

Life after sex trafficking in Nepal: An art therapy and reproductive health therapeutic program with women who have experienced sex trafficking, exploitation and abuse

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Abstract

This paper presents a creative art therapy and reproductive health program for women who have experienced sex slavery, exploitation and abuse in Nepal. The program was created and delivered by the author and her organisation, Art to Healing, which has a longstanding engagement with this issue in Nepal and other grassroots organisations in the region.

An art therapy qualitative approach is used to explore how creative arts therapies, combined with reproductive health experimental education, can support a positive change in attitudes towards body image, gender stigma and cultural status, as well as increase in inner resilience, confidence and self-esteem, for survivors of sex trafficking.

Keywords

Women's health, focusing-oriented art therapy, sex trafficking, gender-based violence, group art therapy.

Introduction: What is trafficking?

Sex trafficking is a complex global issue and a rapidly growing problem in Nepal. According to the Global Slavery Index, Nepal has the fifth highest prevalence of modern slavery after Mauritania, Haiti, Pakistan and India (2013). Victims of Nepali trafficking comprise women (53 percent), girls (33 percent), men (11 percent) and boys (3 percent) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, 2012). This means that women and girls make up 86 percent of the total number of trafficking victims in Nepal, with prostitution the predominant sector in which they are forced to work. The United Nations (UN) considers trafficking to be the third largest international criminal industry, with an annual US\$150 billion global estimated profit (ILO, 2014).

Trafficking is defined in Article 3 of the UN Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum,

the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (2000)

Simply put, sex trafficking is the movement of an adult or child from one place to another, either within a country or across a border, by a group or an individual into a situation in which they face sexual exploitation and slavery.

Nepali girls and women are not only trafficked internally from remote villages to urban centres in Nepal for prostitution, but they are also trafficked to India, Bangladesh and the Middle East. In addition, they work in *dhabas* (highway hotels), dance bars, cabin restaurants and massage parlours in Kathmandu that facilitate sex trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

The implications of trafficking on survivors are devastating. Many of the women and children who experience sex trafficking and exploitation end up dead or permanently injured. They are denied access to education and healthcare, subjected to violence and starvation, and can develop addictions to drugs administered by traffickers (Stallard, 2014). The United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (2008) reports that trafficked women and children often suffer from depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is true of the survivors in Nepal who attended the art therapy program.

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