattered assumptions- Trauma exposure leads to loss of basic beliefs
 - Safety: world as safe (fear, withdrawal, hyperarousal)
 - Trust: people as trustworthy (anger, mistrust, isolation)
 - Control: self as having some control over life (helplessness, hopelessness)
 - Belief: world has meaning (loss of sustaining beliefs- religious, moral)
 - Self: self as worthwhile, individual/ part of community (self-loathing, self as damaged/ruined, self as worthless/property, loss of identity, isolation)
- Dissociation- cognitive means of coping through avoidance or escape; loss of awareness of surroundings
- Concentration problems, memory impairment or loss, difficulty recounting memories in chronological format

Behavioral consequences

- Problems with boundaries- either avoiding others & having problems attaching or becoming enmeshed & having difficulty distinguishing self from other
- Revictimization- getting into similar abusive situations
- Re-enactments- repetitions of trauma dynamics (feeling victimized in other situations, perceiving others as perpetrators or helpless bystanders)
- Identification with perpetrator- also called “Stockholm syndrome,” developing an emotional attachment to the perpetrator for survival
- Submission, learned helplessness, loss of will to resist
- Self-harm (self-mutilation, substance abuse, suicidal behavior)

Hints for Working with Trauma Survivors

These hints are guidelines for any service professionals working with survivors of human trafficking. They are intended for social service providers, attorneys, mental health providers, medical providers, and advocates. Any interactions with survivors of trafficking have the potential to be re-traumatizing or to be beneficial. This guide is intended to: 1) assist all professionals in their given role with the survivor; and to 2) encourage interactions which will contribute to the healing of survivors.

The primary guideline is to *avoid re-traumatization*. Be aware of power dynamics and avoid repeating patterns of control and coercion with your client. Instead, work with them towards *safety and empowerment*.

Interpersonal trauma impacts victims' sense of safety, beliefs about their ability to have control over their life, and ability to trust other people. As a social service provider, all of your interactions with your client should be reparative.

Safety

Work to re-establish safety, including physical and psychological safety. Traumatic events threaten a person's basic sense of safety. They can also weaken faith in the ability of authorities to provide protection.

- Current safety needs: Trafficking victims often have current safety issues. For instance, they may currently be receiving threats from the trafficker. Ensure that a safety assessment has been conducted, including safety issues regarding the trafficker and trafficking situation as well as any other current safety issues (see previous section on safety issues for victims of trafficking).
- Work to create a psychological sense of safety
 - Consider atmosphere where you are working, including issues such as noise level, privacy, structure, predictability
 - Consider gender issues- Some victims who have been victimized by men may be more comfortable working with a female.
 - Safety objects- Do they have belongings that make them feel safer? Photographs, blankets, spiritual items, etc. Utilize these as a resource.
 - Help restore a predictable order and routine. Stable housing is one of the first priorities.
 - Consider their needs in terms of both privacy and connection with others
 - Identify triggers- places, people, sights, sounds, smells, feelings that act as reminders of traumatic experiences

Control

Help victims rebuild a sense of control and empowerment

- Provide accurate, complete information
 - Introduce yourself and explain who you are (your role and purpose)
 - Explain clearly how your organization operates
 - Provide a contact person for questions
 - Provide information about trafficking and services available
 - Provide information about legal issues
 - Explain the length and purpose of meetings and interviews
 - Provide information in a language that they can understand, and at a level that they can understand
- Give choices/options
 - Find out their priorities/ wishes. Make these priorities for you as well.
 - Utilize opportunities for offering choices (small choices matter)
- Give them control
 - Make sure that you have their permission to interview them (that they have made an informed choice to participate)
 - Allow them to take breaks, to decline answering questions, or to stop interviews at any point

Trust

Remember that trust is established slowly

- Don't expect to get a complete story when first meeting the client
- Individuals who have been trafficked have often been coached or have had experiences that have led them to mistrust authorities, particularly law enforcement. Therefore, the slow building of a trusting relationship is particularly important in these cases.
- Research their background to increase understanding
 - Political situation of country of origin
 - Ethnic conflicts
 - Main cultural values
 - Ask if you don't understand
- Use open-ended questions without many interruptions. This technique of open-ended questions allows you to build empathy and trust.
- Help them meet concrete needs. This "gift" helps to build a real connection.

Cultural Factors and Trauma Treatment

My client says he is fine and just wants to forget about what happened. What should I do?

Even if your client appears to be fine, he may be struggling with posttraumatic reactions. Avoidance and numbness are common reactions to traumatic events. Some clients will not complain of being upset. Instead, they may have somatic stress reactions such as muscle tension, physical complaints, or insomnia.

How might cultural factors affect my client's reactions?

Generally, there are biological responses to trauma that are consistent across cultures. For instance, insomnia and nightmares are common reactions across cultures. Jumpiness, concentration problems, and an exaggerated awareness of surroundings (called "hypervigilance") are physiologically-based reactions to trauma.

Culture affects how symptoms are expressed, the meaning of the trauma, and methods of coping. For instance, there are cultural variations in whether distress is expressed more emotionally ("I'm sad," "I'm anxious") or somatically ("My stomach hurts all the time"). There are cultural differences in the placement of responsibility for victimization, and differences in taboos (acceptability of discussing sexual history). There are differences in means of dealing with distress (healing rituals, religious/spiritual guidance, seeking medical treatment).

It is important to both respect your client's cultural background, as well as to offer her different options for help. This is always approached individually, on a case by case basis.

My client thinks that only "crazy" people receive mental health care. What should I do?

Victims of trafficking from other countries may be wary of going to see a therapist or counselor. Instead of calling it "mental health," you may describe it as getting support or talking to someone about how they are doing. Many victims of trafficking experience insomnia, so some social service providers have offered victims the opportunity to see "a sleep doctor" to address this symptom.

Should I encourage my client to talk about or "process" what happened?

It depends. Good trauma treatment proceeds in several stages. The first stage of trauma treatment should always focus on safety and stabilization. The emphasis should be on current-day functioning, including current risks and resources. If a client is currently being stalked by the trafficker or is homeless, it is not the time to focus on the emotional impact of past experiences. Instead, treatment would focus on increasing safety, identifying

current resources, and building coping strategies. Once there is some sense of stability in her current life, your client may be helped by processing her traumatic experiences. Exposure-based therapy can be helpful in decreasing intrusive symptoms such as nightmares or flashbacks. In later stages of healing, survivors may be able to “transform” their negative experiences, using their experience to help themselves or others.

Are there alternatives to traditional talk therapy?

Yes! It is important to work with your client to find out what works for her. Explore with her the forms of healing that are used in her culture. You may help your client connect with a folk healer or religious leader that will work with her on the healing process. Creativity is needed when considering what may be “therapeutic” for your client. In some cases, community-building exercises such as singing together or cooking together can be therapeutic. Movement-based interventions such as exercise, yoga, or tai chi can also be effective.

Who can I contact for help dealing with clients’ traumatic stress reactions?

- Project REACH provides crisis-oriented mental health services to pre-certified victims of trafficking throughout the East coast and Southeast portions of the United States. Trauma specialists from this program provide case consultation regarding individuals who have been trafficked, offering expertise on trauma and mental health to local providers. Program staff are available to travel to meet with survivors of trafficking to provide brief crisis-oriented interventions. Project REACH also offers trainings on human trafficking and trauma.
- You may also contact local agencies funded by the Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) or the Department of Health and Human Services’s Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to provide services to victims of trafficking.
- Finally, you may wish to contact local refugee and immigrant services agencies to request assistance. Agencies who offer services to asylum seekers, refugees, and victims of torture may be familiar with many of the issues facing victims of trafficking.

Vicarious Trauma and Self-care for the Caregiver

What is vicarious trauma?

Providers working with people who have been exposed to severe forms of violence may experience traumatic reactions because of hearing horrible stories. Be aware of the following signs of vicarious trauma within yourself:

- Feeling burned out/ loss of pleasure in your work
- Loss of interest in your usual activities
- Withdrawal from others
- Irritability
- Compulsive work, lack of balance in your life
- Feeling cynical or negative about clients
- Numbing
- Nightmares
- No time or energy for yourself
- Increased sensitivity to violence
- Loss of hope and faith in people

How can social service providers take care of themselves to minimize vicarious trauma?

- Pay attention to your stress level
- Notice any stress reactions or physical reactions as you are working with clients
- Practice good self-care
 - Get enough sleep
 - Exercise regularly
 - Eat regular, balanced meals
 - Make sure you are drinking water throughout the day
 - Take breaks during your day
 - Set detailed, daily, manageable goals
 - Balance your workload, leaving time for family, friends, and leisure
- Identify your own personal ways of coping and use them
- Practice relaxation techniques
- If you notice stress reactions in yourself, seek help.

PROJECT REACH

A Program of the Trauma Center
at Justice Resource Institute

Phone: (617) 232-1303 x211; (617) 232-1280

Email: ProjectREACH@traumacenter.org

Website: www.traumacenter.org/projectreach



This project was supported by Grant No. 2003-VT-BX-K004, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Dept. of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.