



Received: 17 April 2019
Accepted: 06 June 2019
First Published: 16 June 2019

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CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY & NEUROPSYCHOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Emotional needs of women post-rescue from sex trafficking in India

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Abstract: Sex trafficking has persisted a social crime that maintains its status despite being unlawful. Since it prevails, there is a need to investigate it to understand the effects and consequences of the same on the survivors. The current study aims to understand the emotional needs of survivors post-rescue from sex trafficking living in aftercare homes in India and to look into survivors' suggestions post-rescue to NGOs, society, family, government and police. It included ten survivors from sex trafficking, ages between 18 to 24 years old. They are emerging adults who have experienced sex trafficking for at least one year, regardless of whether trafficking happened in childhood, adolescence or early adulthood, rescued one to five years ago. The researcher used a phenomenological approach. Thematic analysis was employed to identify themes within the data collected from the participants. Findings revealed that survivors had got a better life after the rescue, and they need acceptance, respect, understanding, and they need to develop trust on people around them. They still have many challenges post-rescue such as lack of education and job opportunities. They need guidance to start a new life. Mostly, sex trafficking survivors need safety and protection.

Subjects: Asian Studies; Introductory Psychology; General Psychology; Social Psychology

Keywords: sex trafficking; survivor; emotional needs; sexual exploitation

1. Introduction

Sex trafficking comes under human trafficking, and it can be defined as slavery for the purpose of sexual exploitation (George, 2012). During the time of sexual slavery, pimps, the individuals that control the victims, solicit customers for them, and take all their earnings (Batstone, 2010). If the victims get a share, it is very less, the working condition is horrible, and they go through several cases of abuse in a single day (Jones, 2014).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Irani Machado da Silva is interested in helping victims of human trafficking who have gone through severe psychological trauma. She is a voluntary psychologist in an organization that offers help to sex-trafficked women in Bangalore, India, where she counsels survivors. Her Master's degree is in Clinical Psychology and an MPhil in Psychology. She is currently pursuing her Doctoral degree in Psychology. Her areas of research being human trafficking, sex trafficking, psychological trauma, and intervention.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Sex trafficking is a crime that affects many countries of the world, and unfortunately, it is widespread across India. Sex trafficking victims usually suffer from psychological, emotional, and physical health problems because they undergo all sorts of abuses. It has a long-lasting impact on the individual, leaving a permanent scar. Fighting sex trafficking is not the responsibility of authorities alone, but every citizen can confront this horrible crime by being educated about it and making what is possible to bring it to notice the suffering and pain of the innocent victims.

Vulnerability is a pre-trafficking characteristic. Poor and uneducated girls are at higher risk of being trafficked (Williams, 2008). Usually, the victims are lured into sex trafficking by someone they know (Hernandez, 2014; Mahat, 2011). Promises such as well-paid jobs and better living conditions make them accept the offer (Mahat, 2011).

There are more than one million child prostitutes in India. Girls as young as seven years old are brought into the sex trade by abduction, treachery, and so on; landing in a position of forced prostitution (Cable News Network, 2009). Almost 1.2 million girls and children, mostly between ten to sixteen years old have fallen victim to sex trafficking in India (Schultz, 2012). For many of them, if not for all, the life they are forced to live is hell. Sex trafficking is an assault on human dignity. It is harmful, traumatic and dehumanizing (Schauer & Wheaton, 2010).

Sex trafficking has become a billion-dollar business in the country. In Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, eight or more men repeatedly rape small girls as young as nine years old every night (Gupta, 2012). India's sex trafficking is thriving ("Sex Trafficking in India," 2013). Poverty is the most significant factor (Rajan, 2013). Defenseless women and also girls are tempted by promises of false employment in the big cities and even some parents are in great need and sell their daughters to traffickers (Rajan, 2013). The caste system worsens the problem because those who are trafficked into the sex trade come from underprivileged parts of Indian society (Joffres et al., 2008).

Patriarchal practices, which are prevalent in India, disempower females (Matusek, 2016). Other practices such as dowry and sex-selective abortion complicate even more the condition of women in the country (Brysk & Maskey, 2012). "Girls, who should be in middle school are being sold, starved, locked up and raped dozens of times per day. Being sold into a brothel in India is a death sentence: only one percent of sex slaves escape or get rescued" (Knisely, 2014, p. 1).

1.1. Rationale

The researcher's interest was developed as part of the topic concerning sex trafficking when she came to India for the first time and came across rescued girls. After being rescued, they were sent to an aftercare home, where they were brought up. All their physical and medical needs were met but the experience of being trafficked hindered them from functioning effectively in society. The researcher wants to know the support given to them and therefore found that it is essential to bring this topic to the awareness of students, psychologists and professionals so everyone can assist girls suffering from sadness, humiliation, shame, and pain in their life post-rescue.

1.2. Research question

Sex trafficking is a human rights issue and therefore, studying it is of great importance in order to assess best practice to treat survivors post-rescue from sex trafficking and also to give them a voice to tell their experience as the healing process starts, when non-judgmental people listen to their plight with empathy (Litam, 2017).

- (1) What are the emotional needs of survivors post-rescue from sex trafficking?

1.3. Specific objectives

- (1) To understand the emotional needs of survivors post-rescue from sex trafficking
- (2) To explore the survivors' suggestions post-rescue to NGOs, society, family, government and police

2. Method

The current study utilized qualitative data obtained from interviews using open-ended questions with participants who experienced sex tracking for, at least, one year and rescued one to five years

ago. Participants shared their own experiences in sex trafficking and reflected their opinion on how it had an impact on their lives.

2.1. Phenomenological approach

This study used a phenomenological approach, which focuses on the study of consciousness as experienced from the first person's point of view and the objects of lived experiences (Patton, 2015). That is an attempt to understand the experiences lived by sex trafficking survivors in their post-rescue stage and the meaning of these experiences for them.

2.2. Operational definitions

2.2.1. Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking comes under human trafficking, and as stated by The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA-US) implies utilizing people for commercial sex induced by fraud, coercion or by force (George, 2012).

2.2.2. Emotional needs

They are psychological requirements of the intra-psychic that usually center on basic feelings such as love, sorrow, anger, fear, frustration and depression. It also involves empathy, understanding, and supports human beings offer to one another (Barker, 2017).

2.3. Sampling

The researcher selected participants using purposive sampling technique. According to Elmusharaf (2012), this technique is especially useful in investigative research, and where a small number of specific individuals or cases are decisive in describing and explaining the phenomena of interest.

2.4. Participants

This study included ten survivors from sex trafficking, ages between 18 to 24 years old. They are emerging adults who have experienced sex trafficking for at least one year. The interviews took place in Bangalore and Nagpur, but the participants are from different states in India. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) was used to screen participants for inclusion criteria. It consists of four domains scale that assesses "somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression" (Goldberg, 1978). Participants who have scored less than five overall indicate they are not prone to any psychological morbidity and thus, were apt to participate in the current study. Those who scored five and above overall in the GHQ-28 suggested they are prone to symptoms of psychological illness, and thus, they were not included in the current study.

2.5. Data collection process

Data were collected from participants one by one in a room with the door closed, so the participants were free to share their experiences undisturbed by others. Rapport was first established, so the participants felt comfortable in the presence of the researcher. The consent form was explained and then, the participants were asked to sign it. The researcher intended to use a voice recorder to facilitate the process, but the participants in this population were not willing to record verbatim. Hence, the researcher took interviews verbatim, except for one participant who was willing to record verbatim.

2.6. Data analysis

Following the completion of an individual interview, the researcher typed verbatim using the word document and the audio was transcribed using the word document and later on, interviews were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes within the data collected.

2.7. Trustworthiness and validity

- Interviews were done after the rapport with the participants was made. The researcher wrote down verbatim carefully in order not to miss out on any detail

- Self-reflection where the researcher examined her assumptions and preconceptions and how these could affect the research decisions
- Memo questions—The researcher prepared memo questions and contacted the participants for clarification on a few topics
- Member check—Participants were provided with the opportunity to give their inputs on the findings
- Peer debriefing—The themes were also discussed with peers and feedback was taken

2.8. Ethical consideration

- This study has got Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval by Christ (Deemed to be University) Bangalore, India
- Consent was taken from each participant before conducting the interview
- The World Health Organization's (WHO) 'Ten Guiding Principles' for interviewing sex-trafficked women was followed (Zimmerman, 2003)

3. Results and discussion

The current study conducted by the researcher aimed to understand the emotional needs of survivors post-rescue and looked into survivors' suggestions to NGOs, society, family, government and police. Data were coded, and the basic themes, organizing themes and global themes emerged.

3.1. Demographic information

This study comprises data from ten participants, and they were recruited in Nagpur, Maharashtra, and Bangalore, Karnataka. They were from different states in India and were sex-trafficked interstate. Five participants were originally from Maharashtra, two from Karnataka, one from Assam, one from Tamil Nadu and one from Orissa. The duration of time they spent in the sex industry varied from two to ten years.

3.2. Analysis and findings

The data was analyzed, and major themes arose from the data. The themes were organized in categories, and they are a desire to satisfy the emotional needs and expectations of survivors post-rescue.

3.3. A desire to satisfy the emotional needs

Emotional needs are psychological intra-psychic requirements that usually center on basic feelings such as love, sorrow, anger, fear, frustration and depression. It also involves empathy, understanding, and support human beings offer to one another (Barker, 2017).

3.3.1. Aspirations for a new life

Although sex trafficking victims lived without hope before rescue, with new life came aspirations, but they feel alienated from society because of the stigma attached to them (Counts, 2015). Often service providers fail in providing adequate security to sex-trafficked women (Dahal, Joshi, & Swahnberg, 2015).

3.3.1.1. Acceptance and support. Counts (2015) stated that a significant barrier to recovery was the sense of discrimination and exclusion survivors have. Acceptance is crucial for the well being of survivors. Also, they need support, encouragement and companionship to carry on their new life. Almost all the participants in this study reported they do not tell their stories to any anyone to avoid discrimination and rejection. Given below are a few excerpts from survivors on how they need acceptance and support. "Girls like me if they know they don't talk to us also. For them, we

are dirty girls” (P 1, personal communication, 6 June 2018). “Everyone needs someone to be there for them, and someone to love, like too much” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018). “I always have fear if they know my story, they judge me, like that, because of my past” (P 5, personal communication, 5 July 2018).

3.3.1.2. *Belongingness*. Sex trafficking survivors feel discriminated and rejected by their family and community (Counts, 2015). In a study done in Mumbai’s red-light brothel district by Dalla and Kreimer (2016), a sex trafficking survivor had the courage to visit her family, but unfortunately, her mother kicked her out, and her father used abusive words. All the participants in this study reported they hide their past to fit into society, but still, they do not feel a part of the society. It can be seen in the following verbatim.

I don’t feel now also part of society even though I have been rescued. Society does not accept because we are from that area—red-light area. That’s why I don’t feel part of society. Even though I am rescued. If I tell people my story they will not accept me, you know? We can’t tell our story that is it. If they know they don’t talk to us also (P 7, personal communication, 6 July 2018)

After the rescue, survivors feel out of place. They are not sex workers any longer, but also they do not feel part of society. They need to be a part of a group or community.

3.3.1.3. *Respect*. In a study by Dalla and Kreimer (2016, p. 178), a participant stated, “After your honor is gone, nobody will ask about you, not even people in your village.” Survivors have a feeling that males always look at them as sex workers. To have respect, participants conceal their stories. As females, they long for respect despite their stories and backgrounds. Given below are a few excerpts from survivors on how survivors need respect. “Not telling my story. Otherwise, I will not get any respect or anything” (P 7, personal communication, 6 July 2018). “They don’t give respect to girls like me, even to small girls” (P 8, personal communication, 6 July 2018).

3.3.1.4. *Guidance*. Women face many challenges post-rescue, and they are not in a position to make decisions for themselves (Dahal et al., 2015). Participants reported that guidance is needed to bring out the best in them. Survivors should be guided on how to lead new lives and how to deal with different circumstances they may face in their lives. Given below are a few excerpts from survivors on how they need guidance to live a new life. “I always wanted somebody to guide me. I still need somebody to guide me” (P 7, personal communication, 6 July 2018). “When I feel very bad or can’t handle the problem, I need help. I need someone. Please tell me I am wrong here, please tell me” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.3.1.5. *Trust*. According to Litam (2017), sex trafficking survivors need to build trust with those around them. They were betrayed a lot, so they find it difficult to trust even those helping them. In this study, all the participants reported they do not trust people. It can be seen in the following verbatim.

I don’t trust people. Some people are bad. You don’t know who is good and who is bad. So you need to be careful ... All this happened to me because I trusted a lady in a train station and this happened to me. She was bad. You need to know where you are, people that are near you. (P 1, personal communication, 4 June 2018)

Participants reported they do not trust people. They are very cautious because they trusted those who could not be trusted and were betrayed. They need to develop trust, but this is not easy for them.

3.3.1.6. Understanding. Sex trafficking survivors need to be understood by those around them, their community and society at large (Litam, 2017). Because of their experience, they feel people do not understand them. They desire to talk about their problems, knowing people will not judge because of their past. They went through a lot of pain and suffering. So, understanding is required. Participants clearly said they should not be judged because of their past. Given below are a few excerpts from survivors on how survivors need understanding. “People should understand us ... They should treat us like human beings. Not judging” (P 3, personal communication, 3 July 2018). “I sometimes, thinking, not sharing to anyone because people can’t understand me that much” (P 4, personal communication, 4 July 2018). “People don’t understand because of our background. So many pain, you know?” (P 6, personal communication, 6 July 2018).

3.3.1.7. Protection. Sex trafficking survivors need to feel that they are in a safe place (Bruijn, 2017). Most sex trafficking survivors reported being recruited by someone known to them—a boyfriend or a male relative (Hernandez, 2014). People who were supposed to protect them have failed in giving them protection. So, protection is one of the main concerns of survivors. In this study, survivors cry out for protection. It can be seen in the following verbatim.

The world is not safe. I went through suffering. All this happened to me because of no protection. My mother and father, they don’t like me. They left me ... To be abandoned was the most difficult thing in my life. Then all this thing ... bad things I went through. All this happened to me because of no protection. (P 9, personal communication, 24 July 2018)

Participant P 9 said she was sold as a sex-slave because of a lack of protection. Her plight started at her own home because she reported not being loved by her parents. As her parents did not love her, she was left unprotected, and therefore she fell into the hands of the traffickers. Protection is crucial for this population after the rescue, or else, they feel they are in danger of being re-trafficked.

3.3.1.8. Safety. Survivors feel that if they are not in a safe place, they might be in danger of being re-trafficked or being exploited again (Twigg, 2016). Participants reported that the world is not safe for females because they are witnesses on how girls and women are treated in the sex industry. They are taken away from their homes and forced to work as sex workers without even the most basic needs met. Given below are a few excerpts from survivors on how they need safety. “I feel the world is not safe for girls because I saw with my eyes everything” (P 3, personal communication, 3 July 2018). “I am a girl. And if people used to ask me this question, I will say ‘no safety,’ because I had seen so many outside people, how they did ... I got to know how people are treating girls ... putting them to do something bad, bad things” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4. Expectations of survivors post-rescue

Survivors reported they feel better after being rescued, and they have some expectations that would make the world a better place for them to live.

3.4.1. Ngos

In this study, all participants have good impressions about NGOs because these organizations are taking care of all their needs.

3.4.1.1. Emotional support. According to Bruijn (2017), sex trafficking survivors mainly need safety, perseverance, understanding, treatment that inspires courage and confidence to connect with service providers, colleagues, and the community. Participants expect love, understanding, and someone to rely upon during the difficulties they face. They have lost many things such as the love of their families, friends, and peers. So, NGOs are in a position to offer emotional support for them to live a new life. They have not only physical needs but also emotional ones. This can be seen in

the following excerpt. “Everyone needs someone to be there for them, and someone to love ... like too much” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.1.2. Forgiveness. According to Jones (2014), forgiveness is important in the process of recovery, and it has different layers. Forgiving oneself is the first layer because only after they forgive themselves, they will be able to forgive others. Although it was not the survivors’ fault they were put into sex trafficking and were forced to work as sex workers, they feel dirty and often blame themselves for what happened in the past (Eldridge, 2017). They ask for forgiveness from those who are helping this population. This can be seen in the following excerpt. “They should like always forgive them, forgive them, and like pushing them front, go front, don’t underestimate us” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.2. Society

Hossain and Korban (2014) say that society plays an important role in the life of human beings. It aggregates people within a community. Human beings live together because they cannot live isolated. They need one another to share happy moments and sorrows. So, society remains important to sex trafficking survivors. It gives a sense of belongingness.

3.4.2.1. Gender equality. According to Brysk and Maskey (2012), gender inequality results in poverty for women making them more vulnerable to victimization and sex trafficking. Participants suggest that society should treat boys and girls equally. As families give preference to boys, it makes girls feel rejected. Often girls are treated like servants in their homes, and this should change (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018). Participants suggest there should be gender equality in the country and society should accept the fact that boys and girls are equal. This is seen in the following excerpt. “People used to only love boys in India. Boys are everything. Everything is for boys” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.2.2. Love. Love is vital for children’s development and mental health. The child needs to feel important, as well as loved. It is believed children are more likely to have behavioral and emotional disorders when love is lacking (Fernandez, 2013). Participants feel society should love girls the same way they love boys. This is seen in the following excerpts. “People think that girl is like bad, and so many parents used to think ... Please grow fast and, don’t be here, go and get married” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018). “So many girls lost their identities, like so many girls lost their families, or so many girls are sold out ... There should be people who should do work for them truthful lovely, like true love” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.3. Family

Every parent is supposed to love and care for their children. When this does not happen, girls are prompted to seek employment and leave their homes because of family violence, becoming then, vulnerable to sex trafficking (Rose, 2014).

3.4.3.1. Freedom. There are many limitations imposed on women and girls in India (Ray, 2015). Participants in this study feel there are many restrictions families put on girls. Girls do not have much choice other than to grow up and get married. Given below is an excerpt from a survivor. “They say you are a girl, you can’t do this. You have this limit. You don’t cross that limit ... There are so many restrictions in India” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.3.2. Support to pursue dreams. According to the findings by Ray (2015), girls are forced to stop schooling and get married at a young age, while male siblings continue at school. In this study, participants said girls have dreams, and families should always support their dreams. It can be seen in the following verbatim.

They should help them, whatever dreams they have and whatever they want to do. Sometimes families do not understand. Because of that, so many girls use to run away, used to suicide. They are done suicide because the family does not understand. (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018)

Participant P 2 suggests that families should help girls pursue their dreams and understand them. Lack of understanding and support has caused many girls to run away from home or to commit suicide to be free of all restrictions imposed on them.

3.4.3.3. *Love.* Participants feel families should love their girls the same way they do their boys. Also, parents should have a good relationship with the girls treating them with dignity and love. Love is essential for human beings. According to Fernandez (2013), children are more likely to have behavioral and emotional disorders when love is lacking. This can be seen in the following excerpts. “They felt that girls are not their child like they are for ... God gave the girl for something else. They only love boys” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018). “Only girl they are treated badly. They should love girls and understand that boys and girls are equal” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.4. *Government and police/law and order*

The government in a country has a role in the promotion as well as protection of human rights and sex trafficking is, for sure, a human rights issue because it is an assault on human dignity. It is harmful, traumatic and dehumanizing (Schauer & Wheaton, 2010). Police have a role as law enforcement to protect the rights of the citizens within a country. Nevertheless, sex trafficking is growing in the country because of the lack of government intervention and the absence of law enforcement (Matusek, 2016).

3.4.4.1. *Punishment to wrongdoers.* Deane (2010) said that severe punishment must be imposed on those who violate human rights. According to the participants, violence and trafficking of women persist, because there is no punishment for the criminals. Those who have power are committing evil acts such as rape and go unpunished because they manipulate the authorities in their favor and the innocent women and girls suffer the consequences because there is no protection for them. It can be seen in the following verbatim.

Rape is happening, no judgment, because people belong from a political family and they made some mistake, or they did some rape and all, they will pay, they will change all the setup, and that girl will be lost somewhere. I don't know where she is. So the government, like, there should be a punishment for who is doing this. (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018)

To stop this crime, severe punishment should be imposed on the offenders of the law. Given below is an excerpt from a survivor. “Police has to stop bad people. They are harming innocent girls. Bad people are free to do bad things to good girls.” (P 1, personal communication, 4 June 2018).

3.4.4.2. *Save girls.* Almost 1.2 million girls and children, mostly between ten to sixteen years old have fallen victim to sex trafficking in India (Schultz, 2012). In this study, participants appeal to the police and the government to save girls. Given below are a few excerpts from survivors on the need to save girls. “Like I was trapped in sexual slavery, there are many girls in the same situation” (P 7, personal communication, 6 July 2018). “Even with police, girls are not safe. They're like using their power to do all these things ... They are also very bad and they are abusing the girls. They should save girls” (P 2, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.5. *General suggestions*

Common themes that have emerged in all five organizing themes (NGOs, society, family, government, and police) are described as general suggestions.

3.4.5.1. Employment. One of the factors that drive sex trafficking is economics (Rajan, 2013). Thus, economic rehabilitation is important to successful reintegration because it was economic deprivation that led women to victimization in the first place (Matusek, 2016; Pandey, Tewari, & Bhowmick, 2013). Most of the sex trafficking survivors have worked only as sex workers, so they need job skills training, and life skills to have stable employment. To have a job is important for the survivors' ability to have financial independence and care for her needs (Honeycutt, 2012). Unfortunately, they are discriminated when looking for a job. It can be seen in the following excerpt. "When I go for the interview they say, Oh! She was in this area (red-light area), they thought like that. Every time they will not give a job" (P 3, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.4.5.2. Acceptance and understanding. Survivors yearn for acceptance and understanding first of all in their own family, friends, and then in their community and society at large (Counts, 2015). Participants request acceptance and understanding from NGOs, society, family, government, and police. They did the "dirty job" against their will. They were sold into it as merchandise. Given below are some excerpts from survivors on how they need understanding and support. "Sometimes, families are not understanding. Because of that, so many girls use to run away. They are done suicide, because the family is not understanding" (P 1, personal communication, 4 June 2018). "Like society should understand that girls are treating very badly, especially in India. It's like people don't understand the girls' point" (P 2, personal communication, 24 July 2018). "Even as rescued from the red light area, my past is there in my mind. Not accepting if people know" (P 5, personal communication, 5 July 2018).

3.4.5.3. Safety and protection. All the participants described the world as an unsafe place to live. It might be because they see the world as more dangerous after experiencing sex trafficking (Williams, 2008). Hence, they need protection. It can be seen in the following verbatim.

They should protect the girls and not let them go through what I went. We girls were innocents and then bad people sold us out to do a dirty job. Family can protect girls. Help you when you need help. They should protect you from danger ... the government should tell people to protect girls in our country. Many are suffering and nobody is trying to help them. The government has the power to help girls so that they don't fall into the hands of bad people. (P 1, personal communication, 4 June 2018)

Although they have been rescued, they have anxiety and feel as if they are not protected that horrifying things might happen again. They also appeal for protection for all the girls in the country, because, if they have no protection, they might fall into the hands of dangerous people (traffickers).

3.4.5.4. Education. According to Matusek (2016), women in India struggle with a lack of education that leads to fewer job and economic opportunities. Education can change the lives of girls and women in the country. Given below are some excerpts from survivors on how girls need education. "I think they should put girls to study. They have to charge lower fees for poor girls because some girls are poor. They can't study, no? Give education, like that. (P 5, personal communication, 5 July 2018). "Give education to girls and do not bring them to that red-light area" (P 3, personal communication, 3 July 2018).

3.5. Limitations of the study

- A limitation is the researcher's inability to communicate in Hindi. Because of this limitation, only participants who were able to communicate in English were included in this study
- The researcher's status of someone from another culture may have influenced the participants' response

3.6. Implications of this study

- All individual can use the findings of this study to understand sex trafficking survivors better
- Build the capacity of local communities to better understand and respond to the needs of a trafficked woman

4. Conclusion

The first objective is to understand the emotional needs of survivors post-rescue. It is apparent that sex trafficking survivors need acceptance and support. They still have many challenges post-rescue, and they need guidance to start a new life. They need to connect with service providers, but trust issue hinders them from opening up and talking about their feelings and emotional difficulties. Mostly, sex trafficking survivors need safety and protection. That is for them to feel they are safe and also to keep them away from traffickers and from people who might exploit them.

The second objective is to explore survivors' expectations post-rescue to NGOs, society, family, government and police. First of all, survivors expect acceptance. Even though they are rescued from sex trafficking, they do not feel accepted by those around them and by their community. They feel more comfortable in hiding their past to avoid being judged. Sex trafficking affects the way they see the world. Sex-trafficked women see the world as more dangerous, and they want to feel they are in a safe place. All of them were betrayed and forced into sex work against their will. They feel the need of talking about their pain but they have a misconception that nobody will understand their problems. Safety, acceptance, and understanding would offer them a safe environment to talk about their emotional wounds. Finally, they need help with education and job opportunities.

The current study revealed survivors have got a better life after the rescue but feel sad sometimes, have feelings of isolation and helplessness, lack of understanding, fear, shame, un-acceptance, and guilt, which leads to tension. With therapy, social and emotional support, job counseling, and skills training, they can be helped to return to a normal life.

Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Citation information

Cite this article as: Emotional needs of women post-rescue from sex trafficking in India, Irani Machado da Silva & Anuradha Sathiyaseelan, *Cogent Psychology* (2019), 6: 1631584.

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