

Best Practices for Counselors Working with Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to *explore* current understanding of the complexity of human trafficking and how that contributes to a gap in effective and adequate care for victims and survivors. This study also *proposes* therapeutic application of this knowledge.

Methodology

The information presented in this study was collected through a literature review of current studies on Human Trafficking, a review on trauma informed care, and personal experience of working with individuals who have experienced human trafficking.

Definitions and Terms

The United Nations defines human trafficking as: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit”(Burke, 2019).

The United States recognizes two primary subsets of trafficking to include:

- Labor Trafficking
- Sex Trafficking

Victim: an individual who is still currently being exploited by human trafficking.

Survivor: an individual who has escaped or otherwise separated from the human trafficking trade and is working on recovery.

Trafficker: can also be referred to as a “pimp” or a “madame”; an individual who forces or otherwise coerces an individual into any type of work without their continued consent.

Misconceptions Surrounding Human Trafficking

- There are a variety of myths surrounding human trafficking that perpetuate stereotypes and make it more difficult to see victims and be able to assist them in their journey to safety and healing.
 - Myth: Human Trafficking is uncommon
 - Fact: Human trafficking is likely to be underreported, however, as of 2016 it was estimated that there were approximately 403,000 people who were victims of human trafficking(Litam, 2017).
 - Myth: Human Trafficking only affects other countries, or individuals who are undocumented immigrants from other countries .
 - Fact: There have been confirmed cases of human trafficking in each state within the United States(Litam, 2017).
 - Myth: Human trafficking only occurs in communities with individuals from lower socioeconomic status
 - Fact: There are certain risk factors that may predispose certain minority groups to human trafficking, however, human trafficking can and does happen to people from a variety of backgrounds(Litam, 2017).
 - Myth: The subsets of human trafficking (i.e. forced labor, drug trafficking, sex trafficking) exist in a vacuum
 - Fact: The lines that distinguish the difference between subsets of human trafficking can become blurred and difficult to separate. (i.e. woman who is forced into underpaid labor and coerced to assist in smuggling drugs behind the threat of deportation of she does not cooperate).

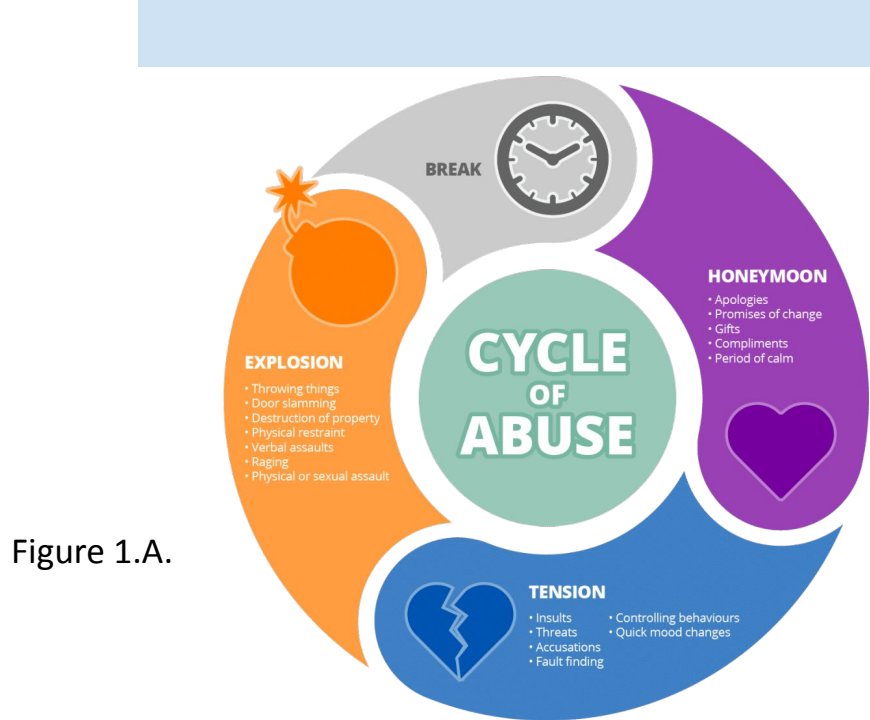


Figure 1.A.

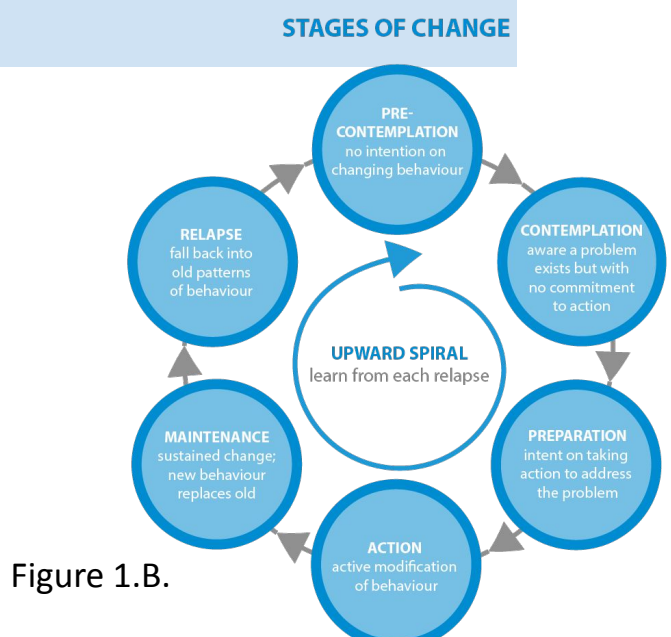


Figure 1.B.

How Human Trafficking Victimization Manifests in the Clinical Setting

- May be hidden under different more “visible” issues including but not limited to substance use disorders, homelessness, and a history of incarceration.
- Issues with trust and interpersonal relationships due to a cycle of trauma bonding or cycle of abuse (figure 1.A.)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Internal battle of readiness to separate from the trade, or the stages of change(figure 1.B.)

Suggestions for Competency Areas to be Developed for Counselors

- Be familiar with the definition of human trafficking and other basic terms.
- Have a working knowledge of basic laws and legal procedures in regards to human trafficking.
- Evaluate for potential risk factors in clients.
- Identify signs that potential victimization is occurring.
- Be familiar with Trauma Informed Care and how to adapt therapeutic interventions and techniques to individuals who have experienced human trafficking.

Suggestions for Active Application of Knowledge in the Therapeutic Setting

- Art Therapy
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing
- Relational Culural Therapy

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References

