

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2024, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1134 – 1147

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.05.04.02>

Research Article

Aftercare for Survivors of Human Trafficking: A Case Study on Optimal Approach to Recovery and Integration

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Article history:

Submission January 2024

Revised April 2024

Accepted April 2024

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking is a modern-day slavery that mostly disproportionate women in the society. This study aimed to fill the knowledge gaps regarding the aftercare experiences of human trafficking survivors as they navigated their recovery and reintegration into society, with a specific focus on the Philippines. The research investigated the effectiveness of aftercare interventions provided by agency, highlighting the importance of comprehensive and customized support systems. It drew on Empowerment Theory and Ecological Systems Theory to inform its analysis. The study utilized a qualitative intrinsic case study design, employing purposeful sampling to gather insights from social worker, psychologist, house parents, survivors and other professional involved in aftercare. Collecting data using typically involved conducting in-depth interviews, engaging with key informants, and facilitating focus group discussions. Emerging themes were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's method of thematic analysis. The study uncovered two main themes: "Grappling with Adversities" and "Socio-emotional Transformation." It provided insight into the challenges and situations experienced by survivors, as well as the influence of support systems, healing processes, and personal development initiatives on their recovery. The research highlighted the significance of education, development of independent living skills, and provision of emotional support in empowering survivors. Suggested measures involved the establishment of thorough post-treatment support initiatives, public initiatives to raise awareness within the community, and ongoing professional training for workers. This study added to our knowledge of survivor empowerment within the realm of human trafficking and emphasized the importance of continued research and evaluation of aftercare programs.

Keywords: *Aftercare, Human trafficking survivors, Recovery and integration*

How to cite:

Abayle, C. L. & Candilas, K. S. (2024). Aftercare for Survivors of Human Trafficking: A Case Study on Optimal Approach to Recovery and Integration. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 5(4), 1134 – 1147. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.05.04.02

Introduction

Human trafficking is a grave global issue that tramples on fundamental human rights, causing enduring harm to survivors, their families, and communities. It disproportionately affects women and girls from vulnerable social groups, revealing how human trafficking is deeply rooted in patriarchal power systems and interlocking oppressions (Caretta, 2015; Hu, 2019; Lockyer, 2020; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2018). Moreover, human trafficking is a consequence of various vulnerabilities and injustices, often tied to histories of systemic trauma (Sprang & Cole, 2018).

Over time, the majority of efforts to counter trafficking in Southeast Asia (and around the world) have been concentrated in shelters, with far fewer specialized services available in community settings (Shafer, 2016). Shelters are designed to assist in recovery, but the quality of care varies significantly. Successful shelter-based services can fulfill essential needs like housing, food, medical care, and education (Hacker et al., 2015). In the Philippines, the government allocated 59 million, a 35 percent decrease from 90 million in 2022, to implement the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons (RRPTP) (Romero, 2022). The Department of Social Welfare and Development administered the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons (DSWD, 2023). Furthermore, authorities, such as the DSWD, referred identified victims to the RRPTP for services such as shelter, provision of basic needs, medical care, education assistance, counseling, and livelihood support (US Department of State, 2023).

Despite the efforts with RRPTP to combat human trafficking, the number of human trafficking victims continues to rise, leading to the involvement of NGOs in facilitating aftercare services. Aftercare refers to the services provided to victims of human trafficking following their rescue. The primary goal of aftercare is to provide practical assistance, along with hope and healing, to individuals profoundly affected by trauma (Gozdziak & Lowell, 2016). Additionally, the Philippines currently holds a Tier 1 ranking by the US Department of State, indicating that it meets the basic standards for

eliminating trafficking (McGeough, 2022). However, despite the substantial and ongoing progress made in the fight against human trafficking in the Philippines, Dedase-Esconton et al (2020) argue that there are still shortcomings in the system affecting the effective delivery of aftercare interventions and support services for survivors. These gaps pose risks that could render reintegrated survivors vulnerable to re-victimization.

Recognizing the existing knowledge gaps in services for trafficking survivors, it is essential to enhance the research rigor and service evaluation (Davy, 2016; Dell et al., 2017). Dell et al. (2017) conducted a review of the limited evidence on exit and post-exit services for trafficking survivors, emphasizing the need to develop a standardized set of constructs for evaluating trafficking aftercare and support services.

This study aimed to shed light on the lack of evidence regarding exit and post-exit aftercare for survivors of human trafficking in integration in society. By exploring this issue, researchers hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the most effective approach for agencies to support the recovery and integration of human trafficking survivors. Additionally, this case study aimed to uncover the most effective ways to support survivors of human trafficking in their journey towards healing and rebuilding their lives.

Theoretical Perspective

This case study assumed that survivors of human trafficking received an appropriate optimal approach to recovery and integration.

This assumption was supported by the theories of Empowerment Theory by Rappaport (1981) and Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1974).

The first theoretical perspective underpinning this case study was Empowerment Theory, primarily attributed to Rappaport. It is considered instrumental in guiding individuals towards building autonomy and control in their lives. Cordisco-Tsai et al., (2020) affirmed this by applying the empowerment theory to a group of female sex trafficking survivors, observing significant improvements in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social support following an empowerment-based group intervention.

Based on this study, it is evident that empowerment-based interventions can play a crucial role in helping survivors develop the necessary skills and resources needed for healing and rebuilding their lives. Martinez (2022) on the other hand, asserts that this theory recognizes oppression as a significant contributor to disempowerment, affecting various marginalized groups. In fact, fostering fundamental abilities among adult survivors of human trafficking within workplace environments in the Philippines entails practitioners aiding survivors in cultivating crucial skills for both employment and societal assimilation (Gill & Tsai-Cordisco, 2018). Social Enterprises (SEs) in the Philippines have initiated efforts to address survivors' recovery and integration requirements, emphasizing economic empowerment and essential workplace competencies (Ju, Poveda, & Thinyane, 2022). This theory's contribution to the current study lies in its emphasis on providing survivors with the essential resources, skills, knowledge, and support required to regain control over their lives during the exit and post-exit phases.

The second theoretical foundation in this case study was Ecological Theory by Bronfenbrenner, positing that an individual's development is influenced by an interplay of interconnected environmental factors. Sanchez (2020) substantiates this by highlighting that individual counseling, support groups, family reunification, and community-based support are integral parts of the model's services at all levels. These components should be implemented comprehensively and meticulously, contributing significantly to the healing process of survivors. Moreover, Barner et. al., (2017) underscore the necessity of considering risk factors at all levels of the ecological system, encompassing individual, relational, and community risk factors. This implies that professionals must focus on comprehending and coordinating the impact of these dynamics to enhance clients and systems. The Ecological Theory is highly applicable to survivors and the professionals aiding them, as it seeks to analyze these structures and promote harmony through improved understanding and coordination among coalition members, survivors, and professionals Bush-Armendariz et. al.,

2014). This theory's contribution to the study is rooted in its ability to help survivors view themselves within the context of various interacting systems, including the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (interactions among microsystems), exosystem (external settings), and macrosystem (cultural values and norms).

By integrating empowerment theory and ecological systems theory into the study of aftercare for human trafficking survivors in their optimal approach to recovery and integration, service providers could create comprehensive and tailored support systems that empowered survivors, considered their individual strengths, and addressed the complex interplay of systems affecting their recovery and integration into society. This holistic approach was crucial for promoting the well-being and long-term success of survivors as they rebuilt their lives.

Methods

In this research, a qualitative intrinsic case study was employed as the research design. This approach involved a deep investigation into a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Intrinsic case studies were centered around a case that held unique significance for the researcher Creswell (2009) and Stake (2000) The purpose of this design was to thoroughly examine the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the recovery and integration method offered to survivors of human trafficking.

A non-probability purposeful sampling design was utilized in this study. The participants were intentionally chosen based on specific criteria: a) The agency must hold a valid license and accreditation from the DSWD to operate, b) The intervention for human trafficking survivors must have been provided for a minimum duration of one year prior to the year 2023 when this study was conducted, c) Social Workers who had been actively engaged in the aftercare of human trafficking victims or had regular contact with them due to the nature of their work, d) Other professionals involved in the intervention (e.g., psychologists, LGU officials, psychometricians, etc.), e) Houseparents working in the agency for human trafficking

survivors, f) Other relevant individuals involved in the intervention, and g) All the target participants voluntarily participated in the study.

In-depth semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions were used in this case study as the method of data collection. The researcher had two sets of open-ended questions intended for survivors and workers to gather their insights regarding aftercare for survivors of human trafficking and their optimal approach to recovery and integration. The interviews were conducted conversationally and separately for survivors and workers. Natural segues from the conversation were used to lead into the next question unless a response did not provide such an opportunity. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed with code names to maintain anonymity. The face-to-face interviews lasted for at least 90 minutes. Additionally, a series of in-depth case study interviews were conducted face-to-face every other day following the focus group discussions with workers in the agency. The first set of interviews involved the human trafficking survivors, followed by the Social Workers working in the agency, and subsequently, other recommended professionals and relevant persons involved in the intervention.

Before the conduct of the study, the researcher sought approval from the school's Research Ethics Committee (REC) to determine whether the study met the basic ethical principles of research. The safety of the participants, protection of their privacy and data confidentiality, transparency and informed consent of voluntary participation and a transmittal letter addressed to the agency, transcription and deletion of the data gathered, as well as the researcher's qualifications and skills, and social value were then verified. Following REC approval, an in-depth semi-structured interview, KII, and FGD from October to November 2023 were scheduled to collect responses from participants.

A transmittal letter addressed to the agency was sent to ask permission to conduct a study of their workers and clients. Following the approval, each participant had separate informed consent and consent to the interview to

sign, which were recorded for documentation and analysis. They were introduced to the background of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The interview adhered to the principles of an equitable interviewing relationship where participants were not unduly vulnerable. Thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke, 2006 was used in analyzing and interpreting the data. This required the transcription of interview recordings and followed coding stages. This method helped to reflect reality and uncover the underlying patterns in qualitative data by identifying shared themes or patterns in the data. Following the review of the transcribed interviews, the primary concepts were expressed in each response and were emphasized and subsequently organized into categories based on shared similarities capturing the optimal approach to recovery and integration for human trafficking survivors.

Trustworthiness (Polit & Beck, 2012) such as dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability were observed to guarantee the transparency of this research investigation. For dependability, the researcher asked an intercoder to crosscheck the coded data with the correct interpretation of the transcribed data. To establish credibility, the researcher explicitly informed the participants that the interview was being conducted solely for research purposes. Upon completion of the study, they received a copy of the paper. To ensure confirmability, the researcher thoroughly covered and achieved participants' experiences of the optimal approach to recovery and integration. Therefore, the coded data that identified their experience on approach were provided to them for verification. To ensure transferability, the researcher captured detailed descriptions of the participants' circumstances, focusing on their experiences regarding the optimal approach to recovery and integration.

Result and Discussion

Two themes emerged in the findings. These are Grappling with Adversities and Socio-emotional transformation. These themes are based on the clustered as categories as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the codes and clustered as considered significant in the formulation of the categories. The codes and categories are two main themes.

Table 1. Survivors of Human Trafficking Experiences to Recovery and Integration of the Aftercare

Main Themes	Categories	Codes
Grappling with Adversities	Hardships	Difficulty in understanding her aunt "Direct her frustration and blame towards me" "Constant inquiries" referring to past experiences of the client Discomfort Financial struggle Concern Exhausting Feeling isolated "Hurtful comments" "Suicidal thoughts" "Gossip" Blaming for imprisonment Outcomes blaming Low-esteem "Unstable emotions and behaviors" attention seeker "discouragement"
	Circumstances	Geographic shift Drop the case Labelling Wrongly label Quick judgment Misconception "Unfairly judge" dysfunctional family Intrude on someone's privacy. "Unprocessed trauma", financial expectations "Family issues" mistrust restricted conflict "Lack of readiness" "Mental health need" complicated
Socio-emotional transformation	Support systems	"Myself" "My Family" "The organization" Supportive family and agency "Collaborative partnerships" "Educational scholarships" Family "Regards as family"

Main Themes	Categories	Codes
		Family foundation Collaboration Alumni Networking House parent Motherly love "Source of motivation" (referring to younger siblings)
	Healing Process	"Knowledge on mental health" "Financial literacy" Social assistance "Educational assistance" "Valuable lessons on financial management" Spiritual influence "guidance" "Valuable knowledge Communication development time management "independent" Transitional housing Education "Safety and security" "Financial literacy training" "Emotional regulation" community-centric "Religious teachings" SGI's social services. sense of love freedom moderation "Life skills"--life and community transformative autonomy life skills mental health support Therapeutic support
	Individual and Collective Impact	confidence building knowledge acquisition "Closed relationship" "Voice my thoughts" "Motivation to improve" "My past does not define who I am today" "Pursue studies" Inspired by the success stories of women in SGI Development of initiative and cognitive "Strive for improvement" "Sense of belonging" Personal choice Fostered connection with God belief

Main Themes	Categories	Codes
		"Handle responsibilities" Recognition and pursuit SGI's impact "Feel fortunate" Knowledge gained "Feel complete and strong" Believing oneself "Remarkable resilience" Determination Encouragement Reframing negative attitudes into positive Moving forward in life "Immensely grateful" Gratitude Thankful Appreciative Gratitude "Practicing initiative" Role model "Overcome" (referring to dark moments) "Move forward in life" "Bounce back" Turning negative into positive "Put an end" (referring to wrongdoings of her parent) Acceptance
	Personal Development	"Valuable skills" - independent living Independence Freedom of decision "Freedom" "Embraced independent living" Confident on decision making Life lessons Capable and ready Overcoming Accountability Independence Cultivation. Career mobility Enduring skills

Discussion

Data on participants' experiences with aftercare for recovery and integration was gathered using semi-structured interviews. For the sake of maintaining confidentiality, participants were given code names or pseudonyms (P1, P2, P3, PW1, PW2, PW3, and PW4). Through a careful analysis of the case study, two significant themes emerged: (1) Grappling

with Adversities and (2) Socio-emotional transformation.

Grappling with Adversities

Human trafficking Survivors, as grappling with adversities, refers to the participants' experiences of hardships and circumstances.

Hardships

Hardships in Human trafficking survivors is a manifestation of the participants experiences of blaming, discomfort, feeling isolated, exhaustion and unstable emotions and behaviors. In the interview participants shared that they are struggling dealing with their family as they were being blame for the incident. As shared by participants 1 and 2 *"Despite our previous closeness, my aunt in Canada began to blame me for the incident..."* (P1, pg.1, Lines 5-14) *"When I returned to society, I was subjected to gossip, particularly from my mother's side, who blamed me for her imprisonment."* (P2, pg.2, Line 40).

Additionally, participants 1 and 3 expressed that their once peaceful environment was disrupted due to the incident. *"The once peaceful atmosphere has been disrupted since my aunt's incarceration, turning a once-welcoming environment into a source of discomfort."* (P1, pg.1, Line 14); *"This has left me feeling isolated and unwelcome in society..."* (P3, pg.1, Line 19). Moreover, participant 2 added that as human trafficking survivors is exhausting due to communities' inquiries. *"Responding to their questions can be exhausting, so sometimes I simply smile in response."* (P2, pg. 1, Line 17). Furthermore, participant worker 2 shared that usually person who experience human trafficking tend to have unstable emotions and behaviors *"Mostly, newcomers often experience unstable emotions and behaviors. They may display mood swings and a desire for attention."* (PW2, pg.4, Line 109).

Ottisova et al. (2016) surmise that experiencing hardships can have a significant impact on a person's mental health, leading to conditions like depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and self-harm. Survivors often need support to overcome the psychological effects of their experiences (Altun, Abas et, al., 2017).

Circumstances

Participants' experiences are influenced on the circumstances that surrounds the survivors as such being labelled, family issues, and mistrust. Participants reported that most of the time the community labelled them they live in. Below are the responses:

"Lately, experiencing gossip and being labeled as "from DSWD" has resulted in people treating me differently due to my past." (P3, pg.1, Line 18-19). Furthermore, *"As someone who experienced trafficking, people would often pass judgment and wrongly label me, saying things like, "maybe she wants it." These assumptions are completely untrue. I never desired or chose this path, and it's disheartening to be unfairly judged and diminished."* (P1, pg. 2, Lines 30-31).

In addition, participant 1 claimed that due to the incident family dynamics changed. *"However, when the latter was apprehended and imprisoned, the dynamics changed."* (P1, pg.1, Line 7); *"It's a little difficult in terms of family. Because they are supporting my aunt, who is the one responsible for the situation, I would describe it as negative and complicated. It is a situation in which I've received more help from people other than my family."* (P1, pg.2, Line 23). Moreover, participants worker 1 and 4 added on the circumstances of family issues as human trafficking survivors. Below are the responses:

"Many of the clients referred here lack a functional family and a secure home environment." (PW1, pg.4, Line 107). Moreover, *"Mine, would be financial over the years with so many women, especially when they leave us after their college graduate have their full-time jobs, the family expect them to give a large portion of their income to support their family."* (PW4, pg. 5, Line 128), Additionally, *"...as family issues may sometimes contribute to discouragement, impacting the client's mindset and overall well-being."* (PW1, pg. 5, Line 132).

Labels like "victim" or "trafficking survivor" can perpetuate stigma and hinder reintegration due to negative stereotypes and societal expectations. It underscores the significance of narratives shaped by survivors themselves, emphasizing the need for them to reclaim identities that extend beyond their trafficking experiences (Le, 2017).

Socio-emotional transformation

In aftercare of human trafficking survivors' socio-emotional transformation as support systems, healing process, individual and collective impact and personal development are key factors to recovery and integration.

Support Systems

In human trafficking support systems for survivors are crucial for their recovery and integration. Sanchez (2020) substantiates this by highlighting that individual counseling, support groups, family reunification, and community-based support are integral parts of the model's services at all levels. These components should be implemented comprehensively and meticulously, contributing significantly to the healing process of survivors. Participants 1, 2, 3 and participant worker 1 shared having support systems help them recover from their traumatic experiences. Below are their responses:

"After leaving the shelter, my family offered me emotional support during the re-integration process. Despite their preference for us to stay in the shelter, as they believed it would provide a better life, they stood by me." (P2, pg. 2, Line 24). "SGI has been a tremendous help to me. The DSWD referred me to SGI, and during my first week there, they administered a psychological test to assess my mental health. They also referred me to the Restore Foundation to help with my recovery." (P1, pg. 2, Line 22). "My family supported the decisions I made rather than opposing them." (P3, pg.2, Line 27).

"I received emotional support from both my family and the agency, particularly benefiting from the agency's assistance. They emphasized finding a balance in everything, allowing me to experience life differently from how it was at the agency." (P2, pg.2, Line 50). "My top three support systems are myself, my family, and the organization for survivors of human trafficking." (P3, pg.2, Line 52). "The primary support system for individuals in their recovery journey comes from their

family and those they regard as family. This support significantly aids in their healing process." (PW1, pg. 5, Line 131). "Nevertheless, family remains a strong pillar of support in the healing process..." (PW1, pg. 5, Line 133).

Healing Process

The healing process is vital for human trafficking survivors. It plays a crucial role in rebuilding their lives after the traumatic experience of human trafficking. Participants shared their journey of their healing process that education really help them as it added their knowledge and navigate them in their life.

"Many residents here benefit from educational Scholarships provided by our partners. Additionally, we refer residents to other agencies for their specific needs, such as seminars." (PW1, pg. 5, Line 116). "For instance, they receive financial literacy training on budgeting their money and emotional regulation support from the HEART organization." (PW1, pg. 5, Line 118).

"...Additionally, SGI plays a crucial role by providing effective support in terms of financial assistance, shelter, and educational aid." (PW1, pg. 5, Line 133). "Typically, our referrals come from partnered organizations, and these individuals often seek transitional housing to pursue their education." (PW1, pg.5, Line 106).

"We started a program in 2020 as community-based housing that we support I'll say that with that program has overwhelming positive in terms of that particular program and how it is set up for complete independent in the future. Our program is voluntary which means the women they can request to discharge even we don't agree. So sometimes the experience, perceptions they have upon leaving and admission would have different phase." (PW4, pg.5, Line 154-155).

Furthermore, participant 2 shared that having taught independent living

handle them their problem. *"The agency instilled in us valuable skills for independent living, teaching us to handle our own challenges without relying excessively on them or our families."* (P2, pg. 2, Line 50). Participant 3 added that *"The agency's support is especially noteworthy, as they equip us with knowledge on mental health and financial literacy, and regularly check in with social workers to provide assistance."* (P3, pg. 2, Line 54).

These only indicates that building core skills among adult survivors of human trafficking in a workplace setting in the Philippines involves practitioners supporting survivors in developing essential skills for employment and integration into society (Gill & Tsai-Cordisco, 2018). In fact, Social Enterprises (SEs) in the Philippines have started to provide support for survivors' recovery and integration needs, focusing on economic empowerment and core skills required in a workplace setting (Ju et al., 2022). Survivors of human trafficking in the Philippines, particularly those who have experienced sex trafficking, face challenges such as physical, sexual, and psychological harm, marginalization, and isolation during the reintegration phase. The process of recovery and social-economic inclusion is crucial for these individuals as they transition from exploitation to reintegration into society. Efforts to empower survivors through communication at interpersonal and community levels play a significant role in their overall well-being and development.

Individual and Collective Impact

Individual and collective impact are crucial in addressing the complex challenges of human trafficking survivors to recovery and integration. Participants shared their responses how the program from the shelter provide impacted them. Below are the responses:

"I feel confident in my ability to reintegrate into the community. The knowledge I gained from the shelter equips me to navigate the community effectively, and I've learned valuable lessons on how to protect myself in society. While I used to be shy,

my time in the shelter empowered me to voice my thoughts without holding back, despite my past experiences." (P1, pg. 3, Lines 57-59).

"Instead of viewing my difficult experience negatively, I saw it as motivation to improve and believed that I could still bounce back." (P2, pg.3, Line 60). *"I acknowledge my challenging past, yet I continuously work towards progress, reminding myself that my past does not define who I am today."* (P3, pg.3, Line 61).

"Although we had the freedom to choose our activities, I consistently gravitated towards spiritual teachings, worship, and fellowship. These practices grounded me and fostered a connection with God, contributing to the positive changes in my life." (P2, pg.3, Line 83-84). *"They used their past as their strength and the negative attitudes were reframe into positive."* (PW2, pg. 5, Line 141).

Through therapy and support, survivors can reclaim their lives, becoming a source of inspiration for others as they challenge stereotypes. Many individuals actively participate in training programs and workshops, generously sharing their experiences to prevent trafficking and provide support to other survivors (Le, 2017).

Personal Development

Personal development helps human trafficking victims build resilience, empowerment, and skills. It helps traumatized human trafficking victims rebuild their lives. It aids social integration, self-esteem restoration, and long-term health. Participants expressed that they have freedom on their own and feel empowered. *"I had the freedom to independently solve and address my problems, thanks to the education and seminars they provided."* (P3, pg.3, Line 75). On the other hand, participants 2 and 3, shared that they were able to build independence on themselves. *"This experience has taught me to be more independent and handle responsibilities better, a skill I have carried with me upon reintegrating into the community."* (P2, pg. 3,

Line 91). *"Certainly, I've successfully embraced independent living. In the past, I heavily relied on others, but now I can confidently make decisions and navigate my own path."* (P3, pg. 3, Line 93).

Furthermore, participant worker 2 and 4 highlighted that as they were being taught independence; they are now accountable to their action and enduring skills. *"They are now held responsible for their duties. This both amazed and challenge newcomers, as they realize they will be answerable for all their actions. For instance, if the budgeted money does not match during liquidation, they are required to make the necessary payments."* (PW2, pg. 6, Line 160). *"The gratitude, the skills she learned with us, is still with her, she still carries the things she learns with us even how many years later."* (PW4, pg.6, Line 169).

The findings underscore the crucial significance of involving clients in decision-making regarding their care experiences and plans for reintegration into the community. When decisions are consistently made on behalf of survivors, it results in the "deprivation of their autonomy and decision-making capacity" (Delap & Wedge, 2016). It is imperative to uphold survivors' self-determination and actively engage them as partners in decisions about their lives, aligning with a rights-based approach (Balsells et al., 2017; Delap & Wedge, 2016).

Conclusion

The study inquired the aftercare of human trafficking survivors to recovery and integration. Based on the finding drawn, it is inferred that their experiences of trafficking are exhibitions of circumstances and views on the approach of the aftercare.

Participant interviews reveal significant challenges in the recovery of human trafficking survivors. Participants exposes difficulties like blame, discomfort, isolation, and mental health impacts, aligning with existing trauma literature. Conversely, the Socio-emotional Transformation, emphasizes the crucial role of support systems, healing processes, and personal development initiatives, as highlighted by Sanchez (2020). Education emerges as pivotal in rebuilding lives, fostering confidence, positive mindsets, and ongoing progress among survivors.

This study responds to the call by Cole and Sprang (2018) to explore best practices in human trafficking worker-client interactions, focusing on facilitating disclosure and leveraging clients' strengths. The emphasis is on empowerment, particularly addressing hardships and circumstances. Aligned with empowerment theory, survivors regain power through therapy, fostering a positive counselor-client relationship, and providing a supportive environment with opportunities that enhance their self-worth.

Despite the power lost through trauma, survivors can reclaim it by understanding their experiences and undergoing education, independent living training, and job training. Social services, coupled with coordinated efforts across various domains, can drive policy changes, enabling survivors to achieve independence. The application of empowerment theory supports successful reintegration, acknowledging that this process may extend over several years. Likewise, it aligns with ecological theory, which emphasizes survivor empowerment in human trafficking interventions. The microsystem focuses on positive counselor-client relationships and therapy. Coordinated efforts across social services (mesosystem) and policy changes (exosystem) contribute to a supportive environment. The study recognizes the impact of societal values (macrosystem) and advocates for survivor empowerment through comprehensive, interconnected approaches. Ecological theory enhances understanding by considering the multi-dimensional nature of survivor empowerment across various systems and contexts.

Considering these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, the development and implementation of comprehensive aftercare programs are essential, addressing the diverse challenges faced by survivors. These programs should integrate trauma-informed education and skills development to facilitate the healing process and empower survivors with tools for independent living. Community awareness campaigns are crucial to reduce labeling and judgment, fostering understanding and support within communities. Strengthening existing support systems, such as individual counseling and family reunification, is

recommended to enhance survivors' emotional well-being. Moreover, workers involved in the aftercare of the survivors that they may enhance or continue to update themselves applying new strategies and approaches. Furthermore, the promotion and expansion of personal development initiatives, including education and skill-building programs, should be prioritized to empower survivors and enable them to lead independent and fulfilling lives. Continued research and evaluation efforts are encouraged to understand evolving survivor needs and assess the effectiveness of interventions, ensuring aftercare programs remain responsive and adaptive to survivors' experiences.

While this study offers crucial insights into the delivery of social services for human trafficking survivors, it has notable limitations. Firstly, adherence to agency policies restricted access to journals, case studies, and related documents of survivors, impacting the depth of available information due to confidentiality concerns. Additionally, the sample size is relatively small, inherent to the case study design and influenced by time constraints on participant availability, though deemed sufficient for a comparative qualitative study.

Acknowledgement

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Lourdes College Graduate School, my professor Dr. Kurt S. Candilas, and Solid Ground International for their unwavering support throughout the duration of this research study. My sincere appreciation goes to my esteemed co-author, my professor, and advisers whose guidance and expertise have been invaluable in shaping this work.

I am immensely grateful to the panel members for their thorough review and constructive feedback, which have significantly enhanced the quality of this research. My heartfelt thanks also go to my peers and participants whose contributions and involvement have been instrumental in the success of this study.

I am profoundly grateful to my parents for their unwavering support, encouragement, and understanding throughout this journey. Their love and encouragement have been a constant source of strength.

Above all, I offer my deepest gratitude to our Almighty God for His grace, guidance, and blessings that have enabled me to undertake and complete this research endeavor.

Thank you all for your invaluable contributions and support.

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