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Experiences of Female Sex Trafficking Survivors who have Accessed Treatment for Substance Use: A Systematic Review

Nicole J. Hallett

University of Southern Maine, nicole.hallett@maine.edu

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Experiences of Female Sex Trafficking Survivors who have Accessed Treatment for Substance Use: A Systematic Review

Nicole J. Hallett, University of Southern Maine, and Dr. Dorothea Ivey, University of Southern Maine

Abstract

Substantial literature identifies the prevalence of sex trafficking (ST) and substance use in the United States. The aim of this study was to better understand what factors facilitate access to treatment for substance use by survivors of ST. The findings of this study may suggest that service providers should evaluate factors that facilitate access to treatment, which may result in improved mental and physical health outcomes.

Introduction

ST is a significant public health issue that intersects with substance use in a number of ways. Drugs are used as both a means of coercion and as a means of coping with physical and emotional pain. Survivors of ST often require detoxification and treatment for substance use. There are several risk factors pertaining to ST and substance use, but facilitators for accessing treatment have remained understudied.

Methods

A systematic review of the literature was undertaken to answer the overarching research questions:

- Databases searched include PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Social Work Abstracts, Gender Studies Collection, Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar.
- Search terms entered into each database were *sex trafficking AND substance use disorder*, *sex trafficking AND substance use*, *sex trafficking AND substance abuse*, *sex trafficking AND addiction*, *sex trafficking AND drug treatment*, and *commercial sexual exploitation AND addiction*.
- Inclusion criteria determined that studies must be scholarly, examine the experiences of adult, female, survivors of ST who have accessed treatment for substance use, include female participants that are 18 years of age or older, and define ST as outlined by the V-TVPA of 2000.

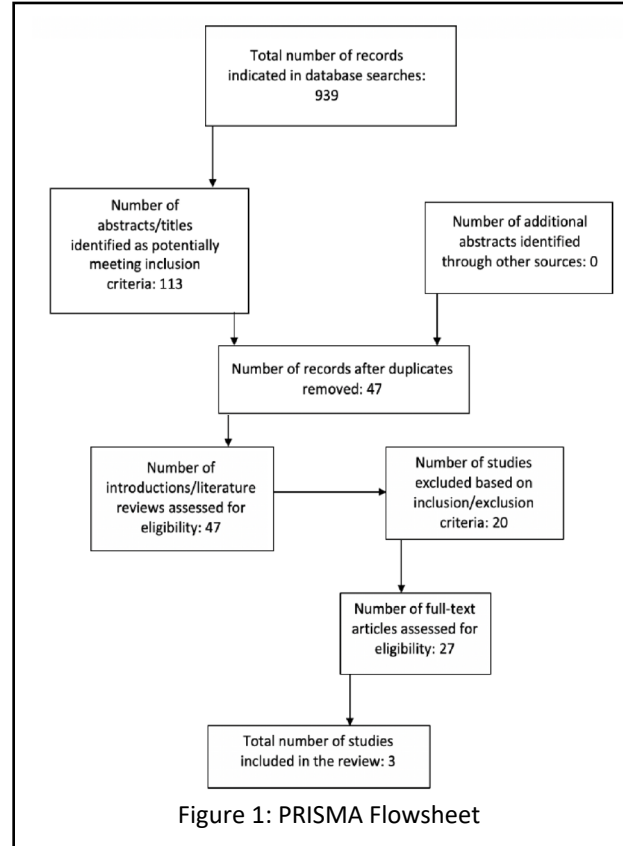


Figure 1: PRISMA Flowsheet

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of adult, female, ST survivors who have successfully accessed treatment for substance use?
2. What factors facilitate access to substance use treatment in adult women who are survivors of ST?

Results

The three included studies revealed several themes having to do with programmatic facilitators, provider facilitators, and individual facilitators:

- Programmatic facilitators – Decreased wait times, elimination of the requirement for a negative drug screening prior to admission, the creation of transitional housing, elimination of termination from services upon relapse, a trauma-informed approach to care, and collaborative and multidisciplinary care.
- Provider facilitators – Clear diagnostic tools and skills, avoidance of diagnostic overshadowing, a focus on health and safety, empathy versus sympathy, regarding the survivor as the expert, elimination of stigma and judgement, respect for self-identity, and culturally competent care.
- Individual facilitators – Personal motivation as a result of loss, legal problems, and/or health problems, a desire to address complex feelings associated with ST, and a desire to experience mutual aid in group settings.

Implications for Future Practice

This study's findings are largely consistent with current literature and several recommendations can be made as it pertains to the above facilitators. Further qualitative research should be conducted by interviewing survivors directly. Additionally, a more rigorous study is needed to examine the experiences of male and minor survivors of ST. However, this study does provide some valuable information pertaining to how the above facilitators can be duplicated to increase access to treatment by survivors of ST. It is hoped that this study will contribute to future research and be expanded upon to better understand the experiences of ST survivors.